

Native American Artists, Gatekeepers and Markets:

A Reflection on Regional Trajectories

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## Introduction

A puzzle for many Native American artists, funders and policymakers is the long-term relative economic success of Southwestern US Native artists compared with sustained challenges for their counterparts in most other American and Canadian regions. In this paper, we summarize the work of historians, anthropologists and art critics on the evolution of markets and supportive in the American Southwest and compare these to past and present circumstances for Woodland Indians, especially in the western Great Lakes region. While there are yet other experiences not covered here—Inuit, Northwestern, Plains and Southeast tribes—the art worlds of the two regions form an instructive pallet for understanding how Native American artists, traders, teachers, gatekeepers, and patrons have interacted to produce different outcomes. We lodge this experience in the larger contexts of US policy towards Native Americans and changing ideologies and non-Native attitudes towards Indians.

Over more than a century, the works of Native visual artists in the American southwest increasingly gained visibility and market value in the broader non-Native society. This evolutionary development, unparalleled for Native artists in other US regions, reveals important tensions within and outside of the Native American community around the character of Native art and artists' ability to produce their own creative vision while parlaying their work into livelihoods. Non-Native traders, railroads and related tourist-serving companies played initial roles in developing an art market, generating incomes but altering the character of

artistic output. In the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Eastern philanthropists' concerns for authenticity resulted in the recording and preserving of traditional art forms and in new opportunities for training and support for Native artists, but discouraged innovation.

A counter-movement occurred after World War II, when some Native artists and key funders rejected traditionalism as folk art and made modernist education and techniques the norm. The persistence of a broad and increasingly unmediated market for contemporary southwestern Native art enabled many Native artists to refuse the traditional/modernist dualism. This stance evolved following the founding of the Sante Fe-based Institute for American Indian Art, funded by philanthropists outside of the community but controlled by Native artists who rejected constraining conventions. This was particularly the case in painting and sculpture, while continuity as well as innovation characterizes the broader and still heavily tourist-related markets for Native pottery, jewelry and weaving.

Woodland Indians, in contrast, have never enjoyed the tourist-centered markets of the Southwest, in part because of environmental and settlement differences and in part because of the extraordinary entrepreneurship of certain businesses and institutions in the Southwest. Yet broader markets for Ojbiwe art forms are a distinct possibility in the Upper Midwest, we argue. They can be nurtured on both the demand and supply sides, as informed by the Southwest experience and described at length in our larger study in progress.

## I. The Environmental, Policy and Ideological Context

The American southwest is an exceptional region. Arid, desert-like, it defied Euro-American settlement patterns: the small, diversified family farming that had flourished outside of the cotton-growing south up through the latter portion of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The attempt to impose similar land development patterns, via land-financed railroads, riparian water rights, and 160 acre homesteading was defeated soundly by an obdurate environment, as John Wesley Powell precociously predicted in his survey explorations in the 1860s (Stegner, 1954).

By the time that the railroads, settlement efforts, and the US army reached the Southwest, American Indians in the region had already encountered, battled and accommodated the Spanish and the Mexicans in over two centuries of bloody warfare, raids, enslavement and compromise that continued well into the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. After the US takeover in 1948, the Pueblos, particular those along the Rio Grande, retained their rights to land they had granted by the Spanish and Mexicans, and they were receptive to American governments' irrigation and agricultural innovations. Because they and their westward Pueblo neighbors the Zuni and Hopi were considered peaceful, settled agriculturalists, they escaped the US army's warfare that battered the Navajo and Apache, partially nomadic groups who had migrated from the north and east. After five years in captivity at Fort Sumner, Navajo leaders in 1868 settled for a large reservation in northeastern Arizona and northwestern New Mexico and began farming and shepherding. The Apache continued to resist, were finally defeated

in 1886, and moved to Fort Sill, Oklahoma (Spicer, 1962:214-222; Dillworth, 1996: 10-12).

