

Native Art as seen through Native Eyes:
An examination of contemporary Native art
From a Storytelling Perspective

A dissertation submitted to the Committee of Graduate Studies in partial
Fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctorate of Philosophy in the
Faculty of Arts and Science

Indigenous Studies Ph.D. Program
Trent University
Peterborough, Ontario

Copyright Robert Alvin Phillips, 2015
May 2015

ABSTRACT

**Native Art as seen through Native Eyes:
An examination of contemporary Native art
From a Storytelling Perspective
Robert Alvin Phillips**

Since the end of the Second World War, artists of Native descent have engaged with the Fine Art world where their work has come to be placed in the category of Native art. As a result of my journey, I have come to realize that in the Fine Art world the term Native art tends to be associated with the practices of our ancestors in times past obscuring our contemporary nature. In the present day context, however, I see an evolution and will tell the stories of the artists I met, who became a part of my life and thus a part of my narrative to point out that the voices of contemporary artists of Native descent, when speaking of their work, demonstrate a modern form of Native creativity, pride and joy that needs to be properly recognized. While Native artists do respect our traditions and do deal with issues of importance to our communities, they also create their artwork using sophisticated and modern techniques. It is up to us to make our contemporary nature known far and wide.

A storytelling approach based on the Michael Thrasher Medicine Wheel Teachings is employed to present the voices of our contemporary artists of Native descent who when speaking of their work create a rich and vibrant story of Native creativity, pride and joy.

Keywords: Indigenous Knowledge, Native Art, Culture, Storytelling, Elder.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this dissertation through their help and support. Unfortunately space allows for the mention of but a very few.

Thanks are particularly due to my committee members Professor Mark Dockstator, Professor David Newhouse, and Professor Michele Lacombe.

Chi Miigwech as well to my friends and classmates Lana Ray and Dr. Jerry Fontaine.

Native Art as seen through Native Eyes:
An examination of contemporary Native art
From a Storytelling Perspective

Table of Contents

Title Page	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Chapter 1: The View from the Center	1
Thesis Statement	1
Medicine Wheel	11
Organization	16
A Unique Position	19
How did I came to this place in life?	19
Where would I chat with all these Native artists?	21

The Circumstances under which the Interviews Take Place	21
Who are the Artists Interviewed and When?	22
Who comprises the sample size which is the focus of this dissertation?	22
Limitations	23
Ethics	24
Featured Artists	24
Chapter 2: The Southern Direction	
Time, Relationships, Experience - Jeff Thomas and Methodology	26
The Jeff Thomas Interview	27
This is How It's Seen and What It Means to Us	32
The Story of the Good Little Indian Brave	34
The Medicine Wheel Teachings	38
The Holistic Center and Bob Phillips	39
Looking East	39
Southern Direction: Time/Relationships/Experience/Artists	42
The Western Direction: Feelings/Reason	43
The Northern Direction: Behavior and Movement	45

Chapter 3: The Eastern Direction

Vision and Respect - Our Contemporary Artists	48
The Artists	49
Arthur Renwick	51
Jeff Thomas	53
Jane Ash Poitras	55
Marrie Mumford	57
Bonnie Devine	59
Rita Letendre	61
Alex Janvier	62
Why?	64

Chapter 4: The Eastern Direction

Vision and Respect - The Vision in the Books	66
External Vision	66
The Native Academic Perspective	69
Misrepresentation	70
Native Academic Approaches	72

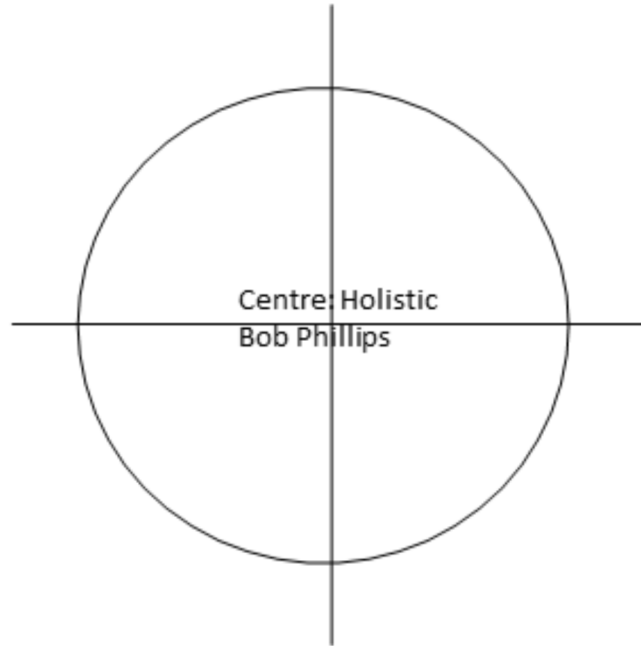
A Unique Worldview	74
The Elder	77
Searching for Knowledge	78
Storytelling	84
Questions about Questions	86
An Historical Connection	88
Chapter 5: The Southern Direction Time, Relationships, Experience	
Arthur Renwick and the Mainstream Perspective	90
Interview with Arthur Renwick	92
Simon Tookome and Market Forces	95
The Stereotype of Appearance	99
Native Stereotypes and Breaking the Mold	100
Norval Morriseau and Authenticity	103
Arthur Renwick Interview Part Two	106
Chapter 6: The Western Direction	
Feelings and Reason - Jane Ash Poitras and Native Elders	110
The Jane Ash Poitras Interview	112

Art Elder	116
Storytelling and the Elder	118
Marrie Mumford's View	119
Chapter 7: The Northern Direction: Behavior and Movement	
Bonnie Devine & Rita Letendre "Contemporary Artists"	129
The Bonnie Devine Interview	131
Movement and Behavior	135
Rita Letendre's Perspective	138
Chapter 8: The Northern Direction	
Behavior and Movement - A Brief Story about Alex Janvier	146
The Art Reserve	155
The Party Line	157
Appropriation	158
Chapter 9: The Holistic Centre - Full Circle	
How Did It Start?	165
A Matter of Perspective	168
Native Artist?	173

A Holistic View	176
Moving Forward	180
Works Cited	186

Chapter 1: The View from the Center

Holistic – Bob Phillips



This story is an Indigenous story. As an Indigenous story, it deals with issues of importance to our communities. As an Indigenous story, it is complex in that it deals with a number of topics that are interrelated. The main thrust of this Indigenous story, however, is its insistence that our stories must be told and must be told by our people.

Thesis Statement

The focus of this story, which is an Indigenous Studies PhD Program dissertation, is its thesis: The voices of contemporary artists of Native descent, when speaking of their work, create a rich and vibrant story of Native creativity, pride and joy. This dissertation is my journey, my story. Through storytelling I have learned a great deal about Native art, through my own “eyes”. My personal lived experience, as an artist of Native descent, has been greatly enriched by the stories of the artists I met who, ultimately, have become a

part of my life and thus a part of this narrative.

This story is told from a unique perspective, that of the author. Few have had an opportunity to interview as many Native artists as I have. The *AVR Arts Review* radio show has been hosted and produced by me once a week, every week for the past ten years presenting the voices of Native artists discussing and promoting their work on the national Aboriginal Voices Radio Network. My involvement with Native art and artists some fifty times a year for ten years adds up to in excess of four hundred interviews that were not part of any organized research project. The result has been the formation of a personal understanding of Native art that I view as a rich and vibrant story as told by the artists themselves. As a storyteller and a doctoral candidate, I find myself in the somewhat unique position of being able to present some of their voices to illustrate the degree to which Native creativity, pride and joy abounds in our contemporary approach to Fine Art.

As a trained Native artist myself, the conversations before, during and after going on air involved an oral exchange of information about Fine Art from our perspective. A great deal has been written about Native art, but until very recently few of the authors were Native people. My association with such a wide variety of Native artists and their work gradually led me to realize that even in this modern world our opinions, attitudes and knowledge of Fine Art are held at the community level in a largely oral traditional form. Exposure to their voices and stories displays their work and their perspectives in a new light.

The Fine Art world is decidedly a mainstream institution. My involvement with both the Fine Art world and art produced by Native artists has convinced me that non-Native

members of the Fine Art world often view Native art differently than we do. What is my understanding of the mainstream Fine Art perspective with respect to our art and artists? It is perhaps best explained by considering an example. The Woodland Style as in the work of Norval Morriseau seems to be what is generally thought of when the term Native art is used. References to birch bark paintings, a rough and direct application of paint combined with a limited palette of flat colours associated with centuries old rock paintings created a link to a dim past that was considered by mainstream collectors to be authentic. Subjects such as birds, animals, spirits, shamen and Native legends contributed to the certification of authenticity by once again meeting the stereotypical expectations of work produced by the remnants of a long dead culture. Norval's work and the market for Native art that it sparked led to a proliferation of similar work by artists of Native descent to meet the demand. The style rapidly became accepted in both the Native and non-Native communities as traditional in spite of the fact that it dates from the early nineteen-sixties. In the process a series of unrealistic and stereotypical assumptions about Native people, Native cultures and Native artists were confirmed. Norval Morriseau was definitely a genius in that he provided the mainstream Fine Art world with exactly what it expected of Native people. In addition to the primitive and "traditional" appearance of the work, Norval himself projected an image of a simple, uneducated, untrained individual painting to meet primitive needs and heavily addicted to both drugs and alcohol. In other words, the Fine Art perspective of work classified as Native art was that it would satisfy a set of stereotypical and unreal conditions generally associated with authenticity.

The perspective of our contemporary artists of Native descent as revealed in their voices and stories is unique in that we do not see ourselves as meeting the expected

criteria. The artists presented here are not known for their addiction to drugs or alcohol; the artists presented here are well educated and highly trained members of the Fine Art community; the artists presented here do deal with issues of interest to the Native community and do value traditional aspects of our cultures, but they are creating work specifically designed for the mainstream Fine Art market in the same manner as any other culture. As such the way they view themselves and their relation to the Fine Art world, their contemporary perspective, presents a very different story from that often expected. In my opinion the voices of our artists create a rich and vibrant story of Native creativity, pride and joy and do so in a manner that is genuinely authentic rather than in a manner that matches an illusionary authenticity imposed by an unfounded mainstream expectation.

For centuries before contact Native cultures evolved and adapted to meet changing conditions in the world we inhabit in the same manner as any other culture. In spite of the mainstream expectation that we would completely disappear, our cultures have evolved and remained alive and thriving. Listening to Native voices over the years I have come to reject the suggestion that art produced by our people is somehow hybrid in that it is no longer authentically Native, but not yet fully mainstream. Although many of the artists whose voices are presented here work in very contemporary styles, they remain and their artwork remains authentically Native. Moreover, the contemporary perspective that becomes apparent in the transcripts that follow is not the mark of a pan Native culture, but rather of a very modern expression of Native cultures that are alive and adaptive.

Each of us is unique, yet we usually share attributes and characteristics with others. During a decidedly mainstream conference about forty years ago, an elderly Native Chief

crossed the crowded hall to ask what band I belonged to. Something about my appearance tipped him off to the fact that we belonged to the same group in spite of the fact that I was dressed exactly as the mainstream people milling about us. While each was a distinct individual, the Chief and I shared a set of recognizable traits that we have come to expect in fellow members of our group.

My artwork may be typical of my hand alone and may well identify a piece as being produced by me even without a signature because of my particular stage of development, my artistic training or even the time frame in which it was made. While it possible to deal with the work of specific individuals, I am far more interested in the group dynamics associated with the Fine Art world. As a result, this story focuses on the manner in which the perspective of our contemporary Native artists is unique in that it not at all what is generally expected. My experience with the Fine Art world leads me to believe that work produced by people classified as Native artists is commonly thought of as being traditional and primitive in a manner that links back to a time long past. In sharp contrast, the manner in which those very same Native artists tend to see themselves and their relationship to the Fine Art world is modern and advanced. I maintain that the contemporary point of view of artists of Native descent is lost in the face of popular concepts and expectations. As this story unfolds, I will present the voices of today's Native artists and do so because I believe that unless we make our voices heard we will simply allow others to define us and in the process shape us according to their expectations.

Native stories are often complex in that they simultaneously deal with a number of issues that are interrelated. The problem of attempting to define or identify the true Native

perspective is in itself complex. How do we know what the mainstream view of our art and artists is? How too do we demonstrate the distinct and therefore unique manner in which our contemporary Native artists see their relationship with Fine Art? The concepts and connotations associated with the Fine Art category of Native art are subtle and often unacknowledged, yet it is possible to gain some insight by considering the way our artists are treated. The negative treatment we have received is a common theme in the stories that follow and it is possible to identify many other themes such as education, subject matter and artistic style. Those themes, while interesting in and of themselves, are simply components that taken together allow us to come to a realistic conclusion. The way Native artists perceive themselves and their relationship to the Fine Art world is unique in its overall contemporary nature. The stories told here by our contemporary artists of Native descent must be told if the way we perceive ourselves is to become known and that can only be accomplished by allowing our Native artists to tell our own stories.

I stress that our stories must be told and must be told by our people. That position is a reaction to a form of mainstream blindness that makes it difficult to view Native people and Native cultures accurately. As a Native art historian I am particularly conscious of that problem in the Fine Art world, but as a Native academic I am also aware of a parallel situation within the university community. Story crafting and telling has for centuries been a legitimate means of answering questions, addressing problems and acquiring new knowledge. This is a PhD dissertation, but approaching it as a Native story allows the researcher/storyteller to consider the thesis/focus in a manner that both Native and non-Native communities can relate to.

Storytellers, be they traditional or contemporary, are usually conscious of the fact that

their audience is composed of people from different walks of life, from different cultural backgrounds or even from different worldviews. As the storyteller, therefore, I will begin by pointing out something about the way we refer to ourselves and how I will use terms that refer to our people. When I grew up, I was an Indian and in spite of the fact that the term seems to have fallen out of favour, I am still able to relate to it. Quite frankly, a part of me still sees myself as an Indian. It is, however, but one of the terms that will be used in this story to refer to our people. More recent terms such as First Nations, Native, Aboriginal and Indigenous replace or run parallel to the old term Indian and they will certainly be used here where appropriate or according to the personal preferences of the speaker.

There is one term, however, that will be used quite frequently and that is Native. In the story I tell about the involvement of our people in the Fine Art world I will generally use the term Native as being synonymous with all of the terms just mentioned. The category of Native art is part of the mainstream institution of Fine Art and the designation I most frequently hear employed with respect to the artwork produced by our people is “Native art”. While other terms are heard from time to time, it is my experience that the term Native art is the standard employed in galleries by curators, commentators and collectors. As a result, I tend to employ the term Native more frequently than any of the alternatives.

Another term is used in relation to Indigenous peoples: Inuit. The marketing system dedicated to artwork produced by Inuit peoples is different from and separate from that serving the more southern groups. The two principal terms employed in the art market, therefore, are Inuit art and Native art. While some of the lessons learned from the

experience of Inuit artists may be of interest here, this dissertation is not concerned with the Inuit art world. Rather it focuses on the way in which artists of Native descent see art.

Use of the term Native art in this story implies that it is possible to define what Native art is, but the task is not quite as simple as one might think. What I understand as Native art is quite simply any form of art whatsoever that has been produced by artists of Native descent. That seems straightforward enough and indeed the mainstream Fine Art world would probably agree, but the issue is much more complex. Part of the problem lies with our understanding of what art is. The Fine Art world makes a distinction between what it sees as art and what it sees as craft. When I use the term Native art in this dissertation I am referring to work that has been produced for use in or in relation to the Fine Art institution. It does not include, for example, the making of moccasins no matter how elaborately decorated unless they are part of a work or project destined for the institution of Fine Art.

One of the great difficulties encountered by our artists arises from connotations associated with the term “Traditional.” A view that I constantly run into in the Fine Art world tends to think of Native art as being traditional in that it follows production practices that have been in place for hundreds of years. The unacknowledged connotations associated with the term traditional tend to imply a primitive, unsophisticated and even archaic nature. My experience with the Fine Art community suggests that work produced by our contemporary artists is all too easily lumped in with traditional crafts. While exceptions do occur, the general Canadian population tends to place the work of an artist of Native descent into the subcategory of Native art regardless of any other factor associated with the work. Why does this continue to occur in spite of

the appearance of highly sophisticated work? I believe that the perspective of our contemporary artists is not as well recognized as it should be. As this story unfolds, I will attempt to clarify our contemporary perspective by presenting the voices of our artists in the hope that the concept of what constitutes Native art can be brought more closely into line with our present day reality.

The Indigenous approach employed in the construction of this dissertation is a contemporary adaptation of more traditional practices and incorporates aspects of mainstream academic processes where they help advance the thesis. Nevertheless, there is a heavy reliance on the lived personal experience of specialists that for the purposes of this dissertation are, from my perspective, considered elders. The lived personal experiences of elders acquired over time as specialists in the fields in which they excel leads them to make relevant observations and conclusions. The adaptation of our traditional methodologies to the contemporary academic context in a manner that admits the legitimacy of lived personal experience as admissible data requires some justification. This is accomplished by basing the story/dissertation on the Michael Thrasher Medicine Wheel Teachings. The holistic approach applied here employs storytelling as the means of dealing with the complex problem of examining the Native perspective of Fine Art and its related problem of academic validity through recognition of a distinct Native worldview.

Stories in Indigenous communities are usually crafted by and told by the old people; this story is no exception. As a seventy year old Mi'kmaq, I have accumulated a depth of experience when it comes to Indigenous practices associated with the Fine Art world. Throughout my lifetime, I have been particularly impacted by a widely held view that connects Natives to a pre-contact era and tends to see our people and cultures as being

archaic. On the other hand, I am well aware as a contemporary Native person of the fact that I hold modern views and I know that I am not alone. Today our artists are as contemporary as those of any other culture. Using the topic of Native art and the voices of Native artists to demonstrate the fact that our cultures are fully contemporary strikes me as being a very worthwhile project.

The unique perspective of our contemporary artists could be more widely recognized in the Fine Art world were we to insist that our stories be heard. As a contemporary Native academic, however, I am also conscious of a need to insist that our stories be heard in the Academy. Storytelling is a valid contemporary Native approach to the acquisition of new knowledge and understanding. When confronted with a problem or a question in the past, the elder with pertinent knowledge would present an oral report in the same manner as a mainstream academic researcher of today would be expected to present the results of an enquiry in the form of a written report. In both cases specific protocols would be followed from the formulation of the original question to the type of acquired knowledge or data available for consideration or analysis. The ultimate conclusion would be reported to the community that would determine its worth or accuracy.

This dissertation is actually a Native story in the sense that its creation has followed those same traditional protocols. At the same time, I am a contemporary academic of Native descent whose culture has evolved and adapted. The mainstream academic may well think of a story as being simply an imaginary tale meant to entertain, but as a Native person I recognize the power of the protocols involved to ensure a sound investigation capable of producing new knowledge. My preference for storytelling is closely linked to

its ability to incorporate the kind of internal knowledge that the Thrasher Medicine Wheel teachings suggest are a necessary part of an investigation anchored in a Native worldview. In other words, this story is actually the report of conclusions arrived at after a significant investigation or analysis of available data.

Medicine Wheel

Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit by Jo-ann Archibald presents the proposition that traditional Indigenous intellectual models, such as the Medicine Wheel, support the use of storytelling as an Indigenous approach. (Archibald) Storytelling is a valuable means of gathering and presenting data. It has been particularly useful here in that storytelling was also the process, through the radio interviews with the artists, by which the data was both gathered (artists) and the conclusions are presented.

Michael Thrasher's Medicine Wheel Teachings are not readily available in printed or even electronic form, but the basics are known in the community and one can consult dissertations by Dr. Kevin Fitzmaruice or Dr. Jenifer Dockstator to obtain an impression of their impact. Professor Mark Dockstator has been associated with Michael Thrasher at Trent University for a number of years and is quite familiar with his teachings. Professor Dockstator has, therefore, served as both a resource and a guide as I endeavored to figure out the relationship of the Teachings to storytelling. On the other hand, it was left to me to work out how to apply those teachings to the justification of the use of storytelling as an Indigenous method.

The Eastern Direction in the Michael Thrasher Medicine Wheel Teachings favors a Native perspective that it encourages the use of two forms of data, the internal as well as

the external. Crafting a story in keeping with an Indigenous intellectual approach allows the inquirer or elder to consult and analyze his own lived personal experience. At the same time the connection between storytelling and the gathering and presentation of data is facilitated by access to external data.

It is important to note that in this dissertation I have not included extensive references when explaining the connection of the Medicine Wheel Teachings to storytelling. As is the case with many aspects of Native education, I was encouraged to work out the connection myself. As a result, the explanations are my opinions and my opinions alone. Those explanations, therefore, are not cited. On the other hand, I am just learning. I do not have an “understanding” of the Medicine Wheel (that would take many more years of study) but I do have an “awareness” and that allows me (from teachings of Michael Thrasher) to use it as a tool, to both learn personally, which I have, and to allow others to learn – which hopefully they can do from its use in my dissertation.

There is one thing I have begun to learn from my close look at it and that is that the Medicine Wheel is associated with a holistic perspective, which is somewhat different from Western based approaches. The Medicine Wheel is by nature holistic . . . which means that it is all inclusive. It is epistemology, ontology, methodology and axiology.

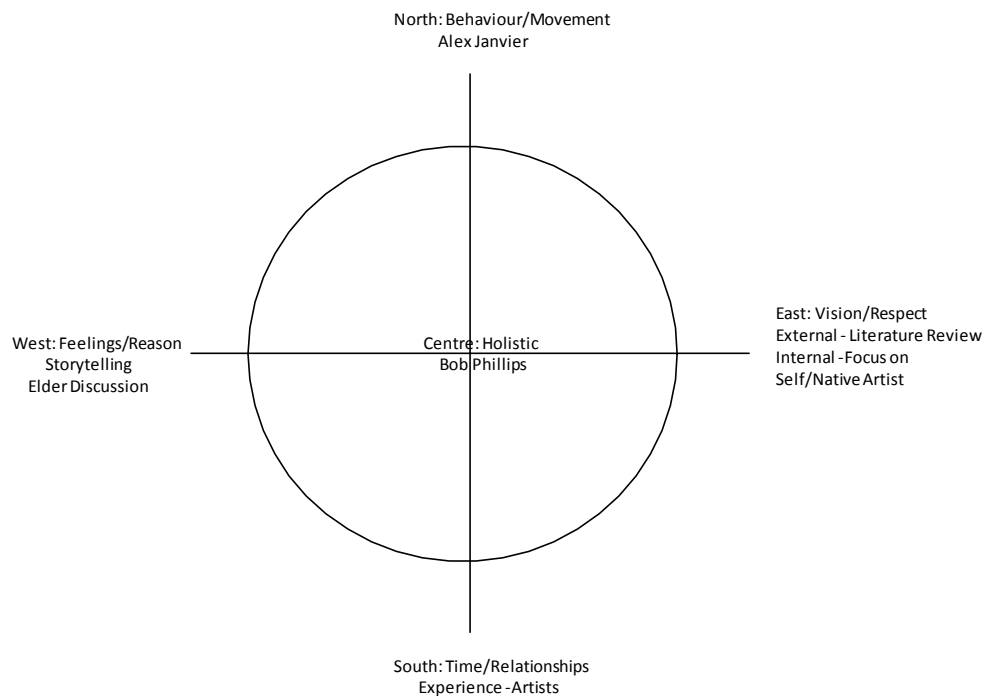
The story is organized according to the Medicine Wheel teachings to highlight their value in the acquisition of new knowledge. As a contemporary Native person I have modernized protocols where appropriate by incorporating mainstream methods. The fact that the story is presented in a written form including transcripts of conversations with artists is a further modernization that is made possible by the fact that we live in a digital age. Nevertheless, this story is very traditional in that it relies heavily on the experience

of the researcher/storyteller. The few transcripts presented here are simply illustrations of the hundreds of conversations that I have had with artists of Native descent. The conclusions arrived at are therefore based on impressions formed as the result of a great deal of experience. As an experienced academic in my own right, it is not surprising that the story and the dissertation overlap to present the conclusion that the voices of contemporary artists of Native descent, when speaking of their work, create a rich and vibrant story of Native creativity, pride and joy. The value of contemporary storytelling as a research vehicle to the Native community is reinforced through the use of the Michael Thrasher Medicine Wheel Teachings that have been conveyed to me by my PhD supervisor Professor Mark Dockstator.

The organization of this dissertation follows the pattern associated with the Michael Thrasher Medicine Wheel Teachings. The Medicine Wheel is an ancient concept whose links to the pre-contact period are found in stone circles distributed across the prairies. Since the concept of the Medicine Wheel is so deeply embedded in Indigenous cultures, it must be recognized that there are many explanations or interpretations of it and the Michael Thrasher version is but one of many.

Elder Michael Thrasher uses the Medicine Wheel to consider our ways of knowing. The Medicine Wheel is essentially a circle ruled to indicate the four directions. Concepts associated with knowing are attached to each of the directions and the storyteller/researcher is placed at the circle's centre. As it happens, I am an academically trained art historian with extensive exposure to Native art and artists. I am also an experienced contemporary storyteller who understands that stories, like artwork, do not just suddenly appear. They are created. To be accepted by the community as being valid

and reliable, a story must be the result of analytical and research practices or protocols that are capable of producing sound results. By employing the Medicine Wheel Teachings as a lens through which to examine aspects of Native culture, I am able to use them as the philosophical foundation for the Indigenous methodology employed here that supports the storytelling approach.



While the Medicine Wheel Teachings will be considered more deeply in the chapter on methodology, they have an impact throughout the dissertation. As a result I have found them useful in its organization. Since the project is so closely linked to the storyteller/researcher, the first chapter focuses on my view from the centre. Chapters will

then be presented for each of the four directions as their topics are linked to the concepts highlighted at each point. The final chapter will return to the centre for a consideration of the conclusions. In this way, it is hoped that the organization and structure of the dissertation will encourage a holistic view and a balanced approach to the matters under consideration.

The story today is also about the Fine Art category of Native art. You may already be familiar with much of the story, unless of course you happen to be a non-Native person. I say that because our people do not always see eye-to-eye with the mainstream culture. Native people today live as a minority group among a much larger Canadian population. In this story I will use terms such as “mainstream” or “dominant society” to refer to the widely accepted social group generally thought of as being the majority in Canada. That their views do not always coincide with our own is a fact a number of very prominent and highly respected Native academics have commented on. In his instructive work, *Journey to Daylight-Land: Through Ojibwa Eyes*, James Dumont points out that Indigenous cultures have a distinctly different worldview from that held by the mainstream (Dumont). As an individual who has spent a great deal of time dealing with Native art and artists, I have come to realize that what James Dumont points out is equally true in the art world. The story that unfolds in the voices of our artists reflects our own worldview and in doing so confirms that our cultures have adapted and evolved to meet present day conditions, yet remain authentically Native.

Over the centuries that we have enjoyed Mother Earth, we have constantly sought to increase our knowledge of and our understanding of the world we live in and have gradually refined the means of coming to sound and reliable conclusions. The Indigenous

worldview James Dumont presents requires the use of the Native perspective in academia when attempting to better understand processes associated with our cultures. In keeping with the need to take into consideration our own worldview, this story will foreground the voices of some of our most successful artists as they discuss their work. The use of storytelling is in itself an attempt to consider the Native perspective. There are many ways to tell a story. This is only one. It is from the Native perspective—from a Medicine Wheel framework that values oral tradition and lived experience as found in the voices of our artists. The story to be told here, after all, is our story and telling it in our own way ensures the inclusion of factors that impact us.

Organization

This dissertation is organized around the Medicine Wheel to highlight the presence of elements of the teachings that form the philosophical basis of the methodological approach, storytelling. Nevertheless, this dissertation is not about the Medicine Wheel Teachings; it is about recognizing that the voices of contemporary artists of Native descent, when speaking of their work, create a rich and vibrant story of Native creativity, pride and joy. The Medicine Wheel Teachings help further that goal.

The Medicine Wheel Teachings employed here are those of elder Michael Thrasher. Michael (KA-WHYWA-WEET) is a nationally recognized Métis teacher of Anishinabi First Nations philosophy, tradition and culture. He is widely credited for his ability to use traditional knowledge and viewpoints to address contemporary issues. Significantly, Michael was one of the four Traditional Teachers and Elders invited to conduct the sacred pipe ceremony at the opening of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People. In

addition, he was the co-chair of the first Round Table Hearings for the Royal Commission in Edmonton. His contacts and experience extend from the grass roots of the First Nations community to the offices of governments and multi-national corporations (Thrasher).

Michael is adept utilizing ancient First Nations teaching, understanding and methodology which assists in building a background grid through which to see your universe. Traditional philosophies and teachings from what are known as Medicine Circles provide a background grid to understand and work within the laws of nature that assure your harmonious growth potentials can be realized. Connecting to a method that will allow you to "See" your universe and your "Journey Around It" can foster the necessary balance of growth and change you seek (Thrasher).

The center of the Medicine Wheel is where the story begins. I, as the storyteller, am located at the centre. As the story progresses it connects to and weaves through all of the elements in the four directions that surround the centre. In the process of interacting with the Medicine Wheel elements, the story takes on a holistic quality that works to create balance. As a result, the center serves as an introduction that provides an indication of where the dissertation is going. It also provides some background information on the principal artists whose voices will be presented throughout the dissertation. The center is also closely linked to the storyteller/researcher who is responsible for taking the primary question under consideration. It, therefore, presents my perspective and the thesis.

Vision is a key element of any research project and storytelling is no exception. Two chapters are therefore associated with the Eastern direction. The second chapter presents the artists whose voices will be heard throughout the dissertation, since the Eastern direction admits the importance of internal lived experience provided by the artists. The

third chapter deals with what the books tell us and serves as the literature review. It is presented in the Eastern direction that also recognizes the importance of external experience.

Moving to the bottom of the circle we find the elements of time, experience and relationships associated with the Southern direction. The voice of Arthur Renwick is presented in chapter four and is associated with the Southern direction because his comments deal with time, in the sense of history, as well as our experience with the way others see us. Chapter five deals with methodology and presents the experience and views of Jeff Thomas. The means we use to gain knowledge and experience are important.

Looking toward the West we find reason and feelings. Jane Ash Poitras and Marrie Mumford, whose works illustrate the reason and feelings elements associated with the Western direction, are presented in Chapter six in a consideration of the role of the Elder.

The Northern direction is concerned with movement and behavior. Chapter seven therefore introduces the perspective of both Bonnie Devine and Rita Letendre who exemplify the putting into practice of a contemporary approach to Native art. Chapter eight is concerned with behavior as well as movement and presents an investigation of the career of Alex Janvier. In it the reaction of the Fine Art world to what is actually a very contemporary Native artist serves to highlight the need to make certain that our voices are heard.

The Centre is returned to in Chapter nine. Following the Medicine Wheel philosophy has induced me to employ a holistic approach that strives for balance. The centre is, of course, the position I occupy as the storyteller/researcher and it is the fitting place to present my conclusions and promote movement by urging others to listen to our voices.

A Unique Position

I am an old man who has acquired considerable unique experience. As the host and producer of the AVR Arts Review, for example, I have had an opportunity to discuss Native art with literally hundreds of artists of Native descent. The result is that I am able to make a number of observations about the perspective of our artists and to form conclusions that are the result of a long learning process. A very common approach to education in Native communities involves learning through observation and participation. The act of discussing art with hundreds of artists of Native descent has been a lived, hands-on experience that has provided me with a wealth of information to draw upon. Not surprisingly, those artists discussed their own artwork and their approaches when creating it. In the process, they present Native art in a new light. The characteristic that I intend to focus on in this story is the contemporary nature of their views and their work. In this story I present the voices of contemporary artists of Native descent who discuss their own approaches to the production of artwork and who relate some of their own experiences. The hope is that the perception of contemporary Native art they have instilled in me over the years will become more widely known and valued.

How I came to this place in life

One of the Seven Grandfather Teachings urges humility (Benton-Benai, 64). In keeping with it, I am under an obligation not to brag, which I generally respect. There was a time when our communities were small enough that all of its members were well known and the qualifications of our Chiefs and Elders were common knowledge. Today, especially in the academic community, we often deal with people whose backgrounds are not well known and the need to understand the qualifications of the people we are listening to becomes an important consideration. As the author of this dissertation, I am

also under an obligation to point out my qualifications and will do so here in the hope that the manner in which I do so will be understood in its proper context.

Much to my surprise, I am in something of a unique position with respect to the Fine Art category of Native art. Having grown up in the West End of Toronto in a decidedly mainstream community, I clearly have a sound understanding of the manner in which it functions along with its attitudes and approaches. The experience of living in the mainstream has been with me since I was a child and has been extended academically through extensive university training in both Fine Art studio and Fine Art history. That formal training sits on top of a lifelong interest in art that has been a part of me for as long as I can remember and has led me to ultimately become an academically qualified art historian.

At the same time as I was growing up in the mainstream community, I was gradually taking my place within it as a Native person. While there was a great deal of denial within my family, a situation that I now see as a common defence against racism, I have nevertheless been consistently identified as a Native person by both the Native and the mainstream populations since I was a young school boy. The only real alteration with respect to my place in society that I see today is in the different terms used to describe me. Back then, I was an Indian. Today, it is difficult to know just what I am . . . Native, Aboriginal, First Nations or Indigenous. While the terms may have changed, their implications do not seem to have been transformed considerably. I remain a member of a minority group and I am often still subject to attitudes that on the surface do not seem to be rooted in a realistic view of our people or our cultures.

The combining of both worlds actually happened when I took my place on air with

the Aboriginal Voices Radio Network as the host and producer of the AVR Arts Review. Astonishingly, for me at least, my lifelong interest in art combined with my extensive mainstream training and my understanding of Native culture to give me credibility with the artists with whom I found myself chatting. That I have provided a weekly radio show for ten years means that I have discussed art with literally hundreds of artists of Native descent. Being able to engage in conversations about art with so many artists is a unique experience.

Where would I chat with all these Native artists

Initially, when I was put on the air by Patrice Mouseau at Aboriginal Voices Radio, it was necessary to go into the studio every week to sit in front of the imposing barrel microphone that gave me voice. I owe a great deal to Patrice for first of all recognizing that I was capable of supplying the necessary material, but perhaps more importantly for patiently training me in the sometimes mysterious ways of the radio world. Quickly, however, I realized that as an art historian, I could be more effective if I were mobile and organized the equipment needed to run interviews in front of the work produced by the artist. As a result, the interviews were conducted in the galleries exhibiting the work, in the artist's studios or wherever the artist could comfortably chat.

The Circumstances under which the Interviews Take Place

The term interview that is commonly employed in the radio industry is often misunderstood by academics that link the term to research. Nothing could be farther from the truth here. The artists presented on the AVR Arts Review simply engage in conversation with me in order to publicize their work. As the show producer, I approach

artists of Native descent and offer them an opportunity to discuss their work and ideas before the general public through the radio. Many would never have that opportunity in the mainstream media. Being particularly conscious of the need to give voice to the artists, I make sure that the show is about the guest and not about me. Guests are welcome to express any opinion they wish and they are the ones who choose the topic. There is no research agenda and their comments are broadcast both publically and nationally as they express them.

Who are the Artists Interviewed and When?

Many people would give a great deal to be on the air for five minutes, but after having been on air for ten years, I seldom look forward to the weekly task of finding someone new to put on the air. At certain times of the year, such as in the fall, a large number of exhibitions take place and it is easy to find artists who want to appear on the show. At other times, artists may be referred by friends or acquaintances, while sometimes I simply trip over them. No organized criteria is used to select the artists to be put on air as there might be if they were being interviewed as part of a research project. Once artists agree to do a radio show, they are interviewed wherever and whenever they like. Being mobile and able to work in the field has many advantages.

Who Comprises the Sample Size which is the Focus of this Dissertation?

The artists presented on the AVR Arts Review program are there to promote their own work and their own ideas. They are not taking part in any research project and are free to present any ideas they wish. Naturally they only indirectly discuss the category of Native

art because they are focused on their own work. On the other hand, their voices do present the Native perspective and their concerns often throw light onto the nature of the category from their point of view. As a result, I have simply selected a handful of artists who are considered well known and successful artists in the category of Native art and whose discussions are instructive. The single criterion for selecting the artists presented was that their discussions are helpful in demonstrating the Native perspective as I have come to know it.

Limitations

While this dissertation does deal directly with the Native perspective concerning the Fine Art category of Native art, it is not an examination of all forms of Native art or even an attempt to define what Native art is or should be. Moreover, it is not a critique of the Fine Art world; it is not a critique of the mainstream it is a part of; and it is not a critique of the category of Native art. A large number of Indigenous people have earned a living or found other benefits from the very existence of the special category of Native art. I must count myself among that number because it has been the basis of the AVR Arts Review Show for the past ten years. Instead, the observations and conclusions presented here are offered in the hope that the category can become even more useful if it is viewed accurately.

The selected transcripts of half hour recorded conversations with artists of Native descent presented in this story to illustrate our unique perspective do have limitations associated with them, but those very limitations are also their strengths. For example, the conversations were not part of any investigation whatsoever. They were simply radio

broadcasts undertaken by the artists to publicize their work. As a result, the thoughts expressed in the transcripts were not directed in any manner. They were genuinely those of the artists themselves. The limitation is that they were never asked to present their perspective in a way that would support the thesis. The strength is that the transcripts provide an accurate view of the thoughts of the artists involved. Their appearance here allows the reader to experience firsthand the voices of contemporary artists of Native descent that, when speaking of their work, create a rich and vibrant story of Native creativity, pride and joy.

