SURVIVANCE AND SOVEREIGNTY ON TURTLE ISLAND:

ENGAGING WITH CONTEMPORARY NATIVE AMERICAN ART

Excerpts from the Exhibition

KUPFERBERG HOLOCAUST CENTER

QUEENSBOROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE | CUNY

Land Acknowledgment

The Kupferberg Holocaust Center is situated on the traditional land of the Matinecock people, in proximity to the Lenape and Shinnecock people, who continue to live here today. We offer gratitude and respect to all of the Indigenous people of Turtle Island, past, present, and future.

Left: *Mirror Shield Project*, Concept Artist: Cannupa Hanska Luger, Drone operation / Performance organization: Rory Wakemup Oceti Sakowin camp, Standing Rock, ND, 2016, Image courtesy of the artist; *Thank you to Jack Becker from Forecast Public Art for helping bring Mirror Shields to Standing Rock, ND, along with Rory Wakemup at All My Relations Arts in Minneapolis, Minnesota, who facilitated a workshop, hosting Cannupa Hanska Luger as guest artist for the Mirror Shield Project.

Survivance & Sovereignty on Turtle Island: Engaging with Contemporary Native American Art

Native Americans make up less than
one percent of the population of America.
0.8 percent of 100 percent.

O, mine efficient country.

I do not remember the days before America—
I do not remember the days when we were all here

— Natalie Diaz, 2018 MacArthur Fellow
from "American Arithmetic"

This exhibition addresses the histories and the present-day realities of the first people of this continent through contemporary art. Turtle Island is the name given to North America by the Anishinabek, the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois), and the Lenape, some of the Indigenous people of this region. Not unlike Noah's Ark which rose from the water in the Torah, in this local creation story the North American continent was formed as a great turtle raised her back out of the ocean. As residents of this land, *what do we know about the people and the cultures of Turtle Island today?*

Exhibiting artist Cannupa Hanska Luger writes, "As artists . . . we are the mirrors. We are the reflective points that break through a barrier." Luger is one of 16 artists of Indigenous descent in this exhibition who are from some of the more than 1,200 sovereign tribal nations in the United States and Canada, each with the authority to self-govern. Their artworks all speak to survivance: a term that emphasizes both cultural survival and resistance. Indigenous people are still here despite hundreds of years of genocide and mass atrocities, including germ warfare, compulsory relocations, internment, forced sterilization, family separation, and lack of religious freedom.

This exhibition has found its home at the Kupferberg Holocaust Center because it is through studying the Holocaust that we develop the vocabulary to examine and acknowledge other genocides and the contemporary responses to them. By using art to communicate the impact that genocide has upon Indigenous people on Turtle Island, we can understand that these egregious crimes of attempted erasure are not outliers but part of a continuum. Engaging with art and survivance also means addressing cultural revival and resistance: we must consider today's movements to honor Indigenous people and their lifeways as we look toward the future of Turtle Island.

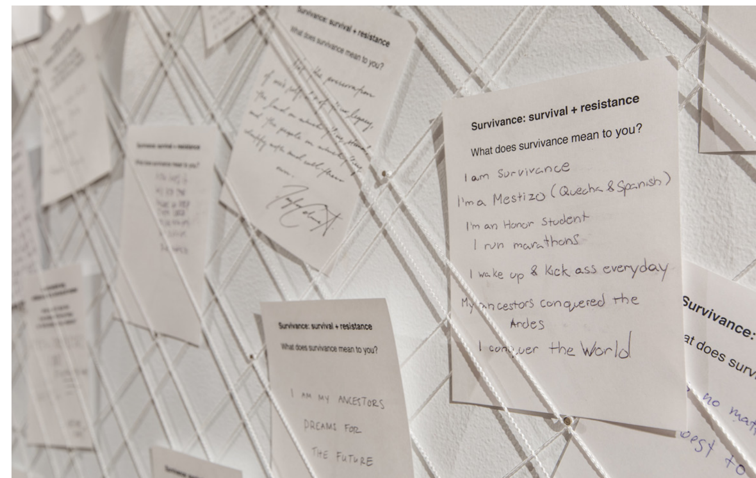

Photo: Leo Correa / Queensborough Community College, CUNY

Acknowledgments

Exhibition Co-Curators: Danyelle Means (Oglala Lakota), Independent Curator & Kat Griefen, Queensborough Community College (QCC) Faculty, Art and Design Department, Gallery and Museum Studies Program and Kupferberg Holocaust Center (KHC), 2018–2019 Scholar-in-Residence and 2019–2020 Curator-in-Residence

Senior KHC Curatorial Fellows: Sofia Lago (2018) and Eddie Ruiz (2019)

KHC Fellows & QCC Gallery and Museum Studies students: Bernard Fortin, Tovah Hecht, Navdeep Kaur, Barbara Kelly, Karla Medina, Julio Meza, Angelica Pomar, Diana Sabio, and Yinxia Yang

Advisor: Diane Fraher (Osage / Cherokee), Director, Amerinda Inc.

KHC Community Committee for the Survivance exhibit: Gale Criss, Marilyn Dipkin, Martin Melcer, and Evelyn Schechter

KHC Docents: Gale Criss, Hannah Garson, Adrienne Kivelson, Cheryle Levine, Marilyn Dipkin, Martin Melcer, Jack Schwarz, and Sandra Pensak

KHC Staff: Laura Beth Cohen, Ph.D., Executive Director; Marisa L. Hollywood, Associate Director; Victoria Fernandez, Joel George, and Jennifer Hickey

QCC Faculty: Dr. Franca Ferrari, Philip Listengart, Dr. Hayes Peter Mauro, and Lisa Sita; and the Art and Design Department

QCC: Dr. Timothy G. Lynch, Interim President, and Rosemary Sullivan Zins, Vice President for Institutional Advancement

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Photo: Leo Correa / Queensborough Community College, CUNY

Arms Open and Widespread:
A Conversation between Danyelle Means and Kat Griefen

Beginnings

Griefen: When we first discussed the possibility of an exhibition of contemporary Native American art, at a center focused on the Holocaust and the study of genocides, what made you think this was a feasible project?