The preservation and evolution of Indian art forms and artists' access to non-Indian markets thus differ widely, even among the tribes of the Southwest. The Pueblo and Navajo remained on or near land they knew and understood, able to farm it and make useful as well as beautiful artifacts out of materials close at hand. In contrast, many other Native American groups were completely forced out of their own environments, settled in the most inhospitable places, where animal, plant and mineral materials that they had used in their artwork were absent, and subjected to cycles of American Indian policy that alternately tried to assimilate them culturally and economically (e.g. the Dawes General Allotment Act of 1887 and the boarding schools where Indian children were forced to learn English, industrial skills and Christianity) or isolate them on reservations. The Pueblos, whose land rights were honored, escaped the Dawes act attempt to break up reservations into small individual holdings, a process that resulted in huge portions falling into non-Indian hands elsewhere (Hoxie, 1977: 127; Dillworth, 1996: 13).

This spare environmental and historical summary helps to explain why the Pueblo and Navajo were spared some of the worst depredations of Indians, including artist, elsewhere in the US (Deitch, 1989: 225). But it does not fully explain the appeal of Southwestern Native arts and crafts for Euro-American audiences. To understand this, anthropologists and historians have developed the notion of primitivism (Bell, 1972). Primitivism celebrates the superiority of

simpler way of life and played a major role in the emergence of the Southwest as a distinct cultural region:

In its association with its Native American inhabitants, the Southwest became known as a place of the unique, the handmade, the rural, and the authentic, as opposed to the modern metropolis, which was characterized as a place of mass-produced objects and culture, the urban and the spurious (Dillworth, 1996: 5).

Dillworth goes on to argue that Pueblos, and to some extent Navajos, became a kind of folk in the rhetoric of empire building and colonialism:

Unlike the Plains Indians, who were usually represented as savage (though sometimes noble) warriors, the Pueblos were a “semi-civilized,” self-sufficient, settled, and agricultural people who lived in houses and produced attractive handicrafts. They were not like the urban poor; they seemed to be ethnic others who were happy to remain outside modernity (Dillworth, 1996:6).

In her book, Dillworth analyzes the strategies—collecting, spectacle, and “playing Indian”—that marketers of the Southwest developed and used relentlessly to increase transportation business and land sales.

The broadening of Indian arts and crafts from utilitarian and community-serving functions to a source of income via sales to outside consumers is embedded in explosive growth of industrial capitalism, which spawned both a consumer culture and tourism. The primitivism and hunger for authenticity that created a demand for Native art work offered Native artists a safe space for the expression of their identity and traditional beliefs and values (Berlo and Phillips, 1998: 212).

Yet non-native patronage has been a mixed blessing for Indian artists, argue Berlo and Phillips:

Individual patronage, on the one hand, has all too often stimulated the production of repetitious and stereotypical images of the Indian as noble

savage, tragic warrior, or new-age mystic—a phenomenon whose continuing vitality is evident at powwow booths and commercial art galleries from Ontario to Sante Fe. Institutional patronage, on the other hand, has imposed arbitrary hierarchies and systems of classification that disrupt Native unities of thoughts about objects and about the visual as an integral part of culture. Until the 1970s few art galleries—and virtually no large urban art museums—collected or displayed twentieth-century Native art. For the most part, ethnographic museums, too, rejected works in Western media; they saw them as inauthentic and acculturated (1998: 212-3).

## II. Native Artists, Traders and Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Euro-American Markets

In the fifty years following the US annexation of the Southwest territories from Mexico in 1848, a period during which the Navajo, Apache and Pueblo Indians of that region were increasingly confined to reservations, Indian traders began to accept and market Indian work – baskets, rugs, pottery, jewelry – as barter for food and hard goods they supplied (Faunce, 1981; Brody, 1976). Eastern buyers were already accustomed to collecting curios from what they widely believed to be a disappearing culture, displaying them in cabinets of curiosity for visitors to admire (Gordon and Herzog, 1988). But pottery and rugs could also be used in the home, creating a larger market for these artifacts (Dillworth, 1996).