Ethics

Ph.D. dissertations in the Indigenous Studies Department must undergo two rigorous examinations by ethics review committees. One is at the university level while the other is within our own department. The object is to ensure that our people are treated fairly. As a result, the present dissertation is forbidden from quoting any artist who may have appeared on the AVR Arts Radio Show if I held the microphone or was in anyway involved unless I have obtained permission. While the opinions expressed by the artists involved were broadcast nationally and publicly, the fact that I might include their voices in a dissertation might not have been something that they would have agreed to initially. All of the artists presented have consented to allow their words to be used. The degree of difficulty posed by the need to contact and obtain permission to quote has significantly narrowed the list of artists it was possible to present.

Featured Artists

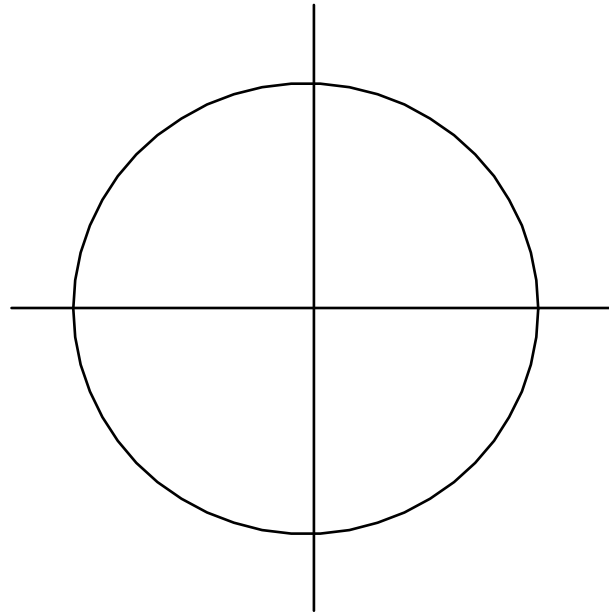
The following artists are presented in the dissertation. Each is a highly successful and experienced artist who is well known in the industry. The fact that I have known these

artists for many years helps draw attention to the fact that I have undergone a learning process that depended on them and hundreds like them. The transcripts or stories about the artists illustrate the kinds of discussions that led me to recognize that their voices create a rich and vibrant story of Native creativity, pride and joy. These artists will be considered in more detail in the third chapter under the heading of the Eastern Direction—Vision since the artists, as a group, illustrate our internal vision.

The perspectives of Arthur Renwick, Jeff Thomas, Jane Ash Poitras, Marrie Mumford, Bonnie Devine, Rita Letendre and Alex Janvier are presented in the dissertation to illustrate that the story of our contemporary Native artists is a rich and vibrant story of Native creativity, pride and joy. Each is unique, yet collectively they present a perspective that marks our approach to Fine Art as being fully contemporary while remaining authentically Native.

The brief introduction of the artists presented here provides an indication of the people that this story is all about. In the next chapter I offer a more in depth the view of Jeff Thomas and a consideration of methodology.

Chapter 2: The Southern Direction Time, Relationships, Experience - Jeff Thomas and Methodology



South: Time/Relationships
Experience - Artists

The Southern direction deals with time, experience and relationships. These basic concepts have implications elsewhere in that they influenced history, how we acquire knowledge and the formation of our resulting perspective. In this chapter, Jeff Thomas speaks about looking forward and backward, about oral traditions and about how important it is to accurately convey what we do in a respectful way. This is followed by a story about my own experience growing up and the importance of looking backward (inward) in order to properly move forward. This section also considers a number of the characteristics of our present day artists, as illustrated in Jeff's discussion. The third section considers the choice I made to use the Medicine Wheel as a methodology. The

Medicine Wheel methodology will be introduced and then an explanation will be presented about how it has been used to form the content and structure of this dissertation.

Discussions with our artists for broadcast on the Aboriginal Voices Radio Network led me to realize that the voices of contemporary artists of Native descent, when speaking of their work, create a rich and vibrant story of Native creativity, pride and joy. Jeff Thomas is an excellent example. The following is a full transcription of a discussion I had with Jeff, and his son Bear, back in May of 2008 and it allows you to gauge the manner in which I have come to know the Fine Art category of Native art.

The Jeff Thomas Interview

Bob: Hi Everyone, Bob Phillips here once again with the AVR Arts Review and today I happen to be particularly fortunate because I am standing here at the University of Toronto in their beautiful, beautiful art gallery here with Mr. Jeff Thomas. These images that I see on the wall on this side, for example, can you tell me something about what we're looking at here?

Jeff: What we're looking at here is the TransCanada Highway in British Columbia and two years ago I made a trip from Vancouver to Calgary and Alberta and into Lethbridge as well. So these photographs, most of them, are the result of that road trip, but it's playing on the idea of the road trip and the kind of things that tourists see and that. Some of the things that interest me and also playing on that idea of or asking that question of, "What would an Indian see through a camera?" And it's not always what you would think or people wouldn't know what you would think, so that's the idea and the play in this room there is four different series that play on that, different aspects of my life.

Bob: Do you mind if I ask in looking at these particular images, is there one in particular that the general population might not expect? Just to give an illustration for people out there.

Jeff: Well I think here most of the photographs are based on the railroad, so over the last probably three or four years I have been following railroad lines through different parts of Canada and through cities and more rural areas and that photographing. So you look at a snow plow at a museum in Revelstoke. I photographed the train plow with the clouds and that in the background and there is nothing Aboriginal about that when you look at it. But what I try to draw into the discussion and to the larger issues that I look at is the presence or the absence of

Aboriginal people in railroad history. In larger societies, well we ask those questions about representation and things like that. Here it is less . . . with my earlier work I used monuments and things like that, cigar store Indians and that, but here it plays on a different level. And I think probably one that encompasses more of the things that interest me. It is just not about identity all the time, but it's about things that interest me and I find visually appealing and once again here and at another location at Spences Bridge you see the Canada Tanker Car truck there and I shot it from inside the car and it was just simply the way that the light was falling on that particular location that really interested me. So I was collecting images and then bringing them together into this body of work and to see eventually what evolves out of that.

Bob: You know very often when I'm dealing with people they tend to think that the North American Native is simply wandering around with feathers and moccasins all the time. They don't realize that we're also very urban, that we're very technically sound and advanced the same as everyone else like I understand that you have now begun working with digital. But even more importantly looking at trains and things the way everyone else looks at it seems to be a very sound way of presenting the fact that, "Hey! We're human beings just the same as everyone else.

Jeff: That's so true. And we think that today, you know, in this century that those stereotypes would have vanished by this time, but they haven't and we realize that even in the arts world that we work in a very small arena, in a very small pool of people that come to see the work. The larger issues that affect Aboriginal people on a daily basis are still out there. When we think about prejudice and land claims and all these things that Aboriginal people see on a daily level including going to jobs in the city, riding the streetcar and the subway, driving to work they see the same thing. The basis on which they see it is a bit different, but we still have that same common human level that's often lost in the stereotype. And for me that's what this work is coming . . . when I mention about coming full circle, it's starting out dealing with those stereotype issues and things like that. Representation, how do we see ourselves through the camera or through paints or installation work and things like that? In this case, it's an evolution of saying, "Well, this is what I see." So when you come into the gallery, before you come into the main doors you'll see an early historical photograph from I think 1913 it is and it shows a group of Indians in a car and they're dressed to go to a Pow Wow or an event. And the question there is, "What do you think they see?" And that sets the tone for the rest of the exhibition. So everything kind of falls into place from that particular photograph.

Bob: Anyone who happens to be anywhere close to here or any place else that you show now or in the future should go and have a look to see what you see because when I look at some of these walls it's absolutely astounding, first of all, the quality of the work itself. How did you happen to become involved with photography?

Jeff: Well ironically enough, given that the title of the show Drive By is my career in photography began from a car accident that left me disabled. I wasn't able to work again and I had to reinvent my life and I turned to my interest in photography to do that. And what happened because I have such a difficult time walking is that I started

driving around in a car finding locations to photograph and so I would get out, set up and take photographs. And over time, more recently my problems with my back have increased and that, so I started shooting right from inside of the car. So I don't even get out anymore and as you'll see here. You'll see the car door frame in the photograph as well and that's where Drive By really began to evolve was from that idea and thinking about this lens sticking outside of the window and looking at something, thinking about how Aboriginal people are watched and how they're profiled and things like that. It's a play on that as well, so that's how my career in photography began and how it's evolved over the years. And to this point now where it's actually still shooting from things that I find in the everyday world, but now within the containment of the car itself.

Bob: You know it's time for a brief station break. We'll be right back.

Part 2

Bob: You know Jeff I was just looking at this wall over here and it seems to be a very large, almost mural like piece. Can you tell me something about that?

Jeff: Yea, this is a piece that I produced last year and it's called Highway 17 Wampum

Belt and it's based on a time in 2005. I was driving up to North Bay, Ontario and I just passed the town of Arnprior and I noticed out of the window the Hiawatha Wampum Belt, which is a significant historical marker for Iroquoian people on a rock cut, on a highway. There was a lot of traffic and I couldn't stop and pull over and check it out, so all the remainder of my trip and coming back I was thinking, "Why was it there? Was it really there?" So anyways, I got back and pulled over and there it was.

I began thinking about the presence of Iroquoian culture and the absence of it in the everyday world particularly in the city and how significant that find was. And what did it mean? I thought that, you know, I was going to North Bay for a reason, but obviously I saw that it was for another reason. I was curious, so I went back several times trying to photograph it and I was wondering why it was there. The following year I was reading in a newspaper in a travel section and they noted in there that in Arnprior itself there was a rare stand of white pine trees. In Iroquoian history the white pine is a central figure on the Hiawatha Wampum Belt and represents the Tree of Peace, so it is a really important icon and so I thought maybe that's why that Wampum Belt is there. So Bear and I went to Arnprior and we found that tree in the cemetery. As this project began to evolve this exhibition, I was looking at the drive by and a map. A map has always been an important part of my work. I use GPS to track where I go and where I stop to photograph and that. And I was thinking too how the Hiawatha Wampum Belt was a map as well. It mapped certainly the location of the five original tribes that accepted the peace plan and that. And it also signifies a route through Iroquoia and that route doesn't stop at the end the belt. In my mind and from what I learned from my elders is that it continues to evolve and takes into account

who we are today. So I fashioned five photographs from that that replicate the Hiawatha Wampum Belt.

And so when you look at the first one on the left hand side, it's the original site on Highway 17 outside of Arnprior. The second one represents the photograph I made, the detailed shot of the Wampum Belt painted on the rock cut. The center one is the white pine tree in Arnprior cemetery. The next one is from Tyendinaga form the Mohawk reserve, which is now blockaded the highway down there and ongoing turmoil down there. And the last one is from the Caledonia site just outside of Six Nations and each one has been along the routes that I have travelled. And also it brings in the other half of the Wampum Belt. In my mind it brings into the contemporary aspects and the fact that the issues that we have been dealing with for a long time are still here and relevant and still violent in large part. And so that's what I wanted to call attention to.

The other thing that is important with this is that you will notice that there is a red button on the wall over there and what that does is activate an audio, so what I've just been explaining that audio will explain in more detail and give the visitor and idea of what this actually means because so much of our audience is non Aboriginal people and even people who are Aboriginal will not necessarily know Iroquoian history. So I think it is important for us as the artists to convey accurately the things that we use in our work and in a respectful way. And because our traditions are oral based, this was a way to use the audio component to also bring into the focus in this exhibition that aspect of using our voices as well. And so that's what this mural is about.

Bob: Well, in looking at this mural, I find something else that you've added in there that I think very highly of and that is especially when you begin to think of that belt as originating in the past, but also pointing a way to the future. In the first image you have a photograph of the Wampum Belt on the rock face, but you have included the rearview mirror with a photograph of where we've been, so to speak. And in the last one, you've done the same thing. Once again you've included the mirror with looking back as well as looking forward. That is actually an astounding piece.

Jeff: Well, I'm very happy with that and what I found was that because I started shooting with the digital camera, a point and shoot, that it gave me so much more latitude to play within the car. And I began to notice the importance of having the mirror, the car door mirror, in the photograph as well . . . not only the car door itself, but the mirror and also because what you're doing is . . . what I love about this is you are looking forward through the photograph, but you're also looking behind you as well. And I thought, "How do we encompass our traditional values into the work that we do without having to have the obvious icons in the work, right?" And here in my mind that's how we translate that ideology in the photographs. So here we have looking forward, looking back and in that case with the Wampum Belt just off to the side in the periphery like in our minds and our memories is our history that we carry with us wherever we go. So yes, it does encompass so many different aspects of who we are.

Bob: You know, this little program is something like a journey as well and unfortunately we have to take a short break. We'll be right back.

Part 3

Jeff: To hear people comment on your work, you learn about your . . . I may do it intuitively, you know, I don't think about it sometimes, but then when you have an exhibition like this and you get feedback on it and people point these things out and you learn as well. And to me, that's what the arts are about. It's not about me being here and being the center of attention. It's about the work becoming the center of attention and how it gets people engaged in speaking. So when we think about things here like Caledonia and Tyendinaga and other land issues and things like that, what happens there is that people stop thinking for themselves. You know, they kind of just revert to the news reports and things like that, which are quite often misleading or not accurately portrayed. And I think that because we live in such a fast paced media world now that we don't have time to stop and to really contemplate. And here, and what I find is the hallmark of Aboriginal thought is that contemplation. It's about finding resolution and it only comes from talking and so here, and what I learned is exactly that. So, you know, I learn and that's what I enjoy about the work.

Bob: There's something when we start thinking about tradition one way that I learn is by sitting in a sharing circle or even sneaking into a sweat lodge. And that same type of thing where you get feedback on your ideas or your thinking and here it is happening at a digital level. One of the ways that you began bringing this type of things to peoples' attention was actually it seems to me by photographing your son Bear here. Is that right?

Jeff: Yea, it is. The first time I made a photograph of Bear outside of the home was here in Toronto on Queen Street and the photograph is in the exhibition. And we were just out one day, Bear was seven years old and I had set up a darkroom and that and he was interested in working with me in the darkroom. So we were out photographing one day and it was near Queen and Spadina and there was his graffiti on the wall, Cultural Revolution. And I was looking at it and it didn't look that interesting to me and so I had Bear . . . I said, "Bear stand in front of it." So I wanted to photograph him so he would have not only a memento of the day, but he could make the photograph himself in the darkroom. And it was interesting because somebody walked by and just, you know, you could kind of hear it. They said, "Child exploitation." I turned around and I thought, "Well, what's up with that?" And it always stayed in my mind, but it was so interesting because when I saw the photograph in the darkroom, it changed my idea of what photography could do. It was no longer just the idea of photographing what you had found it was about what you had to say. And seeing Bear in a photograph at that time was not only about my lineage and my son and passing on what I'm learning to him, but it was also about the absence or the invisible Aboriginal presence in cities like Toronto. And given the large number of Aboriginal people that live here, I often like to use the image of standing on the corner and seeing how long it takes you before you see another Aboriginal person. And then maybe people on the outside world will get a sense of what it means for a lot of us

who live in the city. You could stand there for days and in some cities you could never see another Aboriginal person. But here with Bear and putting him in the photograph helped me to better understand ways of dealing with that kind of invisibility. And when you think about the offshoot of that . . . about invisibility and like the residential schools and loss of culture and image and positive image and things like that well here's a way that we began to locate ourselves within that landscape. And to find ways to deal with it, of not being victims, so in a way those photographs are very empowering because Bear's presence shows that we're in control of that image. And this is how it's seen and this is what it means to us. (Thomas, AVR)

This is how it's seen and what it means to us

Jeff Thomas is one of our most successful contemporary artists and is one of the individuals whose work and whose points of view enabled me to separate the contemporary from the traditional in the Fine Art world. For a very long time I, as a Native person, believed that the artwork produced by our people was, and should always be, linked to our ancestors in a very traditional manner. Gradually, I came to realize that our present day artists are very contemporary and so their perspective is anchored in the here and now. While it is true that it respects the lessons of the past, our artwork has evolved to take its place in the modern context. Our people drive modern cars, carry cell phones and as is the case with Jeff Thomas also carry digital cameras. I chose Jeff Thomas as one of the artists to present here because he typifies the contemporary perspective that I have come to be familiar with.

“What would an Indian see through a camera?” Jeff’s question is insightful. How we see the world and ourselves is very important to who we are. Here we have one of our leading artists actually questioning what we see. Since the question involves the camera, it also involves art and the art world. Our perspective as Native artists as revealed in their own voices is now fully contemporary, but their comments are particularly valuable

because the Native perspective does not appear to have been adequately recognized, at least in the Fine Art world.

Being contemporary does not prevent us from respecting our ancestors or the lessons of the past. Being contemporary does not mean that we need to turn our backs on our heritage. It does mean that we are able to bring elements of that kind into the modern everyday world and that we are able fit them into our new realities. Jeff continues, “How do we encompass our traditional values into the work that we do without having to have the obvious icons in the work, right?” (Thomas, AVR) As with any other culture that is creating artwork for today's market, our artists deal with issues of interest to themselves, and as often as not, those issues are also important to the rest of us as Native people.

Our concerns reveal a great deal about our perspective and one of the concerns alluded to by Jeff is the problem of stereotypical views. He is conscious of the fact that Aboriginal people are watched, but from a set of convictions that begin with an unrealistic view. Jeff states,

“You’ll see the car door frame in the photograph as well and that’s where Drive By really began to evolve. It was from that idea and thinking about this lens sticking outside of the window and looking at something, thinking about how Aboriginal people are watched and how they’re profiled and things like that.” (Thomas, AVR)

When I suggest that our perspective has not been properly recognized, I am thinking of the kind of problems that Jeff is referring to here. Why are we not seen as being contemporary? The way we are seen by others often appears out of touch with reality. Unfortunately the Fine Art world is a part of our reality for as Jeff puts it,

“And we think that today, you know, in this century that those stereotypes would have vanished by this time, but they haven’t and we realize that even in the arts world that

we work in a very small arena, in a very small pool of people that come to see the work.” (Thomas, AVR)

The Story of the Good Little Indian Brave

Jeff Thomas talks about stereotypes and how the way we are perceived affects what our view is and how we see ourselves. In doing, so he reminds me of a story about when I was a kid and how the way we are seen comes into our own minds to shape who we are and to affect the choices we make later.

As I approach the age of seventy (perhaps a little too quickly for my liking), the stories of my childhood are always special. Perhaps it is because of the power that this time in our lives holds for each of us, but the smallest of words or the most unintentional actions can have a great impact on the rest of our lives. Such is the case with the story that recalls my earliest memory of being labeled an “Indian”.

When public school began for me in the early 1950s in a decidedly non-Native suburb of Toronto, the old black dial-up wall phone in the kitchen would begin ringing every evening as my classmates phoned one-after-the-other to ask how to do the homework. One particularly memorable day in class saw a little girl receive a star for having all of the right answers. Without announcing that I had given the girl her answers the night before, I pointed out that I had all of the right answers too and asked for a star. The teacher hesitated briefly and then informed me that she got the star because she was neater. I was then told to sit up straight like a good little brave. I immediately sat bolt upright with my arms folded across my chest like the Indian braves depicted in my comic books. At home with my arms still folded across my chest I asked my mother if I was an

Indian. To my astonishment, she became fearful and agitated, admonishing me never to use that term again because my great grandfather would roll over in his grave.

As is the case with many Indigenous stories, this one has a number of significant ideas associated with it, not the least of which is the fact that it is the first time I can recall being overtly identified as a Native by an adult. It is also the first of what hindsight might identify as an example of the negative consequences associated with this classification. This event was to be repeated in a number of variations throughout my public and high school life, kicking off a lifelong interest in the way Native people are perceived by the dominant society. Mature reflection and the accumulated impact of such experiences ultimately allowed me to understand the reasons for the fear in my mother's voice as she counseled denial.

Although I no longer sit with my arms folded across my chest, I do reflect my impression of contemporary Indian philosophy by founding this dissertation in a storytelling tradition, which I believe is an appropriate tool for research undertaken from an Indigenous perspective. In recounting the story of the Little Indian Brave, I find it has a great deal to do with the topic of Native art. It seems to me, from all of my life experience and from the countless discussions I have had with artists like Jeff Thomas, that we as artists and as academics have been told by mainstream society to "sit up straight and act like good little Indians". From these many encounters, I am left with the feeling that, in essence, we are told to produce art that fits the majority society's view of what Native Art should look like. Moreover, it is often my impression that we as Native academics are being told to be good little Indians by "sitting up straight", that is, by using Western research methods to enquire into the nature of the space occupied by Native

culture. It is with this in mind that I consciously select a distinctive Indigenous research framework, the Medicine Wheel, to guide my work in the area of Native Fine Art.

The discussion with Jeff Thomas relates to all of the points on the Medicine Wheel, but I have chosen to include him in this section dealing with methodology because he so clearly demonstrates that our contemporary approach to art and life includes the practice of carefully researching his topics. He illustrates a very sophisticated and efficient research approach that is fully modern and difficult to classify as “traditional” in the sense of being anchored in the dim past.

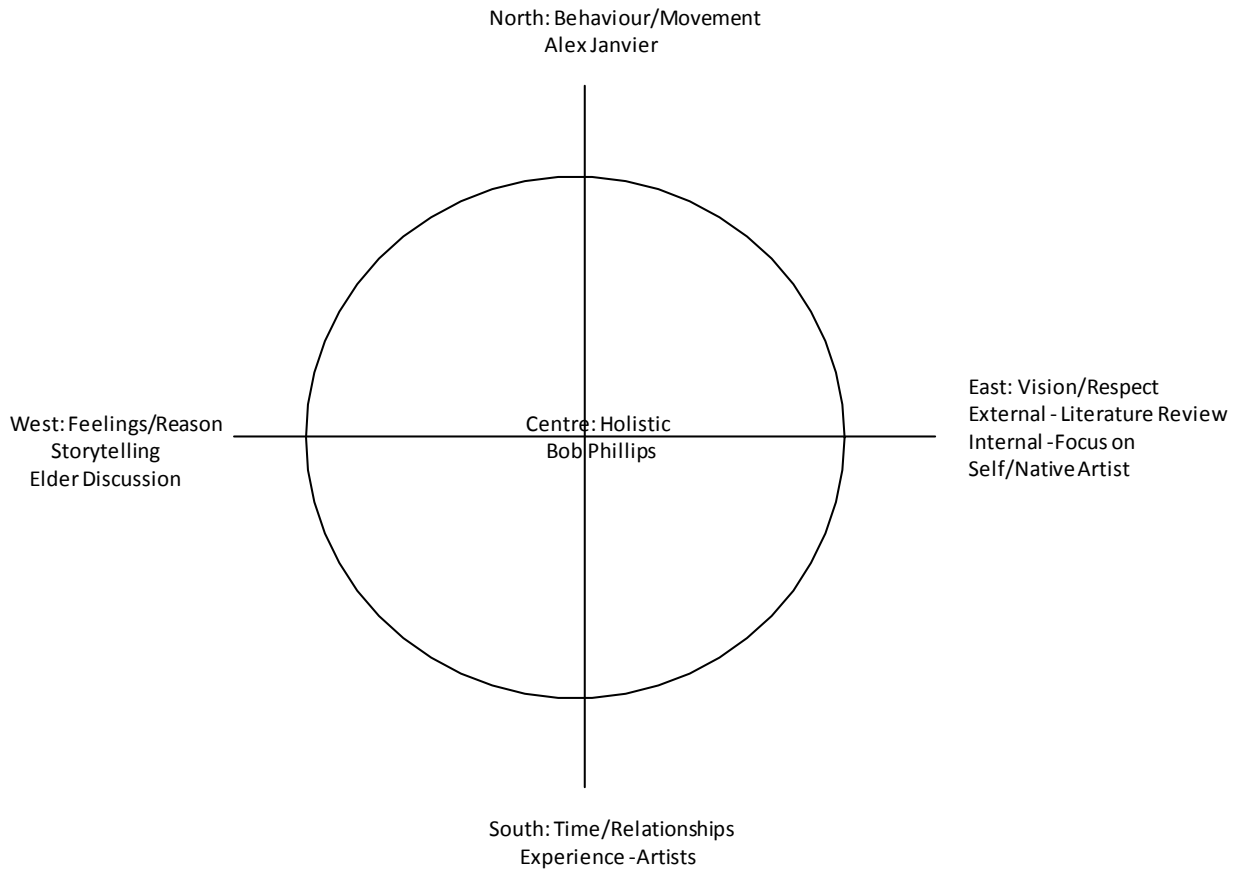
My search for a balanced approach that would permit me to clarify the very contemporary, yet very Native, problem of understanding the dynamics of the category of Native art led me to explore the Medicine Circle Teachings of Michael Thrasher. Using his approach became particularly important because it allowed me to use my lived and personal experience as a Native person in combination with a depth of experience in art history to ponder a number of questions from a Native perspective—as seen through Native eyes. Is the Fine Art category of Native Art full of accurate or misleading assumptions about Native people? Do these assumptions encourage Native artists to meet mainstream definitions and preconceived notions of what is “Native”? The story presented here examines the space we occupy from our perspective rather than that of the dominant society.

Taken from the Departmental literature, the following statement led me to take the Indigenous methodological approach that produced that this dissertation:

“The Indigenous Studies PhD Program at Trent University seeks to ensure that physical, mental, emotional and spiritual dimensions of Indigenous knowledge, as reflected in traditional and contemporary world views and expressed in practice, are articulated, discussed, documented, recognized and experienced.” (Indigenous Studies Ph.D. Vision Statement)

At Trent University, the combination of course work and the wide range of cultural activities in the Indigenous Studies Department properly reflect the broad concerns of the Vision Statement. Recognition of the fact that Indigenous Knowledge has spiritual, emotional and mental aspects, in addition to its obvious physical connection, allowed me to begin looking at the category of Native art as being related to many other aspects of our culture. The Vision Statement's inclusion of both traditional and contemporary worldviews ultimately permitted me to recognize the value of employing contemporary forms of traditional Indigenous methodologies to answer the questions that plagued me. Moreover, that the statement clearly promotes their expression in practice motivated me to delve deeply into their nature and to begin employing them myself. A key element of the Vision Statement was the inclusion of a stylized contemporary Medicine Wheel diagram, which led me to look very carefully at the nature of Indigenous methods employed to better understand the world in which we live.

The Medicine Wheel Teachings



The initial overview of the basic elements associated with traditional Native methods of seeking new knowledge and understandings begins with an examination of Michael Thrasher's Teachings. The Medicine Circle has four directions as well as a center and specific elements are assigned to each. For the purposes of illustrating my position in this work, I place myself as the researcher at the center of the Circle. While it is possible to consider and discuss the various aspects of the circle in order around its periphery, it should also be recognized that the elements may be further related in combinations diagonally across the circle. In the end it is the full combination of all of the elements working together that produces valid results.

The Holistic Center and Bob Phillips

The center of the Medicine Wheel is the location of the Self in the research. It is where the coming together of all the parts takes place in a manner that is balanced and reliable. While it produces clear conclusions, it is an active center that constantly interacts with the four directions through what must be recognized as a journey toward a better understanding of the world we live in, rather than simply a destination isolated and complete in itself. Here the center is as much a part of the Medicine Wheel as any of its elements. Adopting the Medicine Wheel teachings for my approach dictates that I must examine and include all of the elements that make it up. Together they build the “whole” picture, the “looking through Native eyes”, that constitutes a Native perspective and is the title of this dissertation. We are related to everything else here on Mother Earth, so as Native people we usually take a holistic view of things. By incorporating all four elements that surround a lifetime of lived experience, the analysis is expected to produce conclusions that other Native artists can relate to and decide that they make sense.

Looking East

From my position as the primary researcher in the center of the circle, my view of the elements identified by Michael Thrasher begins with the Eastern direction that recognizes the importance of Vision. The Teachings remind us that we have two possible views: the external and the internal. My first attempts to examine Native Art at the Masters level and later at the Doctoral level examined the space outside of myself for information that would inform the topic. Following the archival research methods I had been trained in, I poured through the vast storehouse of books and journals at the U of T Robarts Library. This external approach to Vision did yield valuable information and insights, but it more

often than not produced results that seemed at odds with my lived experience leaving me to search elsewhere for a Native perspective.

As I became more familiar with the Medicine Wheel Teachings, however, I came to realize that we all possess another kind of vision, the Internal. Each of us shares with others a common experience of the world outside of ourselves. However, we all have a unique inner life that is all our own. It is the product of our individual thoughts and experiences. Similarly, the individual's lived experience and therefore point of view might be expected to be unique to members of the Native community. My new awareness of our internal vision opened up a whole new database of acceptable and valid information that can inform the topic. Why was I, a Native artist, looking outward to Western Society for the methods and approaches to be used to better understand issues of importance to our cultures when our own communities had developed and refined reliable practices over centuries that take into consideration our internal views?

Gradually, I came to understand the implications of using an Indigenous approach as introduced to me through the Medicine Wheel in PhD vision statement and as amplified by Michael Thrasher's Teachings. By looking inward and admitting my own knowledge as being valid, I could examine aspects of Native art through my own eyes. The Indigenous methodologies are empowering. As a Native person I should be able use my own Native perspective to define what "Native" is. The complexity of my previous approaches to Native Art melted away with the simplicity inherent in the Medicine Wheel approach.

Contemporary Indigenous methodologies reflect an Indigenous worldview rooted in Indigenous spiritual principles and cultural values. They blend Indigenous thought, as expressed in a variety of sources including the knowledge of Indigenous Elders and Traditional people, with mainstream academic perspectives. Native culture places a high value on personal experience and respects internal vision. To be balanced, however, vision must include the external view as well. As an urban Native person who has been highly trained in Western academic methods, I do recognize the need to blend Indigenous thought with Western perspectives. One of the most enduring misconceptions about Native culture is that it essentially stopped dead in its tracks following contact with the Western European. Although perhaps no longer expressed as clearly and overtly as it once was, the idea that Native culture has not evolved is still a powerful undercurrent. Our cultures are very dynamic and continue to grow and change to meet new conditions in the same manner that they did long before first contact. The use of a traditional methodology, therefore, does not imply adherence to practices that are out of touch with our contemporary context. The mainstream academic practice of undertaking a literature review is very useful and easily incorporated into contemporary practice because of our recognition of a shared external vision. Incorporating it into a contemporary adaptation of a traditional Native methodology is a reflection of the dynamic nature of our cultures.

The Eastern direction's concern with vision also involves respect. It considers not only what we come to know of the world we inhabit but just as importantly, how we relate to it. The term experience, therefore, must include more than factual forms of information. The internal life we lead is important, but we do not live in a vacuum. As human beings we share our experience of the world with others and that experience may

include emotions, feeling and opinions. We have common ground with other human beings, with the plant people, with our animal relatives and even with the more inanimate parts of Mother Earth herself. Our experience with the external world is not something that can be ignored and in a contemporary academic setting may include literature as well as the opinions of others. The Medicine Wheel Teachings oblige us to consider our own internal feelings and experience when examining the outside world because they influence our relationship to everything around us. Respecting the power and influence of our inner vision involves showing respect for one and all.

Southern Direction: Time/Relationships/Experience/Artists

Over time I have built relationships with many Native artists and through the many discussions of art I have had with them I have learned a great deal. Perhaps more importantly, they have shaped my perspective as I interacted with theirs. With the passage of a great deal of time the perspective of the artists has become a part of me and the stories I tell. Therefore, in this dissertation I tell my own stories that have been formed, in part, through those relationships, but I also let the artists tell their stories. The dissertation is organized in a manner that presents my relationships with those artists and the experience resulting from them.

It is one thing to look internally to one's own personal database, but the extent and quality of the material held therein must be reliable if useful conclusions are to be expected. The southern direction's concern with time addresses this need. At almost seventy years old, we may assume that I have accumulated a considerable amount of experience of both the internal and external variety. Still, simply being elderly does not guarantee the amassing of relevant experience. Nevertheless there does seem to be a

strong correlation between the amount of time spent with a subject and the usefulness of the resulting experience.

Time is a key ingredient in the accumulation of the kind of experience fundamental to Indigenous methodologies. It is also a critical factor in the formation of relationships within the community that help broaden an individual's personal experience and his understanding of the culture. Time is also important to understanding long standing problems because repeated exposure increases sensitivity. The researcher charged with investigating the category of Native art develops relationships with the artists over time in a way that provides the basic experience to inform his analysis.

The Western Direction: Feelings/Reason

Feelings and Reason are the focus of the Western direction. With the Medicine Wheel the subjective is important. How we feel about something is important, therefore, how the storyteller/researcher feels about matters under consideration is also important. This work includes stories from the author that are reflections on how my feelings came about. As a result I also write in the first person in a manner that acknowledges the subjective component reflecting the feelings associated with the story as well as the need to deal with reason in a manner that promotes balance.

When examining the philosophical tenets put forth in the Medicine Circle teachings, I began to understand the emphasis placed by our cultures on a holistic approach. Feelings and reason are so intimately related that any attempt to involve one without the other can be seriously misleading. Feelings are surprisingly important when dealing with matters of cultural significance. How I feel about a particular kind of art is after all a reflection of

my worldview. More importantly, how I as a researcher feel about the subject under consideration will also influence my internal mental life and over time the nature of my internal lived experience. One of the ways in which feelings help shape the internal database has to do with one's relationship to other artists and the community at large. We are, for example, inclined to go into more depth and detail when we like a subject and personally know the people involved.

Feelings are also important with respect to the manner in which the conclusions of the study are presented to the community. A dry, objective and arm's-length report tends to be devoid of feeling. The storytelling approach on the other hand is capable of communicating both the pragmatic conclusions we normally expect from a mainstream study, but also the feelings associated with them. The storytelling approach respects the researcher's relationship with the material, with other artists and with the audience to whom the conclusions are being presented.

As a Native researcher I am equally interested in the use of reason to produce accurate and reliable conclusions. I find strength in the Medicine Wheel's insistence on reason as one of the ingredients that may be incorporated in an Indigenous approach to inquiry. The more holistic worldview common to the Medicine Wheel, however, admits the connection between feelings and reason as well. If through an examination of my internal lived experience I balance reason and feelings, I will be in a better position to understand how others might feel about the subject under consideration.

The Northern Direction: Behavior and Movement

Teachings about the Northern direction generally cover two important aspects of life: movement and behavior. You can't just think and talk about Aboriginal approaches, you must also "do". In an effort to meet the requirement for movement, I have carefully explained the way in which the teachings/philosophy influenced my decisions to employ the storytelling approach and to justify the types of information used along with their validation. The creation of the story is itself an attempt to meet the requirement for movement.

Sitting around and theorizing about things will never get anything done. Sitting, for example, in a classroom studying Indigenous Knowledge for hours on end without putting it to use is a waste of time; there must be movement. Recognizing that fact is what led me to adopt the Medicine Wheel approach. It is a valuable true tool for understanding everyday life, but it is also a very powerful method of examining academic questions because it provides a structure for the process. It is used, therefore, as both the philosophical and methodological basis of this dissertation.

Since the Northern direction deals with movement, I am reminded that there should be conclusions. The Indigenous approaches associated with the Medicine Wheel Teachings reveal that it is the journey that is important and not the destination. In keeping with that imperative, I carry out research into the engagement of Native people with the Fine Art category of Native Art by means of a typically Native methodological analysis of what I as an individual know about the subject. I present the results in a manner primarily associated with the oral tradition and storytelling. In the creation of the story, I have followed the Medicine Wheel Teachings in the hope that exposing the thesis that the

voices of contemporary artists of Native descent, when speaking of their work, create a rich and vibrant story of Native creativity, pride and joy will promote a more accurate view by Native and non-Native people alike.

In the transcription of the discussion with Jeff Thomas, he alludes to our oral traditions when he says, “[a]nd because our traditions are oral based, this was a way to use the audio component to also bring into the focus in this exhibition that aspect of using our voices as well. And so that’s what this mural is about.” (Thomas, AVR) In the context of writing a dissertation, a consideration of oral tradition relates to methodology especially given my connection to oral tradition on the radio. How we approach and write about a certain topic often reflects the community we are a part of. In this case, the story I tell seeks to present our perspective and as a result I have used the Medicine Wheel approach to help tell our own story. The issue is one of controlling the image. How we see ourselves is at the heart of this dissertation and the Medicine Wheel Teachings allow us to explore the question in a manner that respects the Native worldview.

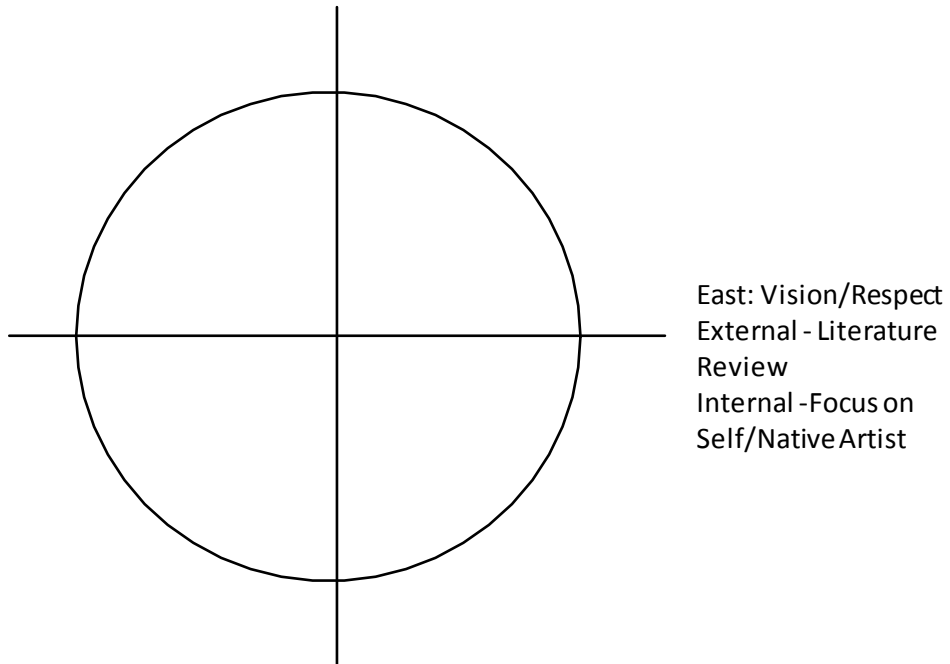
The Medicine Wheel has also been very useful in organizing the structure of the dissertation. Each of the points on the Wheel have been allotted two chapters. The Introduction naturally begins at the Center where I, as the storyteller/researcher, begin considering the issues associated with the thesis. Each of the four directions follow in turn, but it is important to recognize that all points on the wheel are interrelated. The last chapter returns to the Center of the Wheel where the conclusions are dealt with and where movement in the form of acceptance of the thesis can occur.