Means: One of the things that you talked about initially was Gerald Vizenor's idea of survivance. Many people assume that genocide no longer occurs or that it could never happen again. But, as survivors, Native people have to be involved in, and actively engaged in, remembrance and resisting so that we are not erased. This is survivance. These ideas are what spoke to me.

Griefen: The title of the exhibition includes the word "engaging" which reminds me of an article I assigned to the students who participated on the curatorial committee. The article, "Challenging Visitors to Move from Memory to Action," addresses how the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum speaks about remembrance and memory but it also asks visitors to go to a place of action.

Means: It was important that the exhibit's title resist passive absorption and allow visitors to imagine an active role for themselves in learning, understanding and maybe coming out of ignorance through engagement.

Means: My own connection to Native American activism through my family certainly has a lasting effect on almost everything I do. When we met, I had recently returned from Standing Rock where the protests were happening in the fall of 2016. It was important that we include a piece in the exhibition that spoke to that protection movement. The people at the encampments in North Dakota were protecting the water and the earth in defiance of authority. The *Mirror Shield Project*, which was instigated by Cannupa Hanska Luger and which we included in the exhibition, borrows from an earlier moment when a group of Ukrainian women used mirrors to reflect officers in full riot gear back at themselves. This project is about wanting people to see themselves. To put their violence in the mirror and show that to them. This exhibition is about what happens if we listen to one another, if we put aside violence and face that mirror.

So much of what we were talking about at Standing Rock was about protecting. We want people to see what they are doing to the earth and to each other.

Means and Griefen are the co-curators for the Kupferberg Holocaust Center exhibit, *Survivance and Sovereignty on Turtle Island: Engaging with Contemporary Native American Art*. They also led the related 2018–2019 KHC/NEH colloquium, *Survivance on Turtle Island: Engaging with Native American Cultural Survival, Resistance, and Allyship.*

Opening celebrations for the *Survivance* exhibit. Left to right: Angelica Pomar, Kat Griefen, Karla Medina, Danyelle Means, Nadema Agard, Renelle White Buffalo, and Judy Dow. Photo: Leo Correa / Queensborough Community College, CUNY

Genocide has to do with violence and aggression. The Mirror Shields make connections between communities.

Griefen: The movement of water protectors at Standing Rock was certainly one inspiration for the *Survivance* exhibit. Seeing Native people from more than 300 different nations and tribes across the continent hands joined with allies such as Rabbis, other faith leaders, and folks from different communities, all saying at the same time in different voices, “this is not acceptable,” was very powerful.

Means: Museums and centers like the Kupferberg Holocaust Center (KHC) can bring awareness to these issues. They can bring communities together. Ignorance is just not knowing. There’s no malicious intent. But once you do know how do you go about sharing that new knowledge, exploring it and wanting to know more?

As a Native person, education has always been a way to resist. As an Oglala Lakota person, I understand that we had leaders who resisted with violence. We had leaders who didn’t protest and who went on to reservations without violence. Some of the leaders that are important to me are those who taught the communities on reservations. Red Cloud and Spotted Tail taught people within their tribes about the importance of education, without which we would not survive. That is a lesson that can apply to any colonized people. There is not one group who holds all of the knowledge. An interest in education ties together the college itself, the exhibition, and the Jewish community. Visitors can come, connect, and build a bridge to new knowledge.

Nadema Agard (Cherokee / Lakota / Powhatan)

Wampum Moons of Change, ***An installation***, 2009
Acrylic / mixed media / sweetgrass braid with ribbon
Twelve 12″ x 12″ soft sculptural works on canvas
Courtesy of the Artist; Photo: Leo Correa / Queensborough Community College, CUNY

- *New Moon of Change: Gebouw (Dutch Building)*
- *Sister Squash Moon of Change: Máhkahkw (Squash)*
- *Crescent Moon of Change: Gouden Munt (Gold Coin)*
- *Medicine Moon of Change: Kwsháhteew (Tobacco)*
- *Nieuw Amsterdam Moon of Change: Molen (Windmill)*
- *Sister Bean Moon of Change: Maaláxkwsiit (Beans)*
- *Blue Moon of Change: Amóxkw (Beaver)*
- *Wampum Moon of Change: Quohog (Clam Shell)*
- *Creation Moon of Change: Takwáx (Turtle)*
- *Full Moon of Change: Niipáahum (Grandmother Moon)*
- *Sister Corn Moon of Change: Xwáskwiim (Corn)*
- *Half Moon of Change: Half Moon (Name of Henry Hudson's Boat)*
- *Wiingiimaskw (Sweetgrass) Offering*

I am a descendant of an Algonquin Nation (Powhatan) great-grandfather named James Willis Randolph from Virginia and a Dutch-American great-grandmother named Ella Tice Randolph from the Bronx, whose ancestors arrived in the seventeenth century. Therefore, this installation has been a most personal and soul-searching endeavor and is dedicated to my Algonquin Nation relatives, the Lenape, and my Dutch ancestors, who discovered one another in the seventeenth century.

According to the Lenape creation story, the world was created on the back of the Takwáx (turtle) hence the North American continent is called "Turtle Island." The moon called Niipáahum by the Lenape is known as Grandmother. Pearls, like those gathered at the shore, at a site now called Pearl Street, surround her. Kwsháhteew (tobacco) and Wiingiimaskw (sweetgrass) are sacred plants used for spiritual reasons. Máhkahkw (squash), Maaláxkwsiit (beans), and Xwáskwiim (corn) are called the Three Sisters because they are the traditional foods of the Lenape and grow together in a symbiotic manner. The pelts of the Amóxkw (beaver) were an important basis of economic exchange between the Lenape and European newcomers.