Indian trade pre-dated European conquest, but the Euro-American trade substantially changed the character of marketed Native artwork. Indians had traded with each other before the European incursions. With the Spanish introduction of sheep, the Navajo, who learned weaving from the Pueblo, began weaving woolen serapes and blankets prized for their tight weave by the Spanish

who even enslaved Navajos for this purpose (Wade, 1974). As with other Indian art forms, Navajo weaving was a dynamic, evolving practice:

Navajo weaving has no deep historical roots in cultural tradition. Essentially, it has always been a commercial link with other Indians, Spanish, and Anglo-Americans. As such, it has thrived on innovation, change, and outside contacts” (Kent, 1976: 101)

Interaction with traders altered Indian work in several ways. First, traders introduced new techniques, such as aniline dyes and commercial yarns, to the Navajo weavers. The dyes removed the need to spend time harvesting natural dyes, enabling a large increase in output (Wade, 1974). Second, traders communicated and shaped consumer preferences, for rugs rather than blankets and for colors that would fit contemporary décor, for instance, and by creating their own “brands” that would enlarge their share of the trade (Kent, 1976; Deitch, 1989; Webster, 1996).

### III. Native Artists and Rail and Auto Tourism: 1895-1930s

The arrival of railroads and thick streams of tourists headed for California and other western destinations brought southwestern Native artists face to face for the first time with customers and collectors. The Santa Fe Railroad, opened in the 1880s and linking the east to California, incorporated Indian arts into its tourist strategy in a way that no other American railroad did (Dilworth, 1996). Initially, the Santa Fe tried to pitch settlement, a successful strategy in more plentiful rainfall regions to the east. They hired artists to depict the west as a sunny, restful place to live, seeking to supplant its wild and dangerous reputation,



and played up the healthful climate (Deitch, 1989; Tisdale, 1996; Weigle & Babcock, 1996).

But facing meager settlement interest and land sales, the Sante Fe turned to tourism in 1895. It created an advertising office that began to recruit ethnographers, artists, photographers and writers to publicize the attractions of the region, including its aboriginal inhabitants (Dillworth, 1996: 17). It built its stations in Spanish style and permitted Indians to sell on their platforms, a practice that lasted until the decline of passenger service in the 1960s (Deitch, 1989). It engaged the Fred Harvey Company, creator of the nation's the first chain restaurant at the Topeka depot in 1876, to build and operate hotels such as the Hopi House along its rails, hiring designers to stage authenticity (Weigle, 1992). At Fred Harvey hotels where travelers decamped for the night, Navajo women and men were on display weaving rugs and making jewelry that were then purchased by Fred Harvey to sell in its gift shops. Indian families would come to work for one to three months and then return home.

Some historians have argued that these were not purely exploitative relationships. The Indians working for the Harvey Company were paid well and produced high-quality work (Deitch, 1989). In her account of a famous Navajo weaver, Elle of Ganado, Moore (2001) shows that Elle set her own limits on the lengths of time she would work. Yet while these interactions generated income, they also challenged Indian aesthetics and cultural practices. For instance, the Harvey company encouraged Navajo silversmiths to reduce the amount of silver they used because it made jewelry too costly and heavy for tourists (Wade,

1974). In the case of Kachinas, instructional and sacred carvings, Pueblo Indians responded to tourist demand by fashioning a distinctly different product stripped of symbolism and using cheaper materials (Deitch, 1989).

Both trading posts and railroad depot hotels exercised a spatial monopoly over the surrounding region and most Indian artists therein. The automobile changed this. In 1926, in an attempt to respond to new opportunities and competition from the automobile, the Harvey Company introduced Indian Tours. The Harveycar Courier Corps hired young, attractive, college-educated and bilingual non-Native women to drive tourists into native villages, showing them how to interact with Indians while relating the history of the region and explaining the native culture. Once inside the villages, tourists were able to buy art directly from native artists (Weigle, 1992, Moore, 2001). These encounters shaped what artists offered for sale. Pueblo potters, for example, learned that tourists wanted small, transportable art that was inexpensive. As a result, potters employed less skill to make miniature, lower quality ceramics (Tisdale, 1996; Brody, 1976). In Pueblo villages, especially those close to the growing tourist and artistic enclaves of Santa Fe and Taos, these auto tours initiated a long and enduring history of direct sales opportunities for ceramic artists.