Jeff Thomas makes a comment in the interview above that seems to sum up the intent of the dissertation, as well as the manner in which the story goes about exploring the fact that the voices of contemporary artists of Native descent, when speaking of their work, create a rich and vibrant story of Native creativity, pride and joy. He states, “[s]o here we have looking forward, looking back and in that case with the Wampum Belt just off to the side in the periphery like in our minds and our memories is our history that we carry with us wherever we go. So yes, it does encompass so many different aspects of who we are.” (Thomas, AVR)

In the next chapter we will look more closely at the backgrounds of the artists presented in this story. It is worth pointing out that although the Medicine Wheel is a circle, it is not necessary to move from one direction to the next around it. We may look forward, backward or diagonally across the circle. In this case we look to the Eastern Direction next with its emphasis on Vision, Respect and Our Contemporary Artists.

Chapter 3: The Eastern Direction

Vision and Respect - Our Contemporary Artists



"Social science is a form of storytelling, and the way we tell stories largely determines who will hear them."

Julie Cruikshank, *Life lived like a story* (Cruikshank, 356)

As an Aboriginal academic, I am confronted time and time again with denial when I point out inconsistencies in the mainstream view of Native art, Native artists and Native cultures. I maintain that the Fine Art concept of Native art and artists has a host of inaccurate and disparaging connotations associated with it. The category of Native art tends to remove our artists and artwork from any modern context, relegating them to the level of untrained practitioners of ancient tribal rites. Our modern Native artists, however, tend to see themselves as being highly trained and competing on equal footing in contemporary artistic styles. The presentation of the voices of a selection of contemporary

Native artists throughout the dissertation will allow readers to come to their own conclusions about the nature of their perspective. The backgrounds of the artists are presented in this chapter to provide an indication of their representative nature.

The Artists

This dissertation is about how Native artists see Native art and the story presented here is based on the traditional Native methodology encompassed in the Medicine Wheel. It is an important story because all too often our stories are lost in the overwhelming number of stories told in our modern digital and global world. In the Fine Art world, stories about Picasso and Jackson Pollock turn up everywhere. Stories about Native artists are also surprisingly common, but most of the stories about Native artists tend to be produced by non-Native authors. Presenting the voices of our artists telling our own stories is therefore a highly important task.

Sometimes, however, there is more to a story than its simple subject or even the storyline. Quite often, how the story is told is every bit as important as what the story is about because the way of telling influences so many of its aspects. In this case I have chosen from a host of possible alternatives to tell the story about how Native artists see Native art. My choice was to tell the story from a Native perspective in a manner that allows many of our contemporary artists to use their own voices to contribute their points of view.

What Native perspective have I actually used? There are many different points of view to choose from. I have selected to use a Medicine Wheel approach when picking a fundamental philosophical basis upon which to build this story about how our artists see Native art. Why would I look to the Medicine Wheel instead of a host of widely accepted

academic approaches? Well, as a Native person I am very conscious of the existence of Native approaches that recognize a distinctly Native perspective. Since the Medicine Wheel approach extends and complements the Vision Statement of the Trent University Indigenous Studies Ph.D. program that was designed and approved by the community and became a basis for implementing a doctoral program at Trent itself, it must be a good starting point.

Who are these stories intended for? Well, once again as a Native person, it is my hope that our people will find elements in the story that they can relate to and that mirror their personal experiences and points of view. In other words, it certainly is intended for an Indigenous audience, but it doesn't stop there. On the contrary, the very act of pointing out that our Native artists have their own perspective, point of view and understanding of Native art recognizes the fact that we do have a different perspective. This story, then, is for everyone. I sincerely hope that non-Native people will find it interesting and through it come to realize that our point of view is very different from what they have come to expect.

Both the Medicine Wheel approach and the Vision Statement of the Indigenous Studies Ph.D. program stress balance. The use of a storytelling approach based on such typically Native philosophical foundations is an attempt to restore balance by presenting our perspective. For too long the only story told and given credibility has been that of the mainstream dominant society. This story brings Native perspectives to the conversation.

The following artists are quoted in the dissertation. Each is a highly successful and experienced artist who is well known in the industry. I, too, am an artist; I, too, am a Native person; I, too, have a perspective. That perspective has been conditioned by

discussing Native art and culture with hundreds of artists of Native descent and I have enlisted the help of several by transcribing the AVR Arts Review radio shows within which they were featured. Why did I choose these particular artists and what is it about them that led me to feel that they can help illustrate the perspective of Native artists with respect to Native art? Perhaps the easiest way to answer such questions is to present a brief discussion of each of the Native people you will hear from in the succeeding chapters.

Arthur Renwick

Arthur Renwick is a Haisla First Nations artist born in Kitimat, British Columbia. He is an internationally recognized artist who has works in the National Gallery of Canada collection. Specializing in photography, Arthur holds an MFA from Concordia University in Montreal and has taught extensively at the Ontario College of Art and Design in addition to the University of Guelph (Renwick, National). As a creative individual, Arthur Renwick is also a well know musician who is in constant demand in the Toronto area. (Renwick, National)

Arthur Renwick is presented in chapter four under the Southern heading because the stories he tells are very strongly connected to both time and experience. He has a powerful interest in history, specifically our history as Indigenous peoples. Moreover, his comments help illustrate the way in which we perceive how we are viewed by others. How we are treated speaks volumes about how we are seen and his stories about how he was treated by an art teacher and, later, an art critic address that issue. Arthur Renwick creates artwork that deals with subjects of political concern to our people and he does so in a sophisticated contemporary style. (Renwick, National)

In 2005 Arthur Renwick won the K.M. Hunter Artist Award. The twelve works of his 2006 Mask Series were purchased by the National Gallery of Canada in 2008. (Renwick, National). Arthur Renwick's work may be seen on the National Gallery website. The gray haired old man with the twisted up face over the name Bob in Arthur Renwick's 2006 Mask Series is actually a photograph of me.

I have, of course, known Arthur Renwick for many years and consider him an excellent friend, but find that fact to be astonishing. Having grown up in the west end of Toronto playing cowboys and Indians in the backyard, I am really amazed that all these years later one of my very good friends would be a Haisla person who grew up on the West Coast so very far from my little world. What is even more astonishing is the fact that we share so many experiences when dealing with the mainstream society. Mi'kmaq, Ojibwa, Cree, Inuit or Haisla we have distinct and, at times, very different cultures. The concept of a Pan Indian culture is a fantasy, yet Arthur Renwick and I appear to have had very similar experiences and points of view when dealing with the non-Native world, both in the education system and in the Fine Art world.

As a young student, I had enormous difficulties in the public school system that one would think would sour me forever on it and cause me to shun any further contact. As it happens though, I have become a well-educated individual. What is perhaps more curious, however, is the fact that both Arthur and I have also become experienced teachers. Those experiences have led me to believe that Arthur Renwick might be a very good individual to illustrate how we perceive the way the mainstream sees us through our dealings with them. As he will tell you, he had problems with the education system, but did not allow that to deter him. When I first met Arthur he was teaching at the Ontario

College of Art and Design. Today he teaches at the University of Guelph in Ontario.

The mainstream perspective often has clear expectations of what Native people, cultures and arts should be like. As an internationally recognized artist, Arthur has also had problems with mainstream art critics who held stereotypical images of our people and our art. Once again hearing his story is instructive. I chose to present Arthur's voice in the Southern direction precisely because his comments mark him as a fully contemporary and highly trained artist of Native descent. His interest in history and the great lengths he goes to learn about the subjects featured in his artwork are not what one would usually associate with "traditional" artwork. That ability and inclination to do in depth and academically sound historical research is another reason to include him in a section that deals with time and experience. It is, after all, an illustration of the methods that we as contemporary Native people use to acquire knowledge about the world we live in.

Jeff Thomas

"I am an urban-Iroquois, born in the city of Buffalo, New York in 1956. My parents and grandparents were born at the Six Nations reserve, near Brantford, Ontario and left the reserve to find work in the city.

You won't find a definition for 'urban Iroquois' in any dictionary or anthropological publication--it is this absence that informs my work as a photo-based artist, researcher, independent curator, cultural analyst and public speaker. My study of Indian-ness seeks to create an image bank of my urban-Iroquois experience, as well as re-contextualize historical images of First Nations people for a contemporary audience. Ultimately, I want to dismantle long entrenched stereotypes and inappropriate caricatures of First Nations people". (Thomas, *Indian-ness*)

Jeff Thomas typifies our modern artists who create photo based work specifically for the Fine Art market and he is recognized internationally. From the Six Nations reserve near Brantford, Ontario, Jeff has been included in the second chapter under the heading of the Southern direction because he too demonstrates a connection to experience and time. However, he is included in the dissertation because his comments and his artwork

demonstrate the contemporary perspective of our artists. His focus on re-contextualizing historical images of First Nations people is in keeping with the intent of this dissertation to promote recognition of the perspective of our contemporary artists by presenting their voices. The result is a rich and vibrant story of Native creativity, pride and joy.

I build my own kayaks in a very traditional manner and tow them down to Lake Ontario on a small set of wheels behind my bicycle. My path to the lake from where I live takes me across the Bathurst Street Bridge, so I am intimately familiar with its view of the city and the CN Tower when looking over its railing. Moreover, having grown up after the Second World War, I am certainly familiar with the little plastic toy Indians and soldiers we used to play with as children. It is no surprise then that I would find the Jeff Thomas photograph of a toy Indian Chief standing on the Bathurst Street Bridge railing in front of the CN Tower seared into my memory. His attempt to place the Indian back in the city was brilliant. Here in Toronto, we have become essentially invisible as a group although individuals with features such as mine are quickly identified and classified. Unfortunately for me that classification tends to have all of the stereotypical elements associated with the toy Indians with which we grew up playing. You can view the photograph *Peace Chief, Tower, Toronto, Ontario, 2004, Chromogenic Print, Indians on Tour* by Jeff Thomas on the Stephen Bulger Gallery website. (Thomas, *Peace Chief*)

Jeff Thomas is concerned with the difference in perspective between what the mainstream expects to find and what we actually see with respect to the Fine Art world. When attempting to figure out the best approach to use in my dissertation, Jeff Thomas came immediately to mind. First of all, he is a superb example of our point of view toward Native art, which is fully contemporary. More importantly here, however, is the

fact that his point of view illustrates the manner in which we go about answering questions about the world we live in. His comments on the AVR Arts Review show fit in very well with a discussion of Methodology. The man asks questions and discovers ways to answer them. Both the questions and the answers are incorporated in his Fine Art photography. As a contemporary storyteller who has been telling stories through the AVR Arts Review radio show for some ten years, you may understand that I also recognize and appreciate the storytelling quality embedded in most of his artwork.

Another reason for including Jeff Thomas in the section dealing with the Southern direction is his interest in looking forward and looking back. There comes a time in our lives when as adults we have children, like his son Bear, and begin to look forward to the next seven generations. Our lived experience at that point often finds us looking back to the lessons, gifts and traditional knowledge passed to us by our own ancestors. Jeff Thomas seems to fit with all of the directions on the Medicine Wheel, but his ability to bring past experience into a modern context makes him an ideal choice for this section.

Jane Ash Poitras

It is my personal opinion that Jane Ash Poitras is an excellent example of a contemporary Art Elder and I have introduced her in chapter seven under the heading of the Western direction that is associated with storytelling as well as feelings and reason. She exemplifies a modern visual storyteller in her artistic production. She holds an MFA in Printmaking from Columbia University and produces very modern mixed media work that includes text, photographs, and newspaper clippings arranged in a manner that deals with subjects important to our people as I know from chatting with her and viewing her work in person. As an internationally recognized contemporary Native artist, she may

easily be considered a knowledgeable specialist with respect to Fine Art.ⁱ

Jane Ash Poitras, however, is well trained in traditional matters including ceremony and the traditional use of medicines. She has supplemented her traditional Indigenous Knowledge in this area with a B.Sc. in Microbiology and therefore must be considered the kind of person we generally tend to think of as being a traditional elder. In the same manner, I see her specialised knowledge with respect to the Fine Art world as qualifying her as an “art” Elder. If we look for the kind of specialized knowledge formerly associated with an Elder as one of the ingredients that goes into the making of a sound storyteller, then Jane Ash Poitras fits the bill. She also demonstrates a perspective that is fully contemporary and once again authentically Native. You may view examples of her work at the The Bearclaw Gallery website. (Poitras, Bearclaw)

The Western direction under which I have placed Jane Ash Poitras is concerned with storytelling as well as both feelings and reason. One of the questions that has pestered me for years is simply, “Who Speaks for Us?” Far too often, subtle and hidden non-Native influences determine who is qualified to speak for us. Storytelling is often equated with traditional Elders who are seen as a kind of religious figure, deeply knowledgeable in matters of ceremony and who are elderly, but that seems to be about it. Jane Ash Poitras is a very contemporary visual storyteller.

Jane Ash Poitras is an excellent individual to present as an illustration of a very different kind of Elder. First of all, Jane Ash, like so many of our people, is still connected to and familiar with the old ways. In her case, that includes many of the areas that are considered traditional Indigenous Knowledge. It is easy then to consider her as an Elder able to present valid stories.

Jane Ash Poitras, however, is also a very highly qualified Fine Art practitioner working in the most advanced of contemporary styles. Her beautiful pieces can be very large and incorporate elements such as photographs, text and newspaper clippings. Jane Ash Poitras is a specialist in the visual arts in a manner that I consider to be at the level of an “art” Elder. In the transcription of the radio show devoted to her, it is easy to see storytelling in the Fine art world as the proper domain of a new kind of Elder, the art Elder.

If a common view would expect our artists to take a simplistic, tribal approach to art production that might be more properly considered craft than true Fine Art, they would be surprised by the thoughts, the approach and the art of Jane Ash Poitras. With an MFA from a prestigious American university and a contemporary approach, she is far from being the accepted “traditional” Native artist. She is, in effect, an artist who just happens to be of Native descent, but who remains deeply embedded in the culture at a very contemporary level.

Marrie Mumford

“Assistant Professor, Indigenous Studies

Canada Research Chair, Aboriginal Arts and Literature

Director, Nozhem, First Peoples Performance Space

Marrie Mumford joined the Indigenous Studies Department in 2004 and is the newly appointed Canada Research Chair in Aboriginal Arts and Literature. Marrie has a BA from the University of Alberta in Theatre and an MFA from Brandis University in Boston. She comes to us from the Aboriginal Arts Program at the Banff Centre in Alberta, where she was Artistic Director. She has worked extensively in Canada and

the U.S. in professional theatre.” (Mumford, Indigenous Studies)

The inclusion of Marrie Mumford in the section dealing with feelings, reason and storytelling illustrates our contemporary orientation. It also demonstrates that the concept an Elder who tells a stories has changed as well. Today the Elder, as in times past, is truly a specialist with a depth of lived personal experience and an accumulated knowledge that can address issues of importance to the community. Our Native cultures have evolved and our approach to both storytelling and to the Fine Art world must be seen as current. The Fine Art world includes dance and theatre. Performance pieces, just like a painting hung in a gallery, is a very public event. Those who forge a lengthy career in it must be considered specialists or, as I like to think of them, art Elders. The transcription of the voice of Marrie Mumford, when discussing her work, is presented in the section dealing with the question of what is an Elder and who is admissible as a storyteller because she is such a fine example of both.

Both Jane Ash Poitras and Marrie Mumford hold MFA's. As a Native person I see them as being specialists because of their ability to produce at the highest level, but a widely held notion of Native artists would not include formal academic training in the arts. Do their contemporary qualifications somehow disqualify them from being art Elders or even Native people? Does their level of success in the mainstream institution of Fine Art make them assimilated individuals who are hybrids that are not quite non-Native, but no longer Native either? Listening to the voice of Marrie Mumford is most instructive because it indicates the strength of our Native cultures that are able to maintain a connection to the past at the same time as we adapt to the present.

As an art Elder, Marrie Mumford is a very important and productive storyteller. I have

often sat in the Nozhem Theatre on the Trent University campus enthralled by performances presented by our Native students. The works tell stories. Those stories are told in highly complex and interrelated ways. Music, spoken word, dance, costume and scenery must all combine to make the story come to life. The transcript of the thoughts of Marrie Mumford provides insight into the contemporary Native perspective of the Fine Art world, but it also allows us to view the perspective of a very powerful storyteller and acknowledge the existence of an art Elder.

Bonnie Devine

Bonnie Devine, a member of the Serpent River First Nation of Northern Ontario (Ojibwa) is an artist, curator, writer and educator. Her primary interests are sculpture, installation and the history and development of contemporary Aboriginal culture. They are central to her art practice and teaching career and inform her work as an independent curator. Devine is an associate professor at the Ontario College of Art and Design in the Aboriginal Visual Culture Program. Recent exhibitions of Devine's artwork include Writing Home at Gallery Connexion in Fredericton, New Brunswick, Medicine River at AxeNeo7 in Gatineau, Quebec, and BadLand at the IAIA Museum in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Her most recent video, A Grim Fairy Tale, was screened at the 2009 Berlin Film Festival. Devine holds Fine Art degrees from the Ontario College of Art and Design and York University. (Devine, National)

Bonnie Devine is presented in the section dealing with the Northern direction concerned with movement and behavior. I am a kayaker who builds his own craft in a very traditional manner. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that my earliest memories of the work of Bonnie Devine occurred in the Hart House Art Gallery on the University of

Toronto campus. I have a habit of sticking my head in there from time to time and was astonished to see a massive canoe hanging about chest high from the gallery ceiling. It was clearly a handmade craft that I immediately recognized as authentic and traditional. What astounded me, however, was the fact that it was not made of birch bark, but rather of paper and that the paper was covered in writing. The canoe struck me at the time as being a very contemporary piece of artwork.

One of the aspects of her career that I see as a demonstration of Native creativity, pride and joy is an active engagement with issues of importance to the community. The topics she addresses find expression in modern artistic practices that include sculpture, video and theatre while maintaining her connection to our people and our history. As a professor at the Ontario College of Art and Design, she has been involved with the creation of an independent Indigenous Visual Culture department that helps train our young Native artists in the most current and advanced techniques.

Bonnie Devine is a very contemporary artist who is also deeply involved with the Fine Art world. Both as a professor and as a curator, she has come to understand a broad range of artistic styles in which artists of Native descent work. As a result, her comments when featured on the AVR Arts Review need to be included when we wish to provide examples of the perspective of Native artists with respect to Native art especially when it comes to movement. Her own artwork is very modern and competes easily with the work of any other culture. As such both her work and her ideas illustrate a very contemporary perspective. When it comes to movement, however, she is a tremendous example. As an artist, as a visual storyteller, as a professor, as an advocate for her people and as a curator she has been responsible for a great deal of movement toward a balanced place in this

world for Native people.

Rita Letendre

“Since her first exhibitions with the Automatistes in 1952 and 1953, many of Letendre's paintings have featured a headstrong, upward reach - a telling visual metaphor for the artist's own restless sense of self-discovery. An early solo show at the Here and Now Gallery in Toronto was reviewed by Robert Fulford, who remarked how Letendre ‘works in the roughest, widest of strokes, she builds up the paint in thick crusts and her colour is often used violently . . . the blunt composition works perfectly as an expression of intransigent and genuinely original personality.’ She was recently awarded the 2010 Governor General's Award in Visual Arts.” (Letendre, Gevik)

The work of Rita Letendre may be seen at the Gallery Gevik website. Rita Letendre is included in the Northern direction because her behavior in the Fine Art world has been contemporary ever since she first began studying and practicing art. She is also included because she is an example of movement in that she has continued to practice a very contemporary style of art throughout her career even when it might have been much easier to work in and sell more “traditional” pieces. Rita Letendre is older than most of the other artists presented in this story. While there are many good reasons to present her voice here, the fact that her artistic career began back in the 1950s raises an important point. She actually came before the advent of the Woodland Style. Rita Letendre was part of a new approach to art that was taking place in Quebec when she was completing her formal academic artistic training. As a friend of the Automatists, she dared to approach art in one of the most contemporary manners possible that remains to this day cutting edge. Her work is very abstract and evokes emotional reactions through her use of colour. It is also very spontaneous. There is no prior sketching or determination of its content. The works are the result of a stream of consciousness that makes use of internalized experience. As a result, it is very high Fine Art. It is also very sound Native art in that it is

the product of a Native artist, but also in that it bears out the wisdom of the Medicine Wheel Teachings. Rita Letendre does, after all, make use of internal lived experience to create her beautiful works.

Rita Letendre is an excellent example of the contemporary Native perspective toward Native art. Her work is contemporary and competes easily with the work of any other culture. Moreover she does not fit the image of the “traditional” Native artist. Her point of view or perspective is one that is mirrored by hundreds of other artists of Native descent. She is simply engaged in producing for the Fine Art world, not for a dead and archaic cultural need. And yet, in spite of her extraordinarily contemporary approach, her work is most often presented in the category of Native art.

Alex Janvier

Alex Janvier is presented under the heading of the Northern direction in chapter nine because he typifies movement or action. His entire career is an example of determination and an action in the struggle to compete in the Fine Art world. He is one of the members of the Native Group of Seven who were pioneers in the struggle to open the Fine Art market to artists of Native descent (Janvier, Website). He has a prominent place in this dissertation because his work is modern and in a style that few would link to the “Traditional” image.

Of Dene Suline and Sauteaux descent, Alex Janvier was born in 1935 and graduated from the Alberta College of Art in Calgary with honours in 1960 to immediately become an art instructor at the University of Alberta. As a result, he has figured prominently in the engagement of Native people with the contemporary Fine Art world throughout the second half of the twentieth century. The historical record

associated with him is of particular interest for its potential to reveal prominent trends and characteristics common in the Native Art category. The fact that Janvier's abstract style is usually associated with practitioners of Western European Fine Art is of further interest for its potential to reveal the influence of his Native background on the way he was viewed as a Canadian or Native artist. His artwork is non-Native in style and executed in the abstract expressionist style generally associated with Vasily Kandinsky. Alex Janvier has also been a prominent artist since the early 1960s and was associated with the Native Group of Seven. The work of Alex Janvier may be seen on his home website. (Janvier, Website)

I have often been told that I have been blessed by good fortune. While that may be the case, it would seem that my good fortune is associated with the electronic Talking Stick that gives voice to so many of our artists. Holding the Talking Stick has allowed me to meet some of our most powerful artists. One evening in Ottawa during a reception honouring Daphne Odjig, I was lucky enough to meet Alex Janvier. The occasion was the first time a Native woman artist had a solo exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada and as a member of the original Native Group of Seven, naturally Alex Janvier was present. To my surprise he presented a point of view that I recognized immediately. He was from the plains and yet his experience with the Fine Art world and with the mainstream culture in general also mirrored mine in spite of the fact that I was raised in Toronto. It would appear that there is a more or less common perspective with respect to Native art on our part after all perhaps because we produce artwork for the mainstream Fine Art World.

Presenting the words of Alex Janvier serves another function. His lived experience

and his engagement with the Fine Art world links all of the other elements of this story together in a very holistic manner. Alex Janvier is not the typical “traditional” Native artist one might expect. His work is very abstract. Moreover, he was a trained artist who worked in the early 1960s. His perspective then is not necessarily one that would be expected by the mainstream. He really does offer a perspective that is common to contemporary artists of Native descent.

Why?

Why did I choose these particular artists to illustrate the presence of a distinct Native perspective? Well, one of the primary reasons is that I have a distinct perspective with respect to Native art myself. I am very familiar with mainstream thinking when it comes to the Fine Art world and more particularly when it comes to things Native. With a foot in both worlds, I have been conscious for a very long time of the existence of a different perspective in our communities. It is that awareness that motivated this dissertation. However, this dissertation is not intended as a critique of the perspective of the mainstream or other cultures. Rather it stems from a desire to have our own perspective recognized.

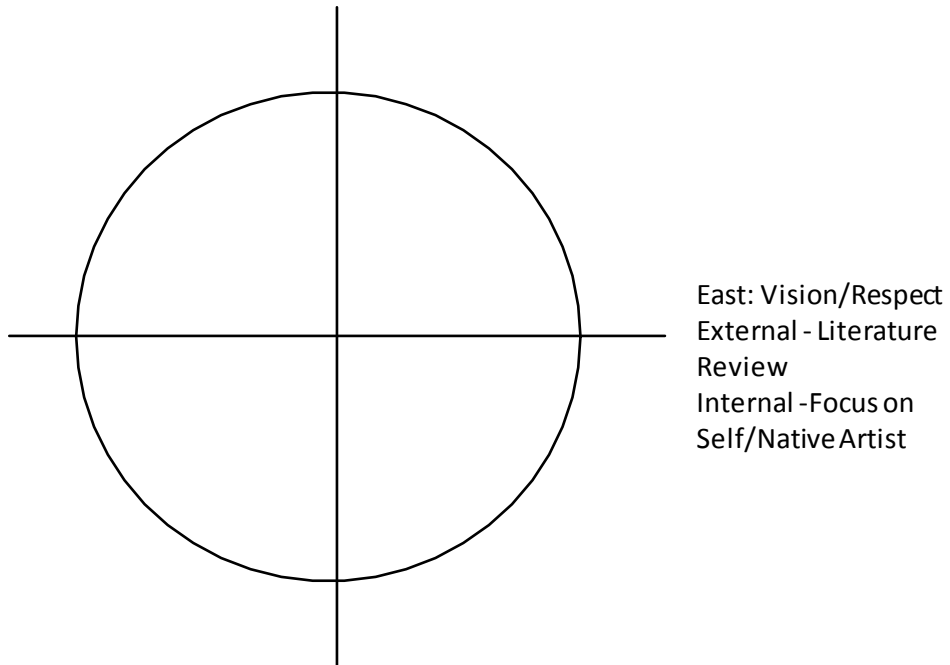
Why did I pick these artists to illustrate the existence of a distinct Native perspective? Well, as the storyteller I can relate to them. I recognize similar concerns in each of their stories. My facial structure is such that a police officer will automatically address me as Chief. Surprisingly Arthur Renwick asked me to distort my face as he brought attention to the importance of appearance to identity, so I include him. Marrie Mumford has learned from the Elders and continues her connection to the ancestors, so I include her as I listen to her as an Elder.

As the storyteller/researcher my conclusion, based on the experience of having discussed Native art with hundreds of Native artists, is that the artists presented here constitute a representative sample. It is also my conclusion as a storyteller/researcher that the apparent perspective is considerably different from commonly held notions that think of Native art as something from a time long past. The overwhelming characteristic of the Native perspective I detect is that of contemporary Native creativity, pride and joy.

Clearly the background information in this chapter demonstrates that the Native artists whose voices and perspectives are presented throughout the dissertation are representative of our contemporary engagement with the Fine Art world. The artists are very diverse in the forms of Fine Art that they pursue. Some are photographers, others are painters or performance artists. The artists include representatives from across the country and represent different Native cultures. In spite of their individuality however, they have a great deal in common. Each is academically highly qualified; each is internationally recognized and considered a successful artist; moreover each creates work in contemporary Fine Art styles. As a result they do not fit the generally accepted image of "traditional" Native artists.

Unfortunately our perspective is not always shared by members of Fine Art world. If they are unaware of our perspective, I believe that we are under an obligation to point it out to them. But I talk too much! It is time to hear a distinct perspective from Native voices other than mine.

Chapter 4: The Eastern Direction Vision and Respect - The Vision in the Books



External Vision

The Medicine Wheel Teachings have provided the foundation for this dissertation in the hope of using Native approaches that reflect our perspective in a contemporary manner, as is the case with Arthur Renwick and the other artists, but that remain true to our traditions. As a result, a storytelling method has been used to present the voices of contemporary artists of Native descent who when speaking of their work create a rich and vibrant story of Native creativity, pride and joy. Recently, ever growing numbers of Native people have begun taking their places in the academic community and have begun to comment on issues of importance to our people. The opinions, experiences and voices of Native academics have actually been very influential in shaping this dissertation and justifying its presentation in a story form.¹ Academia is providing an opportunity for me

to use Aboriginal models and approaches through Trent University's Indigenous Studies PhD program and the Medicine Wheel Teachings.

We are all related and the Medicine Wheel Teachings reflect that fundamental Native point of view. The search for balance associated with it requires that, out of respect, we must take into consideration the thoughts and experiences of all other members of humankind be they Native or mainstream. The Medicine Wheel Teachings recognize that there are different groups of peoples and that we all have similarities and differences. The purpose of the dissertation, however, is not to describe and/or explain these similarities and differences. In keeping with the lessons of the Medicine Wheel, the goal of the dissertation is simply to bring the voice and experiences of Native artists to the forefront. Making sure that their words are heard is an attempt at providing balance to the discourse. This dissertation does so through the lens of a Medicine Wheel framework.

Respect for our relations is a part of Native culture that allows us to live harmoniously with others. Situating my efforts in the context of the work of others is a way of showing respect to the reader and to those who have contributed to my internalized knowledge base. Acknowledging what the books have to say is a way of acknowledging that I do not assume that I am superior to my relations. A Literature Review then becomes an integral part of the Medicine Wheel framework important to the storytelling method employed here.

Shawn Wilson writing in *Research is Ceremony* seems to share the Medicine Wheel interpretation on the inclusion of a literature review. Wilson states,

“[c]riticizing or judging would imply that I know more about someone else's work and the relationships that went into it than they do themselves. I have no doubt that as others did their research, they used the methods and paradigms that seemed most suited to the job as they saw it. What follows then is properly termed a review rather

than a critique.” (Wilson, 43).

The Medicine Wheel has been used as the basis for this investigation into the category of Native art and the use of a storytelling approach. It can be personal, but need not always be so because of the Eastern direction’s requirement for a respectful consideration of external data. Storytelling is a common Native method and one that is able to take into consideration our perspective. The Medicine Wheel Teachings stress a holistic inclusive view of the world. It recognizes differences between written and oral approaches. It is important to recognize, however, that the difference is one of emphasis. It does not imply a binary condition of either/or. In actual fact, both approaches involve a much more widely ranging set of inclusions that form far more of a continuum than a black and white result.

According to Michael Thrasher’s Medicine Wheel teachings, the Creator gave the same original instructions to all humankind, but each individual will interpret them differently. That is the way it is supposed to be because diversity is the key to survival. There must be differences, but there must also be balance (Thrasher). It is not possible to ignore or remove one of the elements, such as the Indigenous perspective. Since the Medicine Wheel is holistic, it is not possible to take away one of the spokes, so the issue becomes one of balance. Inclusion of the Indigenous perspective in the Fine Art world is important to balance. By following the Ph.D. program’s Vision Statement that encourages an Indigenous perspective, this dissertation attempts to introduce a better balance through its focus on the Michael Thrasher Medicine Wheel Teachings. Including the Native perspective in a consideration of the category of Native art should contribute to a better balance, but it is not expected to completely solve the problem. In order to cover all the bases, the story will now turn its attention to what the books tell us.

The Native Academic Perspective

During my review of the literature I was impressed by the work of Mary Longman who, in her 2006 dissertation *Challenging the Ideology of Representation: Contemporary First Nations Art in Canada*, recognizes the exclusion of Native artists from equal treatment within the Fine Art world. She acknowledges a number of contributing factors such as an insistence on authenticity and problems associated with the term traditional. On the other hand, she appears to propose a solution that creates a separate art history. Longman states, “. . . I would assert that the priority of writing a new First Nations art history must begin with First Nations representing themselves and reclaiming their authorship.” (Longman 218). It might well be possible to set up a parallel Native art history independent of any involvement with the Fine Art world. However, while that may well appear to be an attractive solution, it is not without problems of its own. For one thing, Native artists have engaged with the Fine Art market under the assumption that they were simply artists competing on an equal footing and a part of the institution¹. The setting up of an art history independent of the Fine Art world would simply endanger existing markets for their work.

A very large number of authors have contributed to my understanding of the relationship of artists of Native descent to the category of Native art, but none appear to approach the problem of recognizing the contemporary manner in which we approach art today. Some great Native art historians such as Tom Hill, Robert Houle and Leanne Martin have dealt with key elements that clarify the position of the Native in the art world. Of particular importance is Tom Hill's recognition that “. . . since the time of European contact there has been no “pristine” Indian art that has never been modified or

influenced by the dominant Euro-Canadian culture.” (McLuhan and Hill 11). It reveals that an association of marks of the traditional with proof of authenticity is a misguided approach. Works such as these clarify the need to consider and value our contemporary view.

Another group of works contributed greatly to my understanding of our present day approaches to Native art. Some of them dealt with the impact of photography and visual imagery on the way our work is seen by others and how we see it ourselves. Thomas King, for instance, in addition to being a very fine author is also a Fine Art photographer. In his *The Truth About Stories*, he helps reveal the impact of visual representation on both the way we see ourselves and on the way we are viewed, yet his focus is on the literary world. (King). Carol Williams, in *Framing the West*, deals with such issues as they appear in early photographic practices relating to Native women in British Columbia. The value of the work produced by Williams is that it recognizes the manner in which photography has misrepresented Native people, but it does not deal with the overall formal Fine Art world. (Williams).

Misrepresentation

An extensive set of works that influenced my thinking about the Fine Art world dealt with the world film and television. Works, such as those reviewed by Jose Prats, reveal the false image presented in the American Western movie genre. Speaking of revisionist films like *Little Big Man* Prats points out that,

“[t]he new Indian’ ideal qualities became, as had his degradation, the invention of the white man. New, then, though he may be in outward form and even in ascribed moral character, he remains old and all too familiar in his dependence on the white man’s modes of figuration. The intent to revise produces not a different Indian, but a different white perspective on the Indian.” (Prats 16)

Gerald Vizenor is representative of this group of perceptive authors who make it clear that the image of the North American Native presented in the Cowboy and Indian movies was a pure fabrication. The constructed Indian never, ever existed. (Vizenor). Their work stops short of dealing with the Fine Art world, but it did alert me to the fact that the same conditions might exist therein and for the same reasons. A closely related work that helps understand the Fine Art world's similar view of and treatment of the Native was done by Raul S. Chavez whose dissertation *Childhood Indians* points out that an entire generation grew up watching American Westerns in theatres and on television. (Chavez). The concept of the Native they acquired was naturally the false one projected. That generation now runs the galleries, write the critics and purchases art. Telling our own stories that properly project a contemporary image would benefit everyone.

Mary Longman also draws attention to the importance of Native people in the academy. Part of the difficulty has been that academic forms of research tended to ignore the Native point of view. Longman suggests that

"today these practices of control over cultural production continue, though not so much as a conscious act of imperialism, but rather as a residual ethnocentric belief that Western knowledge is superior. Academics assume a superior position and impose their interpretation on other cultures." (Longman 187).

A good deal of what Longman suggests is true, but I'm an academic too. I also happen to be a Native person, so I intend to use a clearly Native methodology. What is behind her remarks seems to be the larger issue of whether or not Native methodologies can be accepted as legitimate approaches by mainstream academics. Surprisingly, there is substantial support in the literature prepared by our own Native academics.

Native Academic Approaches

"When the indigenous peoples become the researchers and not merely the researched, the activity of research is transformed. Questions are framed differently, priorities are ranked differently, problems are defined differently, and people participate on different terms." Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Smith 193)

Linda Smith is heavily involved with education. As a result, the focus of the kind of research that she describes has its basis in the way in which the educational system deals with the Maori people. Certainly the experience of Indigenous peoples in the Canadian context is similar enough to find a good deal of common ground in both the problems and their possible solutions. On the other hand, there is much about her work that makes me uneasy. I wonder if a more careful reading of the ideas presented might be indicated with respect to conditions in our own backyard.

Although I do understand the desire to combat the ever present effects of colonialism, I sensed that a very rigid set of conditions are proposed concerning who is able to deal with Indigenous research. One of those conditions is that the individual speak the language. Another condition is that the individual be familiar with the culture intimately. In setting such conditions, Smith effectively disqualifies me from having anything to do with Indigenous research. I do not fluently speak a Native language and, having grown up in the West End of Toronto, I am not as intimately familiar with Native Culture as Smith would appear to require. On the other hand, both English and French are the principal languages for a large number of Native people in Canada today because of the damage done to Native cultures by the Residential School systems.

I am not the only Native person to have grown up in an urban environment and because I am identified as a Native have gradually made deep connections to our local Native cultures in a manner that is consistent with the ability of all cultures to change according to prevailing conditions. I may not meet Linda Smith's strict definition, yet I see myself and a number of others like me as being a contemporary urban Aboriginals. There can be many different kinds of Indigenous experience. Here in Canada over fifty percent of the Indigenous population now lives in urban centers (Cardinal, 181). Many of the restrictions imposed by Smith would disqualify most Canadian urban Natives.