Each square includes Lenape (Algonquin Nation) and Dutch symbols. The titles include words in the Munsee dialect of the Lenape language spoken by the original New Yorkers and words in the Dutch and English languages. The purple and white color palette is based on wampum. The purple section called sacki, has twice as much value as the white section, called wampi. Wampum, made from the shell of a Quahog (clam) were used as currency and are still used as adornment and as a passport to the spiritual world by the Lenape and other Algonquin Nations.

In the new phase of the moon, a brick building or Gebouw represents change. Also depicted is a windmill or Molen, another of the first important structures in the Nieuw Amsterdam on Manhattan Island, called Menatay by the Lenape. In the crescent moon is the gold coin or Gouden Munt also representing change. In the half-moon phase, is the title of the boat called the "Half Moon" on which the English explorer Henry Hudson arrived in New York Bay.

— Nadema Agard

Pena Bonita (Apache)

Skywalker Series, 2016
Mixed media on photographs
Courtesy of the Artist; Photo: Eddie Ruiz

Pena Bonita pays homage to Skywalkers, the remarkably skilled Native American iron and steel workers who built much of New York City including the Empire State Building. These photographs show an ironworker and friend of the artist wearing the customary welding helmet. The drawings on the surface of the photos are Apache symbols and references to the trade.

Prior to contemporary safety regulations the life-threatening work of building the skyscrapers was rejected by many non-Native people. Some of the early ironworkers were Kanienkehaka or Mohawk people involved with steelwork as part of a trade agreement with contractors that were interested in developing their land. At least one contract for obtaining land rights in the 1880s stipulated that the company hire men from the reservation, though they were paid lower than average wages. More recently, Skywalkers participated in the perilous rescue missions at the Twin Towers on 9/11, and they contributed to the construction of the Freedom Tower.

My mom came from a Christianized background in Oklahoma but it was still matriarchal. She was a talented quiltmaker and made most of my dresses. My dad's family was moved from Oklahoma Indian territory back to New Mexico when he was a tiny child. His folks' social attitudes were oriented toward traditional ceremonies. My growing years often included living with aunts and uncles and grandparents as my mom and dad both had to often travel long distances to find work in California, Texas, and other areas.

[On coming to New York] I deeply appreciated Brooklyn: the Botanical Gardens, Park Slope, and the Brooklyn Museum with its wonderful exhibitions that shaped my desire to use oil paint, photography, and silkscreen in my art journey. There I spent many hours studying the masters and trying to shape my own way. My art reflects women's issues related to home and to work. One of the first pieces I exhibited depicted one of the first women to be accepted into the ironworkers union. She is a Blackfoot tribal member who worked on the Manhattan and Brooklyn Bridges.

— Pena Bonita

Excerpt from Catalog

Judy Dow (Abenaki and French Canadian descent)

Vermont Eugenics Dioramas: Two Backyards, 2010, Wood basketry and mixed media
Courtesy of the Artist; Photos: Leo Correa / Queensborough Community College, CUNY

My artwork focuses on the untold story. It's the story you won't find in a textbook. My art tells the story of my ancestors that had little or no opportunity to voice their opinion.

Henry Perkins, the director of the Vermont Eugenics Survey, led a survey targeting over 6,000 people and their families, over many generations. Some were hunted, others locked up in institutions, while some were sterilized. The ultimate goal was to break up families.

These two backyards show the obvious differences eugenicists were looking for. The road my family lived on is the place where the people of Moccasin Village hunted, fished, and burned the land each year and harvested various nuts, berries, fish, and animals. The backyards of these people became places to tan hides, do the laundry, and split and stack firewood. The street provided a place to play, because nobody here owned a car. Life was good for the people in this little neighborhood. They worked hard to survive as a community. Little did

Originally, in the 1880s, eugenics was considered a science. The eugenics movement was aimed at “improving” the genetic composition of the human race through selective breeding. In Germany, Hitler’s scientists, who had been in communication with US-based eugenicists, sterilized as many as 400,000 people, both men and women. Today eugenics is generally accepted to be a racist pseudoscience.

Artist and educator Judy Dow is dedicated to preserving her Abenaki heritage by depicting untold stories through basketmaking techniques passed down from her ancestors. Historically, Black Ash basketry was a utilitarian practice for Abenaki people who made containers for travel and storage. Later, basket weaving financially supported many Abenaki families who sold their work to tourists after their land and livelihood was taken. Today, Dow teaches basketry methods to people of all ages and ethnicities while she tells the stories of her people through the work.

they know that the land they lived on blocked the scenic view for the wealthy people on the hill; thus, these people became a target of the Eugenics Survey primarily because they lived in the wrong place, spoke a different language, and lived differently than their neighbors. Time and time again, supporters of the Eugenics Survey went back to the same addresses. People ran, hid, assimilated, and others fought back to survive. I’m here to tell the untold story of my family in which 623 people were hunted [and] institutionalized, and some were sterilized.

[The] eugenics program lost favor with the public as Adolf Hitler’s atrocities became better known throughout the world. Some programs went out of business and others distanced themselves by changing their names to those that reflected a “kinder” way of addressing the same issues. And yet other [states] like Vermont still have the original sterilization law on the books with only a few amendments.

— Judy Dow

Shan Goshorn (Eastern Band Cherokee)

Prayers for the Land, 2015, Arches watercolor paper printed with archival inks and acrylic paint, 6″ x 5.5″ x 7.5″
Loan courtesy of Kathleen O'Grady

Gold 'N Values, 2017
Arches watercolor paper printed with archival inks, acrylic paint, artificial sinew, copper foil, 11″ x 6.5″ x 6.5″
Photos courtesy of the Estate of Shan Goshorn

Prayers for the Land

This Cherokee-style, single weave basket combines a tribal prayer requesting healing and well-being with a close-up image of foliage and sky. The reverse side of the splints (interior) features a ledger sheet from some old transactions, where money was exchanged for goods. In contrast with the colonial view of purchasing land for individual ownership, Native people respected the significance of everyone being caregivers to our first mother, the Earth. In this piece I am hoping to remind the viewer that it is our responsibility to care for this priceless gift of land and air that we share with so many other beings—there can be no price set on this invaluable part of sustaining life.