In the same era, Indian artists were able to sell their work in the plaza in Santa Fe directly to tourists. In 1922, as part of the Santa Fe Fiesta, created by the Museum of New Mexico to help promote tourism and community identity, Indian artists were invited to display their work in what was the first Indian Fair, now the famous annual Indian Market. From the first, this was an explicitly Native

arts exhibition. Pueblo and other artists, some from as far afield as northern Minnesota and Oklahoma, camped out on the outskirts of town; the encampments became a primary attraction of the Fair. Since the 1940s, the market has become a an August weekend event that has provided valued incomes for exhibiting artists (Bernstein, 2007).

### III. Eastern Philanthropists and Authenticity

The emergence of elite concern with historical preservation of “authentic” Indian art further complicated this trajectory. In the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, eastern elites, including the Rockefeller family, became concerned that Native Americans were a disappearing race and that their traditional cultural artifacts were endangered. Decades of assimilationist policies had indeed made deep inroads into Native cultural practices. These elites began to purchase and preserve, in museums in the east and new centers like Santa Fe’s Wheelwright Museum, the best of the pre-contact artwork. In the 1920s, John D. Rockefeller financially supported the Indian Arts Fund and the Laboratory of Anthropology in Santa Fe, both dedicated to the preservation and revival of southwest Native American arts.

Thus despite an expanding menu of techniques and materials, the traditionalist turn suppressed an appreciation for contemporary Indian artistic innovation. Indians were supposed to paint, pot and weave like traditional Indians! Some white artists began to encourage and teach Native artists to rediscover and work in their traditional forms, avoiding European and modernist

techniques. Outstanding among these was the Studio School that non-Native Dorothy Dunn set up in Sante Fe in 1932 to instruct high school-age Native American artists how to draw and paint in a traditional fashion. Dunn taught only the flat styles derived from rock painting and abstract and geometric forms found in traditional painted pottery, beadwork and basketry. She refused to teach perspective drawing, color theory, and shading techniques developed over the centuries in European painting, preferring that students rely on their natural ability and remembrance of their cultural traditions. The art

historians/anthropologists Berlo and Phillips conclude of Dunn's effort that it was

a remarkably non-authoritarian approach to Native art pedagogy. It resulted, however, in a large body of work that was rather uniform in its decorative, two-dimensional approach genre scenes... In later years, the Studio School was criticized for its fossilization of Indian art within a narrow stylistic mould. Yet for its era, it was a remarkable experiment which produced an entire generation of Indian artists who, in turn, served as role models for the next two generations (1998: 217-8).

Many artists trained under Dunn honored her in their lifetimes, especially for giving them the opportunity to do artwork as their living. Her Santa Clara Pueblo student Pablita Velarde, was commissioned in 1939 to paint large mural scenes of Pueblo life for Bandelier National Monument, completed in 1945. Verde rediscovered and produced in hand-ground pigments many of the traditional dyes and paint hues that had been lost to synthetic colors and chose themes that explored the interests and concerns of women that were of little interest to other Pueblo artists and non-Indian collectors (Bouton, 2007).

This traditionalist tack reflected both a desire by foundations and governments to incorporate Native culture in economic development efforts and

by American elite arts institutions to champion a distinctly American art aesthetic. During World War II, Rockefeller patronage underwrote a view, disseminated through the Museum of Modern Art in New York, that Native American art could serve as a model and resource for a new American modernism distinct from European tradition (Anthes, 2006: 173). In 1941, the Museum of Modern Art exhibited three floors of works by Indian artists, anointing these as art rather than ethnographic specimens. The curator hoped that “the down-town galleries will swing into line and accompany our exhibit with sales exhibits that should create a steady market for Indian paintings in the east” (quoted in Berlo and Phillips, 2006: 218-9).

#### IV. The Rise of Modernism

Beyond pictographs and sand drawings, painting and related art forms were not traditional with most Native Americans. The emergence of easel painting and sculpture as Native art forms is mostly a 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon and parts company with pottery, jewelry and textiles which continue to be made in and used by historic communities even while marketed externally. Some of the first western style drawings were done by Indian prisoners, such as the “ledger artists” at Fort Marion in the 1870s, with an explicitly strategic and political intent. As Edgar Heap of Birds, a Cheyenne-Arapaho artist and descendant of one of the Fort Marion artists, puts it:

These imprisoned artist/warriors began to use contemporary forms to communicate with the white public, as a way of defending Native peoples.