In all fairness, however, Linda Smith, in the final chapters of her book, appears to take a larger view suggesting that other approaches are possible. For example, she speaks of the "... recognition that indigenous cultures have changed inexorably." (Smith 116). Moreover, she observes that, "[t]he pressure internally is frequently manifested through struggles over leadership, over what counts as 'traditional', and over which interests within the community are being privileged by particular deals and settlements." (Smith 110). Such influences cannot be ignored. One of the more positive points in Linda Smith's work is when she "... insists that the first beneficiaries of indigenous knowledge must be direct indigenous descendants of that knowledge." Although she is not necessarily including the contemporary urban Native, she nevertheless stands up for the rights of Native people in a very welcome manner (Smith 119).

Elsewhere, she also acknowledges the fact that most funding for research, Indigenous or not, is state controlled. She points out that, "[i]n this sense the research is not research; it is a purchased product which becomes owned by the state." (Smith 118). Linda Smith suggests that the granting of funding by the state sets up the kind of conditions that

determine ultimately what the research is and exactly how it is going to be carried out. Whether funded or not, a good deal of academic research appears to be forced into a non-Native mold because the conditions under which it is undertaken demand a degree of conformity. My insistence on storytelling and the use of research methods consistent with the Native worldview is not an attempt to solve the resulting problems. It is simply an attempt to bring forward the voices and experiences of Native artists, which can be used to define a Native approach based on the Medicine Wheel Teachings. Linda Smith points to some very concrete examples of how changes were made that do seem to benefit the communities involved without totally turning their backs on systems already in place. Nevertheless, she is careful in the end to point out that nothing is perfect and that all this is only a bit of advancement. She states, “[i]n other words, the two pathways are not at odds with each other but simply reflect two distinct developments. They intersect and inform each other at a number of different levels.” (Smith 125) Linda Smith's writings have the positive effect of drawing attention to the need to engage more closely in a critical examination of processes that would otherwise be taken for granted. (Smith)

A Unique Worldview

The Medicine Wheel points out that the Indigenous emphasis is on subjectivity. When considering the nature of knowledge, Willie Ermine presents the idea that Native ideology is unique. With respect to the Aboriginal view of the cosmos he suggests that “. . . Aboriginal people turn to the inner space. This inner space is that universe of being which in each person that is synonymous with the soul, the spirit, the self, or the being.” He goes on to suggest that by placing themselves in the stream of consciousness they were able to explore existence subjectively (Ermine 103).

Willie Ermine also indicates that Aboriginal language and culture carries markers that suggest that Aboriginal people have obtained knowledge that is very different from that of Western peoples. He states, "[t]he accumulation and synthesis of insights and tribal understandings acquired through inwardness, and the juxtaposition of knowledge on the physical plane as culture and community, is the task of contemporary aboriginal education." (Ermine, 110). In making that statement the author makes an important distinction between Aboriginal approaches and those of the dominant society. If we are to pick up on this indication of a direction to be taken, then we must have a look at rituals and ceremonial observances which lead us to these inward journeys that must be considered important parts of the Aboriginal educational system. Storytelling fits the bill. Throughout the article, he stresses the inward space as being of primary importance to Aboriginal people when coming to understand how we know what we know. He says, "Aboriginal education has a responsibility to uphold a worldview based on recognizing and affirming wholeness and to disseminate the policy to all humanity." (Ermine, 110). Clearly the author links the discovery of interior values with the acquisition of knowledge. He goes on to suggest that "the fragmentary self-worldview that permeates the Western world is detrimental to aboriginal epistemology." (Ermine, 110).

It is my belief that a part of the inner universe Willie Ermine highlights is an accumulation of lived experience and a familiarity with forms of Indigenous Knowledge that are held to be sound and trustworthy by the community at large. When an Elder takes a problem under consideration in the inner universe, we must recognize and affirm the wholeness of a process capable of producing conclusions that are appropriate in the context of the human condition as well as the external reality.

Simpson states, “[r]ather than documenting knowledge we should be protecting the land and the Indigenous processes for the transmission of Indigenous Knowledge of the land.” (Simpson 380). In her 2004 article dealing with the recovery and maintenance of Indigenous knowledge, Leanne R. Simpson makes a very astute observation in that our efforts are often misdirected. Contemporary solutions to the problem of disappearing traditional knowledge focus on the physical act of documenting through recording with the pen, camera, and microphone. Such approaches assume that Indigenous Knowledge is both finite and independent of the human beings who hold it. This view is misleading.

One of the characteristics of the oral tradition is that human beings formulate experience based concepts, approaches, and attitudes. It is the transmission of experience, opinion, and guidance that makes Indigenous Knowledge work. It is not the purpose of the dissertation to criticize either Western society or Western methodological approaches. It is an explanation of the Medicine Wheel approach as a means of better understanding the category of Native art. Removing any human being from the equation is not possible because it throws the system out of balance. When academics undertake research that is designed to assure neutrality, objectivity, and distance to satisfy the demand that the research be an impartial investigation, the internal data of the Eastern direction is ignored. This approach, however, is similar to the fallacy exposed by Simpson. It has the effect of totally removing the Aboriginal from the equation and functions as a colonial mechanism that extends the classification of the Aboriginal as a non-entity. Removing the human being from the equation produces erroneous results.

Neocolonial mechanisms such as these operate at a subliminal level as the natural expression of internalized ideas and concepts embedded in the dominant society’s

worldview. Indigenous academics are not immune to neocolonial biases since most of our training takes place in dominant society institutions. Simpson points out that her own attempts to change the opinions of the scientific community are usually frustrated because her voice is restricted by publishers to Indigenous venues that scientists rarely explore (Simpson, 376).

How then should the community act to protect its interests? Leanne Simpson works in the area of traditional ecological knowledge. The problem of neocolonial attitudes in contemporary research is not, however, limited to a specific discipline. It is not possible, therefore, to assume that our own fields of research are immune to imbedded oppressive mechanisms. The efforts of academics, such as Simpson, lend credibility to my insistence on employing a Native approach to research a topic that so intimately affects us. Her work makes it difficult to miss the dominant society orientation and encourages research that is of appropriate value to the Indigenous community as well as the dominant society.

The Elder

Joseph Couture, in “The Role of Elders: Emergent Issues”, makes some very interesting statements in this article. Among other things, he points out, “that a true Elder is not classifiable as a passive informant on the traditional past, but is a creative theologian, open to the possibilities of the situation, to new ideas into symbols, into a dialogue between the traditions.” (Couture 50). In this he suggests that the traditional Elder was actually capable of accommodating change. When we consider that the Elders were human beings, that statement makes a lot of sense.

On the other hand, he seems to equate his respected Elders with the practice of shamanism when he suggests that they are capable of moving easily between worlds (Couture 49). While it may be true that certain Elders were and continue to be shamans, there appears to be no real advantage in generalizing with such a statement. While Couture may indeed be expressing himself in a metaphorical manner, he does continue the association with the spiritual world in a very persistent manner.

Clearly Couture has a very high respect for the role of Elders in Native culture. He states, "I am of the opinion that true Elders are superb embodiments of highly developed human potential. They exemplify the kind of person that a traditional, culturally-based learning environment can and does form and mold." (Couture 47) The characteristics of an Elder and the role of the Elder, however, are not narrowly fixed. The source of the problem seems to find expression in the following statement: "it is no simple matter to describe Elder behavior because of the deep interconnectedness of all facets of their behavior." (Couture 47)

Searching for Knowledge

Lewis Cardinal presents some interesting points, such as "[o]ur Indigenous cultures are rich with ways of gathering, discovering, and uncovering knowledge." (Cardinal, 182). He also touches on a subject that is of primary importance to me, which is that, "[a]ccording to Statistics Canada, 54% of First Nations do not live on reserves." (Cardinal, 181). Lewis Cardinal follows a common path in suggesting about that Native People, "...have a spiritual, emotional, and physical relationship to the land. It speaks to them; it gives them their responsibility for stewardship; and it sets out a relationship."

(Cardinal, 180). In doing so, he sparks a second question on my part: Where does the Urban Native fit in to all of this?

There is an implication that Indigenous ontology and epistemology differs significantly from the approaches taken by the dominant society. Acknowledging that the difference exists as per the Medicine Wheel Teachings is the first step in trying to understand and give value to the Native view of the world. Perhaps one of the most fundamental keys to the differences that exist is a recognition of the fact that the Native view is personally and individually based. The Native, for example, is highly conscious of personal experience as a guarantor of veracity. He or she will certify as truth, for example, only what he has personally witnessed and experience. If truth in the Native community is oriented toward the individual's personal experience, then whatever the individual experiences must, of necessity, be real. Jim Dumont quite properly points to occurrences taking place in dream states as being real events. He says, “[t]here is another level of reality which is concurrent with everyday reality and one of the ways we gain access to this “other reality” is through the dream.” (Dumont 13). There is a set of cultural positions based on this premise that point to the parallel existence of the real and the non-real and allow us to make sense of the differences between the two worlds by formalizing certain aspects of each.

Access to the non-real world can only occur under well understood conditions, such as vision quests. Shape shifting and flexible time are also valid because of the known properties of the non-real world. Those properties are known precisely because of a traditional ontology that accepts both the real and the non-real as valid states. The very personal view of reality adopted by the Native, therefore, is surprisingly linked to a

community view of what is and is not reality and of the laws by which both worlds behave. The community, or traditional view, accepts personal reality as valid.

Couture points to the need to examine Native knowledge in context (Couture). The context must be the cultural mindset as developed over centuries and supports the premise, the certainty, that there is no separation or distinction between matter and spirit. If the context is important, any attempt to understand Native knowledge must be experienced, or participated in. Our voices and opinions are important. It is not enough to look at portions of the picture in the hope of identifying the entire puzzle. With that in mind, a fair question involves the ability of the academic community to deal with Traditional Native knowledge. The question is even more appropriate when we recognize the importance of oral tradition to the development and maintenance of Native ontology. Oral tradition, after all, often appears at odds with the written traditions in which the academic places the most faith.

It is a fact of the modern world that dominant society views are replacing the traditional among our young people. Since the oral traditions are such an important vehicle of transmission of Indigenous Knowledge, young people who are not exposed to it are apt to see Western science as the only possible kind of knowledge. It is important therefore to develop an approach that, in essence, bridges both worldviews. Global warming is an excellent example of a problem that benefits from both approaches. Western science appears quite capable of defining the problem in the real world, but the Native approach to life seems to hold views and approaches that map out a path for the long term solution. Native beliefs do, after all, make humans and human activities an integral part of the world with no greater or lesser value or right than any other.

Acceptance of the importance of the inner world, of the metaphysical, then, is a key not only to understanding Native ontology, but also to protecting it from attack and neglect. Ermine states, “[t]he culture of the Aboriginal recognized and affirmed the spiritual through practical application of inner-space discoveries.” (Ermine 110). This Ermine suggests is what makes anything and everything possible. Recognition of the power of Indigenous knowledge leads inevitably to a consideration of the possible benefits of an approach that permits the collaboration of Western and Native approaches. One of the problems to be faced with respect to traditional knowledge is a determination of its place in modern society. When oral traditions are brought into written form they often lose their potency. The people who transcribe it are frequently outsiders who impose their own worldviews on the knowledge, often without fully comprehending the significance of what they write.¹ There is a hope, however, that as Native peoples are able to take greater control over our communities again, the old ways and values will remain and continue to act as a barrier to further erosion of the use and importance of traditional knowledge and values.

The works discussed so far appear to have produced a shift in thinking on my part that may well be considered a minor revolution in terms of the way I view research and academic practice in general. Perhaps the most influential of these is *Decolonizing Methodologies* (Smith). Generally, the text appears to argue that widely accepted academic approaches function as colonizing tools through the imposition and validation of imperialistic ideas and concepts, which resulted from a very different view of both reality and knowledge than that held by Native peoples. The view underlying the operation of sciences dealing with Indigenous populations tends to be a constructed view

of the ‘Other’ that is reinforced by scholarly organizations and most often presents Indigenous people as primitive. I see the Fine Art world as such. Smith states,

“[r]esearch is one of the ways in which the underlying code of imperialism and colonialism is both regulated and realized. It is regulated through the formal rules of individual scholarly disciplines and scientific paradigms, and the institutions that support them (including the state). It is realized in the myriad of representations and ideological constructions of the Other in scholarly and ‘popular works, and in the principles which help to select and recontextualize those constructions in such things as the media, official histories and school curricula.” (Smith 7-8)

Research, in fact all academic endeavors, must begin taking into account the characteristics of the communities they seek to investigate if they are to free themselves of deeply imbedded colonialist agendas. They must, for example, begin to consider the social, cultural, and spiritual context in which the community exists. One way in which they often seek to accommodate this need is to use trained Native researchers. Native researchers, it is felt, will assure the cooperation of the local population and be able to negotiate the political and social environment to remove barriers to research. The Native researcher benefits from an insider status. Unfortunately, in practice the Native researcher is often considered an outsider whose possible benefit is minimized. Smith is particularly conscious of this problem. She states,

“[t]here are a number of ethical, cultural, political and personal issues that can present special difficulties for indigenous researchers who, in their own communities, work partially as insiders, and are often employed for this purpose, and partially as outsiders, because of their Western education or because they may work across clan, tribe, linguistic, age and gender boundaries. Simultaneously, they work within their research projects or institutions as insiders within a particular paradigm or research model, and as outsiders because they are often marginalized and perceived to be representative of either a minority or a rival interest group.” (Smith 5)

The concept of an outside/insider is the one that has sparked my own shift in paradigm, for I painfully recognize that as much as I consider myself an insider, I was trained in Western thought throughout my schooling. Smith notes that, “[t]he idea of code suggests that there is a deep structure which regulates and legitimates imperial practices.” (Smith 28). If, as she appears to point out, the colonizers cannot see the pattern they create because they work according to internalized rules that function below the level of consciousness, then my training has surely drawn me into the same mindset. The problem of how to free myself from what is now a long standing view of research and academics probably finds its first approach in the recognition that something is wrong. That something can be wrong, not with the worldview held by the dominant society, but rather with my own take on reality suggests a place where a new view might be born. Knowledge is usually not linear in the sense of one thing building on another and very often proceeds by leaps or drastic shifts in paradigm that could be characterized as revolutionary. Once recognized, the view of reality can be altered and a new model substituted to account for the altered view.

Recognition of a deficiency suggested a new research path. Gradually, I came to a deeper understanding of the nature of research itself and attempted to determine or clarify the manner in which Indigenous concepts of research differ from mainstream academic ones. *Our Own Liberation: Reflections on Hawaiian Epistemology*, by Manulani Aluli Meyer, is particularly encouraging in this regard for it confirms that other ways of knowing do exist. Moreover, it is possible to find Indigenous populations in which the dominant views never fully replaced or erased the older traditional knowledge. She points out that, “[h]ow one knows, indeed, what one prioritizes with regard to this knowing,

ends up being the stuffing of identity..." (Meyer 125). I take such comments to be directly related to the way I see myself as both a Native and an Academic.

Storytelling

One of the best known of examples of a Native academic having employed the storytelling tradition in a contemporary form is Thomas King's *The Truth About Stories*. The work was published in 2003 and, on that basis alone, must be considered contemporary (King). Moreover, it appears in print and many people in both the Native and non-Native communities believe that storytelling cannot exist except as an oral form. Thomas King's work clearly refutes that theory. It is a very personal work, in that it is written in the first person and includes very subjective information held as personal experience. The story is also full of opinion—personal opinion. Trained in objective methodologies, the mainstream academic might be tempted to dismiss such entries as unreliable. Doing so would fail to recognize that the opinions are actually carefully formulated observations and conclusions that result from an analysis by a very experienced researcher of data obtained through personal experience. It is not possible to produce a story of this type without going through those steps because the validity of the conclusions and observations will be judged by the community that can make comparisons with its own subjectively held personal experiences.

Considering why Native authors seldom set their works in days gone by, Thomas King offers his own opinion. He states,

"[w]hat Native writers discovered, I believe, was that the North American past, the one that had been created in novels and histories, the one that had been heard on radio and seen on theater screens and on television, the one that had been part of every school curriculum for the past two hundred years, that past was unusable, for it had

not only trapped Native people in a time warp, it also insisted that our past was all we had. No present. No future. And to believe in such a past is to be dead. Faced with such a proposition and knowing from empirical evidence that we were very much alive, physically and culturally, Native writers began to use the Native present as a way to resurrect a Native past and to imagine a Native future. To create, in words, as it were, a Native universe." (King 106)

Native stories are holistic in a way that considers the relationship of the specific argument to all of creation. If King had stuck to a Western academic approach he would have had difficulty relating all of the elements dealt with in his book in a single investigation. He easily ties together lessons about writing, about identity and about a number of other subjects to make a complete and whole work that properly presents the contemporary Native human condition. As such, he not only may be seen as setting a precedent for Native methodologies, but provides an excellent model to follow as well.

Storytelling has often been seen by mainstream academics as a way of presenting entertaining fictions such as myths.¹ Vine Deloria, Jr. in *Philosophy and the Tribal Peoples* points out that although the approach employed in the creation and presentation of a story may be different in the Native community than in the mainstream, the end product is just as valuable. He says,

“[f]irst in consideration must be the deeply held belief that there is something of value in any tribal tradition that transcends mere belief and ethnic pride. Instead of developing an idea of cultural movement that has primitive at one end of the spectrum and modern at the other, great care must be taken to identify tribal societies and Western thinking as being different in their approach to the world but equal in their conclusions about the world.” (Deloria 5)

The role of the Elder in the Native community was also important in the search for answers to pressing questions. Deloria points out that “Elders received a hearing and their counsel was more often than not heeded primarily because people recognized that, if

nothing else, they had a lifetime of experience during which they were presumed to have understood what their various experiences meant.” (Deloria 11)

Questions about Questions

Brian Yazzie Burkhart raises a very interesting point in *What Coyote and the Thales can Teach Us: An outline of American Indian Epistemology*, when he points out that,

“[t]he way in which we ask questions (the way in which we act toward our relations) guides us, then, to the right answers, rather than the other way around wherein what is true directs the method of questioning and the question itself (i.e., we can ask any question we desire and in any way we desire, and the answer will remain the same).” (Burkhart 16)

Questions posed by mainstream academics are often very specific and limited in that they deal with one problem or, at times, even a single aspect of a problem. Native methodologies usually understand that a question about a specific problem may well have far more wide spread implications that relate to all of creation. He also seems to be dealing with another mainstream objection to basing research on the subjective experiences of a single individual, Elder or not. Burkhart says, “[a] Native philosophical understanding must include all experience, not simply my own. If I am to gain a right understanding I must account for all that I see, but also all that you see and all that has been seen by others—all that has been passed down in stories.” (Burkhart 25). The holistic approach implicit in Native methodologies ensures that the personal experience relied on is community oriented because we are all related. Storytelling is not about what a single individual believes in complete isolation. It is usually the result of a careful analysis by an experienced individual whose personal experience is expanded through his connection to community. Art Elders, for example, are in constant contact with the community and reflect community positions.

V. F. Cordova, in *Approaches to Native American Philosophy*, faces the problem of why Native approaches are not well thought of by mainstream academics. She says,

"[o]ne of the major obstacles to understanding an examination of indigenous metaphysics is the result of another assumption which the researcher brings to his study: it is assumed that metaphysics is a philosophical activity that lies outside the capabilities of anyone from other than "advanced" civilizations. And indigenous "tribal" culture, by virtue of not being a culture like that of the "advanced" West, is presumed to be on a different level of "development." Such cultures are assumed to operate in the realm of *superstition* or *imagination* as opposed to the "higher" activities of *observation*, *experience*, and *reflection*." (Cordova 28).

Cordova's point is well made and Gregory Cajete, in *Philosophy of Native Science*, counters mainstream objections by pointing out that there are built in controls. He shares,

"[s]anction of knowledge through the appropriate ritual and tribal society acknowledgment, and commitment to gain and share knowledge are important, since knowledge of the natural world and how best to relate to it is not just a matter of individual understanding but is gained and shared for the benefit and perpetuation of the community. Sanction and commitment acted as foundational safeguards for both individual and tribe and formed a kind of "check and balance" for important knowledge." (Cajete 55)

The academic community, both mainstream and Native, is such that means of insuring that appropriate care is taken to produce reliable results are built into the system regardless of the methodology employed.

Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods by Shawn Wilson is another work by a Native academic that argues for the contemporary use of Native methodologies. Wilson says,

"One thing that became clear through the study and that I discuss in the next chapter, is that indigenous research is ceremony and must be respected as such. A ceremony, according to Minnecunju Elder Lionel Kinunwa, is not just the period at the end of the sentence. It is the required process and preparation that happens long before the event." (Wilson 60-61).

The story is simply the end product. What we do not see is the depth of preparations that made it possible. Wilson continues,

“Research is a ceremony. It bears repeating, as I think this statement ties up and holds together all of the relationships that have gone into the formation of this book. The purpose of any ceremony is to build stronger relationships or bridge the distance between our cosmos and us. The research that we do as indigenous people is a ceremony that allows us a raised level of consciousness and insight into our world. Through going forward together with open minds and good hearts we have uncovered the nature of this ceremony.” (Wilson 137).

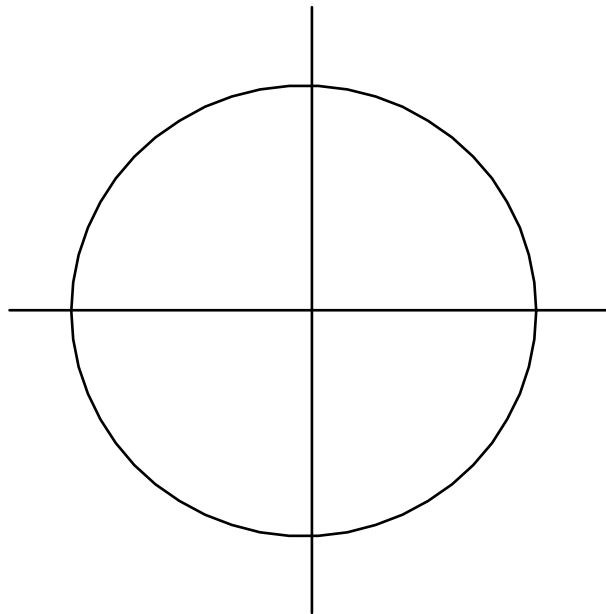
An Historical Connection

It is the lifetime of experience that allows a story to come into being. As a contemporary Native academic, books are a part of my lived experience and must be recognized for their part in bringing this story to life. I do not think that I have ever met a culture that did not use storytelling. Each cultural group, however, uses stories differently and for different purposes. Our involvement with storytelling is unique to us in that the creation of a story involves a set of protocols or procedures that allow the story to be valid. Native methodologies do exist and those associated with storytelling have existed for centuries. Adapted to our modern context, storytelling can give voice to our people in a fully contemporary manner. Understanding that the Elder is a key element in the building and telling of our stories is an important part of justifying storytelling as a valid approach to acquiring knowledge in the academy. It is crucial, however, to recognize that the role and definition of an Elder today includes specialists whose experience is a valuable resource in itself.

When we examine the story told by books, as is the case with a Literature Review, we are in essence dealing with history. History is important to Native people because it shows that our cultures have always been contemporary and full of Native creativity,

pride and joy. In the next chapter, associated with the Southern direction, I begin presenting the voices of our artists who may be considered talking books. Arthur Renwick's perception of the importance of history to our people will be seen to be completely contemporary and authentically Native.

Chapter 5: The Southern Direction: Time, Relationships, Experience Arthur Renwick and the Mainstream Perspective



South: Time/Relationships
Experience - Artists

The way in which we are perceived has consequences. Today we readily admit the negative consequences of stereotypical views and are quick to react when we become aware of them. Unfortunately, the negative impact of the way the mainstream views us is not always apparent because the effects are often subtle, isolated and usually vehemently denied when attention is drawn to it. The issue of stereotypes, the related concepts of authenticity and the importance of history are highlighted in an interview I conducted with our prominent Native artist Arthur Renwick. The interview was first broadcast as part of a radio show that aired in August of 2004. The story of how he was treated by a mainstream art history teacher while a young student seems to provide us with a sense of how we are perceived by others.

The following chapter is organized into two sections. The first presents an excerpt

from the 2004 interview conducted with Arthur Renwick. Once we finish the interview with Arthur, the second part of the chapter will examine the themes highlighted in the interview. More specifically, the latter half of the chapter will focus on the issues of (a) market forces and how they influence Native artists, (b) Native stereotypes and breaking the mold and finally, (c) issues of authenticity. In the context of the thesis for this work, the discussion of these issues will introduce additional stories about Native artists to highlight the voice and experiences of Native artists, as follows:

(a) A story of Inuit art that illustrates the issue of market forces and how they influence Native artists.

(b) A story that illustrates the issue of Native stereotypes and breaking the mold

(c) A story involving our pioneer Native artist Norval Morriseau and the issue of authenticity.

Finally, the second part of the chapter will integrate additional academic references into the stories told of and by the artists. This is done to highlight the important point made by Arthur Renwick when, in his interview, he stresses the importance of history. As highlighted by Arthur, in order to effectively give voice to the stories of Native artists one must bring education to the forefront of the conversation. In this regard, the chapter will bring additional intellectual voices to the stories relative to the impacts of market influences, stereotyping and authenticity.

Interview with Arthur Renwick

Bob: Good Morning! You are listening to the AVR Arts Review with Bob Phillips. Patrice Mousseau is off this morning. In her place I present the second of a two part series on contemporary Haisla artist Arthur Renwick. Last week, Patrice and I discussed Mr. Renwick's work in some detail and I pointed out at that time that there are two parts to any work of art. One part is certainly the physical or technical qualities inherent in the work itself. The other is not nearly as easy to describe and that is the very special and unique element that the individual himself brings to the work. The following excerpts are from an interview I had with Arthur Renwick in his studio. Hopefully it'll give you a chance to better understand this very prominent artist and the issues he deals with in his art. Although very unassuming, Arthur Renwick holds a Master of Fine Arts degree from Concordia University. He teaches photography at the Ontario College of Art and Design and is an internationally renowned and accomplished artist in his own right. He also speaks very well, so for once I'm simply going to be quiet and let you get to know the man behind the work. The first question I asked Mr. Renwick was what attracted him to photography and here's what he had to say.

Arthur: I started off studying Visual Art and started off painting and doing sculpture and ceramics in an art program in Vancouver and had a run-in with one of my art history instructors. A lot of what they were teaching was all about Western European art and I was living in Vancouver where we're surrounded by totem poles and every store you go into you see masks and West Coast designs. I come from a northern community in BC that, you know, makes totem poles. My brother is a mask maker; my uncle is a carver. So it was really disconcerting to be studying art about a foreign place and about foreign ideas that had nothing to do with the place that we were living in, which was Vancouver, British Columbia. So I used to do my own little rebellions and refuse to write certain things and challenge him with certain ideas.

For our final exam, the week before, he announced what the exam was going to be about. He said that we could bring in our textbook if we wanted to, and we could bring in our notes if we wanted to. The exam was to be on the Lascaux and Altamira Caves in France and Spain. So, it was about cave painting. When I walked into the lecture hall for the exam, I had all my notes and was going to regurgitate all the information I had, which is what everybody else was doing. They were sitting there; you know, all the eager students with their pre-written exam. I thought to myself, "What are they actually learning?" I found that I got really frustrated, and I thought, well, you know, forget this! So I wrote a little rant addressing his class and his approach to knowledge, addressing ideas around colonialism.

This was back in 1985. This is before Native studies existed in University or College. There wasn't a Native arts community that had formalized nationally or locally, yet. In 1984 things were just beginning to happen. There were a couple of shows that were starting to happen with Joane Cardinal Shubert, Jane Ash Poitras, Bob Boyer and Eddie Poitras. They were just emerging onto the scene along with some other artists, but I hadn't seen or heard of them yet. I didn't know that the idea of Contemporary Native Art existed, because there were no texts or catalogues available, and there

hadn't been a show of any of that work in Vancouver as of yet.

In this exam, I was addressing ideas about colonialism and ideas around racism, really. Systematic racism. I wrote the paper for my Prof, and went to hand it in at the end of the class, and then I held it back. I thought, "No, it didn't feel right." So I stuck the paper in my back pocket and I went walking home. I kicked myself the whole way home thinking, "Why didn't I just give it to him?" So when I got home, I phoned him up and said, "Hi, I'm one of your students. I wrote the exam, but I didn't hand it in." And he asked me why, and I said, "Well, I would rather talk to you about it." And he said, "Ok, well let's meet for coffee tomorrow, 10 am. I'll meet you at the café on campus." So I went there the following day, and he was sitting there waiting for me. He said, "So, do you have the paper?" And I said, "Yes, I do." And he said, "Are you going to give it to me?" And I said, "No, I'm not." He said, "Well what are you going to do?" And I said, "I'm going to read it to you." I pulled the paper out of my pocket and I read it to him. I got everything off my chest. I confronted him head-on, saying, "This is what I think". I felt relieved.

He was quiet for a minute. Then his first question to me was, "Have you ever been in jail before?" I thought he was joking. I kind of laughed, and I said, "Well no." And he said, "Have you ever seen a psychiatrist?" I laughed nervously and said, "No!" He said, "Have you ever seen the school counselor? You know, maybe she can help you with your problem." And I started realizing that he thought I was crazy for thinking these ideas, and I said, "Well, no. It hadn't occurred to me that this was a problem." And he said, "Well, what we will do is we will meet tomorrow. This is a very important issue, and we will meet with the other art history instructor, and a counselor, and the four of us will sit down and we'll discuss your problem together." And I started getting paranoid and I started thinking, "Am I really crazy? Am I not thinking right? Is this not a normal way to think?" It seemed the ideas I was putting forward to him were really challenging.

I went to meet him the following day, in the room that he'd mentioned. When I got there, the room was pitch dark, and I looked up and saw there were slides being presented on the wall. When my eyes adjusted, I realized that there was a class going on, and the room was full of people. So I stepped out, and became really confused. This woman came running out, who was the other art history instructor, and she called out my name, "Are you Arthur Renwick?" and I said, "Yes." She said, "I'm sorry, Mr. _____ couldn't make it, but we spoke about your problem. What we've decided to do is, just give you grades for all the classes, and let you go." I couldn't believe it. I was shocked; I was upset; I was offended; I was distraught and thought, "What's going on here?" I couldn't comprehend what was going on. Then, it occurred to me that it was really quite straightforward. They didn't want to deal with the issue. They didn't know how to deal with it. So by way of getting around dealing with it, they decided, just give him the grade and let him go. Or, in other words, by giving me grades for the classes, I won't go forward and complain; I won't file any grievances, or anything... I just disappear.

I was really good at drawing and painting. I had won awards and scholarships in that program. I was really good at it. I was good at super realism. They kept one of my drawings, framed it, and have it hanging up in the Faculty Lounge. But, after that

point, I just thought, "I'm not going to study western art or painting anymore." It was at that point I decided to go into photography. I thought, photography will still allow me to be creative; I'll be dealing with things that are interesting to me. I discovered quickly at Emily Carr that, through photography, I was able to use the medium as a visual voice. I was able to address issues that were apparently "troubling me" and create photographic works of things that meant a lot to me. Through photographic imagery, I was able to create empowerment for Native people when they looked at the work. Create a space for us to look and acknowledge that, you know, WE ARE HERE! We have always been here, and we are never going away. And this history is really important to everybody. These are some of the things that are of interest to me when I create work. To create things that have historical meaning, and historical facts that are attached to them, so that when people look at the work (and they do their research) and do the reading behind it, they will actually learn something about their own history. So, to answer your question, that is what inspired me to get into photography.

Bob: History is very important to you.

Arthur: Well, history for First Nations people is highly important. We have to keep pushing it forward because the educational system does not support it. The general public does not know who the First Nations are whose land they have appropriated. They need to learn that. They need to understand the importance of that history. The importance of the fact that First Nations people still exist; that we still own this land; it's our territory and that, our history goes further than six feet under the ground. It goes a lot deeper than that. I'm always baffled . . . I think it's really wonderful that there is Black History month. I think it's a really important event and it needs to be supported. I think it's really exciting. There are a lot of really exciting activities that happen around Black History. (It should be Black History year!)

Looking at that, I get baffled that we only have Aboriginal Day, you know, First Nation's Day. One day out of the year, and blip it's gone. People aren't even aware of what's going on in their own backyard. People don't care, because the governments have so effectively pushed all Native people to a small reserve so that we are out of sight and out of mind. They can live off the spoils of the land and the First Nations people. I get really aggravated and frustrated with that whole thing. When I am speaking, whether in a class or publicly, I always address and acknowledge the territory that we're standing in. First and foremost, but also within the work that I do, is address those histories directly. Make it the most important content of the work, because, the worst thing about any culture, or any history, is... the worst thing that can happen to anyone, is to be forgotten. I refuse to let that happen. So it's something that I have put high on my priority list of things to address within the work that I do.

Bob: Obviously Mr. Renwick cares very deeply about issues that interest to both the Native community and to the Canadian population as a whole. It isn't surprising then that he would address these issues very intensely in his work. We're going to take a short break right now and when we return we will continue with more of Mr. Arthur Renwick. (Renwick, AVR)

Simon Tookome and Market Forces

One of the reasons that Native stories are so capable of dealing with complex and interrelated elements is that they are able to circle back to pick up an interesting trail that amplifies what went before. Knowing what we do now about the way Arthur Renwick was treated by the Fine Art world, we might well be disposed to consider the impact of market forces on Inuit art to see what lessons we might learn from the experience of our closely related cousins. The work of the popular Inuit artist Simon Tookoome is a very good place to start. His son Robert Tookoome is a personal friend of mine and I was particularly pleased to see one of Simon's beautiful colored pencil works on the wall in the Inuit Gallery in the AGO. Simon Tookoome was a very accomplished individual. He was a skilled stone carver and often produced his own stone blocks from which to create prints. Moreover, Simon Tookoome was a skillful hunter, a respected Elder and a Justice of the Peace, as well as being a cameraman and an interviewer for the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation—yet he worked in colored pencil! (Tookoome, Spirt)

Unfortunately, Simon passed away in November of 2010 and sometime later I found myself discussing his work while sitting with Robert Tookoome at his home in Brantford, Ontario. During the conversation, Robert excused himself and brought out a group of beautiful drawings created by his father. The man had been an extraordinary artist and while viewing those works I asked Robert why his dad had never worked in oil or acrylic. To my surprise, I was told that he had indeed tried both and loved them, but when he realized that he could not sell artwork executed in oil or acrylic, he stopped exploring them (Tookoome, Robert).

In his work *Inuit Art: A History*, Richard Crandall, a Western European art collector,

writer and authority, very carefully identifies the process by which the Inuit became involved in the business of making Fine Art. He actually quotes James Houston, the individual responsible for bringing Inuit art to the attention of the world, as making it clear that the market was only interested in work that was considered primitive. A five page buying guide written by Houston titled *Eskimo Handicrafts: A Private Guide for the Hudson's Bay Company Manager 1953*, pointed out which items sold well and which didn't. The poorest selling items were functional objects like cribbage boards. Crandall said, "Houston believed that this was because buyers were looking for 'primitive work by a primitive people' and the functional objects did not 'represent the Eskimo culture.'" (Crandall 98). The result appears to be that galleries have extensive collections of elaborate and highly realistic drawings by Inuit people executed in colored pencil that seem to have followed the need to produce work that remains linked to the primitive.

A popular view holds that the artist is simply driven by an urge to create. While there is no denying such a factor, it must be acknowledged that the Fine Art world is also a vast market in which a great deal of money circulates. That market is as attractive to Native and Inuit people as it is to anyone else. The result is that a lot of individuals, who often also have a creative passion, produce work destined for use and sale in the mainstream art world. If the market will purchase only work that reflects its concept of the culture producing it, the artist has little alternative except to furnish work that meets the desired criteria. Simon Tookoome, as was the case with so many other Inuit artists, struggled to satisfy the very deliberate expectations of a market that was told, in writing by James Houston its creator, to purchase only work that looked primitive. The result tends to reinforce pre-existing mainstream concepts that often ignore contemporary realities. In

the Western European world, little children tend to be most closely associated with the use of colored pencil.¹

The story does not stop there, however, because it takes a very serious turn when we consider the hidden need to meet mainstream expectations to satisfy the widely held Western European views and pervasive colonial attitudes. In such circumstances we are faced with a situation in which mainstream interests effectively define who and what we are. As Indigenous artists we are forced to acknowledge that what happens in the Fine Art world has wide reaching implications. “Doctor, Lawyer, Indian Chief” I grew up with that verse ringing in my ear. Indian, Inuit, Native . . . no matter which name we respond to, we are impacted by the often subtle and hidden expectations of the Fine Art world. Why is it important to become aware of the difference in perspective? The unintended consequences of a mainstream view that is odds with reality can be devastating.