Gold 'N Values

The bulk of the text included in this weaving is the Cherokee Morning Song, which was traditionally sung at dawn to greet the day in a sacred manner. The song reinforces the Cherokee belief that each day is beautiful; the Creator guides us in all we do and we are grateful. Once gold was discovered in Cherokee country in 1829, the settlers were even more aggressive about wanting to own the rich, fertile land identified as Cherokee land. A handful of Cherokee men signed a document agreeing to the US government's proposed removal terms, which would relocate the Cherokee east of the Mississippi, called the Treaty of New Echota. The tribe objected that these men did not have the authority to represent them as they were not elected councilmen, and [they] collected Cherokee signatures from most of the tribal members in protest. Reproductions of some of the signatures from the 95-page document have been included in this piece. They are combined with the Indian Removal Act of 1830, [which was] used illegally by Andrew Jackson to support his subsequent forced removal of southeastern tribes in what became known as the Trail of Tears. Indian people place their connection to their ancestral motherland above everything else, while the dominant white culture idolizes the almighty dollar. This Cherokee single weave basket is a comment on the conflicting value that land holds among different people.

— Shan Goshorn

Erica Lord (Athabascan, Iñupiaq, Finnish, Swedish, English, and Japanese descent)

Blood Quantum (1/4 + 1/16 = 5/16)
Enrollment Number (11-337-07463-04-01)
Digital photographs, 2007, Each 14″ x 40″
Courtesy of Private Collector, Santa Fe, NM

Erica Lord's photographs address the present-day realities for Native American people and bring to mind various historical circumstance when people have been dehumanized as numbers such as the Nazi practice of tattooing people in concentration camps during World War II or the treatment of African American people as three-fifths of a citizen in Article I, Section 2, of the US Constitution of 1787.

1/4 Athabaskan + 1/16 Inupiaq = 5/16 Native.

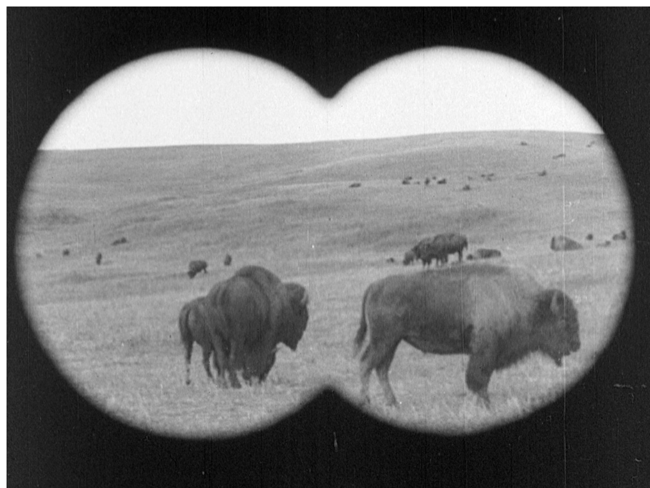
Blood quantum or the Certificate of Degree of Indigenous Blood (CDIB) is a system of registration administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) that states how much "Native American blood" a person has. Without sufficient Indigenous blood quantum, a person cannot be counted as an enrolled tribal member. Without an enrollment number a person cannot access many social services or even legally call themselves Native American. This is another form of erasure.

My origins include a lineage that I was born into and a land I was removed from. My cultural limbo has molded my identity and fueled my art. Constant moving and rootlessness are part of the American experience, but my near perpetual movement is an experience that lies within a larger history: the Native diaspora. This repetition of displacement, making homes, leaving and returning home cyclically, leads to a feeling of leading several lives or a multiplicity of selves. My experience may be multiple or mixed, but I am not incomplete.

— Erica Lord

Kent Monkman (Cree)

Sisters & Brothers, 2015
Video, 3 minutes
Kent Monkman: Director; Producer: Anita Lee
Courtesy of the National Film Board of Canada
Photos taken from the production © 2015 National Film Board of Canada (NFB). All rights reserved



Home of the Buffalo, 1930 - NFB

Cornouailles, 1991 - NFB

My vision as an artist is informed by my experience as an Indigenous person in Canada. I grew up going on school trips to the Manitoba Museum, where I saw Indigenous people in dioramas, frozen in time in a precontact state. I remember trying to come to terms with the way museums represented Indigenous people and how it compared to the reality of Indigenous people living in the city of Winnipeg. As such, in my artistic practice, I confront the complexities of historical and contemporary Indigenous experiences on Turtle Island.

I seek to authorize Indigenous stories into the narrative of Western art history. My work challenges received historical narratives and mainstream representations of Indigenous people, and shows the continuing destruction of colonialism. While examining these themes, I also celebrate Indigenous resilience.

Almost every Indigenous family in Canada has been affected by the residential school system. When looking back on its 150 years as a country, Canada cannot ignore the devastation caused by residential schools.

— Kent Monkman

Kent Monkman is known for his provocative interventions into Western art history. His work, which often features his gender-fluid and emphasizes Indigenous perspectives and subverts mainstream narratives surrounding North American history.

"Kill every buffalo you can! Every buffalo dead is an Indian gone," proclaimed one member of the US Army in 1867, demonstrating the colonial government's awareness of the connection between Indigenous people and animals. However, settlers failed to understand Indigenous systems of kinship that connect all beings.