Older modes of physically violent warfare were left behind in order to articulate the public message, thus ensuring survivability for the warrior and his family while voicing opposition to white domination (Heap of Birds, in Ingberman, 1989: 22).

This motivation and use of white people's visual art methods parallels Ojibwe William Warren's use of English language and writing in his attempt to interpret Ojibwe ways and customs for a white audience in the hopes that the latter would alter their genocidal policies against the Ojibwe (Warren, 1885).

By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and partly due to the training that they had managed to receive under Dunn and elsewhere, many Native artists were restive under the traditionalist regime. New Deal generous funding for artistic work had supported some Native artists, including Dunn's graduates, to attend non-Native art colleges where they learned contemporary art forms. They were eager to experiment and compete on a larger canvass. Modernism, and abstract expressionism, in particular, was attractive to many Native artists, among them Yankton Sioux Oscar Howe, Apache Allen Houser and Ojibwe George Morrison. They rejected the idea that a Native artist must paint in a Native way and asserted that Indian art is that made by an Indian. Morrison famously said, "I'm Indian and I make art, so what I make is Indian art."

A defining moment in this drama was Oklahoma's Philbrook Art Center's refusal to consider a semi-abstract painting submitted by Sioux artist Oscar Howe as eligible for the prize competition in its 1958 Annual Contemporary

American Indian Painting Exhibition. The competition jurors deemed it “a fine painting—but not Indian” (Anthes, 2006: xi). The Philbrook, whose curatorial staff styled this particular exhibition as the standard-bearer of traditional Native work, had in 1946 rejected Ojibwe Patrick DesJarlait’s painting on similar grounds. Howe, by then a professor of art at University of South Dakota at Vermillion, chose to fight back. In a famous letter to the Center’s staff, he

...noted the irony of entrusting non-Indian jurors to determine the authenticity of Indian art...(H)e insisted that ‘Indian Art can compete with any Art in the world, but not as a *suppressed art*’...that the authenticity of his culture and artistic expression was being policed by the ignorant gatekeepers of a white institutions, a situation that recalled the violence and paternalism of the reservation system. He railed against the notion that Native American’s ‘are to be herded like a bunch of sheep, with no right for individualism, dictated to as the Indian always has been, put on reservations and treated like a child, and only the White Man knows what is best for him’...‘I only hope...the Art World will not be one more contributor to holding us in chains’ (Anthes, 2006: 161)

Howe’s vigorous complaint changed the course of future Philbrook and related policies, already under siege over the boundaries of “the traditional.’ Within a year, the Philbrook artistic staff agreed to add an abstract/sympolic category for the competition, although such paintings should still be representative of Native culture. Anthes notes that their liberalized criteria would still exclude a still life or abstraction of a city skyline, suggesting that they “still could not fathom that modern Indian culture and experience might include urban life” (Anthes, 2006: 1690).

But this modernist swing of the pendulum was also in danger of going too far in the other direction, rejecting anything traditional in Native art as un-original. Eastern elite art opinion reflected the resurgent post-New Deal Termination

movement that sought to detribalize Native Americans and integrate them into the national mainstream. As art historian Bill Anthes puts it:

The Terminationists cast Native American culture as backward and out of step with the new realities of the modern world and the challenges of competitive individualism. Native American cultures, they argued, limited individual liberty and prohibited Indians from enjoying the full benefits and freedoms of American citizenship...The New York modernists...abandoned their notions of the Primitive as a resource of authenticity and the font of universal communication, and instead located the last preserve of authenticity in the individual psyche (Anthes, 2006:171)

At a famous conference in 1959, funded by the Rockfellers among others, non-Native anthropologists, academics, art critics and curators made the vehement case for a thoroughly modernist Native American artistic practice. Anthropologist John Adair, for instance, argued that Native American artists could divorce the business of being an artist from their cultural life as an Indian. Professors from the University of Arizona's Art faculty called on Native American artists to abandon their Indianness, one stating that it seemed to him that "the real problem the Indian faces is his insistence that he be an Indian," imploring him to "leave the past in the museum or become a museum piece himself" (Anthes, 2006: 174-6). The non-Native experts emphatically embraced a view of two irreconcilable worlds, Indian and modern. They believed, states art historian Joy Gritton:

that traditional aesthetics—distinguished by concern for communal welfare, social mores, and religious proscriptions and practices—and thus traditional values and beliefs, were dysfunctional and inimical to success in the modern world (Gritton, 1991: 26).