Sitting in a Brantford Six Nations Reserve Fire Hall with Robert Tookoome’s father-in-law chatting as two old men often do, we began to reminisce about the past. Actor Harold J. Smith, better known as Jay Silverheels, who brought Tonto to life in the episodes of the Lone Ranger I watched as a child was from that reserve and when I mentioned that he had been my idol as a kid, the subject turned to the distance from reality that the movies and the TV created. In fact I was told that busloads of mainstream people had been regularly brought to the reserve to buy Native art and souvenirs at the gift shop. They were welcomed by Indians dressed in leather, wearing feathers and riding horses bareback. The tourists expected Indians to appear like that, so they dressed the part to sell their wares. Had they remained in their everyday mainstream attire, had they not

looked the part, the buses would have stopped coming. (Tookoomé, Robert)

Prior to the mid eighteenth century, representations of Native people were accomplished by artists that drew or painted what they saw before them. Brock V. Silversides acknowledges this when he suggests that “while it is generally accepted that paintings can be fictitious and are not necessarily trustworthy, it is a common misconception that photographs do not lie. Common sense, however, shows that such is not the case.” (Silversides 1). Artistic methods of representation carry with them a fundamental recognition and acknowledgement of the fact that the artwork is actually an interpretation. A photograph of a Native chief in a Western European suit jacket would have been just as accurate as one in which the sitter wore a War Bonnet. On the other hand, if the image did not match the widely held concept of an Indian, photographs would not sell. In fact, very few Native people actually wore War Bonnets or considered them to be a part of their culture. With the introduction of photography in the mid eighteenth century, however, the War Bonnet gradually became a symbol for the Indian that has been readily embraced by Native and non-Native alike.ⁱ At the same time, photography appears to have contributed to a sense that unless an individual was dressed in “traditional” clothing, he could not be Native. Thomas King in *The Truth About Stories* points out that, “[i]f you’ve been paying attention, you will have noticed that I’ve defined identity politics in a rather narrow and self-serving fashion. Appearance.” (King 59). Well appearance is everything in the visual world of Fine Art.

The Stereotype of Appearance

Most mainstream people fail to realize that both today and in the past we tend to dress in the same manner as they do. What happens to the Native who does not meet mainstream expectations? Well, one thing that can happen is that he disappears—vanishes—ceases to exist.

A great many artists of Native descent work in styles that do not appear traditional, Allen Sapp is an excellent example. The individuals portrayed in his beautiful paintings do not wear feathers and buckskin. In fact, one of the reasons for the popularity of his work on the plains was the fact that the individuals depicted on the Reserve during the depression were dressed in the same clothes as their non-Native neighbors and they engaged in the same tasks.¹ As a result, non-Native people could relate to the paintings in a way that sparked a good deal of nostalgia. How does the non-Native eye judge the authenticity of such works? There are often clues. The artist may be publicly known as a Native person; he or she may sign his name in syllabics as was the case with Norval Morrisseau or he may sign his name with his treaty number as did Alex Janvier. He may include typically Native symbols in the work or he may deal with Native issues or concerns. The chances are strong as well that he would include names or words in the title that tipped off the viewer.

George Catlin was but one of the early mainstream artists sketching and painting Native people. Artists such as Catlin spent a lot of time in the West and Native people became familiar with Western European styles of painting through contact with them. As a result, Plains Indigenous Knowledge absorbed a taste for and an interest in more European painting styles.¹ It is not surprising, therefore, that our prominent Plains Cree

artist Allan Sapp works in a very realistic style related to the French Barbizon School. His work bears many similarities to works such as *The Gleaners* painted in 1857 by Francois Millet.ⁱ They do, however, deal with Native issues and concerns reflecting everyday life on the Red Pheasant Reserve in the 1920's. Painting reserve life of the Depression era on the prairies while working in a representational style makes Allan Sapp a contemporary Native painter who should not be considered traditional in the sense commonly understood in the mainstream world.

Although working in an almost Impressionist style, this artist is fully Native and leaves a considerable Indigenous Knowledge mark on his work. Specifically, Cree terms and references often appear in the titles. On the other hand, his images lack the usual feel of “traditional work” one finds in a Morriseau or even a Bill Reid. Nevertheless, the careers of all three date from the early 1960s, so the styles they have pioneered must be considered contemporary. The apparent inconsistency of contemporary work being classified as traditional, as in the case of Morriseau and Reid, only emphasizes the living, evolving nature of Indigenous Knowledge that somehow resists mainstream acknowledgement.

Native Stereotypes and Breaking the Mold

There are contemporary artists in abundance who break the stereotypical mold by competing on equal footing with non-Native artists in dominant society venues. Bob Boyer, Rebecca Belmore, and Gerald McMaster are well known examples. There is little of the “traditional” appearance one might expect of a Native in the work by Gerald McMaster, *Trick or Treaty* (McMaster, *Trick or Treaty*). At first glance, the work appears devoid of Indigenous Knowledge content, but a closer examination shows that it too is

open to analysis using Indigenous Knowledge as a gauge. In a cartoonish style that includes text scrawled across the work, he presents a clown-like figure that is actually Sir John A. Macdonald. The Act he offers in the text is the infamous Indian Act, thereby imbuing the piece with Indigenous Knowledge at the level of the idea or concept as well as with respect to attitudes and emotional content. Clearly McMaster is also accessing Indigenous Knowledge with respect to historical context, but the work does not appear to justify being associated with the traditional in a separate category of Native art.ⁱ

Other artists of Native descent like Brian Jungen, whose works have very visible links to tradition yet deal with contemporary issues using mainstream techniques, remain classified as Native artists.ⁱ Their work is far too striking to be ignored or fully excluded, so they are often considered exceptions. Rather than change their point of view, the mainstream mind will often change the individual. As an exception the artist can have a major show in a gallery, but it will be for a relatively short time.ⁱ When I was young, both the art gallery and the museum were free. You could come and go as you liked. Today, it is paid admission. The gallery and the museum have become entertainment centres. They advertise special exhibitions very heavily to increase attendance; they are businesses, yet we look at them as dispassionate authorities.

W. Jackson Rushing in *Native American Art and the New York Avant-Garde: A History of Cultural Primitivism* presents an extensive discussion of the influence that Native work had on the progress of Fine Art. He points out that many of the New York avant-garde “made paintings that referred to atavistic myth, primordial origins, and primitive rituals and symbols, especially those of Native American cultures.” (Rushing 121). The idea was that Native people were at an earlier stage of development. Artists like

Picasso and Jackson Pollock used many of the characteristics of Native work in their own compositions and styles. Rushing continues,

“[i]ndeed, if the primitivism of Picasso and Matisse, for example, was decontextualization of the plastic form of African sculpture, then the works of art examined in this chapter and the following one on Pollock’s primitivism represent the willful recontextualization by the New York avant-garde of forms and myths appropriated from Indian art.” (Rushing 121)

Widespread acknowledgement of the contribution of Native art to the development of mainstream art would be like suggesting that their most revered artists had stolen or appropriated from people who were their equals. Recognition of Native art as a contributing factor in the development of Fine Art would place it in the same position as Greek and Roman works. One unspoken way to avoid the problem is to lump contemporary Native work in with the traditional that is considered primitive. As a result the category of Native art continues to have connotations of the primitive attached to it that justify exclusion from equal participation in the art world.¹ While Native art is not fully shut out of the Fine Art world, it tends to be placed on the side lines and a major contributing factor appears to be a mainstream perspective based in romantic illusion.

A part of the problem that makes it difficult for mainstream people to separate contemporary and traditional work is a failure to recognize that artists of Native descent are producing work designed specifically for the Fine Art world and market rather than for their own cultures. The Navajo shaman creating a sand painting to heal a community member is genuinely working for and within his own culture. Brian Jungen, however, is wilfully creating work for the Fine Art world. Jungen's artwork may have references to Native culture, but is made for the contemporary Fine Art world.

Norval Morriseau and Authenticity

Authenticity is not a question that readily jumps to mind with respect to the work of the great Native artist Norval Morriseau, who is considered the founder of the Woodland Style. His work is open to an analysis of its Indigenous Knowledge content. Derived from mnemonic shamanistic drawings on birch bark scrolls and pictographs that are still visible on rocks in Northern Ontario, Norval's work is essentially flat with fields of plain color enclosed by thick black lines reminiscent of the stained glass windows encountered in Residential School chapels. Moreover, the works usually deal with nature in the form of plants, animals, birds or fish in a way that can also be considered consistent with an Indigenous Knowledge closely attuned to the natural environment. The x-ray vision association appears to stem from his belief in a supernatural world.¹ Indigenous Knowledge does not separate the spirit world from the everyday world. In the exhibition catalogue prepared by gallery owner Joseph McLeod, James Bartleman acknowledges the Indigenous Knowledge content: "Norval Morriseau has drawn upon the spirit of the Anishinabe to create powerful images of mythical beings, woven together in art that tells of the sacredness of all forms of life." (McLeod, 7 page). Based on the weight of Indigenous Knowledge incorporated in the work, it is easy for Western eyes to see it as authentic traditional work.

Indigenous Knowledge, however, can be contemporary as well as traditional because the culture constantly expands and evolves to meet current conditions. In the case of Norval Morriseau's work, the Woodland Style dates from 1962 when he first presented it in the Pollack Gallery in the Yorkville area of Toronto. Prior to 1962, no easel style of

painting was associated with Eastern Native peoples. The work has now been accepted as traditional by Native and non-Native peoples alike, but its documented origins make it a very contemporary and recent arrival in the art world. Norval Morrisseau's imagery appears to be solidly based on traditional practices and accepted Indigenous Knowledge, but it is a new and evolved form that is surely contemporary, yet Western eyes see it as "traditional" and side line it in the category of Native art.

How can we account for the way Western eyes see Native art? In searching my personal experience for some way to explain an apparent systemic cultural blindness, I was reminded of playing Cowboys and Indians as a child. Where did I pick up a view of Indians as heartless savages who were to be justifiably shot and killed by the eight year old Cowboy hero who lived down the street? We got that from watching American Westerns on television. Perhaps the most dominant forms of mass communication accessed by the general population today are film and television. Together these media exercised enormous influence psychologically, politically, and economically. As Gerald Vizenor points out, "[t]he Western Movies, of course, are not cultural visions, but the vicious encounters with the antiselves of civilization, the invented savage." (Vizenor 7). Vizenor's proposition, that Native people in film are simply a simulacrum bearing no real connection to Native people past or present, underlines the fact that Native people have no effective public voice. Authors like Vizenor have demonstrated that the film industry produced a body of work usually thought of as the Western and have demonstrated that the American Western presented a false image of the Indian that influenced generations of mainstream people.

Armando José Prats analyzes the American Western Movie and notes that in such

films we often do not gain our impression of Native people through direct exposure to them, but rather through images such as a tree decorated with scalps before a burning fort (Prats 15-29). Where in the film world the Indian is absent and the tree with scalps attached acts as the stand-in, a bank of stone arrowheads on the wall beside the work of Norval Morrisseau in the Art Gallery of Ontario seems to be a Fine Art world equivalent. The dissertation *Childhood Indians: Television, Film and Sustaining the White (sub)Conscience* by Raul S. Chavez makes it clear that an entire generation of North Americans who never met a Native person acquired a set of concepts about what the Native is like from film and television. (Chavez). Unfortunately, most of those concepts were disparaging.

An entire generation of Baby Boomers grew up learning about Native people through stories told in books, on the radio and on television. Those stories competed with the stories I was told as a child about my own relatives. As a young man in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia my father actually owned a small saw mill and had an accident with the truck late one night that put the truck into a deep ditch. He was unhurt and walked home. Neighbors passing by, however, thought that he had been killed because of a pool of red liquid at the bottom of the ditch. Gas back in those days was red in color and resembled blood beneath the old Ford truck. My dad's stories were about real Indians even if he did not call them that. Moreover, the people in his stories did not dress, look or behave any differently than anyone else. As kids we were just playing cowboys and Indians, but at the same time we were actually learning a set of restrictive definitions about who and what Indians were. Members of that Baby Boomer generation ultimately became curators, art critics and collectors. As adults, their childhood experiences would have often guided

their professional decisions.

Much of the discussion so far deals with how others tend to view Native art, artists and cultures. The rest of the interview with Arthur Renwick continues that process as he recounts the reaction of a prominent mainstream art critic to his Native art. The second part, however, is just as valuable in that it allows us to see the Native artist as a very contemporary individual. Arthur is creating for the Fine Art world. He is dealing with topics that are of personal interest to himself and to the community. He also did a great deal of in depth research before beginning his piece. As a result the piece tells a story and a historically correct story at that. When he approached the task of constructing the artwork, he employed modern mixed media techniques and materials. Perhaps even more importantly his art tells a story that is directly related to issues of importance to our people today. In the second half of the radio show Arthur Renwick may be classified as a postindian warrior in the sense put forward by Gerald Vizenor when he tells us that, “[t]he postindian warriors hover at last over the ruins of tribal representations and surmount the scriptures of manifest manners with new stories. . . .” (Vizenor 191).

Arthur Renwick Interview Part Two

Bob: Well welcome back. This is of course the AVR Arts Review with Bob Phillips. We've been listening to excerpts from an interview I did with photographer and artist Arthur Renwick. One of the questions I asked Arthur had to do with a show he presented in January called Delegates: Chiefs of the Earth and Sky. He gave me a very good idea as to just what was involved in it and how he approached it. I also asked him about some of the criticism that was directed at him by a writer for the Toronto Globe and Mail. His answer is most interesting and so once again, let's hear from Arthur Renwick.

Arthur: The Delegates: Chiefs of the Earth and Sky series was based on a series of photographs that were taken in the 1850s to the 1890s of Lakota and Cheyenne chiefs and warriors who were brought to Washington, DC and photographed in order to entice the chiefs to sign treaties. One of the most famous treaties in that region was the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 where Red Cloud, one of the Sioux chiefs, resisted

signing it until they closed down a fort that was set up in their territory. It was disrupting their buffalo hunt. He held back from signing the treaty for quite a number of years and there were a lot of battles and wars that happened during that time. Some of the more famous battles are the battle of Little Big Horn, where Custer's cavalry was slaughtered. But also a number of others . . . the Sand Creek massacre happened at that time. There were a lot of massacres. Almost everybody's familiar with the Wounded Knee massacre of 1891.

Red Cloud resisted for a number of years, and that treaty, the Fort Laramie Treaty, is one of the most well-known treaties in the United States. If you're studying law in the U.S., it is one of the first war treaties studied in Law 101. It is regarded as the only war the U.S. ever lost, because the U.S. Government, after many years of battle, took down the fort as Red Cloud asked, so that they would sign the treaty. What I found really inspiring about it was the fact that they did resist, and they did manage to win a lot of the wars, but as well something else was going on at that time . . . The photographs I made were inspired from looking at the portraits of the chiefs and warriors that were taken as official delegates of the White House, in Washington D.C. I was looking through this book of portraits, and I would see a chief, such as Shakopee, in full regalia with his lance looking very astute and very proud of his culture. He looked very strong and empowered. Then I flipped a few pages forward and came across another image of Shakopee where he is dressed all in white with a white turban on his head and he's got his hand on his face and he looks completely defeated. I was quite shocked by the juxtaposition of these images and I read the line below the image of him dressed in white and it said, "Shakopee captured after being involved in the Little Crow revolt." Shortly after this picture was taken, he was hung. I thought, "Well that's really odd. Why would they photograph him as a delegate, an important chief, and then later photograph him as a criminal, and hang him?" So I started reading up on it. I went back and revisited Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee. I'd read it before, but in rereading it, after seeing all of these images, a lot of the names that were coming out of the text in the book were the same people in the photographs that I had been looking at in the other book. I was really shocked to all of a sudden see a voice attached to these portraits. I wasn't aware of it before, but the book Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee was a history written from compiled official transcripts out of the Library of Congress. What I was reading were the chiefs' actual speeches, and their voices were translated literally to create the story for that book. I found it amazing that I was reading what they had actually said at the moment of all of these events, while history was happening, and it was really quite inspiring, shocking and aggravating, you know, to reread this tragic history again, and to see their portraits.

It filled my head with wonder about that history, and I just got this bug in me to go down and visit that territory and see for myself what that place was all about. I booked a flight and went down to South Dakota and started photographing landscapes: Pine Ridge, the Black Hills of Dakota, and the Bad Lands. I went and visited all of these places that I had been reading about. I started photographing them not really sure of what I was going to do, but all the while envisioning these battles that had happened there, and tried to find actual sites. You know, the actual site of Wounded Knee, of Custer's Last Stand and visited the Black Hills. I was taken aback

by the overall experience, and I made all of these images. I brought the photographs back to my studio and started working with them. I went on to the Internet and downloaded the actual Fort Laramie Treaty. I started looking at the use of the language and started looking at how language was structured, and quickly realized that these people couldn't understand English. They didn't read English. The Sioux didn't speak English. It was all done through translation. Yet they were expected to sign their X to this paper and give away all of their land and their freedom only to be stuck on a small reserve, which is basically a form of imprisonment. If they didn't sign, or if they refused, they were considered rebels . . . they were labeled as "criminals", and that gave the Government the legal right to have them pursued and hunted down. They were arrested, and if they resisted arrest, they were killed. If they participated in certain revolts, they were hung as criminals, like Shakopee was. Genocide was in full practice at that time, and according to the white U.S., "might was right". The colonialists wanted this land, at any cost, and they were going to make it happen in any way that they could.

I went around Lakota Territory, and I photographed these landscapes and really thought about that history. When I brought the images back to the studio, I started creating this series. I wanted to create some commemoration pieces for those chiefs and warriors. I got a sheet of aluminum that was thirty inches wide, and sixty inches high. I printed the photographs square, thirty inches by thirty inches. I placed the photos of the landscapes on the bottom of the aluminum sheet. The landscape image was cut off at the horizon. The top half of the aluminum was just left bare. Because the photographs are black and white, the grey aluminum resembles a grey sky above the landscapes. In the middle of the "sky", I cut out a punctuation mark, such as a comma, colon, hyphen or a bracket. The punctuation mark represents the silent space in between the English language. It is a mark in text that you only read, but it's never spoken. It is used to construct and control how language is read. As a form of resistance . . . I describe it as taking the pauses, the silences, in between the constructed language of the Fort Laramie Treaty. I cut right through the aluminum, and carved out the symbol leaving a void where the punctuation mark is. In the space behind the void, is a sheet of polished copper. I named each one after one of the chiefs or warrior that signed the Fort Laramie Treaty, such as Red Cloud or American Horse. But I would use their Sioux names. Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse as well as other warriors. I created a whole series of them, and titled it "Delegates: Chiefs of the Earth and Sky" as a commemoration towards everything they fought for.

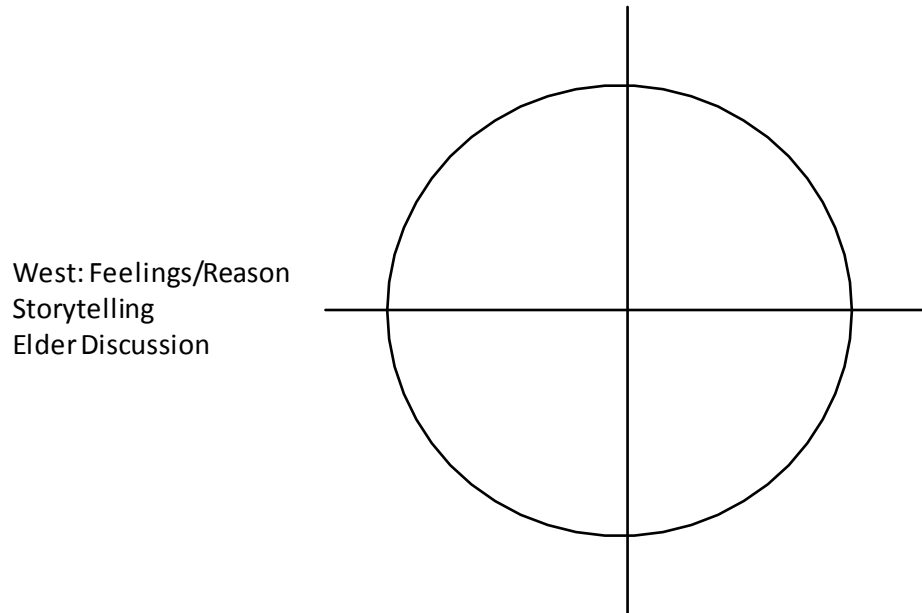
There's a really interesting article that Richard Hill wrote in Fuse Magazine addressing a review in the Globe and Mail that Gary Michael Dault wrote of that show. It was quite an interesting review. He addressed my work in a very derogatory and flippant manner and basically said that First Nations History is . . . I'm summarizing or paraphrasing what he said, but he said, you know, "Why should we even bother?" It's not really important, and the work that I did was the "silliest idea he's ever seen". His review created a lot of animosity in the arts community. As a result, there were a lot of letters to the editor written. Richard Hill wrote this brilliant article in Fuse Magazine called "A Bad Review for Gary Michael Dault". His approach was quite strategic in taking apart not only Gary's perception of Native people, but also the general Canadian perception. In this he set it up as if Gary was

situating himself as “Us” and “Them”. He kept referring to “We” as in “We as viewers” and “We as patrons to the arts”, which also meant “We as the white audience”, don’t deem this history as being important, and it need not be redressed at this time. Why should it ever be redressed? He was blatantly saying, “Us white people” need not deal with this because we have claimed this territory. It is ours and we are living off the spoils of it, and you know, why rain on our parade? Things are comfortable for us and we don’t need you to rub our noses in it. He revealed how Gary’s review came off as very pompous, derogatory, lazy and racist. Richard addressed a lot of his perception head on with similar relation to some of the things that you and I have just been talking about.

Bob: You know it always astounds me after looking at a work of art to learn just how very much goes into its creation. Arthur Renwick is a very special person indeed in that he has a very special ability to think with the aid of art and to communicate through his art. He’s also a very important person both to the Native community and to the Canadian population at large by serving as a bridge to far better understanding. The silence of his art, and his photographs are silent, speaks far more clearly and perceptibly than volumes that have been written by many others. I really must thank Arthur Renwick for being such a fine example to us all. You can see his latest show at Harbour Front’s York Quai as part of the Planet Indigenous Show until September 19th. Thank you all for listening. Tune in again next week when Patrice Mousseau will be back and once again we’ll have the AVR Arts Review with Bob Phillips. Bye for now! (Renwick, AVR)

The Medicine Circle allows us to draw on lived personal experience, but cautions us to maintain a balance between feelings and reason. When I look through my Native eyes at what Western people see, I do so without animosity. What happened so many years ago could not be avoided. As an old storyteller, I sense that it is time for another brief break.

Chapter 6: Western Direction Feelings and Reason - : Jane Ash Poitras and Native Elders



In this dissertation I maintain that the voices of contemporary artists of Native descent, when speaking of their work, create a rich and vibrant story of Native creativity, pride and joy. Being contemporary, the artists cannot be placed in the same category as “traditional” artists considered by the mainstream to be representing an archaic Native culture that is no longer relevant. I have come to the conclusion that the story of Native art that unfolds as our contemporary artists speak of their work is one of great Native creativity, pride and joy and I present their words and views to enable the reader to see what I see: a very modern approach to art that illustrates the ability of Native culture to grow and change to meet the needs of the world we live in today—without ceasing to be Native.

The entire dissertation is actually an attempt to counter the mistaken view that Native people are relics of the past. In this chapter, the transcript of the Jane Ash Poitras broadcast is presented to illustrate the fact that the creation of artwork is justifiably an aspect of Indigenous Knowledge in today's context. The comments by Jane Ash Poitras are followed by an introduction of the reasons for recognizing "art" Elders. Storytelling when viewed as a Native academic means of acquiring new knowledge is linked to the specialized Indigenous Knowledge usually recognized in an Elder, but our contemporary artists are also frequently seen as storytellers. A section is devoted, therefore, to the connection between storytelling and the concept of a Native Elder. Finally, the topic is summed up with the introduction of the views of Marrie Mumford.

The importance of the role of the Elder to a storytelling approach, such as employed here, suggests a discussion should take place concerning what an Elder actually is and raises the question of whether or not there is such a thing as an art Elder. I consider Jane Ash Poitras to be a superb example of what an art Elder can and should be and allow you to hear her voice to validate my conviction. I met up with Jane Ash Poitras at the Feheley Art Gallery here in Toronto when the official opening of her beautiful work took place at the Royal Ontario Museum in their First Peoples Gallery. The following conversation was broadcast on September 24th, 2010.

The Jane Ash Poitras Interview

Bob: Hi everyone! Bob Phillips here once again with the AVR Arts Review and today I happen to be sitting here with an extraordinary artist Jane Ash Poitras. How are you today Jane?

Jane: Really good.

Bob: Well you should be good because first of all I see all kinds of incredible work around me here, but also it seems to me that the Royal Ontario Museum is about ready to put on an exhibition of some of your work that they actually acquired. Is that correct?

Jane: Yea, they bought some very big pieces. The opening was this morning and my daughter went over and she said that it's just people lined up to get in and she said it is just packed. So it's pretty exciting. Last week we were there doing programming with them and it's a pretty beautiful show. I advise everyone if they get a chance to be in Toronto to check it out. It's in the First Nations Gallery. It's pretty hot.

Bob: That First Nations Gallery, I think very highly of that because you know there are an awful lot of old artifacts under glass in that gallery and your work and the work of some other contemporary people sort of set that off to change the impression that is left. Would you agree with that?

Jane: Well because I am purchased by a museum and not the National Gallery of Canada, I guess I am an artifact now too.

Bob: Ho, ho, ho! Well you are a delightful artifact and one that I think very highly of because your work is extraordinarily contemporary. Why don't we talk about Buffalo Seed to start with?

Jane: Ok, that's a good one to talk about. It's a pretty major piece. What happened is that I went back to university and I went into the faculty of medicine and science and took ethno botany courses. So, because I was raised as a traditionalist and spent a lot of time with traditional elders I knew a lot of the traditional plants and all this stuff and did ceremonies. But then I thought I should find the empirical value. So I went back to university and learned the more scientific side of it and so then all of a sudden I kind of placed the traditional with the western. With buffalo seed I knew that sunflowers were indigenous to North America. A lot of people don't realize that, but they are and Native people they looked at the . . . followed the Buffalo and they saw how the buffalo treated the sunflowers. They would pick them up and throw them over their back and the seeds would drop and the birds would come and pick out the ticks and the seeds and the Buffalo liked that. And then the rest of the sunflowers they would eat the petals and the stalks and the roots and all. And a certain part of the sunflower is medicinal. So what happened is that the Native people by observing wild life and animals, and this has been going on since time immemorial, that they learned

how to make the medicines also and use it for medicinal purposes and they were basically the first pharmacologists of the world.

Bob: You know that is something that . . . like that depth of knowledge that Native people have held forever is something that is surprising in that Western Europeans when they arrived here really didn't catch on to that. You have another piece that I believe deals with the effects of Residential School. Is that correct?

Jane: Potato Peeling 101 to Ethno Botany 101 and the idea there is that one panel shows the children in Residential School and one of the main pictures in it is residential school children learning how to peel potatoes. So the thing is that is what their ideology . . . Oh, wow! We're going to teach them how to peel potatoes. Meanwhile we come from a rich resource of pharmacological herb medical knowledge and they never bothered asking us that and so they just took it upon themselves to believe that we were kind of stupid and ignorant. Actually we were smarter.

Bob: You see, that's one of the reasons why I am so pleased with you and your work because if anyone happened to check out your academic achievements it seems to me that among other things you also hold a Master of Fine Art, MFA. Is that correct?

Jane: Yea, I do have an MFA from Columbia in New York.

Bob: He, he, he! You see what I mean! It is very hard for anybody in the dominant society to beat that. That is an extraordinary qualification for the beautiful, beautiful work that you do. And yet there are so many people out there that I don't think they realize that many, many Native people have become very highly educated.

Jane: Well, I expect all Native people to do the same because we're the smartest people on the earth.

Bob: Ha, ha, ha! You're right about that! Well, there was another piece that was chosen. That was the Extinctions I believe.

Jane: Oh, Extermination. Where it talks about . . . it shows pictures of buffalo skulls being piled up in Saskatchewan. It shows the Inuit skulls and it shows the Rhonda skulls. And then on the bottom it shows an early drawing by an Arapaho boy with buffalo's . . . what do you call it when they bang their horns together?

Bob: Oh yes, butting.

Jane: Yes! Butting to get a girlfriend and it was the last known drawing by an Arapaho boy because now-a-days you would probably never see that, so it was really a historical piece. So we called it Extermination because of the idea that the buffalo almost got wiped out. And right now we are wiping out many things, so we should really be We're all precious and we should really be careful about that because the first thing you know we are going to be extinct.

Bob: Well as a matter of fact, they tried to wipe us out.

Jane: Oh yea! In Manifest Destiny!

Bob: Exactly! And yet they didn't succeed and we're coming back stronger than ever.

Jane: That's right! We make the mice look like they're . . . or the rabbits look like amateurs.

Bob: Ha, ha, ha! Now there was another piece in there and that is Good for your Heart. How did that come about?

Jane: Well, that's basically about Foxglove. And Foxglove was discovered by Witherington and it's grown in Canada. They have big, huge farms of it. Sixty-five percent of the world's population relies on Foxglove. That is the generic name. The empirical name is Digitalis Purpurea. It's basically a very, very important medicine and people grow it in their yards all the time and don't realize what a powerful medicinal plant it is. Humming birds use it. That's how they observed that it might have something to do with the heart because you know the way humming birds flutter. So they eat the nectar and that gives them the power to fly that they can. And so once the people looked at it and perfected it that was a very powerful medicine for sixty-five percent of the world's population. It keeps them alive. You would never pick a leaf in your back yard and eat it because in thirty minutes from there, you would be dead. You write your own epitaph. That's how powerful these plants are. So a lot of these plants are medicinal, but you have to really respect them. You just can't go around and pick them and think I'm going to taste this one and that one because some of them can really be deadly.

Bob: That kind of knowledge, I have been on walks with one of our elders here, Joseph Paquette, looking at plants and every so often you hear, "Oh, no, no, no! If you eat that, you're dead, but this one you can."

Jane: Yea, right! Like you can have... there's a red topped mushroom called Amanita muscaria, right? It grows all over in Ontario and the arboreal forest and it is a very powerful mushroom used in the Midewin societies. It is basically a psychotropic medicine, right? So it gives you visions and you have to know how to use it. The shamans and priests and leaders know how to use it, so you have to listen to your elders and not just assume that ah yea I'm going to try this out because you might be seeing all your ancestors in heaven thirty minutes later.

Bob: You had choices. You could have taken all kinds of different paths and yet a great deal of your work deals with very important issues that affect our people. Do you mind if I ask how that came about?

Jane: Well, I think I'm a generalist. I have a degree as a microbiologist and worked for years as a microbiologist. I have, you know, worked in many other fields, ok? And I've studied for years. I've studied law; I've studied religion; I've partaken in many ceremonies. I just came back from Japan and did a whole series with the Zen monks,

esoteric monks, ah Buddhist monks so that was really a good opening. I've really been curious about the amalgamations of science with religion, with art, with everything, so it's just being . . . you know, having a curious mind. So obviously the pedagogical side of the work would come out.

Bob: Well as it happens, Jane one of the things that I've noticed is that a great number of contemporary Native artists seem to be actually very highly trained or very highly educated. You yourself have spent a good deal of time in the academic community. Can you tell me and perhaps some of the young people that are out there any of the benefits that might have come to you from that kind of training?

Jane: Well today in the art world they actually . . . if you're self-trained they don't really take you seriously. The degrees pay for themselves that's why you go to university and why you pay all the tuition money. You study hard because that puts you ahead—the cream of the crop like. One of my . . . Dr. Paquette, he was saying to me when I was in microbiology he said ten percent of the world get through first year and then five percent get through second year, but he said if you go all the way through to a Master's or PhD you're in like point zero, zero, zero, zero one percent of the world and the world knows that. And that's where you get ahead in life, so if you want to be just one of the many in the flock, or if you want to be the leader, the eagle that leads, then it depends on what you want to do so the best thing is to go out and get an education. And try to get as high as you can because when you do then you'll have an easy life. It's a nice life being an academic and knowing all this stuff. And then if you have the experience and things like that then the rewards come around for you and you have a lot of fun and people love you and you get to have limousine service and first class hotels. And you get to go to the ROM and have people, you know, pat you on the back and you get taken out for lunch all the time. And you get asked to do lectures and you get nice honorariums and you get a real sweet life—chuckle.

Bob: Which is of course what all of us want, but especially young Native people sometimes they look at the success of Norval Morrisseau and feel that they don't really need to be trained. On the other hand, if you look at Norval Morrisseau, he was trained as a shaman in ways that most of the dominant society would not recognize, so your advice to young people to go out there and get trained is just absolutely extraordinary. On the other hand, you yourself happen to be, because it's coming up on the end of the program here. I have to thank you, but also tell you that for all of the people out there, you happen to be very good for our hearts and thank you very, very much.

Jane: Arigato!

Bob: Oh, Japanese! Ok, thank you. Arigato (Poitras)

Art Elder

Can a depth of accumulated personal knowledge about art be considered Indigenous Knowledge? If we allow mainstream expectations to condition our answer, we would be forced to say no. The mainstream view of Indigenous Knowledge, past or present, appears to focus on activities that might be considered traditional and involved ceremony, spirituality or the environment. Norval Morrisseau included strong references to traditional ceremonial and spiritual knowledge in his works thereby meeting the mainstream expectations in spite of the fact that the Woodland Style dates from 1962 and therefore must be considered contemporary (McLuhan and Hill 20). He might be considered a repository of Indigenous Knowledge, but what of people like Jane Ash Poitras? I suggest to you that the contemporary view of Indigenous Knowledge from a Native perspective should and must recognize contemporary spheres of activity in the definition. As such, a wise and experienced specialist in art may easily be recognized as an “art Elder.”

Is it appropriate to consider artists like Jane Ash Poitras to be Elders? When I asked Jane Ash Poitras about her piece called *Buffalo Seed* her reply demonstrated a kind of traditional knowledge that would easily classify her as an Elder. She was, “. . . raised as a traditionalist and spent a lot of time with traditional elders.” (Poitras). She knew about the traditional plants and did ceremonies that connected her to the ancestors. She expressed the opinion that by observing wild life and animals, “. . . they learned how to make the medicines also and use it for medicinal purposes and they were basically the first pharmacologists of the world.” (Poitras). Jane Ash Poitras exhibits all of the characteristics of a traditional Elder.

Jane Ash Poitras is a qualified microbiologist who knows about the medicines and easily qualifies as an Elder in the “traditional” sense. However, the reason I classify Jane Ash Poitras as an “art” Elder is that she also holds a Master of Fine Art degree from Columbia University in New York (Poitras). Moreover, she has an extensive amount of knowledge about Native art that I would suggest constitutes Indigenous Knowledge as surely as her extensive ceremonial and spiritual knowledge does. The test of authenticity

though raises the question of whether Indigenous Knowledge can be contemporary enough to deal with art.

The Feheley Art Gallery is a particularly comfortable place for Inuit and Native artists alike, but when there is an exhibition opening it is usually packed with wealthy mainstream collectors. On the day that I was to interview Jane Ash Poitras, I opened the door and walked in to a room filled with elegantly dressed mainstream people milling about before the beautiful works on the walls. When Pat Feheley introduced me to Jane Ash Poitras, I was surprised because I had walked right past her believing that she was one of the collectors. In the absence of traditional clothing and ceremonial equipment like eagle feathers, shakers or smudge pots, she certainly did not fulfill the stereotypical image of an Elder. Chatting with her did reveal a very deep and traditional form of Indigenous Knowledge commonly expected by mainstream definitions. She certainly knows a great deal about plants, animals and medicines and as a result might easily be considered a traditional Elder, but that image is immediately offset by the fact that she is a very highly qualified academic. That is not part of the stereotypical image we normally associate with an Elder. There is another aspect of Jane Ash Poitras, however, that is not usually associated with the role of the Elder; Jane Ash Poitras is an artist. More importantly, she is a very contemporary artist whose work does have links to Native concerns and Indigenous Knowledge, but whose execution and style is decidedly current.

Jane Ash Poitras is not usually seen as an Elder around the art world, but we may easily recognize in her the characteristics we do associate with an Elder. She has been traditionally trained in the forms of Indigenous Knowledge we usually associate with the traditional Elder. Once we recognize that we live in a very contemporary world, however, we are able to accept her highly trained academic status as being a specialized form of Indigenous Knowledge that parallels her more traditional forms. The trick here is to recognize the depth of lived personal knowledge in the Fine Art world that Jane Ash Poitras has acquired as being contemporary Indigenous Knowledge. I believe that once that hurdle has been passed, her exceptional achievements in the art world easily qualify her as an “art Elder.”

Storytelling and the Elder

Do you have to be an Elder to be a storyteller? Well, from a Native cultural point of view, the Elder was usually someone who was recognized as a specialist whose experience allowed them to offer opinions, suggestions or conclusions that made sense to the community. All of the artists presented here are recognized as successful and prominent artists. In other words, they meet the criteria to qualify as knowledgeable people. Not surprisingly, each is a storyteller. The way in which they tell their stories is primarily visual, but they remain prominent storytellers. The traditional storyteller needed to construct a story that was the result of a great deal of introspection and consultation. The contemporary storyteller, visual, oral or written, follows the same kind of path. It is a path that the academic community would easily recognize as research. In each case, the various characteristics or aspects of the research program are those identified in the Medicine Wheel Teachings. The Western direction deals with feelings, reason, storytelling and Elders. Those elements are closely linked because the lived personal experience of the Elder allows the story to be crafted in a manner that creates an appropriate balance between reason and feelings.

Each of the individuals whose voices I present in this dissertation is as an example of an “art” Elder and is recognized internationally as the holder of specialized knowledge in the field of art and more particularly in the field of Native art. It is my contention that the kind of specialized knowledge they hold is a type of contemporary Indigenous Knowledge. As in the case of “traditional” Indigenous Knowledge as defined by Native people, the specialized knowledge of Native art held by these individuals was acquired through observation and participation. Even in the case of artists who have been highly trained in an academic context, the acquisition of artistic skill and knowledge depends heavily on participation in studio work. In the case of Native art, the Indigenous Knowledge associated with it appears to be widely held as community based knowledge in a largely oral form. The knowledge is formed and acquired through interaction with other Native artists and community members. As such it forms a distinct body of personal knowledge that can be accessed by the Native “art” Elder when analyzing or assessing a problem.