Heritage, 1937 - NFB

Indian Residential School, 1969 - NFB

Sisters & Brothers draws parallels between the annihilation of the bison and the devastation inflicted by the residential school system. Once 75 million strong, wild bison were slaughtered almost to extinction by European settlers by the 1890s, both for their hides and bones and as part of a larger policy to eliminate the main food source of the First Nations of the Plains and to make way for colonial appropriation of their lands. Around the same time, the Canadian government established residential schools to remove Indigenous children from their families, destroy their cultures, and assimilate them into mainstream Canadian society. The powwow-step rhythms in the accompanying song "The Road" by A Tribe Called Red drive home the legacy of loss and pain inflicted by more than a century of abuse and neglect. *Sisters & Brothers* mourns the preventable deaths of thousands of children in residential schools while honoring the resiliency of Canada's First Peoples. Just as the bison have survived destruction, Indigenous people have endured.

Monkman created *Sisters & Brothers* for the National Film Board (NFB) series *Souvenir*. By reworking footage from the NFB's archives, the Indigenous artists involved in *Souvenir* examine issues of representation and challenge the colonial gaze from an Indigenous perspective.

Colonial Genocide in Indigenous North America

In the United States, an assemblage of policies and practices is viewed as contributing to the attempted genocide of the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island. It includes colonial contributions to warfare, slavery, and disease spread in the early days after contact with Indigenous groups on the eastern seaboard and in the American south, but also later eras of forced removal, massacre, and assimilative education. Continuing practices of land dispossession, pollution, over-incarceration, spiritual suppression, colonial-induced suicide, linguicide, and other causes of Indigenous suffering have all, as well, been included in the discussion of Indigenous genocide(s). Although this discussion has not, for the most part, penetrated mainstream American consciousness, accusations of American genocide have been consistently lodged, and are perhaps even growing in number.

The word "genocide" was introduced more than seventy-five years ago; it has since garnered enormous rhetorical power that often overshadows its critical utility. There are semantic gaps, not only between the colloquial understanding of genocide and its more nuanced conceptualizations in law and academia, but even amongst scholars themselves. Seen through the lens of the Holocaust, the broader public and many academics consider genocide to be the most extreme form of violence imaginable. According to this widespread view, including other forms of destruction besides mass murder risks diluting the meaning of the term.

In confronting this definitional challenge many point to the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The U.N. Genocide Convention, to which most nations are now signatories, defines genocide as: Acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such, including the following: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. This international legal statute clearly lists several indirectly lethal acts in its definition, including "causing serious bodily or mental harm" and "forcibly transferring children," all under the condition that these acts are committed with "intent to destroy." When thus measured against the stated intentions of residential school administrators—such as American superintendent of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, Richard Henry Pratt, who aimed to "Kill the Indian in him, and save the man"—the charge of genocide appears justified.

But what is at stake in making this charge? Why does it matter to declare the broader history of North American colonialism, as genocidal? Considering the imperatives of Indigenous political theory, which aim to dismantle the structural realities of colonialism and work towards

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a not-yet-realized “postcolonial” situation, what use is there talking of genocide? Does the use of the word “genocide” have any practical value? Might the use of this powerful term foreclose any otherwise positive possibilities in dealing with the needs of Indigenous North Americans and moving towards reconciliation between Native and settler communities?

For many who apply the term genocide to North American settler colonialism, recognition of colonial malevolence is necessary for reconciliation to move forward. Ultimately, the most crucial issue is to begin repairing the relationships damaged by these destructive realities, or, perhaps more accurately, forging new non-genocidal relations in North America. Such transformation might take as many as seven generations, but acknowledgement of wrongdoing is only the first step in this process. As such, it is important for the peoples of the United States to recognize their legacy of genocide, which has too often been hidden—ignored, forgotten, or outright denied.

How did we get to this point, where the inglorious legacies of North American Indigenous-settler relations are finally being exhumed? Is there now a chance for Indigenous and non-Indigenous North Americans to begin an unsettling dialogue and the arduous process of fashioning decolonizing forms of redress and reconciliation?

At the moment, it may seem that this window of opportunity, however glimmering, is wider in Canada than in the United States. This may be because of a more concerted governmental effort to address these issues in Canada. Perhaps this reflects the different demographic positions of Indigenous peoples in either nation-state. While in absolute figures, there are more people of Indigenous descent in the United States than in Canada—with 4.1 million in the former and 1.3 million in the latter—their proportional weight is markedly different. In Canada, 4.5 percent of the total population claims Aboriginal ancestry, compared to 1.5 percent in the United States. Accordingly, Indigenous peoples in Canada may be in a slightly better position to vocalize their concerns.

The somewhat greater window of opportunity to address colonial genocide in Canada compared to the United States may also reflect the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) (2008–2015), a body federally mandated to promote awareness and public education on the legacies of residential school experiences, and that of the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) Inquiry (2016–2019), which together have further enhanced discussion of genocide in Canada. Unfortunately, no federal counterpart exists in the United States, where there seems to be even less public discourse on colonial genocides.

There have at least been some efforts on a state level to begin acknowledging and redressing such issues, as with the Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission, jointly convened in 2010 by the state of Maine and the Wabanaki Confederacy. More recently, a combination of factors led California governor Gavin Newsom in June of 2019 to offer an apology for the genocide of Indigenous peoples in his state. Indigenous nations in the region had long called for such recognition. Their

efforts were enhanced by the work of scholars such as Benjamin Madley, who received international acclaim for his 2016 book *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846–1873*, which raised public awareness of the state's exterminatory efforts.

At the federal level, Assistant Secretary of the Interior Kevin Gover formally apologized in September 2000 on behalf of the Bureau of Indian Affairs for its role in what he called "ethnic cleansing." While the apology was undoubtedly sincere, its immediate effects were hampered by silence and neglect. Gover, also a citizen of the Pawnee Nation, was unable to speak on behalf of the entire United States government, and although the administration of President Clinton did not oppose his apology, it did not publicly endorse it either.