Dorothy Dunn defended the traditionalist approach, defining an Indian artist as "one who utilizes the peculiar art backgrounds of his own tribal group as a



starting point for developing an individual art.” In paternalistic fashion, she argued that Native students needed guidance and specialists to learn culturally-specific techniques and remain connected to their traditional cultures and communities (Directions in Indian Art, 1959: 10).

The modernists won the first round, setting up, with Rockefeller money, a series of experimental summer workshops, called the Southwest Indian Art Project, at the University of Tucson. Here, from 1960 to 1962, young Indian artists were instructed in western and world art and modernist techniques. In a statement of objectives, the organizers wrote:

As the tribal core gradually disintegrates, the traditional art loses its meaning, function, and vitality. The young Indian artist must seek new forms of creative expression that draw upon his cultural heritage without slavishly reproducing old Indian forms the value of which both as art and as an expression of moral and social standards no longer exists (quoted in Anthes, 2006: 176).

However, seasoned Native artists attending the 1959 conference were more concerned with the economics of the marketplace than with artistic conventions (Anthes, 2006: 177). They worried whether Native jewelers could compete with white men making cheaper versions and pressed for attention to ways of broadening the market for their work through educating the public.

Neither the traditionalist nor modernist prescriptions prevailed. The Indian Art Project was displaced by the Bureau of Indian Affairs’ decision to establish the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) on the site of the old Studio School, just off the square in Santa Fe. The Institute opened in 1962, a post-high school program that drew 350 students from 88 tribes in 25 states and taught vocational,

arts and college prep courses. Its founding director, Lloyd Kiva New, a successful Cherokee textile artist and fashion designer, had argued at the Conference that embracing modernity did not mean relinquishing Native identity. Under his leadership and with a senior faculty that included Houser and Luiseno painter Fritz Scholder, the Institute charted a course that embraced new techniques and provided room for innovation. New contended that abstraction was a traditional Native invention, appropriated by white modernists, and that it could form a basis for tribal identity. In his vision, the IAIA curriculum, far from accelerating assimilation, addressed the economic, social and psychological problems facing Indian youth across the country (Anthes, 2006: 178-179).

The result has been a powerful, Native-run institution that has nurtured generations of Native American artists from all over the US, including writers and performing artists, and is a major community and economic development influence in its region. It has provided opportunities to teach and earn income to accomplished Native artists from around the US. As Ojibwe/Plains artist Alfred Youngman testifies:

Many students' lives were saved by their experience at the IAIA, which gave them the spiritual, creative and material tools to build successful lives as painters and make important contributions to their communities (cited in Anthes, 2006: 180).

It has not taken Indian themes out of Indian artwork, as the very politically charged paintings of contemporary Ojibwe once-IAIA student David Bradley demonstrate (*Shared Passion*, 2001).

## V. Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century Developments

Indian arts and crafts in the Southwest underwent a second boom beginning in the 1970s. Reflecting on this period, Deitch (1989) argues that several factors enabled Native artists to achieve higher prices and returns and greater respect among non-Indian peoples. The emerging American Indian movement spawned tribal guilds that negotiated better terms. The population of the southwest grew rapidly, fed by retirement and military industrial expansion (e.g. Los Alamos and Sandia Laboratories, numerous military bases). Recreational tourism, enabled by widespread auto ownership, better highways and the proliferation of parks and monuments, increased production and sales. An “Americana” trend and growing interest in collection and possession of art as an investment strategy deepened the market for Indian jewelry, painting and sculpture.