If, as Joseph Couture points out, however, the Elder functions as an educator, the mere presence of extensive lived experience or specialized knowledge would not in itself be justification for community recognition as an Elder (Couture). The bodies of work produced by Jane Ash Poitras and Jeff Thomas, along with the others presented here, satisfy this requirement because of the focus on problems faced by our communities and the educational value provided. They have approached the problem of translating storytelling into a modern context by telling their stories visually rather than in written form. The world is changing and the mainstream understanding and acceptance of Native people is gradually improving. Improvements, however, are usually the result of pressures put on the system by ground-breakers that draw attention to problems. The manner in which Jeff Thomas helped draw attention to the inappropriate representation in Ottawa by a mainstream sculptor of a Native person kneeling at the base of a statue dedicated to a Western European explorer has had an impact. The offensive Indian statue was moved to a park across the street in Ottawa and no longer kneels before Champlain (Hill 14).

Marrie Mumford's View

“Marrie Mumford, appointed the Canada Research Chair in Aboriginal Arts and Literature at Trent, will be the first artistic director of Trent’s First Peoples Performance Space. Marrie (Metis/Chippewa-Cree) has spent over 25 years in professional theatre in Canada and the U.S. as an actor, director, producer and instructor. She has taught at acting studios and at the University of Toronto after earning a M.A. from Brandeis and a B.A. from the University of Alberta. She has worked with the Native Earth Performing Arts Inc., Tarragon Theatre, Theatre Passe Muraille, Factory Theatre and Toronto Free Theatre (Toronto) and nationally with De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig Theatre Group, Theatre Calgary, Citadel Theatre, Manitoba Theatre Centre and the National Arts Centre in Ottawa.

From 1992 to 1995, Marrie worked with the Ontario Ministry of Culture to implement a cultural industries strategy for Aboriginal Arts organizations. From 1995 to 2003, as Artistic Director of the Aboriginal Arts Program at the Banff Centre, she founded and established innovative programs such as, the Aboriginal Dance program, the Creation of New Works program, the Aboriginal Women’s Voices music project,

the Aboriginal New Media program, the Aboriginal Screenwriters' Program and the Aboriginal Curators series at the Walter Phillips Gallery.

Marrie has also participated on the First Peoples Advisory Committee for the Canada Council, juried the Dreamspeaker Festival in Edmonton and the Sundance Festival in Utah and been a member of the Canadian Aboriginal Music Awards Committee. In 1996, Marrie was honoured with the first James Buller Award for the Advancement of Aboriginal Theatre by the Centre for Indigenous Theatre (Mumford, Indigenous Studies).

Marrie Mumford is one of the professors at Trent University. Her field includes theatre and dance. When I first met Marrie, I assumed that she was another instructor. She was quite unassuming and certainly didn't dress in the manner of a traditional Elder. Gradually however I came to see her not only as a respected Elder, but as an "art" Elder. Why? In an institution devoted to education and full of highly knowledgeable specialists, what is it about Marrie Mumford that would set her apart as an "art" Elder? It is certainly true that education has been considered a function of the Elder, but why don't we see all teachers and professors as Elders?

The stereotypical image of an Elder of course could be used to discount most professors right away. Few of them wear traditional clothing day-in and day-out. Moreover, few of them walk the halls carrying eagle feathers and smudge pots. Mind you, some of the professors in the Indigenous Studies Department are known to begin classes with smudges and many carry an impressive amount of Indigenous Knowledge both in the traditional sense and in the contemporary. Why is it then that we do not classify them as Elders? Obviously the answer to the question of what is an Elder is more complex and elusive than we might like to think. Clearly as well, the mainstream stereotypical understanding of what an Elder is should not be accepted as definitive.

From a Native perspective the term art includes theatre and dance. A fundamental motivation for this dissertation is the extent to which I see mainstream expectations imposed on Native people when we engage with the art world. For some reason the Fine Art category of Native art appears to restrict Native art to painting or sculpture ignoring

our efforts in other accepted art forms such as performance. Marrie Mumford's specialized knowledge in this area of artistic endeavor may easily be considered Indigenous Knowledge in that our involvement with all forms of art in today's world is every bit as legitimate as our involvement in the past was with hunting or the use of plants as natural medicines. More importantly, however, her career is also an example of service to the community and demonstrates the importance of the elder in the process of bridging between the traditional and the contemporary. During an interview in 2010, she offered these thoughts:

We have to look at Indigenous ways of knowing or training. It's very different than western based, so I've been very fortunate to study with elders and they have very much informed my approach to training. We're always learning, looking at our own art forms and our own ways of teaching those art forms. Those elders who still have that knowledge, who are the storytellers, who have the language, the songs and the dances and what are the protocols, what can we use, what can't we use and how do we take that into our contemporary work because we're looking at supporting a new generation of storytellers. And I remember one of the elders saying about music—and it is what most elders have said that I've worked with and when I've talked to Haudenosaunee elders—they've said if we don't know the history of where we came from and our songs, our stories or our music then we're going to only create from European based and not have that knowledge that really is part of our ancestral knowledge. (Mumford, AVR)

There is support here for the inclusion of specialized knowledge associated with Native art in the definition of Indigenous Knowledge. There is also recognition of the role of the Elder in bridging between the traditional and contemporary. Perhaps more importantly there is also an understanding of the need to know and protect our own history as new generations are trained and take their place.

Still, why would I see Marrie Mumford as an Elder and not view all of the other professors as such? Well, Elders appear to come into being as the result of the respect they generate in the community. When I recall the deep respect I held for my Elder James Mason and realize that I was not the only member of the community that respectfully sought his advice, I seem to have a clue as to why I classify Marrie as an Elder and an "art" Elder. The students who deal with Marrie, as well as the other instructors, all treat her with obvious respect. One night I attended an opening performance of a Kaha:wi dance production and joined the performers and guests in the lounge afterwards. When

Marrie Mumford emerged from an elevator to join the group, Santee Smith, the star, producer and choreographer of the performance along with Professor Daystar Rosalie Jones welcomed Marrie with the kind of respect due an Elder. The community in this case was an artistic community and the respect was not being accorded because of ceremonial knowledge or an ability to teach mathematics. Instead, it appeared to be recognition of an individual who certainly possessed a depth of specific knowledge in her field, but who more importantly had touched their lives.

The story I present here addresses a need for a Native definition of what is Indigenous Knowledge and a need for a Native definition of what is an Elder that are not removed from our present day context. It also addresses a need to recognize an Indigenous perspective. Since much of the present day knowledge of Native art is held in an oral form in the community, those who hold Indigenous art Knowledge are under an obligation to pass on our contemporary Native understandings. If we allow Western European concepts to define aspects of Native culture and restrict it to the past, the new generations will be left with only mainstream models.

The world is gradually changing and our people have made great progress since the end of the Second World War. It would be improper for me to suggest that we are totally excluded from a substantial participation in the Fine Art world. By and large, however, I find that the major successes our most prominent artists have enjoyed are still either being segregated or treated as exceptions to the rule. It is difficult to imagine that the bulk of the mainstream population equates their work with contemporary Native people.

There is a closely related question that comes up because I have used a storytelling approach in my dissertation. Am I an Elder? Well, a couple of years ago I was invited to a Hydro One Christmas dinner party with the First Nations and Métis Relations Department. The festive decorations in the banquet hall matched the elegant and fashionable clothing of the guests who were clearly in good humor and comfortably relaxed. As is usually the case at such events, I quickly found myself shaking hands with old friends I had not seen in some time. It was the new people I was introduced to, however, who quickly engaged animated conversations. Seated at a large round dinner table, I found myself deeply involved in a most enjoyable and captivating discussion with

the gentleman next to me as the young people about me settled into their places. Indeed I was barely aware of the activities of the waiters who efficiently reached over my shoulder to place items on the table before me. After some time, the man seated to my right politely broke into our conversation to suggest that I taste the soup. When I appeared to be in no hurry to do so, the gentleman whispered that no one at the table would touch their meal until the elder went first. Looking about the table I suddenly realized that everyone had gone quiet and although they appeared to be waiting patiently, all eyes were fixed on me. I tasted my soup and immediately could hear the clatter of spoons doing the same around the table.

The young people around that table had been raised in traditional environments where Elders were honored members of the community. At mainstream events I am not usually accorded any special recognition and was deeply honored by the respect they paid to me. Nevertheless, I was caught off guard because of the obligation to live my life with humility. While community members often classify me as an Elder, it is not a responsibility that I seek. Clearly, however, there is a responsibility on the part of people identified by the community as Elders to accept the honor and to live up to it.

I very seldom identify myself as an Elder; however, my position in the community suggests that I might have some insight into the role of the Elder in our contemporary world. Since this is as much a story about me as it is about Native art and culture, it seems that it has been appropriate for me to tell you something of what I think about the topic. Our understanding of what an Elder is and the role played by an Elder has changed to a degree from the view our ancestors might have held. In my storytelling approach, I take on the role because the Elder, as the primary researcher, is a key element and that is the case with all traditional Indigenous methodologies. We often fail to realize that many of the things we take for granted are actually connected to other powerful and influential factors. A consideration of the contemporary Elder is surprisingly useful because in addition to clarifying the obvious methodological connection, it can help us understand the concept of authenticity and the influence of mainstream beliefs on our people.

Most of the literature associated with Native Elders appears to stress traditional activities such as the telling of stories anchored in and continuing Indigenous Knowledge

from centuries past. Basil Johnson in his beautiful work *Ojibway Heritage* presents oral tradition stories in written form that rightfully should be passed on to our descendants (Johnston). Eddie Benton Banai in his seminal work *The Mishomis Book*, also presents traditional stories that inform us about life, spiritual beliefs and attitudes from times past that continue to be of value today (Benton-Banai). In “The Role of Elders: Emergent Issues”, Joseph Couture suggests that the Elder can function as a bridge between the traditional and the contemporary in a way that appears to recognize the educational role of the Native Elder in traditional and present day societies (Couture). In my role as the host and producer of the Aboriginal Voices Radio Network *AVR Arts Review Show*, I am both a storyteller and an educator, yet I seldom deal with Nanabush or Weesageechak. Dealing with contemporary issues and stories somehow does not appear to fit the generally accepted image of a traditional storyteller and Elder. Nevertheless, members of the community do recognize me as an Elder and probably do so because I able to bring my experience to bear on contemporary problems and issues in a manner that is fully in keeping with traditional imperatives.

The Woodland Style “. . . was given birth by the imaginative genius of Norval Morrisseau, with his first exhibition at the Pollock Gallery in 1962.” (McLuhan and Hill 20). The style did not exist prior to that event. On the other hand, the Woodland Style is considered traditional today by Native and non-Native alike. Since it looked like it was anchored in the past, it was considered authentic. Works created by artists of Native descent executed in Western European styles are often either dismissed or treated as exceptions. It is the appearance of authenticity that seems to be a deciding factor. Thus the characteristics of the image projected by an individual or by an artwork have a major impact on the position it occupies with respect to authenticity. The difficulty presented by this situation arises from the often subtle, subconscious connotations associated with the image. Linking Native people, culture or artwork to a traditional past frequently entails negative connotations associated with the primitive.

It is my belief that the Elder of the past functioned to a large extent as an educator whose depth of experience served as a storehouse or a repository for Indigenous Knowledge. In *Telling Our Stories* Louis Bird presents Native education as an

experiential process in which information is passed through direct involvement instead of in the passive lecture style of education common today (Bird). If, as I believe, Indigenous Knowledge is not something dredged up from the past, then it is still forming and can be added to in the present. I further believe that Indigenous Knowledge need not be restricted to ancient practices such as the construction of snowshoes or birch bark canoes. Rather, information about artistic practice is a legitimate part of our contemporary Indigenous Knowledge. As a result, the manner in which that knowledge is acquired becomes relevant.

My qualifications as a storyteller impact the credibility of this dissertation and the role of the Elder is so closely associated with storytelling that a presentation of my understanding of what constitutes an Elder in our contemporary environment seems in order. It is my opinion that a new kind of Indian now exists. Moreover, I have come to realize that the adjectives “contemporary” and “urban” must also be applied. Once this is done I find that I am able to recognize in myself one of the primary functions of an Elder, which is education. Even so, one of the Seven Grandfather Teachings suggests humility and advancing arguments in support of my image as an Elder makes me uncomfortable (Wikipedia).

As a Native person who is deeply involved with the Fine Art world, I am conscious of a number of its characteristics that misrepresent Native people and cultures and have a detrimental effect. The negative social consequences of this situation are significant in that they present a false image of Native culture as being archaic and effectively block an accurate perception of Native people as being equal to one and all. The negative characteristics of the Fine Art world help condition opinions held by the general population and have a far reaching if subtle influence on the manner in which Native people and cultures are treated by the society at large. They appear to be present because of unintentional influences brought about by a false and misleading view of the Native and our cultures by mainstream people. Surprisingly the definition of what constitutes an Elder seems to follow the same path.

There is a very good reason for considering the question of what an Elder is and how that might relate to my story about Native art. One of my personal complaints is that the

Native point of view is often ignored within the Fine Art world. As with the category of Native art, there is a mainstream concept of what an Elder is and how much weight might be given to pronouncements made by an Elder. In other words, there are a number of misconceptions associated with the term. In fact, many of those misconceptions actually function at the level of connotation. I would suggest that a connotation is an association that arises when an object, picture or word functioning as a sign links to previously internalized positions held by the observer. The previously internalized positions may be generally held beliefs current in the culture to which the observer belongs. Those positions have been previously accepted as accurate and often provide a set of expectations about the characteristics of the object functioning as a sign or symbol.

In the case of a connotation, there is usually no time, inclination or opportunity to question or analyze the automatic link to internalized positions. If the object or word presents an image that matches the previously held position, it is accepted. If it does not, we tend to reject the object or the word's contrary meaning while maintaining our internal standard. An individual who grew up learning about Native people by watching American Cowboy and Indian Western movies may easily hold a view of Native culture that classifies it as primitive and archaic.

What is missing when we automatically accept definitions created by mainstream cultures about the nature of the Elder is an awareness of other functions the individual may have within his or her own community. From the standpoint of the mainstream community today, the Elder is primarily an individual with specialized knowledge concerning spirituality.¹ That restriction placed on the Elder's particular field of specialization seems to depend primarily on a false understanding of Native people. Mainstream concepts about what is traditionally Native form a test for authenticity. Very often if a work of art or an individual displays the expected characteristics of the traditional, the piece is accepted as real and genuine. If, on the other hand, the characteristics are contemporary, they do not meet the test of authenticity and are rejected as being false.¹ Is there such a thing as an art Elder? If we recognize that the engagement of Native people with the Fine Art world is a contemporary phenomenon, we would expect an art elder to display contemporary characteristics. I see the art Elder as being as

authentic in our contemporary world as the traditional Elder functioning as a specialist in a particular field was in days gone by.

One of the characteristics I have found with Elders such as James Mason was that the individual seeking advice was under no obligation to follow it. In the end the pronouncements, observations and conclusions offered by an Elder were accepted or rejected by the community. I must clearly point out that my view of what constitutes an Elder are based on my lived personal experience and could very easily differ from opinions held by others. If they make sense to the community perhaps they might be adopted or accepted as being true; if not, well

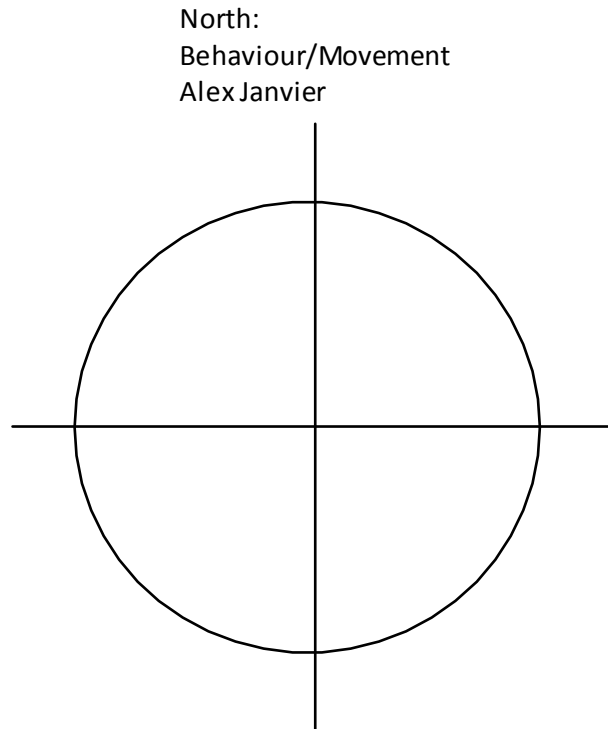
Two characteristics of the Elder, however, appear to have been important: personal experience combined with specialized knowledge and the ability to access that knowledge when analyzing a problem. These are the characteristics I see in the contemporary Elder. In other words, the value of the Elder to the society continues in our contemporary world.

Once we understand that the function of the Elder in the community was much broader than simply ceremonial or spiritual, we begin to understand that contemporary Elders, like those that went before, have a much broader role to play. As a specialist in Native art, the value of an Elder to the community is substantially greater than it would be if restricted to doing ceremonies. A contemporary Elder, then, also has a responsibility to place accumulated experience, along with an ability to analyze and access it, at the disposition of the community.

In this story I present a number of credible “art” Elders that are contemporary Indigenous Knowledge holders and who are also recognized as successful artists. Each time I think of them as art Elders, I sense that we should do what we can to be aware of the subtle imposition of external definitions and expectations. As someone who has spent a great deal of time involved with art, I am particularly concerned about the need to decide for ourselves what Native art is. As a result, I believe we should admit the existence of “art” Elders who help keep our cultures and the way we express them in our own hands. It is the “art” Elders who help us see the category of Native art through Native eyes and understand that their perspective is one hundred percent contemporary.

It is not unusual for a storyteller to allow the audience to form their own opinions. Therefore, I leave it to you to contemplate what has been presented so far as we take another break.

Chapter 7: Northern Direction Behavior and Movement Bonnie Devine & Rita Letendre “Contemporary Artists”



A good deal of effort has been expended in this dissertation to point out that the perspective of contemporary artists of Native descent with respect Native art should be heard through our own voices if we are to avoid leaving it to others to define us. Each of the artists presented in this dissertation works in very contemporary styles and does not fit the accepted mold. The voices of Bonnie Devine and Rita Letendre are now presented because they clearly illustrate the fact that our artists do not fit the widely held profile of a Native artist. Their perspectives are in fact contemporary in that their approaches, their opinions, their respect for education and their careers are excellent examples of the way we see ourselves as simply artists. It is not surprising in the Native community, whether considered traditional or contemporary, to find people who excel at and practice in a

number of areas. While the mainstream may feel that Native art is restricted to the representation of Native legends, our contemporary artists usually have a range of expressive interests that may include curatorial practice, writing, performance art and mainstream artistic styles. The transcript of Bonnie Devine's interview is presented to reinforce recognition of the fact that our perspective is contemporary in its approach to art and that our artistic interests are as wide as those of any other culture.

Motivation and movement are important elements in Michael Thrasher's understanding of the process of the acquisition of new knowledge. There simply is no point in acquiring new knowledge unless it is put into practice (Thrasher). The section devoted to this concept is intended to point out that Native cultures are not dead and gone. They continue to evolve and adapt to the modern context. Both of the artists presented here are representative of the vast majority of Native artists who apply our contemporary cultural perspective to their art production instead of simply working toward a standard that would lock our people into the dim past.

Rita Letendre serves to remind us that the contemporary perspective of Native artists did not occur in the past couple of years. Her direct involvement with the mainstream Fine Art world and her adoption of modern styles dates from the 1950s well before the introduction of the Woodland Style and the feeling that our work can only be considered in the subcategory of Native art.

The Bonnie Devine Interview

When this interview took place in 2011, Bonnie Devine was the department head of an Aboriginal Visual Culture program at the Ontario College of Art and Design. The very existence of that program points to a contemporary involvement with Fine Art on the part of our Native artists. We begin with the second part of the interview.

Bob: Hi Everyone Bob Phillips back once again with the AVR Arts Review and I'm still sitting here in this delightful office with Bonnie Devine and Bonnie we were talking earlier about Norval Morrisseau, but you know there is a fantastic lady I happened to meet one day and that was Daphne Odjig and it seems to me that you have a very special connection with her.

Bonnie: That's right. I met Daphne Odjig in 2003. I did the sets and costumes for a play.

Bob: Oh!

Bonnie: That's right. Native Earth did a play called The Art Show . . .

Bob: I saw that!

Bonnie: . . . by Alanis King. I did the sets and costumes for that show.

Bob: You did a good job.

Bonnie: Thank you very much. It was a wonderful experience for me mainly because . . . well, several reasons. It was my first time working with theatre, so that was a wonderful experience, but beyond that I had an opportunity to travel with Jani Lauzon who played Daphne in the play. She and I travelled out to BC and met Daphne herself as we were preparing for the production. What a thrill. I have to tell you. You know, she is such a model in so many ways for young people starting out, for artists working, for woman, for Aboriginal people in general. She is such a role model, so it was a real honor to meet her. When I met her, what I noticed was that she hadn't had a significant retrospective exhibition. She had kind of been lost. There had been a show of her work in 1984. It had travelled to three galleries in Ontario, but she hadn't had a significant public exhibition since then, and so I put together a proposal to the Canada Council and requested a research and production grant as an independent curator and I began to gather work for an exhibition. I worked with the Art Gallery of Sudbury. We worked on it for I guess two years almost. The show opened in Sudbury in 2007. The National Gallery of Canada took an interest in the project. They came on as partners. They helped us to publish a book. The book, I wanted it published in Ojibwa too. I thought that it was so important that we have a record of this lady and

her story and actually the whole story of Aboriginal and especially the Ojibwa art in the sixties and seventies that was available in the language. And after a bit of a tussle, a bit of negotiation the National Gallery came through and they have published it. It's a full edition of the drawings and paintings of Daphne Odjig, color illustrations completely in Ojibwa, so that was fantastic. I'm so, so proud of that. The exhibition will open in October 22nd, I believe of 2009 at the National Gallery. It will be the first time that an Aboriginal woman has a solo exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada, so I'm just thrilled about that.

Bob: Well she is such . . . not only a powerful figure, but such an important figure in bringing Aboriginal art to the attention of the general public that I'm astounded that something hasn't been done earlier than that.

Bonnie: Well she has very good representation in the commercial galleries. Her work has been well collected. She had a very extensive career as a print maker and so you know her work is known, but in terms of the Beaux Art Galleries . . . and this happens so often to our artists, they are able to win a certain amount of commercial success and a certain amount of fame and fortune, but to have the recognition, the respect, the validation of the academy, this has eluded our senior artists for some time, so Daphne Odjig wasn't inducted into the . . . sorry, she was given a Governor General Award as a visual artist in 2007 and this really represents a major stepping stone for her and for all of our artists because it represents that acknowledgement as a professional, leading, cutting edge Canadian artist. Daphne, like Norval, is self-taught and so for her to have made that transition is an enormous achievement.

Bob: It is an astounding achievement especially back in the days when she was still fighting, both her and Norval, to bring our people's work to the foreground and for her now to be honored in that way shows that we're all beginning to change in our place and Canada is perhaps beginning to change somewhat.

Bonnie: I think that's true. I think we still have major struggles of course. You know, it's a role that Aboriginal people need to play. I think I can say truthfully that the National Gallery didn't produce this exhibition. You know it fell to an Aboriginal woman artist to take the initiative to bring that exhibition forward. The same thing with Norval Morrisseau! His show was curated by Greg Hill another Aboriginal curator/artist, so you know our people are still advocating on the ground floor for our own artists, for our own art history and I think we still have a long way to go before we're completely integrated into that broader stream.

Bob: Unfortunately Bonnie, it's time for a brief station break. We'll be right back.

Part 3

Bob: Hi Everyone Bob Phillips back once again with the Arts Review and of course I'm still sitting here with Bonnie Devine and we were talking about women artists before and as it happens I'm sitting in front of one of our most powerful women artists. Bonnie a few years I happened to see something that astounded me. I happened to see a canoe that you made and of all things it was made out of paper.

Bonnie: Yes, that was in 2003. I had just completed my Master's thesis at York University and I had a box full of all of my notes that I had accumulated. I'd also made a film that was based on those drawings and that research called Rooster Rock. So I had all of the production notes for the film as well and I just didn't want to throw them away and I didn't want to leave them in the box. For me they are living. For me they are a part of the process that I went through to get that education. They represent a very important vehicle for me and of course when I was growing up I saw my grandparents. They never wasted anything. They never threw anything away. Things were repurposed; things were exchanged; things were turned into other things. And I had a dream. I saw the men running in the field. They were carrying a white canoe on their backs. They were bringing it to me and it had writing all underneath. As it came closer to me I saw that it was just covered in all of this writing and pictures and it was beautiful and I thought well that's it. I've got to turn these papers, these words—all of this work into something that symbolizes strength, vitality, flexibility, ability . . . you know how it can go down the rapids. You know the canoe is just what I would call a perfected structure. Nothing wasted. Everything designed in order to make the best advantage of the strength that's inherent in the material. I didn't know if I could build a canoe out of paper. Certainly I had never built a canoe before, but I had a book that had been lent to me and I had a tape also, Joseph Commando, a master canoe maker. Anyways, I used his instructions, his recipe. I followed them to the letter. I sowed the paper together and then I laid it out and then I built it just the way he said. And low and behold when I took . . . I had these cardboard structures around it to hold it up. When I took those structures away I wasn't sure if it would hold. That was a pretty interesting moment. I took those cardboard structures and sure enough that thing it did what it . . . You know, the structure is a work of genius. This is such an important symbol to me of what my grandparents, your grandparents, what they knew and what they could build and the way that its own tensile strength gives it its form. You build it from the outside in, not the inside out. You know all of these things are teachings, so I learned so much from that experience building that canoe.

Bob: The canoe was very closely related to Rooster Rock.

Bonnie: That's right. The story of Rooster Rock and actually the writing on the canoe is based on the research that I did around the discovery of uranium on the Canadian shield in the 1950s. Uranium was discovered at Elliot Lake which is about thirty miles north of Serpent River, which is my home reserve. It had an enormous impact. I mean enormous. It impacted the economy. It impacted the trapping. Until the time of the mining, my grandpa, my uncles, they were trappers. You know they worked in the summer as guides. From the time that the uranium was discovered, that trapping was over and people began to work for the mining industry in various capacities. My dad worked in the mine as well. Anyways, so there was a benevolent effect; there was a good effect. On the other hand, the river got poisoned. The water, the ground water became contaminated. Cutler, Ontario, which is the little village in the centre of the Serpent River First Nation, became the site of a sulfuric acid plant. They needed the sulfuric acid in order to smelt the uranium and they thought it was convenient to put that right in the centre of our reserve. And this has had a tremendous environmental

impact on my homeland. I wanted to tell that story. From the time I was a little girl I had wondered you know, "What are those big piles of yellow powder? Why does it burn the trees?" You know the trees surrounding those sulfuric acid piles were all black. Even the ground was black. It was a very compelling visual influence on me. I believe that seeing those yellow triangles in the black trees made me an artist in some way, made me a storyteller because they were so indelibly etched in my memory, so I wanted to tell the story and that's what I used my Master's for was to learn more about the mining and that resulted in the thesis. It resulted in the film. It resulted in the series of pictures that came out of it, Radiation and Radiance and the video.

Part 4

Bob: Do you mind if I ask what you're working on now?

Bonnie: Sure, I'm working on an exhibition that will open in June in Santa Fe and part of that work is work that I did last year called Writing Home and they're glass casts from the shore line around Serpent River. I wanted to make pictures of the way the rocks are formed. I find that those are like documents. You know what I mean? I was very interested in that, so I did that work last year. But then when I was thinking about what I would do in Santa Fe I realized, Santa Fe is sitting on another mother-load of uranium. Those poor people have gone through the same thing that we went through in the sixties when uranium was all the rage and you know they were digging it out of the ground wherever they could find it. And then the mines were all closed down when the cold war came to an end and so the mines have been lying derelict. Well now all of a sudden people are interested again in uranium and mining companies are poking around in these old sites and thinking about opening up the mines again. And I thought, "You know it would be really interesting to use this opportunity for the exhibition and the journey that I have to make from here down to there to visit all of those mine sites. So that's what I've done. I've created a map from Elliot Lake through Michigan across the United States and to New Mexico visiting the mine sites and the reactors, taking video and putting my hands on the earth.

Bob: Oh my, on Mother Earth!

Bonnie: That's right. That's right. It's called I Touch You Here and it's about the power of our presence to commiserate or to condole with the earth. I wouldn't be so presumptuous to say that you could heal, but the earth needs our love and needs us to witness what's going on.

Bob: Well as a matter of fact Bonnie, when you were talking about visiting various places I came to realize that you know our listeners have an opportunity to actually visit with you at something that's coming up and that is the Catalyst Café. Can you tell me what you're going to do at the Catalyst Café?

Bonnie: Well, I'm going to show the movie that I made last summer called A Grim Fairytale. That is a little short, I made it with David DeLeary, he did the music and the editing and it's about ledger drawings. It is based on the old German Indianer

film, so that was a short. I'm going to show that and talk a bit about the ledger drawings and talking a little bit about what I'll be doing down in Santa Fe.

Bob: I understand that Kerry Potts will be involved as well.

Bonnie: That's right Kerry Potts went with us to Berlin. The Grim Fairytale along with three other movies that were commissioned by ImagineNative. (Devine, AVR)

Movement and Behavior

Michael Thrasher's Medicine Wheel teachings place both movement and behavior at the top of the circle in the Northern direction. When searching for new understandings of what we see about us, we must take into consideration the behavior of the individuals involved and become conscious of any movement or change in the situation (Thrasher). With that in mind, while transcribing the interview with Bonnie Devine, I began to recall an event from my early school days. It was a visit to the Royal Ontario Museum. I remember that class excursion for one reason and one reason only, a totem pole. Try as I might, I am unable to recall any other image from that visit back in the mid-1950s. Today, in my mind's eye, I still clearly see the wooden pole with its carved images in the marble stairwell that spiraled up around it. Surprisingly, little about the place remains in memory except for the totem pole. I know was anxious to see it, so the teacher must have told us about it before we got there. There is also the recollection that all Indians had totem poles near their teepees, but that it was a very long time ago.

Native Stories are usually multilayered and this one is no exception. First of all, I am surprised that the totem comes to mind as one of the first objects that really impressed me as being Native. What surprises me most now, however, is that it is from the west coast while I cannot recall anything from down east. Today, I realize that as a child raised in the city, regardless of heritage, the only Native material around was chosen by non-

Native people. The totem illustrates the way in which our impressions of cultures are shaped and formed when the information is second hand. An entire generation of young Toronto school children was exposed to that totem and the hidden colonial approach behind it.

Bonnie Devine teaches at the Ontario College of Art and Design that is essentially just down the street from the Royal Ontario Museum. The new programs focused on Native visual culture that are happening there today that she discusses do not fit image of an archaic and long dead culture. It is very difficult to separate misleading and negative connotations from visual material. The totem I viewed as a young child is no exception. Located in a mainstream museum, it is considered an artifact of a long passed and primitive culture. However, the ROM totem was not created for the mainstream. It was created for a very rich and vibrant Native culture that had no connection whatsoever to the Western European Fine Art world. It is big and impressive; it is also aesthetically pleasing, but it was not created as Fine Art. Out of context, the ROM totem's stylized and symbolic style may quite easily be understood to be an example of a primitive and backward culture's crude art. Seen through Native eyes, the same ROM totem is symbolically every bit as sophisticated and powerful as pieces created by the ancient Greeks.

Fortunately, there is a good deal of movement evident in the comments by Bonnie Devine concerning the recent recognition of Daphne Odjig, who late in her career has been recognized as a cutting edge professional artist and has been given a solo exhibition at the National Gallery. It is interesting, however, that as Bonnie points out, "[i]t fell to an

Aboriginal woman artist to take the initiative to bring that exhibition forward.” (Devine, AVR).

The discussion with Bonnie Devine reveals that she does not restrict her artistic practice to what might be generally considered traditional. Like Daphne Odjig, Bonnie Devine is quite cutting edge and is quick to employ contemporary methods when creating her artwork. Moreover, she is not restricted to a single form of expression such as easel painting. She is as comfortable with sculpture as she is with set design and with the creation of videos. What becomes readily apparent about her approach is that she creates according to her personal interest and is not simply attempting to create fashionable pieces. Her interest, as with most of our artists, can focus on serious issues faced by our people. *The Rooster Rock Video*, for example, squarely addresses the problem of radioactive contamination on her reserve, the Serpent River. Through her work, Bonnie Devine has proven herself to be an important visual storyteller in the most contemporary of manners.

Bonnie Devine alludes to the fact that the commercial galleries are more likely to provide proper representation for our artists than the public galleries. Six large paintings by Norval Morrisseau hang in a corridor of the Art Gallery of Ontario. The Woodland style did not exist prior to 1962 when it was first introduced by Morrisseau in the Pollock Gallery in Yorkville, yet affixed to the wall beside his very contemporary works is a set of hundreds of stone arrowheads. While the curator probably wanted to suggest that the artist was a Native person and used the arrowheads as a symbol, I have to ask myself, “When was the last time that a Native person used stone arrowheads?” The subtle,

unconscious implication is that Native people including the artist and his work are primitive and backward.

Contemporary artists of Native descent working in Fine Art frequently do not project the expected traditional image associated with the subcategory of Native art. Native culture is often considered static and archaic by the mainstream. Writing under the title “Contributions to Canadian Art by Aboriginal Contemporary Artists” Gerald McMaster comments on the difference between traditional and contemporary approaches. He states, “[t]he earlier artists produced works that were closely related to, and constituted within, band/tribal cultures and languages. Today, artists create works, for the most part, for any and all publics.” (McMaster 140). The general population has been of great assistance in bringing about this change by providing a market for Native art that encourages its greater production and accounts for its shift in focus. Gerald McMaster goes on to point out that “[i]n the case of tribal art, the dialogue was always internal; in Aboriginal contemporary art, the dialogue moves outward into the aesthetic, political, moral, and didactic realms.” (McMaster, Contributions 140). His remark is consistent with a continuing and uninterrupted aesthetic interest that simply turned its attention to new means of expression and now produces for new and different purposes. It is common today to create an object specifically for sale in the Fine Art market with no intention of addressing cultural needs.

Rita Letendre’s Perspective

Art such as that produced by artists like Bonnie Devine and Rita Letendre, who work in contemporary mainstream styles, is not considered traditional Native art, yet as Rita points out, if it is produced by a Native person it should be considered Native art. Our

contemporary artists approach their work in the same manner as any mainstream artist. They are usually as well trained and work in quite modern styles as adeptly as anyone else. In the following transcript of a conversation I had with Rita Letendre, her approach to art is revealed as not only contemporary, but also as being very different from that expected of an artist in the category of Native art. Her voice presents a very rich and vibrant story of Native creativity, pride and joy.

Rita Letendre was born in the Drummondville area of Quebec in 1928, so right now she's eighty-six years old. And in those eighty-six years she has created an extensive body of work and a reputation for herself that really is international. She didn't follow the path of the Woodland Style or make an attempt to deal with more traditional types of work. Instead, back in the 1950s in the Montreal area where she began studying art she came under the influence of and made friends with many of the Automatists. The Automatists back in those days were very rapidly becoming a powerful movement in the province of Quebec. They based their own artistic style on aspects of Surrealism that dealt with automatic behavior¹. By automatic behavior, I mean something in the nature of what happens when you begin to paint without putting a lot of lines on the canvas first or figuring out what you're going to do. You just start painting to see where it goes. That approach led her to a very abstract style and a style which is actually all her own.

Rita Letendre uses color to a great extent to relate to emotions or feelings. The color helps her understand the world about her. Painting in itself can help us think about and understand our life and our relationship to it. As the interview progresses her way of seeing art becomes more and more apparent. For example, she comes back time and time again to the problem of putting human experience into the work or of answering many of

the questions that arise from our interaction with each other. Rita Letendre finds answers to such questions as she works the problem out on canvas.

Rita Letendre employs modern high Fine Art methods and techniques, yet she leaves a stamp on her work that I see as being in keeping with Native worldviews. Looking at her approach with the aid of the Medicine Wheel teachings, for example, I am surprised to see her dealing so directly with the Western direction, feelings and reason. If we sit looking at a beautiful sunset, the glorious colors in that sunset will create a mood. Color then can be very closely tied to feelings that are essentially an internal experience. The elements on the Medicine Wheel may be associated directly across the circle as well as by moving around it. The work of Rita Letendre deals with the Western direction by focusing on feelings, but it can also be related to the Eastern direction that reminds us that vision may be internal as well as external.

Rita uses her lifelong experience in the Fine Art world to create juxtapositions of form and color across a canvas. The relationships of those elements are of particular interest to her because in addition to helping her create a particular feeling, they also help her understand her relationship to world she lives in. Her work leaves a unique mark in the Fine Art world as it reflects the preoccupations with experience and relationships of the Southern direction.

When I review the comments of both Rita Letendre and Bonnie Devine I am astonished to note the manner in which both artists may be positioned with respect to the Northern direction. Neither artist seems to behave in the manner that the category of Native art would seem to expect. Each in fact behaves very much like a contemporary

individual not bound by patterns left over from times gone by. These artists promote movement toward a more accurate recognition of our cultures by breaking the mold. As visual storytellers they steadfastly present a modern and incisive view. Moreover their voices, when speaking of their work, create a rich and vibrant story of Native creativity, pride and joy

Bob: OK, now Rita you were about ready to tell me something about this painting and I stopped you because I wanted to be certain that other people might hear. Can you pick up on those thoughts about this painting? For example, what is the title?