More recently, in 2009, the United States Congress passed a joint resolution that "apologizes . . . to all Native Peoples for the many instances of violence, maltreatment, and neglect inflicted on Native Peoples by citizens of the United States." Yet the resolution was mired in a series of legalistic disclaimers, thereby hindering whatever positive effects it may have. Moreover, tucked away in a Defense Appropriations Bill, the apology has been largely obscured and rejected by some as too little, too late. Accordingly, these initiatives have yet to mobilize a broader public discourse or any governmental initiatives in the United States.

Inhibitions are largely due to predominant nationalist mythologies influencing non-academic, scholarly, and policymaking discourses alike. The enduring beliefs in American exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny, both powerful themes in the collective identity of the United States, are formidable barriers which prevent any serious reckoning with the past and present, especially in terms of genocide. Indeed, there has long been a bardic tradition of historiography in the United States that glorifies the "peopling" of the "New World" at the expense of "feeble barbarians" and "primitive tribes." According to this still prevalent view of history, genocide is presumably antithetical to Americans' national character.

Such hubristic myths have been critically challenged by Native American activists. Inspired by the civil rights movement of the 1960s and a wave of Indigenous revitalization, younger Native Americans spurned what they saw as more conciliatory bodies of Indigenous representatives, such as the National Congress of American Indians, in favor of more militant groups and actions. In 1973, a contingent of the American Indian Movement (AIM), which was founded five years earlier, occupied the town of Wounded Knee, South Dakota, on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. On the site of the infamous 1890 massacre of a Lakota camp of non-combatants, an inglorious episode which was then receiving renewed attention with Dee Brown's best-selling book, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (1971), the AIM standoff with the United States federal government garnered some media coverage, much of it negative. Regardless, this intervention did expose long-standing but under-recognized transgressions against Indigenous peoples in the United States. More recent efforts have likewise called attention to the legitimate grievances of Native Americans. It remains to be seen if such initiatives will foster greater public discussion and help crack the shell of the mythologized American identity.

Such activism has inspired positive scholarly developments, as with the emergence of "New Indian History," but much of the discourse regarding American genocides has been limited. A few publications emerged in the late-1970s and 1980s that began focusing on the legacies of racism and conquest in

Native America, albeit not always through the critical lens of genocide. These works set the stage for the clamorous and very public commemorations of the 1992 Columbian quincentennial, which instantly became a lightning rod of the concurrent “culture wars” in the United States.

On the one hand were those who slighted any overt criticism of colonialism, with many conservatives continuing to celebrate the “myth of discovery,” while those more liberally-inclined opted for the sanitized “encounter/exchange” narrative that downplayed aspects of exploitation and domination. On the other hand were those ardent voices who unabashedly charged the entire Columbian legacy as one of genocide. As passionate as these debates were, in the public forum they were ultimately short-lived, and dialogue about the past and present injustices in Native America quickly receded, leaving the question of colonial genocide to specialized corners of the academy.

While the reluctance in the United States to recognize Indigenous grievances has thus far been explained in ideational and cultural terms, there is a strong material basis for this collective denial as well. There is perhaps an unspoken fear that to acknowledge the destructive legacy of settler colonialism would undermine the perceived legitimacy of prevailing property regimes. After all, much of North America was swindled from Indigenous peoples through the mythical but still powerful Doctrine of Discovery, the perceived right of conquest, and/or deceitful treaties. Restitution for colonial genocide would thus entail returning stolen territories. The fear in settler society is that this would result in the abrogation of private property rights, as well as create economic and political uncertainty for those who profit off of the land, such as corporations in the areas of agriculture, logging, mining, and oil.

Yet Kanien’kehá:ka scholar Taiaiake Alfred suggests that such restitution would not necessarily force non-Natives off the land, but rather involve them decolonizing their relationships, not only with the Indigenous peoples with whom they share the earth, but with the land itself. Moreover, Dakota scholar Waziyatawin suggests that the hundreds of millions of acres of public land in Canada and the United States, territory that is not allotted as private property, should also be returned to their original inhabitants. Thus, the fears of settler society over the status of their properties should not inhibit efforts to decolonize settler territorial relations.

Interestingly, issues of territorial occupation and conquest were present in the very first formulation of genocide as provided by Raphael Lemkin. Lemkin, who coined the word “genocide” in his seminal study, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, wrote that genocide involves “two phases,” first the destruction of the targeted group’s “national pattern,” and second “the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor” on the territory of the former. This oft-quoted passage thus explicates that genocide may be deeply bound up with colonizing processes as a particular form of conquest and occupation.

Moreover, Lemkin’s capacious definition of genocide, which included political, social, cultural, economic, biological, physical, religious, and moral components, provides a useful framework for understanding the multiple strands of the colonial assault on Indigenous peoples. For his tragically unfulfilled multivolume project, *History of Genocide*, Lemkin also researched dozens of historical case studies, including those in the Americas, clearly indicating that he thought his neologism was perfectly appropriate in this context. His contributions have enjoyed a recent renewal of interest that has been concurrent with the increased

attention paid to colonial genocides. But there has also developed a certain "origin myth" around Lemkin that overshadows conceptual weaknesses, particularly his static, rigid, and essentialized view of culture.

Genocide studies laid dormant after Lemkin's death in 1959 for over a generation, until a coterie of mostly North American social scientists revived the field in the 1980s and 1990s. Many of these academics drew from Lemkin's "origin myth," namely his scholarly-activist bent and his passionate crusade for global justice. However, they generally did not share Lemkin's broad conceptualization of genocide, which was primarily concerned with protecting the lives of groups, and instead offered truncated definitions that focused on the mass murder of individuals. Moreover, and again unlike Lemkin, this generation tended to implicitly adopt the Holocaust as a conceptual prototype for genocide studies.

Through this narrow frame of reference, very little space was provided for discussion of colonial genocides in Indigenous North America. For the most part, the alternative category of "ethnocide" or "cultural genocide" was used to label those cases that did not meet their reductive definitional standards of genocide, tacitly suggesting that these instances were less severe or important than the Holocaust and other major genocides of the twentieth century. The trend of conceptually splitting "genocide" from "cultural genocide" persists as a result of this generation of scholarship, inhibiting a full discussion of colonial genocides.

Yet an even greater barrier to this discussion has been the identity politics that is seemingly intrinsic to the study of genocide. Associated with the aforementioned generation of genocide scholars of the 1980s and 1990s were proponents of the "uniqueness" thesis. According to this view, the Holocaust was taken as the most important, if not the only, case of genocide.

This argument diminished the relevance of other peoples' traumatic pasts and provoked sharp responses from "rival" victim advocates. In particular, David Stannard and Ward Churchill advocated strongly for the study of colonial genocides in Indigenous North America. Although the critical responses of the latter are understandable, considering their righteous indignation against the rampant denial of Indigenous grievances in North America, the polemics produced by this debate often have produced far more heat than light, as scholar-advocates of specific groups contested over the mantle of suffering through asymmetric comparisons with the Holocaust. Thankfully, a new generation of genocide scholarship is moving beyond these timeworn and irreconcilable divisions.

Much of this fresh work has emerged from Australia, where there has been a considerable degree of public discourse concerning the plights of Aboriginal peoples. Two significant political events—the 1992 Mabo decision by the Australian High Court, which rejected the doctrine of *terra nullius* and affirmed the existence of Native title in common law, and the 1997 publication of the *Bringing them Home* report, which documented the forcible removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families and communities—precipitated an ongoing debate over the interpretation of Australian history. The visibility of this public discussion in Australia, the so-called "History Wars," is much greater than in North America, and the government's role in initiating such dialogue is suggestive. This is especially so considering how the TRC and MMIWG are functioning to promote a somewhat wider discourse in Canada compared to the United States, where the lack of any such national

dialogue might be explained by the absence of comparable governmental initiatives.

Within the context of this public discourse in Australia, the subfield of colonial genocide studies has flourished. Colin Tatz, Tony Barta, Robert Manne, and Henry Reynolds provided path-breaking publications, followed by the substantial collection of essays compiled by Ann Curthoys and John Docker. Likewise, the work of Patrick Wolfe has been significant, especially in elucidating the links between Australian and American patterns of settler colonialism, a social formation that is distinct from other types of colonialism. In 2003, historian Dirk Moses organized an important conference at the University of Sydney on “Genocide and Colonialism” and went on to edit a series of important volumes.

These contributions have focused on the multiple and interlinked ways through which group destruction might occur, and the local and specific effects of these forces within Indigenous settings. They do not seek to show that colonialism in North America or Australia was identical to genocidal practices in Nazi Germany, and instead demonstrate the destructiveness of colonial interventions in these regions on their own terms. In making this point, this literature returns to Lemkin’s primary concern for the lives of groups rather than strictly for the lives of individual group members.

The last but not least important intellectual discourse that greatly informs the present discussion is the field of Indigenous studies. Beginning in the late-1960s, North American universities began to institute programs that focused on the unique perspectives and histories of Indigenous peoples. More specifically, this scholarship affirms that Indigenous peoples have the “intellectual sovereignty” to (re-)produce their own epistemologies. In many ways, this discourse resonates with subaltern studies and postcolonial theory, although many Indigenous scholars are rightly adamant that one cannot yet speak of a “postcolonial” era in the North American or Oceanic contexts, as colonialism persists in many guises.

And instead of taking for granted the essentialized label of “Indian” within the reified category of the nation-state, these contributions encourage us to see North America from an Indigenist perspective that respects and promotes Indigenous peoples’ diverse ways of being, doing, and knowing. Otherwise known as Turtle Island, Indigenous North America is thus comprised of hundreds of unique groups, nations, and traditions that have existed since time immemorial. It is this cultural plurality that has been threatened by five centuries of colonization.

While this perspective is vitally important, some contemporary contributors of Indigenous histories have perhaps been reluctant to use the concept of genocide, as doing so might suggest a fatalistic passivity, an absence of Indigenous creativity and adaptability, and the irrevocability of death. As such, it is important for genocide scholars to draw from Native studies in order to stress what Gerald Vizenor has dubbed “survivance.” Accordingly, in the face of enormous pressures for destruction and erasure, Indigenous peoples in North America rightly rejoice in their perseverance and revitalization.

Nonetheless, the terminology of genocide has a role to play, and not merely as a means to adjudicate the past or to assign to it a dollar figure for purposes of compensation. Rather, the concept of genocide offers an analytical device for evaluating destructive relations of domination and subordination so that such relations might be changed and ongoing patterns of colonial genocide in North America brought to a halt. ■

Two Perspectives on Survivance of Native American Art in New York

Photo: Jerry Rotundi

When I think about Native art, I always think about a time measured in tens of thousands of years when all the peoples of the earth were passing knowledge through the beautiful drawings and carvings they were making in spaces made sacred by them, where they knew the seen and the unseen. The medicine men tell us there was a time when we all knew one another and would take mystic journeys to visit each other. Maybe that is why the human figures you see on these rocks all over the world look the same.

Over eons of time as commerce developed many people became alienated from the land, but some stayed close to the earth, and their art remained sacred to them. In a world of 15 minutes of individual fame and 30 second sound bites, Native art endures as more than mere survivance. If art in the larger world is a reaction against conformity, intellectualism, and a void in society, contemporary Native American artists of the New York Movement continue the ancient practice of transmitting knowledge through various media, styles, and perspectives in the visual, performing, literary, and media arts.