RITA: Mysterious Memory

BOB: Oh, that's beautiful!

RITA: And the luminosity of it. There actually is quite a drama in it, but there is life comes out, you know. And it is the two sides of life, the dark side and the light side. Isn't that right?

BOB: It's exactly right. And the way that you've juxtaposed different colours certainly the red against the cooler green makes it become very vibrant and active.

RITA: It creates a little bit of a shock. Don't fall asleep please! That's what I tell the painting. But you know all of my paintings have a lot of energy in them, at least I think. Well, I am quite sure.

BOB: You know that doesn't surprise me because you've got lots of energy, so it transfers right into the paintings. Was there anything in particular that you were thinking about when you built that particular painting?

RITA: No, I am all the time trying to discover through my painting a world, the world in action. You know like for example there is . . . it is like, like the ancient memory, the pre-historical people. It exists in everybody. We have the same genes. They just moved that all. They went through the dinosaurs and then through other people and they are in the air and we have them also. So I'm trying to capture that, the life of the world, the life of humanity. I am part of it so I want . . . I don't want a pretty picture. I want something that means something. That's why I can go on and on painting. If I was just making pretty pictures, you know, I would have taken a break and relaxed a long time ago. It's no use. I don't think so. It's of no use from my point of view. We don't need that. We need to communicate with humanity and that's why I consider that a painting that is a closet is dead. The one that people can look at and communicate with, that is alive. So that's why I have to show my paintings.

BOB: Well you know, your remarks strike home with me because very often I feel a connection with the ancestors. Now that connection comes at a very basic level. I'm sure that the ancestors when they got up in the morning and saw a beautiful day had experienced the same kind of feelings.

RITA: Absolutely! And when they saw a storm that was going to crush them or see the danger of being squashed, you know. And even there is one painting here I call Ancient Memory. This one is very much like oooh . . .

BOB: Is it close to here?

RITA: It's somewhere. I don't know. Ah, that's another one of the same spirit. The same spirit as Ancient Memory. I don't where is Ancient Memory. It's a little more dramatic even.

BOB: Ancient Memory

RITA: Oh Ancient Memory. I thought it was more dramatic. Maybe because there is more light than in my studio. Ha,ha, ha.

BOB: Well I find it very dramatic anyway because of again your handling of the paint, your handling of the various colors. The flow and movement in there that's absolutely beautiful.

RITA: I think it's important. It's not . . . it is very beautiful, but more important than beautiful, it has to talk to you. You know, it has to say something about life, all life, the eternal life. You know I called a painting Life is Forever. It is true. It is the name of a painting, but I do believe that life is forever. It just transforms itself constantly. You know, but it's there like the sun, like the air, the wind, ourselves, and anybody. We have a term. We start life at one moment and we are going towards death. That is the normal lifespan of a person, but that person is only one. Life is more than one. It is one and everything, so that's why life is forever. It's not mine, but maybe my spirit. Maybe the spirits of those who went before. Everything is like that. Maybe the tree. It grows some leaves; it falls down and grows some more roots or if there is a fruit. It's a continuing thing and people also do reproduce themselves. So that's why, you know. It's not only me or you. It's all of us all forever and before, since forever.

BOB: You know the concept of life is forever is again something that I have a very powerful interest in. I recently built a little hand drum. And when I finished the hand drum I offered tobacco. And I thanked the cedar tree for giving its life for me to use. Now one of the reasons that I can do that is by thinking of the cedar tree as partially being a physical body, but partially having a spirit the same as you and I and certainly you have begun to put spirit into your paintings and I am just astounded with that.

RITA: But that's what I'm searching for. I am trying to understand and feel life and put it on in all its facets, you know. Like joy, the pain, the anguish, but they are all part of one thing. One cannot really appreciate one thing without the other. You

know, that's as simple as that. If you, like for example, the wonderful thing of smelling of a flower, the feeling of the sun touching your skin and all that or even walking in a lake and swimming in it, you know. It's all part of the human experience that I'd like to put into my work. So that's what I do!

BOB: Well, you know there's another aspect to human experience and that is a time line. We actually exist over a certain amount of time and we mature from young people into older people. And it seems to me that as a young person you began quite a career and I was wondering how you became involved with art and what thoughts you have about back then. How did that happen that you became an artist?

RITA: It's so incredible. My mother when . . . I was a person, you know, that asked questions constantly. I drove my mother crazy, so there was one way . . . and my grandmother also . . . so they gave me pencils and paper, so I did always draw constantly. In the school I was making my lesson, but on the edge there was always drawing. And then I decorated the school. And then later on, I came from a little village we could not be poorer . . . just surviving . . .

BOB: Which village?

RITA: It was near Drumondville that was called St. Marguerite at that time. And part of the time also I was in St. Francois, which is just across the lake. As a matter of fact in the summer you could cross the river because you know in the spring you could use the rowboat, but in the summer you could jump from one stone and another across the river. Which I did! That's where my grandmother was living. So anyway, I didn't know about painting. I didn't know that it existed, at all! I remember thinking at one moment looking at a magazine, I said "Well, the world is all photography." I wished that there would still be painting.

Well, I discovered there was painting. I was taking a can of paint or whatever and I did charcoal, but at one moment there was, it was absolutely amazing, I was then about nineteen, yea I think nineteen. I was working in a restaurant as a waitress, but I was the lousiest waitress that can be. If you had a cup of coffee, there was as much in the saucer as there was . . . you know! I was not very good really, so at one moment the manager of the little restaurant found out that I was not bad at calculating. They did have a cashier with a thing. You did have to calculate, mark the price and calculate the total and get the money and give the change. He considered that I was not bad at that and it was certainly better than being a waitress. I was doing that, so while sitting at the cash like that you know during the middle of the day I had time, so I was drawing, drawing, and drawing. And one customer, my God, I wish I had been able to know him more because he died when I was . . . Anyway, I will tell you why I would have liked to know him more.

While I was there he insisted that I should go to art school. I was much too afraid to do that. And at the time of the Beaux Arts registration, he took me in his car and put me in front of the . . . and in Montreal the art school is higher than the sidewalk, so they had a bit of a stairs. So I started to climb the stairs and I was waiting until he

goes away, so I would go! But he kept parking there, so I was obliged to climb and then when I came up, somebody says, "You're here for registration?" Yes! And then they sent me to some corner to ask me questions and then they gave me some charcoal and . . . I never had charcoal, I used to use crayon, but charcoal and a piece of paper and they gave me a model to draw. And it was a mess, you know, there was so much charcoal on the floor. I kept breaking them because I didn't know that is so soft. Anyway, the result . . . I don't know why, they accepted me. And then I continued. And then I was still working in the restaurant, but I was working in the evening. I was in school during the day and in the evening I was working. During that time I discovered not only the old paintings, which I had discovered at one moment. Some Fragonard, I don't know why there were some reproductions, at that time I remember saying, "Oh, my God, isn't it sad that I'm not a man and that I'm not living in that time. I could have been a painter." But in the meantime in the Ecole des Beaux Arts I discovered lots of people like Matisse and Picasso and Van Gogh. So, I thought it was really fantastic and I could become a painter. And then that year there was an exhibition of the Automatists. Borduas with a few people like Fernand Leduc, Jean-Paul Mousseau, uh . . .

BOB: Françoise?

RITA: Sullivan? No, she was not a painter at that time. She was a dancer. She was modern dance. Fantastic by the way! She became a painter later. And Marcel Ferron. Anyway, I met them and I saw the show in the school. The reason why I went to see that show is because the teacher at the school said that it was horrible and these people . . . and that is painting. I looked at that and said, "Fantastic! It's exciting." And so I became friends and started to work with them. Not WITH them, but meeting them and . . . That was a very interesting relationship in that group. We were talking; we were expressing ourselves; we were arguing about our point of view. What we felt and we were discovering the world according to us, you know? And it was really fantastic and then that guy that brought me there died during my first year of school, so he never knew that I became anything. Isn't it sad? I wish that I had been able to tell him, "Thank you!"

BOB: Well you know different things mean different things to different people. However, one of the reasons that I am so pleased to look at your work and chat with you is that since this is Aboriginal Voices Radio there are a lot of young people out there. Young people who might not realize that it is possible to compete in art; that it is possible to become trained and that they're not restricted to let's say the Woodland Style or Traditional Styles. They can compete with other mainstream artists.

RITA: I remember there was a fellow that I had a house at the moment and with some trees and the tree man was Ojibwa. And one time he says, "I don't collect art, but my brother does. But he collects only Aboriginal art." I say, "Aboriginal art is nonsense. If you're Aboriginal whatever art you do is Aboriginal art." But he has the idea that you have to be, you know, with the symbols of old things, old legends and stuff.

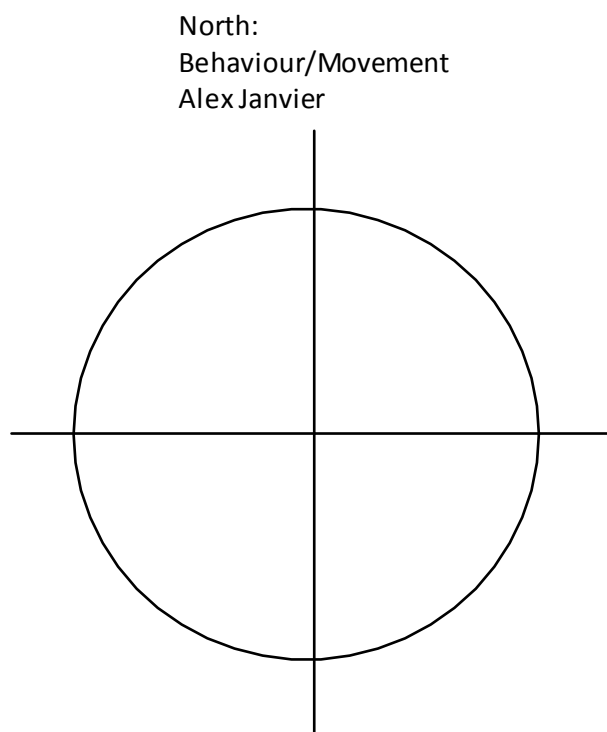
BOB: Exactly! While those things have great value, when you look at somebody like Bob Boyer or yourself that work outside of that basic format, really it's astounding.

BOB: You know unfortunately I think I'm running out of time here and so before we have to start talking to Grandmother Moon I had better end this. Thank you again.

RITA: It's been a pleasure talking with you. (Letendre, AVR)

Rita Letendre is one of the pioneers who chose to compete on equal footing with everyone else in the Fine Art world. Both Rita and Bonnie Devine serve to indicate that the perspective of our Native artists is definitely unique in that it is far more contemporary and eclectic than most people realize. Our people today are highly trained and are active in all aspects of the Fine Art world. While they continue to deal with issues of concern to the Native community in the same manner as other communities do, our artists compete on equal footing as Native artists without being locked into a stereotypical and irrelevant form of production. In the next chapter we will have a close look at the career of another one of our pioneers, Alex Janvier.

Chapter 8: Northern Direction Behavior and Movement - A Brief Story about Alex Janvier



The Aboriginal community in Canada is in a minority position. Unfortunately the original inhabitants of this land had to contend with stereotypical attitudes and views that have impacted our lives for centuries. I maintain that those same attitudes and views continue today in the Fine Art world in its category of Native art. Being subtle and unspoken, their presence is not always recognized leaving them free to inflict damage without even being questioned. This dissertation is not a comparison with the mainstream world, but it is about telling our stories and recognizing our unique character as a counter measure to concepts that would relegate us to a world long past. The presentation of the voices of our artists is my way of pointing out that we are in fact contemporary and that

the voices of our artists, when speaking of their work, create a rich and vibrant story of Native creativity, pride and joy.

The Medicine Wheel teachings have been used in this paper to justify the use of Native academic practices such as storytelling that have a valid place in the acquisition of new knowledge that is relevant to the Native worldview. If the use of storytelling is admitted as a valid Native academic approach in a contemporary context, however, its power may be amplified by incorporating in a blended manner mainstream research practices where appropriate. Archival research is a tool that I have come to think highly of and have incorporated here as a check on the premise that the voices of contemporary artists of Native descent, when speaking of their work, create a rich and vibrant story of Native creativity, pride and joy. This chapter demonstrates the difference between the actuality of Alex Janvier's career and the way the mainstream perceived him.

The chapter touches on a host of issues associated with the difference between the way we perceive ourselves and the way others see us. They are complex because our relationship with the mainstream is complex. Some of the issues dealt will include commercialization, appropriation or outright theft, lack of recognition or marginalization and the view that we cannot be educated or trained appropriately. The common element I seek to present here, however, is that as contemporary people we do not fit the common disparaging view. The countermeasure I recommend is to insist that the voices of our contemporary artists of Native descent be heard. The rich and vibrant story of Native creativity, pride and joy that unfold as they discuss their own work goes a long way toward ensuring that our cultures and arts are properly recognized and respected.

These days when I play Cowboys and Indians, the Cowboys are imaginary and the Indians are real. Alex Janvier is not a simulacrum; Alex Janvier is a very real Indian. The Indian's position as the original landlord of all of North America may have been pushed aside and forgotten, but our representatives like Alex Janvier still walk the land with a very firm step.

“Alex Janvier is one of our most highly thought of and most successful Native artists. He was born in 1935 of Dene Suline and Sauteaux descent in Cold Lake, Alberta and is a member of the Le Goff Reserve. He attended the Blue Quill Residential School in St. Paul and went on to graduate from the Alberta College of Art in Calgary with honors in 1960 to immediately become an art instructor at the University of Alberta. Over the years Alex Janvier has become an internationally renowned artist. As a member of the Native Group of Seven, he is one of those groundbreaking people that led the way for most of our contemporary artists today” (Janvier, 2014).

The Professional Native Indian Artists Incorporated (PNIAI), this Group of Seven was a ground-breaking cultural and political entity that self-organized to demand recognition as professional, contemporary artists, to challenge old constructs, and to stimulate a new way of thinking about contemporary Aboriginal people, their lives and art. Gathering informally at first in the early 1970s, Jackson Beardy (1944-1984), Eddy Cobiness (1933-1996), Alex Janvier (b. 1935), Norval Morrisseau (1932-2007), Daphne Odjig (b. 1919), Carl Ray (1942-1978) and Joseph Sanchez (b. 1948) formed this influential and historical group. Since their official incorporation in 1974, the PNIAI have

often been wryly referred to as the “Indian Group of Seven.” (MacKanzie Art Gallery, 2011).

As a matter of fact, at one point back in 1993 Alex Janvier was hired by the Canadian government to put a massive painting into the dome of the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Ottawa. That painting was called *Morning Star*. It shows the morning star as the guide and is broken up into four different parts each of which has to do with a different aspect of Native culture (Janvier, 2014). His work is not what one would think of as being “traditional” Native art and yet it is very traditional. The modern abstract appearance is influenced by styles of abstract expressionism employed by Western European painters, but it also reflects work produced in Native communities, centuries ago.

It has been my conclusion all along that the Fine Art category of Native art does not deal with our work equitably. The classification of a piece of artwork as Native art can effectively sideline it. Once an artist is classified as being a Native person, there is a tendency to remove the individual’s work from being considered fully Fine Art. An example of exclusion from my own life as an urban Indian is that I was thrown out of the school system by my French teacher, yet today I am a polyglot who speaks a number of languages including French. The event demonstrates the manner in which a number of individuals honestly take decisions they believe are right based on the prevailing community points of view or attitudes. The points of view and attitudes with respect to Native art often sideline the artists in the same way as Arthur Renwick and myself were sidelined as young students.

While listening to Alex Janvier at the Gevik gallery in November 2012, I was surprised to hear that he had similar experiences.

Alex: We are capable of the transition from where we were stuck and moving onwards. And we're no longer listening to part of Indian Affairs or their agents. Their agents are the ones that held everything you know. You couldn't move without them. For me to go to art school I had to get a permit to leave the reserve.

Bob: Was that easy?

Alex: No! I was accepted in London County Art School in England in London and the Indian agent put a stop to that. So I applied to AGO . . . art gallery or the art school here in Toronto and I was accepted and the Indian agent says I wasn't smart enough to go to that school. So he gave me a—he registered me at the Albert College of Art and that's where I spent my four years and that was the beginning of what was to change. I was educated enough to know when you hear BS, you know you hear BS. (Janvier, Gevik)

The Ontario College of Art was the Toronto art school to which Alex was accepted. The Indian agent's view of Janvier has been proven wrong given the artist's astonishingly success. It is unlikely that either my French teacher or Alex's Indian agent acquired their views of Native people by watching television, but while the means of transmission—literature, radio or simple word of mouth—may have been different from experienced by slightly later generations, the result is the same. The mainstream understanding that is at the basis of such individual decisions is very powerful and since it is unspoken and subtle, it can continue to do real damage unless exposed and checked at its source.

One way or another Alex Janvier became an academically trained artist in a public art college taking a very Western European approach and as such would seem justified in expecting to participate in and gain support on an equal basis from mainstream Fine Art organizations. Chatting with him in Ottawa back in 2009, I discovered that it was not always the case.

Bob: Bob Phillips, Mi'kmaq with the Native radio station Aboriginal Voices Radio and I was just wondering if perhaps you would like to say something especially for some of our young people because you were there when things were a lot different than they are now.

Alex: Yea, I was born in 1935, so even the idea of Native painting was out of the picture. The galleries and so on they had a standing standard that it was just laid out for people who were acclaimed as tax payers and I was told that I didn't pay taxes so I couldn't even apply for Canada Council. This was in 1965—in the spring of 1965. Those were the words, you know. And that came out of the Arts Council of that day and it still exists.

Bob: We're as Canadian as anyone else.

Alex: Well as soon as you get off the Reserve you pay taxes. You know every food that you buy and every gas that you put. (Janvier, Odjig)

Things have changed a great deal since 1965 thanks to the efforts of people like Alex Janvier, but we have some distance to go yet in our search for equal treatment. In January of 1999, David Staples commenting in *The Edmonton Journal* began his article in a most interesting manner. He stated, “Alex Janvier, the acclaimed Canadian artist and painter of the great domed ceiling at the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Ottawa, is out to win something important for his people, the same people who haven't always loved him well.” (Staples A2). From time to time the mainstream press does refer to Alex Janvier as a Canadian artist, as is the case here. Still, the reference to his people is a clear reminder that Alex Janvier is a Native artist. This is also an example of the very subtle almost invisible boundaries associated with the category of Native art. Pointing them out usually brings arguments denying the implication.

As a young kid on a summer visit to my grandparents in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia my dad took me to a farm where he stood chatting with an old friend in a field full of cows. I pointed out that there seemed to be a battery attached to a thin wire around the open field, asked if it was somehow electrified and reached out to touch it. The resulting

shock was not dangerous, but the invisible barrier kept both the cattle and me right where we were supposed to be. Alex may well be referred to as Canadian from time to time, but the fact that he is a Native is seldom ignored. The term itself seems to power an invisible, yet very effective barrier.

When I enrolled in the University of Toronto studio art program, I set out to become artist. There was never any thought of undertaking formal training to become a Native artist and there is evidence in the public record left by Alex Janvier to suggest that I was not alone. In her 1978 *Edmonton Journal* article “Janvier—name, not a number”, Helen Melnyk points out:

“Janvier has been called the bridge between native (his paintings employ the rich, colorful Haida, Cree and Blackfeet signs and symbols) and abstract art but he doesn’t like to be known as an ‘Indian painter’. ‘I just happen to be an Indian but I don’t ride on it. I don’t have to. I think I can succeed without it.’” (Melnyk).ⁱⁱ

Throughout this story I have pointed out that mainstream concepts concerning the Native are easily absorbed by our people. The way in which the government defines the Indian is an example that caused me grief when as a young man my status friends would call me a “wannabe” after learning that I was non-status. Initially they defined me as one of them, but when I was measured against the government definition, they sided with the government. The power of mainstream concepts is such that it can easily shape the way we see ourselves and Alex Janvier ran into the same problem because of his contemporary abstract style. The David Staples article continued:

“In his home town of Cold Lake, Janvier and his children have often been called “apples.” It is other native Indians who have called the Janviers this, telling them that they are red on the outside, but white on the inside. Janvier, 63, says many natives successful in various fields are hit with the apple tag by other less successful natives.

'It's not an easy title to live with,' he says.

What does he say now when he's called an apple?

'I say, "Thank you. I am an apple."'

Really?

'Of course. We've been brainwashed. We've been taught Christianity, taught to move away from one's self and become something else that you're really uncomfortable being. It's hard to be a white person. You guys make it so damn tough on yourselves.'" (Staples A2).

One of the great dangers associated with the Fine Art category of Native art is that it facilitates the placing of artistic control in the hands of non-Native people. The Fine Art market's demand for authenticity tends to define real Native art as that found in petroglyphs from centuries past. The Woodland style has come to be considered traditional because it is visually strongly linked to that type of work. What is not clearly understood is that it did not exist prior to 1962 and must, therefore, be considered contemporary. Widespread acceptance of the Woodland style in the mainstream art world set up a powerful economic demand that encouraged its adoption by a large number of artists of Native descent. As seen in the "Apple" comments, contemporary work produced by artists like Janvier were essentially seen as Western European by both the mainstream and the Native, yet the work remains classified as Native art because Janvier just happens to be an Indian.

The Melnyk article makes another very interesting point: Janvier also has little use for government interference with the arts. She quotes, "I don't like art going through a McDonald's processing. The Indian and Crafts Corporation of Canada tries to hamburger native art and then serve it to 20 million people. I don't want to see the same thing happened to the Indian as Eskimo art.'" (Melnyk)ⁱⁱ Obviously back in 1978 when this

article was published Alex Janvier was well aware of the marketing strategy used to sell Inuit art. We tend to think of artists, regardless of their culture of origin, as simply working for the love of art. While that often is the case, artists involved with the Fine Art world are usually well aware that it is a vast market. Alex Janvier like so many others is engaging with the Fine Art institution rather than creating specifically and uniquely for his own culture and was interested in how to market his work.

Charles Mandel in an *Edmonton Journal* article titled, “Janvier’s new works are consistent, joyful”, adds some thoughts that help us better understand the relationship of Alex Janvier to the Fine Art market. He says, “Janvier has said that he looked to Russian Vasily Kandinsky for inspiration. Certainly he shares Kandinsky's loose, fluid style and colorful, free expression.” (Mandel)ⁱⁱ. He continues with his description speaking of five new canvases on display as he makes the following observations:

“[t]ypically, these feature traditional native motifs distorted into joyously dancing shapes and flowing calligraphic swipes. The imagery is deceptive, suggesting a totem pole here and an animal spirit there, but the work's always shifting beyond the eye's ability to translate. In that sense, Janvier's works are visionary. As if peeling back the door to another dimension, the artworks offer a tantalizing, magical world. As to the comparison to Kandinsky, if you think that's overblown, just haul out your art books and compare Janvier's colors to those in such famous pieces as *Composition IX or X*. You couldn't find a more natural match of pallets. His smaller watercolors reflect the issues which currently occupy his time. These mandala-like works, revolving in space like miniature galaxies, they are such titles as *Water Rights*, *Traditional Land Claim* and *Resources Claim*.” (Mandel)ⁱⁱ

Clearly Janvier’s painting style is considered both contemporary and Western European, but for all of that he remains an Indian.

The Art Reserve

This is where the waters get muddy. The Vancouver Group is the term given to group of seven conceptual photographic artists who deal with social concerns. One of their members, Ken Lum, happens to be a Canadian of Chinese descent. In 2001 Ken Lum did an installation on the roof of the Vancouver Art Gallery that consisted of model boats mounted at each of the building's four corners. Titled *Four Boats Stranded: Red and Yellow, Black and White* the work comments on immigration and acculturation. The colors, of course, refer to four races (Lum). The work is very contemporary; the work comments on issues of concern to the artist; and the work is considered a part of the mainstream Fine Art world. The work is not separated off into a Fine Art category called Chinese art.

The work of Alex Janvier, who happens to be a Canadian of Native descent, is very contemporary; his work comments on issues of concern to the artist; but the work is NOT considered a part of the mainstream Fine Art world. Alex Janvier's work is always separated off into a Fine Art category called Native art.

In September of 1993 the Canadian Museum of Civilization threw its doors open to unveil Alex Janvier's *Morning Star* massive dome mural. In January of 1994 Nancy Baele commented on exhibitions by both Robert Davidson and Alex Janvier in her perceptive *Ottawa Citizen* article "The measure is art, not ethnography". She raises the question, "Why are they at the Canadian Museum of Civilization?" (Baele)ⁱⁱ After suggesting that they would be better in the National Gallery she continues, "[a]t the museum, the context is different. The emphasis is on ethnography, the scientific description of different races." (Baele)ⁱⁱ. She concludes with a thoughtful observation,

“Both institutions would be better served if their boundaries were more flexible, if native artists were regarded as contemporary artists foremost and if ethnography came second.” (Baele)ⁱⁱ. Nancy Baele’s comments lend support to the idea that the category of Native art has its own view of artists of Native descent.

When Daphne Odjig was given the first solo exhibition by a Native woman at the National Gallery of Canada in 2009, I had a chance to chat with Alex Janvier at the opening. What he had to say is instructive.

Alex: We just celebrated Daphne tonight and prior to that Morrisseau took down this whole building. So this group of seven . . . that they called seven, we were eight, but they called us seven have really changed the look on the art world for Native viewing. We’re actually commanding personal introductions today in the art world and it will continue. And I think that Canada will be much more flourishing by accepting us into their fold.

Bob: You know in a sense I’m almost speechless talking to you, especially standing here tonight because it seems to me not so very long ago Jackson Beardy was not permitted to enter the building when some of his work was actually on display here. Do you remember that?

Alex: Yes, there were incidents similar to that. It wasn’t the first one. It was almost a continuation of . . . but where we decided to get really sore and mad was when we were told to exhibit in the War Museum and then that’s when the group of seven, group of eight actually, decided to change this and that gave us the momentum that we needed to pull together coherently to head in one direction. And this is the result tonight! And Daphne was one of the members of that group . . . Morrisseau was the other one and they both have now successfully exhibited here at the National Gallery level. And I’m glad, you know, two out of seven or two out of eight have been able to penetrate the established routine of exhibition.

Bob: On the other hand, it seems to me that you put your mark on the ceiling of one of the buildings around here didn’t you?

Alex: Yes, The Museum of Civilization and I’ve done a few more other ones elsewhere, but that’s been one of the key contacts for the general public and so the public became more and more aware of what was really going on and then it was becoming more and more acceptable. And now it’s acceptable to see artwork in public places by First Nations or Inuit or the Métis Association people. So there is a change, a climate of change now and I like it.” (Janvier, Odjig)

Alex Janvier also told me that he considers Bill Reid, who had such a powerful impact on west coast Native art, to be one of the members of the Native Group of Seven, which is why he considers that the group really had eight members.

Alex: Yea, Bill Reid was one of the few people that are quite articulate. In fact, he was doing the job you're doing for CBC, so he was quite articulate and articulation was what was really needed because normally the interviews were like put downs rather than helping, you know, and once the interview goes downward they just keep pushing it down till, you know, till you don't make any sense out of it and then the interview stops—quits. And so that's where we found ourselves, but Bill was very articulate. He used to work for CBC radio announcement or something like that. He knew the game and he was very articulate, so when we formed this group in the early seventies, he became our person to make contacts with the people that know the industry, you know. He knew people inside, so he was able to talk to them and articulate our position and that gave us the first stepping stone toward what seemed to be an impossible future. (Janvier, Odjig)

The Party Line

Janvier's comments about his relationship with the press are also informative. He points out that, "normally the interviews were like put downs rather than helping, you know, and once the interview goes downward they just keep pushing it down till, you know, and once the interview goes downward they just keep pushing it down till, you know, till you don't make any sense out of it and then the interview stops—quits." (Janvier, Odjig). The mainstream concept of Native people is extraordinarily powerful and pervasive. Even when reporting on Native art with good intentions, journalists seem to present "The Party Line." The CBC made a thirty minute documentary about Alex Janvier's life and art that was premiered in November of 1984 destined to be shown nationally on the CBC series *Seeing it our Way*. The *Edmonton Journal* staff writer James Adams wrote about the film and while discussing Janvier's experiences with the dominant culture characterizes his work in the following manner: "Indeed, these themes occasionally have found their way into Janvier's art, which might best be described as a

heady, flowing hybrid of abstract, representational, expressionistic and native symbolic motifs." (Adams). As an artist myself, I would not be flattered by such a description of my work. He continues a little deeper in the article:

"Moreover, some of his better-known work — like a swooping, curving stairwell mural in the Strathcona County Building in Sherwood Park or a four-panel commission in the Cold Lake city Council chambers — are vivid explorations of the rise, decline and fall of native societies — yet they're housed, ironically enough, in such unabashedly white institutions as county administration offices and town council rooms." (Adams).ⁱⁱ

The shift from traditional to contemporary is not always seen in the same manner by the mainstream as by artists like Alex Janvier. As a very contemporary urban Native, the difference that I see between the contemporary and the traditional is not one of assimilation. When Adams employs the term hybrid to describe contemporary work, I take it that he is implying that Native culture per se has ceased to exist, but has not yet become fully assimilated. My reading of the meaning of the term in his article as referring to the culture as much as the artwork stems from his statement about, "the rise, decline and fall of native societies." (Adams).ⁱⁱ Misconceptions about Native culture are both subtle and pervasive.

Appropriation

Abstract and symbolic Western European styles have often borrowed heavily from approaches taken by Native people for centuries. If the act of borrowing and adapting may be thought of as creating a hybrid culture, then it could easily be that Western European cultures appropriating Native techniques are themselves hybrid. The topic of the appropriation came up in conversation I had with Alex Janvier.

Alex: They were stealing information off me because I had a really good tutoring by Karl Altenberg whose daughter I met yesterday. She came to visit. They live in London, so she came down and visited and spent time with us. But that man gave me the tutoring that I needed when I was . . . starting when I was around fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen . . . and I had probably been given the best information that's required for anybody. But I was lucky that I was able to do that. To find this man or this man found me or got the two together. And he used to take out a whole bunch of books out of the library in the University of Alberta and he would take the books out and he would say to me, "My boy, study the pictures. Do not read." So that's what I did. I spent a lot of time studying art.

Bob: Ok, if you don't mind maybe we can come back to that when it quiets down a little bit, but that's incredible and especially the point of view that they were actually stealing from you.

Alex: Yup! I wasn't quite sure until later. We used to have these drawing books, eh? And this guy would . . . and I had a system. I had a code for each page. It wasn't numbered like one, two, three, but I had a code and I could tell which codes were missing. And later on this man, one of my teachers, did the same design and put it on the side of one of the high rises in Edmonton. He made a metal sculpture out of it. He got a lot of money for it and I got nothing out of it. But that's what was going on in my life in the beginning. I was never protected. I couldn't protect anything that I owned until the artists were fighting for their rights and I joined them.

Bob: The Group of Seven—Eight? (Previously Alex had included Bill Reid in the group making it eight.)

Alex: With Jack Chambers. You know, the right to get paid for the exhibitions and so I joined that and I got that for the Native side. To make sure that we get something out of it and it turned out to be a . . . It became a universal law, you know, for all Canadians. So I think . . . I've always done something to help the picture of the art world in Canada. See during my studies I realized that most of the art came from New York and the rest of it came from Europe. And those were the celebrated forms, you know, and anything Canadian was not really considered important—much less the Native.

Bob: Much less the Native! You work in a very Western European type of very abstract style, and yet you were not considered . . .

Alex: And yet the abstract world was very much my base culture. You know, you look at the designs on everything that we wore or had as Indian art . . . absolutely abstract. In fact some of the so called great painters of New York stole and exploded those designs into huge canvases and they became the artists recognized.

Bob: People like Jackson Pollock for example?

Alex: Yup! I saw their work, you know, and I could see the traces of where they stole it from. You know the sand painting and all that.

Bob: Yea! From the Navajo sand painters!

Alex: Yup! And when I saw that then I felt that I was doing the right thing.

Bob: Well, I think you were doing the right thing and the proof is in people like Brian Jungen and Rebecca Belmore and people like that who today have international status. Why? It's because of the work that you did and Norval, and Daphne . . . all of those people.

*Alex: Yea, well it opened a sacred door. And they were considered sacred doors.
(Janvier, Gevik)*

Catalogues prepared for exhibitions held in art galleries usually provide a good deal of commentary on the artist's work and background. A number of catalogs exist that were produced as a part of the sales effort by various galleries featuring the work of Alex Janvier. However, most of the articles dealing with his work, like that by Charles Mandel, offer little more than a paragraph to describe the work. Our Native art historian Robert Houle, writing in *The Native Perspective* in 1978, devoted four full pages under the title “Alex Janvier: 20th Century native symbols & images”. In the article he points out that,

“[t]o fully understand contemporary Native sensibilities, one may have to start examining them differently from the anthropological or ethnological viewpoints. These viewpoints are valid and important when examining traditional artifacts and art forms. However, the point of view changes when studying contemporary Canadian Indian symbolism and imagery. These symbols and images are more relevant to the Canadian Indian’s radically altered society. It would be only logical to study contemporary Native art from a new perspective—an art historical perspective.” (Houle 17).

Like me, Robert Houle is an academically trained art historian who happens to be Native. It is natural then that both Robert Houle and I would approach the work of Alex Janvier as art historians in the same manner as we would approach the work of Jackson Pollock, Picasso or any of the other mainstream artists. The category of Native art, however, seems to set the work apart in a manner that must be approached differently. Both Houle and I see the work of Alex Janvier as art that is the equal to the production of

any other group. The mainstream commentator on the other hand usually demonstrates a form of blindness that stems from preconceived notions.

Houle justifies his opinion. He states,

“[a] Native artist like Alex Janvier has to be examined from an art historical perspective in order to be understood and appreciated. Janvier's synthesis is a rational balance of his sensibilities and Western tradition. Absent in his work is man as being the manipulator of nature absent is the romantic notion of the "noble savage" of the nineteenth century.” (Houle 17).

What I believe Houle is pointing out here is that the work of Alex Janvier does not easily meet mainstream preconceived expectations. He suggested this can be caused by a number of "problems like paternalism, colonialism, ignorance, or even "historical guilt" as crippling factors." (Houle 19). On the other hand Robert Houle goes on to point out that “the Indian viewer has not remained beyond reproach”. (Houle, 19). He suggests that "a sad outcome from such an institution can only continue the ‘colonial lives mentality’ of the Indian. This can cripple him from understanding and appreciating art done by one of the most innovative and creative minds in the contemporary Native art scene." (Houle 19).

Janvier’s work certainly has a very Western European feel when we consider his style. On the other hand the subject matter usually reflects his concerns and those of his community. The David Staples article points out that the government took over a significant portion of Alex Janvier’s home band’s hunting grounds for the Cold Lake Weapons Range (Staples A2). The struggle to obtain compensation through land claims has contributed themes in Janvier’s paintings. Janvier considers the Native population to be the original landlords. His concerns and his Native heritage are a part of his work for

all to see. Initially, he would sign his work with his treaty number, 287, but includes Native signs and symbols in most of his work. The Charles Mandel article quoted above lists example titles: *Water Rights, Traditional Land Claim and Resources Claim* (Mandel).¹¹ When it comes to authenticity the work of Alex Janvier may well present a non-typical appearance for an artist of Native descent, but there are more than enough clues associated with it to ensure that it is placed in the category of Native art.

There have been many changes over the course of Alex Janvier's long career that seem to be encouraging. The future both with respect to Native participation in the Fine Art world and with respect to land claims looks better and Alex remains optimistic.

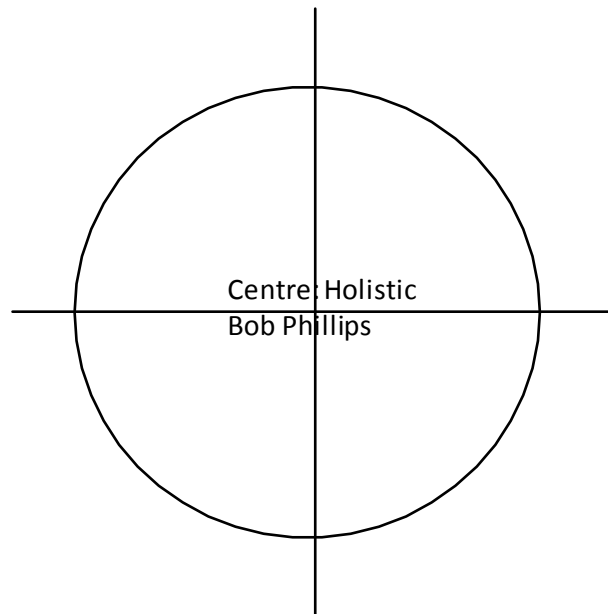
Alex: There's going to be some kind of a balance where things are going to happen. I'm sure of that. The landlord is going to come alive again. He's already making a noise, you know, and now I'm making visual noise.

Alex: And now we've entered into the . . . beyond the sacred door idea. I think the Native art will add something greater to Canadian art in time. I'm just little bit ahead of my time, but it'll come to that. We may even take back the land for all I know. (Sustained laughter)

Bob: Well, I'll be right there leading the pack!