The transitory nature of modern society especially in an urban center at an international crossroads generates a need in all of us for something that represents the collective vision of a people, something that endures through changing times. In order to be whole, the balance between a vision of change and the eternal must be maintained throughout artistic practice. As stated by Chief Oren Lyons, Faithkeeper of the Wolf Clan-Onondaga Nation, “Now more than ever we cannot afford the luxury of not preserving the messages of our traditions.” As prophesied, there has been an attrition but there has also been a “distillation” and intensification of the commitment to the traditions and messages in these these prophesies. If Native American art as a whole has enduring principles, this treasure can be discovered by seekers in the work of contemporary Native American artists of the New York Movement.[1]

— Diane Fraher (Osage / Cherokee), Filmmaker and Director of Amerinda Inc.

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1. “Oren Lyons PBS Interview.” Posted May 17, 2015, YouTube video, 55:26. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i_qj5_PUhlo
2. David Bunn Martine, *Recovering Memories: Vernacular Photography from the Historical Native American Brooklyn Neighborhoods and Contemporary Photography from the New York Movement of Contemporary Native American Art* (New York: Amerinda Inc., 2018), 12.

Photo: Sage Sohier, Rauschenberg Residency

You could hear a pin drop as Delbert Thunderhawk (Lakota) completed another beautiful song he had just composed as a means of fighting homesickness. The ancient song composed and sang in the heart of Brooklyn was accompanied by his hand drum, the sound of which a little girl, Muriel Miguel (Kuna-Rappahannock), who grew up to found Spiderwoman Theater, fell asleep to as a child during the early years of the twentieth century. The rhythmic cadences contrasted sharply with the car engines and screaming horns of the Brooklyn neighborhood, in which no Native people had lived for perhaps 200 years. That private exercise in tradition and community represents for contemporary Native New York an early intimate statement of artistic survivance.[2]

Many Native people came to New York City in the early twentieth century following the rodeos, for jobs in steel and iron work, but also expressing their traditional Native art aesthetics. Some of the early visual artists, such as Leon Polk Smith (Cherokee) and Lloyd Oxendine (Lumbee), brought with them their innate indigenous sensibilities and translated them into the modernist language of abstract expressionism and the New York school.

The New York movement of contemporary Native American art's main theme is diversity: diversity of artistic expression and practice, and diversity in tribal and cultural representation. The national obsession with Native American art actually began largely with the sponsorship of wealthy New York patrons who traveled west in the 1920s and brought back early customary Native arts and displayed them in large art museums for the first time. Many people in the United States thought that Native American as a race would soon be extinct so the retrieval of Native American "folk art" was seen as a way to save the people's culture and, in fact, the people themselves. This belief was but one of the many mistaken notions about Native American culture.

Despite these problems, Native American art in New York endured. The Native Contemporary Theater, the first contemporary Native American art gallery outside of Santa Fe, NM, and the first Native feminist theater began here in the 1970s (Spiderwoman Theater). Now three generations on, these artists continue to espouse their innermost traditions and express them through ancient genres and methods as well as through contemporary media. Thus here in New York there is a continuum from Delbert Thunderhawk singing his song in Brooklyn in the early twentieth century to today when our city boasts the largest Native American art movement outside Santa Fe. We are just getting started.

— David Bunn Martine (Chiricahua Apache / Shinnecock / Montauk)

SHAN GOSHORN (1957–2018)

On December 1, 2018, Shan Goshorn walked on. For many of us, death is yet another journey we must walk through in order to meet those who have gone before. Shan's short time on Turtle Island was filled with laughing, learning, and championing Indigenous expression in all forms. We will miss her remarkable ability to share the harsh reality of our existence through her weavings.

The curatorial team dedicates this exhibition to the memory of Shan Goshorn and to her extraordinary work.

Images courtesy of the Estate of Shan Goshorn

I became politically active with my art in the early 1990s in response to America's quincentennial (the country's 500-year celebration of Columbus blundering onto our shores). Using a variety of multimedia techniques with photography, I created several bodies of work that addressed human rights issues unique to Native people . . . My intention is to present historical and contemporary issues that continue to be relevant to Indian people today, to a world that still relies on Hollywood as a reliable informant about Indian life.

– Shan Goshorn

Genocide. It is a horrible word that sums up the most inhumane of actions. And it is a word rarely associated with the atrocities that happened in America . . . Massacres are remembered as battles, prisons are called forts, and the routine denial of Native language, religion, citizenship, and even food (to those sequestered in forts or on reservations) was the accepted solution to the "Indian problem" for decades.

– Shan Goshorn

Shrouded in Grey, 2015
Arches watercolor paper splints printed with archival inks, acrylic paint, artificial sinew
11.25″ x 7.75″ x 8″

Shrouded in Grey addresses genocide, a term coined by Raphael Lemkin, a Jewish lawyer from Poland, who in 1948, persuaded the United Nations, to adopt the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, classifying genocide as a crime under international law. While Lemkin escaped to the United States, 49 members of his family were murdered in the Holocaust.

For this basket, Goshorn wove together Lemkin's definition of genocide: "Whoever, while participating in a conspiracy to destroy a national, racial or religious group, undertakes an attack against life, liberty, or property of members of such groups is guilty of the crime of genocide," with three documents that support the claim that Native American people are survivors of genocide. The Indian Removal Act of 1830, the Medicine Lodge Treaty, and the roster of children at the Carlisle Indian Boarding School are just some of the documents that speak to compulsory relocations and land grabs, internments, family separation, suppression of religious freedom, and mass atrocities that Indigenous people on Turtle Island suffered and survived. By weaving together seemingly disparate documents related to the experiences of Jewish communities and Native American communities, Goshorn pays homage to all those who lost their lives in genocides while looking towards connecting and healing for those who survived. The title of this work references the burial shroud and reminds us not to be blind to those who are still persecuted today.

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Front & back cover: Shan Goshorn
Shrouded in Grey, 2015
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