Alex: When the landlords start shaking the rattles, you know. (Janvier, Gevik)

Chapter 9: The Holistic Centre - Full Circle



Apparently my grandfather ran a cartage business off of the family farm that included horses and wagons. One very special team of jet black horses was kept to pull a hearse. My mother's oldest brother Emerson was often involved when a funeral took place. I remember sitting at his feet listening in awe as he told stories about those times. I was very proud of the fact that he would share his stories with me and many of them remain fresh in my memory. Today I also realize that each of those stories held lessons. When a very young child passed away, my Uncle Emerson was assigned to carry the little white casket in his arms from the church to the cemetery followed by the grieving family on foot. He shook his head slowly from side to side as he remembered how heavy the casket got. He told me that it wasn't very big, but it was a long way to the grave yard and as his arms tired, the load got heavier and heavier. The load was safely delivered to its final resting place and the lesson delivered to me was that you have a duty to discharge your

responsibility once you accept to carry a load regardless of its nature or the difficulties you encounter.

The way in which things can come full circle is sometimes astonishing. So many years after hearing my uncle's stories, I found myself sitting on the floor of the Gevik Gallery beside Alex Janvier's chair as he told me stories about the old days. As I sat holding up my microphone and listening to this very wise art Elder, my uncle Emerson kept flashing through my mind. Still, holding a microphone is a responsibility in itself and I managed to ask Alex, "Well now talking about making noise, you were telling me a few minutes ago about some of these paintings on the wall, especially the round ones. How did you come up with the idea?" (Janvier, Gevik). He responded,

"Well, that was the drum, I started a drum series and then I saw that as the emblematic shape of the drum, so I used that to announce our greater intention. And I believe somewhere along the line there is going to be . . . somebody is going to paint a red circle or something and some of our song makers will sing a song to that and that's going to catch right across in all the Native Nations. It'll be coming at a Pow Wow or some place, but that is going to be the heralding song. And because Réal said the artists will bring our people back, it is going to be quite in line with that I think. I'm just an artist who's got the lucky part of this and I'm a fortunate kid it turned out to be." (Janvier, Gevik)

Like my Uncle Emerson, Alex Janvier has carried a very heavy load without dropping it. His head may slowly shake from side to side as he recalls the many difficulties, yet he remains optimistic and is proud of his role. The lesson I take from his stories is that by meeting the responsibilities life assigns us, we are able to make changes that will benefit future generations. Like the circle, the story I tell here today has no end.

The Medicine Wheel Teachings have their basis in a distinct and unique Indigenous worldview. Alex Janvier used the circle in a number of compositions and one of the

reasons is its importance in the Native community. The Native view tends to be circular. It is associated with a worldview that considers man to be simply a part of the world. I am no better and no worse than anything else in it. We are related to literally everything else. Consequently as Indigenous people we are particularly conscious of the forces that shape life on Mother Earth and their rhythms. Spring becomes summer; summer becomes fall; and fall becomes winter—then the circle begins once again. Storytelling is no different. Native stories tend to be cyclical as well. The end is simply a time for reflection that will spark a new beginning.

Native stories are not generally geared to the consideration of a single problem in isolation. Usually they are holistic; they take into consideration the relationship of the problem to the rest of creation. According to the Medicine Wheel teachings, the storyteller occupies the center of the circle. Since we are all related, consideration of a problem by the storyteller logically begins and ends with the center. Having been related to each of the elements on the circle, the story may well offer a sound and considered solution to the problem that sparked it. The true goal of the Native story, however, is to pass on the quest for deeper understanding. Long after its close, the story continues in the minds of the people who have heard it.

How did it start?

Sensing the close of this story, I have begun to ask myself how all of this got started, as the storyteller what I might have learned and where I would like to see things go from here. Following the path suggested by the Medicine Wheel teachings induced me to begin at the center where it began with my sense that contemporary artists of Native descent who engage with the Fine Art world have a rich and vibrant story of Native creativity,

pride and joy that should be heard and recognized. That sense was a personal impression that grew out of a lifetime of experience with the art world and from direct contact with literally hundreds of our artists. It is only fitting here, therefore, that as the storyteller I come back to the center of the circle.

I have come to believe that as contemporary artists of Native descent we have our own view of Native art and that our voices should be heard to promote an accurate and realistic understanding of our present day cultures and arts. For many years as an artist and as a Native person, I thought I knew what Native art was all about and what it should be. I learned about Native art by visiting galleries and reading every book on the subject that I could get my hands on. Once I began hosting the AVR Arts Review radio show, however, the constant direct contact with the artists themselves gradually brought me to the point of wondering if I might be missing something. Looking back on those early days holding the microphone, I keep coming back to one unsettling and key event that occurred time and time again. People I saw as Native artists objected to the label. They steadfastly maintained that they were not Native artists and insisted that they were simply artists who just happened to be Native.

At first I tended to dismiss statements like that as being the unfounded opinions of pretentious individuals. It must be remembered that I qualified as an Art Historian at two of Canada's finest universities before I went on air with Aboriginal Voices Radio. Moreover, the galleries I visited were owned by non-Native people and the books I read were written by non-Native authors, anthropologists and Fine Art authorities. Naturally, I came to see Native art through non-Native eyes. Still, as the frequency with which I began to encounter Native artists who were not happy being identified as such and whose

views on Native art appeared out of sync with the expected model, I was gradually led to look for ways to explain the situation. As a trained and experienced academic, I repeatedly turned to the Western European academic methods of research and investigation that I was so well acquainted with to account for what I was beginning to see. Time and time again I was able to come up with limited success, yet I always found myself with the feeling that something was missing.

Trent University turned out to be a place of astonishing revelation. Constant contact with Native academics and Native cultures reinforced the beliefs and attitudes I had quietly inherited from my parents and ancestors. For the first time in my academic career I was able to integrate a Native worldview into my search for new understanding. The Indigenous Studies Vision Statement and Michael Thrasher's Medicine Wheel teachings encouraged me to employ typically Native research and investigative approaches that are unique to our cultures. Accepting their validity caused me to recognize the value of my approach as the host and producer of the AVR Arts Review show. For the past ten years the show has allowed me to follow the example of my uncles and relatives as each week I became the storyteller.

Storytelling for our people has historically been a reliable means of making sense of the world we live in. Applying it to the problem of making sense out of what I now see in the world of Native art has produced conclusions and new understandings that have much wider implications. Today I no longer see myself as a Native artist; I now see myself as an artist who happens to be a Native person. In a parallel manner, today I no longer see myself as a Native academic; I now see myself as an academic who happens to be a Native person. In both cases my approaches and my views are every bit as sound and as

valuable as those espoused by any other culture. Today I have come to understand that our Native view is something to be immensely proud of and to be defended. After all, our traditional view is that we are no better and no worse than anything else on Mother Earth.

A Matter of Perspective

How we see ourselves as Native people is reflected in the way the Native artists presented here see themselves and how they see their relationship to art. From my experience and in my personal opinion the most important characteristic of that view is that we are contemporary. We do have a connection to the past and we do value tradition, yet we are contemporary. Yes, there is a concern for history and for a continuation of Native culture, but we do live in and are actually a part of the modern world.

The word perspective is important because being a minority group we have our own perspective. In mainstream institutions like the Fine Art world or even the educational system our perspective is not always properly known. As a result, others tend to make assumptions about us. When that happens, we can fall into the trap of accepting the external definitions as being valid and of conforming to them. It is important that we recognize that we have our view of ourselves and of our cultures. However, it is also extremely important that we insist that others see us realistically. The academic and the Fine Art worlds are only two of the mainstream institutions that tend to see us improperly. I use the art world that I am familiar with to point out the impact of negative and unrealistic connotations. We use words to name and describe things, but those words often quietly carry unstated associations connected to preconceived ideas or concepts. The term Native art is usually associated with the pre-contact era. The artists I present here are not creating art work specifically for their own tribal cultures according to

principles set down centuries ago. Creating work destined for the Fine Art world and market, they are very contemporary individuals who employ contemporary methods to create their work.

The first chapter of this story set out the basic idea that the voices of contemporary artists of Native descent, when speaking of their work, create a rich and vibrant story of Native creativity, pride and joy. The story is remarkable in that it appears to be largely overlooked in the Fine Art institution. A large portion of mainstream society appears oblivious to the fact that we might have a point of view at all and that if we did it would be the same as its own. I maintain that the story told by our contemporary artists demonstrates great creativity, immense pride and boundless joy. It is not at all what the stereotypical understandings of it would have us believe.

The chapter providing background on the Native artists I present in this dissertation includes information indicating that they are representative of our people in spite of the fact that they come from many different cultural backgrounds and from widely dispersed geographic locations. When I suggest that they are part of the same story, however, I am not suggesting that they are in any manner pan-Aboriginal. Nevertheless, they do share a very common trait and that is that they are contemporary. Our modern Native artists may well deal with issues impacting our people, but they are not creating artwork to satisfy a long passed tribal need.

As a modern Native academic I am aware of the need to meet university level standards and expectations with respect to research. The chapter on methodology and the perspective of Jeff Thomas points out that just as false and stereotypical views are

common concerning Native art and artists, so too it is possible for mainstream academics to misunderstand or be unfamiliar with long standing Native methods of acquiring new knowledge. The chapter justifies the use of storytelling in the creation of this dissertation. It does so by introducing the reasoning inherent in the Michael Thrasher Medicine Wheel Teachings that are the basis for the organization of this work.

If the story unfolding through the voices of contemporary artists of Native descent when they speak of their work is not widely recognized in the Fine Art community, how we see ourselves and Native art must be noticeably different from the view held by the mainstream society. It is possible to acquire an idea of how we are seen by looking at how we are treated. In the chapter on the mainstream perspective the stories told by Arthur Renwick make it clear that we are not always viewed realistically and that fact leads to negative consequences for simply being Native people. As we work through the dissertation it becomes apparent that the difficulties Arthur Renwick experienced in school were not his alone. Both Alex Janvier and I have encountered similar difficulties with the way we have been treated that make it clear that we have been viewed unrealistically.

The chapter on Native elders introducing Jane Ash Poitras is an attempt to bridge concepts thought to be traditional with their more contemporary forms. Native culture has not ceased to exist, but it has changed and adapted to our modern context without becoming non-Native. From our perspective the role of the elder is every bit as important today as it ever was, but it is important to understand that it can just as easily be linked to the holding of specialized Indigenous Knowledge in the field of Fine Art as it would have in days gone by with reference to hunting or natural medicines. Moreover, Marrie

Mumford's view demonstrates that we should be able to decide for ourselves what Native art is and that the definition must include a wider range of art forms than are commonly ascribed to us. Both artists illustrate the existence of what I choose to see as art elders.

The chapter presenting Bonnie Devine and Rita Letendre is closely linked to the need to put our intentions into practice. If we are to counteract a negative and stereotypical view of Native people, we must take action. Each of these artists works actively in areas that totally contradict the inaccurate assumptions generally associated with Native artists. They are modern and do not match the image of people who are essentially left over from a long past era.

The chapter on Alex Janvier is particularly important because it presents the results of research on the career of this powerful artist. In the process we see that the many obstacles an inaccurate view of our people created were surmounted as he maintained his contemporary identity. Alex Janvier is one of the ground-breaking Native artists whose efforts led to the great interest in Native art we enjoy today. He serves as a prime example of the fact that artists of Native descent are not anchored in the dim past and that our cultures remain dynamic, rich and vibrant.

The solution and the ultimate recommendation resulting from the story I tell is that we must insist on making our voices heard so that we may be seen realistically as contemporary individuals both by ourselves and by others. We need to change the connotations associated with the Fine Art category of Native art. It must come across as contemporary in a way that respects tradition and at the same time values our history, but is not anchored in the distant past. The work in the category of Native art is actually very

sophisticated and most of our successful artists are highly trained academically and must be seen as such.

For a very long time I felt that Native art could only be traditional in the sense that it was linked to our cultures as they existed prior to contact. While we do have a connection to the past, as is the case with all cultures, I now recognize that we are actually very contemporary and live in the same world as our non-Native neighbors. Today I am linked to community in a manner that astounds me after having grown up in a mainstream world. Clearly, even as a child I was far more firmly connected to Native culture than I ever imagined. Now, however, I understand my youthful blindness to be an inability to separate the two worlds, Native and mainstream. For me the Mi'kmaq basket on the English style dining room table was no different than the table itself. I grew up with both and neither appeared out of place. The real eye opening must be attributed to Aboriginal Voices Radio. The magic talking stick that is my microphone connected me both on and off the air very intensively to the Native community and accounts for my new understanding of issues of importance to our people. However, it also accounts for my sense of responsibility. I now feel that I have a duty to encourage changes that will ease the load for those who will think of us as ancestors.

In building this story I examined our Native relationship to the Fine Art world, but as I did so was forced to reflect on the relationship of the Native to the mainstream. Looking closely at the Fine Art category of Native art has made it possible to become aware of the way in which many of its characteristics are determined by the mainstream expectation of what the Native should be like. Fundamental to this story is the fact that two different worldviews exist. The result is that the mainstream sees the world through its perspective

and with rare exceptions is completely unaware of the existence of the Native view or any of its characteristics. As a minority group nested within the mainstream society, however, the Native is in a better position to be conscious of both views. Those of us who have the wider view are under an obligation to find ways that enable the non-Native to see our position. This story is my way of taking on that responsibility.

Native Artist?

How do we answer the question of whether the individual is a Native artist or is actually an artist who happens to be Native? The connotation that I sense as being associated with the term Native artist assumes that the artwork is always being created only for our culture and community. The artist of Native descent, however, is actually acting in the same manner as any other member of Canadian society by producing work specifically for the Fine Art institution. That individual may well be dealing with personal or even community concerns, but the work is designed and executed for exhibition or sale in the Fine Art world.

There does not appear to be a word in any Native language that is the equivalent of the English word art. On the other hand, there are many examples of highly developed aesthetic tastes in traditional societies. A Tsimshian mask from the Dundas collection was recently repatriated to Canada and may be considered the equal of any of the Greek and Roman antiquities. The absence of an equivalent term for art in the Native community does not signal a lack of an interest in art as it is defined by the mainstream, but it does signal that it is the mainstream that creates the definitions. The ideas associated with the term Native art have been heavily influenced by anthropologists and ethnologists working from Western European concepts that assumed that Native culture ceased to exist in

anything except a residual form after contact. What the ethnologists missed was that Native culture did not cease to exist. For centuries before contact it evolved to meet the constant challenges that all forms of life on this planet face. The challenges since contact have been great, but Native cultures have continued to evolve and have adapted. Consequently they continue to exist in contemporary forms.

A widespread concept of Native people and cultures equates the term traditional with an archaic and unsophisticated past; the characteristics associated with the term traditional are automatically carried over and attached to contemporary work. Contemporary artwork is routinely lumped into the category of Native art with work that either originated in the dim past or leaves that impression. We are very heavily influenced by mainstream concepts. If the category Native art is permitted to be associated with negative and unrealistic connotations without serious objections from our own people, we are in effect allowing it to define who we are.

The implication here is that we are turning our ability to define who and what we are over to the majority group. The Fine Art world's understanding of what constitutes Native art has in fact been absorbed and accepted by a large portion of our population. The ideas or concepts associated with the category of Native art help drive the market. Connotations commonly associated with this category tend to ignore our contemporary nature. The Woodland Style established by Norval Morrisseau in 1962 has come to be thought of as traditional in both mainstream and Native communities.

Artist Benjamin Chee Chee took his own life in an Ottawa jail cell in 1977 at the height of his career and only a few days away from his thirty-third birthday. Chee Chee's

creative talent is highly sophisticated. He sought and created a unique style by which his work would be immediately recognizable.¹ Many hold the same goal; few reach it. The evidence of his work ranks him as an extraordinary contemporary Canadian artist regardless of cultural background. In *Chee Chee: A Study of Aboriginal Suicide*, author Al Evans discusses the psychological concept known as the “Looking Glass Self”. In doing so, Evans exposes the destructive effect that can result when, as members of a minority group, Native youth accept a disparaging characterization held the majority culture and behave accordingly (Evans 68). In my opinion, the way in which Chee Chee’s work was promoted by mainstream people minimized and even trivialized Benjamin’s considerable artistic talent by employing a marketing program that capitalized on a stereotypical and pejorative concept of Native culture. If my reading is correct, the false concept of Native people and cultures held by members of the Fine Art world is one of the subtle and pervasive forces Evans points to as contributing factors undermining the self-confidence and self-worth of our young people. The impact of negative connotations and attitudes in the Fine Art world, no matter how subtle, must be viewed as having the potential to cause significant harm.

Before undertaking my examination of the category of Native art, I held the opinion that the only people blind to the situation were members of the mainstream. Today I realize that many of our own people have accepted the Fine Art institution’s definitions that tend to shape not only our art, but our identity as well. All doubt as to the validity of my belief evaporated when I learned that members of Alex Janvier’s home community referred to him as an Apple, red on the outside and white inside. They did not see his contemporary artwork as being traditional; they were in fact accepting external

definitions as their own. It is my hope, therefore, that this story will open a few eyes on both sides.

A Holistic View

Native stories, however, are seldom restricted to a single focus. The fact that I have used a Native approach to examine the problems that concern me is also significant. Like art, Native storytelling often has connotations associated with it that characterize it as a leftover from a dim and unsophisticated past. The unspoken implication is that storytelling may well be suitable for the relating of myths, but it could have no place in any serious academic pursuit. I do not wish to labor a point, but I see Native culture as being alive and well. The practices developed and refined in the past that produced reliable results for generations of our people must have had merit. The trick has been to adapt storytelling to our contemporary world as a valid research tool. Once it is realized that the building of a story entails the same degree of investigation and rigor as any Western academic research report would require, the ability of Native approaches can be seen to meet all of today's demanding academic requirements.

The storytelling approach follows the fundamental requirements for the acquisition of new and reliable knowledge as set out in Michael Thrasher's Medicine Wheel teachings. The true advantage that storytelling holds as a research tool is its ability to include personal experience as admissible data. As a Native person, I see myself as being related equally and intimately to everything in this world. My personal experience of that relationship is germane if for no other reason than the fact that it allows me to approach a problem in a holistic manner.

The contemporary application of Native research methods is based on the kind of data that I have available through my own internal experience in addition to and in combination with my experience of the external world. I must accept as legitimate evidence consultations or discussions that I've had with other community members. In my case, I have had a wide range of conversations that have taken place with our artists over the past ten years with the radio show. Those conversations have two different forms. One is the recorded portion ultimately broadcast nationally through the radio show that are now stored digitally. Transcriptions of some of them appear in this dissertation and complement my research. The second form is internal. A vast amount of information is transferred before and after the actual recording of shows as the artist and I simply chat. The holistic approach includes both reason and feelings when dealing with issues effecting the Native community. My feelings about Native art have been shaped as the result of those informal chats.

The crafting of my story featuring voices of contemporary artists of Native descent speaking of their work has allowed me to verify my own conclusions. Research examining the public record associated with Alex Janvier's career may at first glance appear to be a uniquely Western European academic practice, but I see it as a contemporary adaptation of the manner in which the validity of conclusions was decided in the past. Validation of the observations and conclusions was decided on the basis of whether it made sense to the community members to whom the story/report was presented. The contemporary adaptation that incorporates Western European research tools to verify conclusions takes into consideration the fact that the kind of audience the story reaches has changed. As a contemporary academic who happens to be a Native

person, I see no need to restrict my approach to only those that might have existed in the dim past. In choosing to do extensive research on the career of Alex Janvier, I chose what I assumed would be the most difficult case because of his untypical style of painting. To my surprise, the public record provided instance after instance to confirm my opinions.

The real value of the Native approach, however, lies in its ability to interpret the results in a manner that has wider more holistic implications. The difficulties Alex Janvier experienced with his Indian agent were not unique to him. As a result they point to a root problem that stems from an inaccurate and disparaging concept of what the Native is. Members of the non-Native population act on an internalized model and make decisions with respect to their relationships with Native people based on it. Once we learn to drive a car, we internalize a general model of behavior against which we make automatic decisions concerning how to react to a particular situation. We automatically stop at a red traffic light and wait patiently for the green regardless of the specific circumstances at the time. If Native people are seen as leftovers from an irrelevant past, the decisions you take with respect to a young Native person are automatic regardless of the specific circumstances at the time.

Ah, but what about exhibitions of works by internationally recognized Native artists such as Rebecca Belmore, Jeff Thomas or Brian Jungen? Each has international recognition, but all are still classified as Native artists. Alex Janvier painted a dome, but he is still a Native artist. The comments about Janvier's murals by *The Edmonton Journal* staff writer James Adams throw light on this situation (Adams)ⁱⁱ. The term hybrid he employs is much more insidious than most people realize. It is defended fiercely by members of the mainstream acting out of a belief that their concepts are universal, but it

suggests that Native culture has ceased to exist without having been fully integrated into the dominant culture. The tendency on the part of members of the Fine Art world is to treat the works of artists such as Brian Jungen and Alex Janvier as hybrids; they are exceptions because they are partially assimilated. They appear to be included with open arms into mainstream Fine Art galleries, but their work usually appears as a special exhibition of limited duration unless it is in a museum as is the case with some of the work by Jane Ash Poitras. It does not get nailed to the wall next to “legitimate” Fine Art works by people like Picasso or Jackson Pollock. There is an invisible barrier that keeps Native artists in their place. It is only when we bump up against it that we are shocked by its very real existence.

The category of Native art is linked to the same mentality that defends the term hybrid when it comes to appropriation. A Native artist like Arthur Shilling or Alex Janvier is thought of as appropriating Western European styles that make the work examples of hybridization. Here too we must step back and recognize that the contemporary artist of Native descent is not creating work for use within his own culture. He is functioning as any other artist to produce works destined for use in the Fine Art institution. Native culture neither died out nor became contaminated by Western European concepts. It has adapted to contemporary conditions rather than becoming a hybrid. Working in a Western European style is no more disruptive of Native culture than it is for the Vancouver Group artist of Chinese descent, Ken Lum, unless

Suppose we define Native culture as being limited to the traditional as set out by the anthropologists and the ethnologists. Under such a definition the artist who works in a contemporary style ceases to be an authentic Native. The category of Native art makes no

distinction between the contemporary and the traditional other than treating contemporary work as an exception.

The existence of the category of Native art serves an important purpose. It protects the reputations of artists such as Picasso and Pollock as innovators. Now, my comments here should not be taken as a denial of the fact that they were. I do want to point out, however, that they looked to Native artistic practices for inspiration. As long as the category of Native art continues to be associated with the primitive, archaic and unsophisticated, innovators such as Pollock cannot be accused of appropriation, yet they thought nothing of shamelessly taking ideas from our people to use for their own benefit. Thoughts of this type need to be kept in perspective. I am not accusing these individuals of criminal theft. Rather, it is likely that their concept of Native people at the time set the rules for what was acceptable. Once again we come back to an unconscious application of an internalized set of standards that happen to be based on fallacies. When it comes to the category of Native art, Native people who work in Western European styles are thought to be appropriating, while mainstream people working in Native styles are seen as innovative.

Moving Forward

As an old Indian I am aware of a responsibility to present my opinion. In doing so, I preface my remarks with a reminder that this part of the story is what I have come to know and understand. I do not speak for anyone else. Native stories are usually not imperatives. They normally leave it to members of the audience to make up their own mind about the value of what has been presented and about how to react to its revelations. This story is no different.

Should the category of Native art be done away with? Well, in spite of its many negatives, it has a great deal of value. For one thing the category of Native art provides an income for many artists of Native descent. For another, it is a genuine move on the part of the mainstream society toward inclusiveness. I am sure that anyone reading this story could add many more valid reasons for maintaining the category of Native art—at least for now.

My consideration of the category of Native art has revealed the battery that powers the invisible barrier as being the pervasive negative and stereotypical connotations associated with it. Since non-Native members of the Fine Art community are unable to recognize those connotations, it becomes our responsibility to find ways bring them to their attention. If I am to take my place in the institution of Fine Art as an artist rather than a Native artist, then it is my responsibility to, as Alex Janvier points out, “make noise.” Gerald Vizenor serves as an example here. By exposing the false view of the Native in the American Western, he has brought about significant change.¹ The television drama *Arctic Air* provided ample proof that change is possible. Our task is to bring about a similar awareness in Canadian society with respect to the Fine Art world.

The Medicine Wheel Teachings stress the need for balance. We are responsible for that balance and cannot look outside of ourselves to have others do that for us. We are the ones who need to insist that Native Art must be associated with the contemporary. When a collector thinks about Native Art, the value must be in its contemporary nature. To have that happen, we must recognize that the traditional is just one part of who we are.

I feel very strongly that we should steadfastly resist the temptation to define ourselves according to mainstream standards. It is our responsibility to make a clear distinction between the traditional and the contemporary. The mainstream will lump both into a single package destined for the museum shelf unless we recognize the vibrancy of our cultures. While we build on and respect the gifts left to us by our ancestors, we are part of a contemporary culture. Even dressed in regalia at a Pow Wow we are never far from our computers and cell phones.

I believe that seeing Native art as legitimate Canadian Fine Art in the same manner as works by people like the Western European Group of Seven would benefit the mainstream as much as our own people. In my view it would be difficult to rapidly alter the connotations associated with the term traditional, but it is likely possible to bring about a change that separates contemporary work from the term. I am not talking about stripping all Native symbols and references out of our work. I am simply suggesting that the work be viewed differently. Our goal should be to encourage a change in perception. It would be helpful if the Fine Art world were to come to the conclusion that its definition of contemporary Native art should not include artifacts.

All cultures tell stories and as a result there can be great confusion in the academic community over why storytelling might be considered a legitimate approach. The lessons provided in the Michael Thrasher Medicine Wheel Teachings guide the shaping of the story model in that they properly reflect the Native worldview and insist on the inclusion of specific areas of consideration that lead to a reliable analysis of the available data and even set up what constitutes legitimate data.

The points on the wheel serve to remind us of the necessity of taking key aspects of human nature into consideration. Building a story starts with the storyteller and that fact is emphasized by placing the storyteller at the centre of the circle. In considering the characteristics of Native art as seen through Native eyes the Eastern direction that deals with vision encouraged me to use my own internal lived personal experience in conjunction with external data. The resulting insight following an analysis of my personal experience was confirmed by the voices of contemporary artists of Native descent who when speaking of their work, create a rich and vibrant story of Native creativity, pride and joy.

Moving about the Medicine Wheel to the Southern direction, which mandates a consideration of Time, Relationships and Experience, meant reaching back in time to examine experience and relationships that were formed long before the building of the story began. Storytelling led me to analyze the combination of my own experience (internal vision) with external data that consisted of transcripts of the published radio shows along with material in printed form held in libraries such as the one maintained by the Art Gallery of Ontario.

The Western direction insists that in the attempt to understand what my journey as a Native person has taught me about Native art I am obliged to analyze and consider both Feelings and Reason. I am also obliged to do so in a manner that seeks a balance. Coming to the conclusion that important characteristics of Native art as revealed in the voices of the artists are creativity, pride and joy came from an analysis of my own internal Native perspective. The balance was achieved when it became apparent that other people of

Native descent, specifically the artists under consideration, projected the same characteristics.

The Northern direction dealing with Behavior and Movement brought me to the realization that the mainstream Fine Art world tends to view Native art as being “Traditional” and that the term usually has connotations associated with it that are equated with primitive repetitions of archaic approaches to artistic production. Native art as seen through my eyes, on the other hand, is as contemporary as anything produced by any other culture. Recognizing that the behavior of our artists of Native descent is fully contemporary led me to acknowledge that it is the behavior of mainstream people that needs to be updated. Therefore, the movement recommended by the dissertation is for us to convince the mainstream Fine Art world that we are every bit as contemporary as they are.

Returning to the centre of the Michael Thrasher Medicine Wheel leads to a conclusion that is the result of a very carefully structured analysis of what my journey as a Native person has taught me about Native art. The storytelling approach, properly structured according to the dictates of the Michael Thrasher Medicine Wheel, requires movement in the form of a completed story that is presented to the community for validation. The holistic view demanded by the Teachings ensures the formulation of a conclusion that respects our relationship to everything on Mother Earth including the mainstream Fine Art world. The conclusion, therefore, is simply stated by pointing out that the voices of contemporary artists of Native descent, when speaking of their work, create a rich and vibrant story of Native creativity, pride and joy. Moreover, our contemporary nature

needs to be recognized by the mainstream community and it is our responsibility to make that story known.

The presentation of my story and those of the artists I have met leaves me with the hope that others can learn as much from our stories as I did. To reiterate, the purpose of this work is to tell my story, and there are many more stories to tell, this in only one. In the process of telling my own story I came to realize that the voices of contemporary artists of Native descent, when speaking of their work, create a rich and vibrant story of Native creativity, pride and joy.

Having come full circle, this is not the end of the story because, as elder Michael Thrasher points out, the circle never ends.

Works Cited

- Adams, James. "CBC film traces life of Janvier." Edmonton Journal 7 Nov. 1984.
- Archibald, Jo-ann. *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008.
- Augustine, Stephen J. "Preface: Oral History and Oral Traditions." Eigenbrod, Julian Renee and Renate. *Aboriginal Oral Traditions: Theory, Practice, Ethics*. Fernwood, 2008.
- Baele, Nancy. "The measure is art, not ethnography." *The Ottawa Citizen* 30 Jan 1994.
- Benton-Banai, Edward. *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway*. Hayward, Wisconsin: Indian Country Communications Inc., 1988.
- Bird, Louis. *Telling Our Stories*. Peterborough, Ont: Broadview Press, 2005.
- Burkhart, Brian Yazzie. "What Coyote and the Thales Can Teach Us: An Outline of American Indian Epistemology." *American Indian Thought*. Ed. Anne Waters. 2004.
- Cajete, Gregory. "Philosophy of Native Science." *American Indian Thought*. Ed. Anne Waters. 2004.
- Cardinal, Lewis. "What is an Indigenous Perspective?" *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 25.2 (2001).
- Chavez, Raul S. "Childhood Indians: Television, Film and Sustaining the White (Sub)Conscience." Diss. University of California Riverside, 2005.
- Cordova, V. R. "Approaches to Native American Philosophy." *American Indian Thought*. Ed. Anne Waters. 2004.
- Couture, Joseph. "The Role of Elders: Emergent Issues." *Visions of the Heart: Canadian Aboriginal Issue*. Ed. David Long and Olive Dickason. Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1996. 41-56.
- Crandall, Richard C. *Inuit Art: A History*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2000.
- Cruikshank, Julie. "Introduction: Life History and Life Stories." *Life Lived Like a Story: Life Stories of Three Youkon Native Elders*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1990.
- Devine, Bonnie. Interview. *AVR Arts Review*. Aboriginal Voices Radio Network. 29 July 2011.
- . "National Gallery of Canada." 2014. PDF.
- Deloria, Vine. "Philosophy and the Tribal Peoples." *American Indian Thought*. Ed. Anne Waters. 2004.

- Directing in the Performing Arts. *Marrie Mumford*. 2013.
<<http://www.directingintheperformingarts.com/participants/marrie-mumford/>>.
- Dumont, James. "Journey to Daylight-Land: Through Ojibwa Eyes." *Laurentian University Review*. 8.2 (1976): 31-43.
- Ermine, Willie. "Aboriginal Epistemology." *First Nations Education in Canada: The Circle Unfolds*. Ed. Marie Battiste and Jean Barman. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1995.
- Evans, Al. *Chee Chee: A Study of Aboriginal Suicide*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004.
- Goulet, Jean-Guy A. *Ways of Knowing: Experience, Knowledge, and Power among the Dene Tha*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998.
- Hill, Richard William. "Jeff Thomas: Working Histories." *Jeff Thomas: A Study of Indian-ness*. Toronto: Gallery 44, 2004. 8-19.
- Houle, Robert. "Alex Janvier: 20th century native symbols & images." *The Native Perspective* 2.9 (1978).
- Indigenous Studies Ph.D. Vision Statement. *Indigenous Studies Ph.D.* 2014.
<<http://www.trentu.ca/indigenoustudiesphd/>>.
- Janvier, Alex. 2014. Website. <<http://alexjanvier.com/aa1.html>>.
- . AVR Arts Review Gevik Gallery. with Bob Phillips. Aboriginal Voices Radio Network. 2012.
- . AVR Arts Review Odjig Exhibition. with Bob Phillips. Aboriginal Voices Radio Network. 2009.
- Johnston, Basil. *Ojibway Heitage* New York: Columbia University Press, 1976
- Julan, Renée and Renate Eigenbrod. *Aboriginal Oral Traditions: Theory, Practice, Ethics*. Fernwood Publishing, 2008.
- Kaempffert, Waldemar. *A Popular History of American Invention*. Scribner's Sons, 1924.
- King, Thomas. *The Truth about Stories: A Native Narrative*. Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2003.
- Letendre, Rita. Interview with *AVR Arts Review*. *AVR Arts Review*, Aboriginal Voices Radio, 2 Jan 2008.
- . Gallery Gevik Inc. "Rita Letendre – Artist Biography." 2014.
<<http://www.gevik.com/letendre/>>.
- Longman, Mary. "Challenging the Ideology of Representation: Contemporary First Nations Art in Canada." Diss. University of Victoria, 2006.
- Lum, Ken. *Four Boats Stranded: Red and Yellow, Black and White*. City of Vancouver. 2001. n.d.
<http://app.vancouver.ca/PublicArt_net/ArtworkDetails.aspx?ArtworkID=386&Neighbourhood=&Ownership=&Program=>.

- MacKanzie Art Gallery. *Indian Group of Seven*. 2011. Website.
<<http://www.mackenzieartgallery.ca/engage/exhibitions/7>>.
- Mandel, Charles. "Janvier's New Works are Consistent, Joyful." *Edmonton Journal* 28 Apr. 1997.
- McLeod, Joseph. Norval Morrisseau. 2006. Maslak McLeod Gallery. Ref Type: Catalog
- McLuhan, Elizabeth and Tom Hill. *Norval Morrisseau and the Emergence of the Image Makers*. Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1984.
- McMaster, Gerald. *Trick or Treaty*.
<http://www.britesites.com/native_artist_interviews/gmcmaster.htm>.
- . "Contributions to Canadian Art by Aboriginal Contemporary Artists." *Hidden in Plain Sight: Contributions of Aboriginal Peoples to Canadian Identity and Culture*. Toronto: Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005.
- Melnyk, Helen. "Janvier—name, not a number". *Edmonton Journal* 18 Mar. 1978.
- Meyer, Manulani Aluli. "Our Own Liberation: Reflections on Hawaiian Epistemology". *The Contemporary Pacific* 13.1 (2001).
- Mumford, Marrie. AVR Arts Review. with Bob Phillips. Aboriginal Voices Radio Network. 18 April 2010.
- . Indigenous Studies Department Faculty. 2014. Website.
<<http://www.trentu.ca/academic/nativestudies/faculty.html>>.
- Poitras, Jane Ash. Interview with *AVR Arts Review*. *AVR Arts Review, Aboriginal Voices Radio, 11-24-2010*.
- . The Bearclaw Gallery. *Jane Ash Poitras*. n.d.
<<http://www.bearclawgallery.com/Artists.aspx?ArtistID=19>>.
- Prats, Armando José. "His Master's Voice(over): Revisionist Ethos and Narrative Dependence from *Broken Arrow* (1959) to *Geronimo: An American Legend*." *ANQ* 9.3 (1996): 15-29.
- Renwick, Arthur. Interview. *AVR Arts Review*. Aboriginal Voices Radio Network. 2004.
- . *National Gallery of Canada*. 2014. Website.
<<https://www.gallery.ca/en/see/collections/artist.php?iartistid=4603>>.
- Rushing, William J. *Native American Art and the New York Avant-Garde a History of Cultural Primitivism*. 1st ed. xii, 250 p vols. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995.
- Silversides, Brock. *The Face Pullers: Photographing Native Canadians, 1871-1939*. 184 p vols. Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishers, 1994.
- Simpson, Leanne R. "Anti-Colonial Strategies for the Recovery and Maintenance of Indigenous Knowledge." *The American Indian Quarterly* 28.3 & 4 (2004).

- Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Dunedin: University of Otago, 1999.
- Staples, David. "Artists Helping Natives to Reclaim 'Sacred Homeland'." *Edmonton Journal*, 11 Jan. 1999.
- Thomas, Jeff. Interview with Bob Phillips. *AVR Arts Review*. Aboriginal Voices Radio Network. May 2008.
- . *Jeff Thomas: A Study of Indian-ness*. n.d. Website. 25 04 2014. <<http://www.scoutingforindians.com/biography.html>>.
- . *Peace Chief, Tower, Toronto, Ontario, 2004*. Stephen Bulger Gallery. <http://www.bulgergallery.com/dynamic/fr_artwork_display.asp?ArtworkID=1548>.
- Thrasher, Michael. 25 March 2014. <<http://turtle-island.net/>>.
- Tookoome, Robert. "Simon Tookoome." 2011. Private Conversation.
- . Tookoome, Simon. *Spirit Wrestler Gallery*. 2014. <http://www.spiritwrestler.com/catalog/index.php?artists_id=93>.
- Vizenor, Gerald Robert. *Manifest Manners Postindian Warriors of Survivance*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994.
- Williams, Carol J. *Framing the West: Race, Gender, and the Photographic Frontier in the Pacific Northwest*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Wilson, Shawn. *Research Is Ceremony*. Halifax, N.S.: Fernwood Pub., 2008.

ⁱ I have offered personal opinion or direct knowledge in a manner that might require a source citation had I taken it from someone else.

ⁱⁱ Pages 170 Melnyk, 171 Melnyk, 172 Mandel, 173 Baele, 174 Baele, 176 Adams, 180 Mandel, 200 Adams. The research for these pieces was conducted in the Art Gallery of Ontario library where each is a clipping from the respective newspaper and no page numbers were associated with them.