Yet for painters more than potters, jewelers and textile artists, the new freedom to innovate has individualized Native artists and attenuated their relationships to their own communities. Although major urban art museums and galleries now purchase and hang Native American contemporary work where they once completely excluded them, patrons still possess the power to define authenticity and to determine value according to their own culture-based criteria rather than those of the artists. Work that demonstrates familiarity with broader western art movements and techniques and is more polished appears to be

avored over work emerging more directly from Native experience. Berlo and Phillips conclude:

the divisions between fine art and craft continue to operate, and professional art school training continues to be regarded as a 'higher' qualification than traditional apprenticeship. Paintings and sculptures that examine oral traditions are shown much less often than those that address current issues of politics and identity. And the western privileging of visual experience continues to segregate material objects from the contexts that give them meaning in Native communities (2006: 238)

In this sense, contemporary visual artists in all regions face similar hurdles.

There are exceptions, as the 2008 show of Rabbit Before Horses, an Ojibwe painter, at the University of Minnesota's Tweed Museum demonstrates.

## VI. Comparisons with Woodland Native Artists

This brief account of the trajectory that southwestern US Native American artists have traveled in forging livelihoods and experimenting with new art forms is instructive on the challenges facing any ethnic or poor group face in relying on cultural creations and services for economic and community development. But the Native American experience is distinctive because of the centuries-long genocidal clash of economic, political and cultural systems, a drama that is still unfolding.

The conditions facilitating the relative success of Pueblo, Hopi and Navajo artists in creating and sustaining work in a far-flung capitalist market economy are worth comparing with the circumstances of Woodland Indians like the Great Lakes and Canadian Ojibwe. The settlement patterns in the American Southwest were somewhat kinder to Indian tribes there. Because the land they occupied when the Spanish, Mexicans and Americans arrived was not fertile for agriculture

or forestry, they were not as fully dispossessed nor, with some differences among the groups, compounded on reservations on the poorest of land elsewhere. Thus their connection with materials such as clays and indigenous dyes was not disrupted as was Woodland Indians access to land and materials in their forced migration and confinement on reservations.

From the beginning, market income for Southwestern Indians was linked to far-flung markets. While traders played a role in all Indian regions, the 19<sup>th</sup> market for Navajo rugs, a distinctive product linked to successful shepherding and compatible with eastern middle-class appetites for decor, was particularly strong. The success of entrepreneurial tourism, in part a function of the region's location on the Santa Fe Trail to California and in part of the railroads' desperation in the face of low settler demand for land, opened up work and sales opportunities for Native potters, jewelers and weavers on a scale that was not replicated in other US regions. Once the automobile displaced the train as the tourist's vehicle of choice, Native artists were able to market their work more directly to consumers in their own Pueblos and at events such as the annual Santa Fe market. Streams of well-heeled tourists were simply not traversing the roads along which most Woodland Indians lived, and this reality continues today.

As artists and wealthy easterners moved into the Southwest on the tails of robust tourism, philanthropists and anthropologists began to engage in the preservation and encouragement of Native artwork. They collected the best of anonymous, traditional work, exhibited today in the Wheelwright and Museum of American Indian Art in Santa Fe. They began, most famously in Dunn's Studio

School, to foster the continuation of traditional artistic practice by providing instruction to Native American artists. Although constrained to work in “authentic” techniques and genres, these students were thus given an opportunity to learn and build individual careers in art. In the decades that followed, many of them went on to acquire art training in white institutions and to challenge the prescriptive strictures. Museums like the Philbrooke and schools like the Institute for American Indian Arts offered training and exhibition space for them, legitimating their work in elite art-collecting circles.

Over time, Southwestern Native painters and sculptors, in particular, became modernists, though many still incorporated Native images, myths and themes in their work. Over the course of this evolution, gatekeepers such as traders, teachers, curators, critics and patrons altered the work that Southwestern Indian artists did by blessing some forms and rejecting others and by introducing new materials, colors and techniques into the mix of possibilities, an inevitable product of the power of affluent consumers and professionals in the art market. However, some scholars argue that Native artists retained relative control over training and working conditions, creating a distinctive and diverse body of work that remains a source of considerable income for them and their communities to this day.

Today, Southwestern Indian artists enjoy relatively strong and sustained opportunities to become artists and to make a living at it. Their livelihoods are still heavily tied to tourism that has continued to grow in the region. Their market opportunities are amplified by the post-World War II conversion of New Mexico

and Arizona into attractive retirement and working environments for modern day settlers from elsewhere generating a related strong demand for distinctive Southwestern décor. Despite the individualization of artists, even potters and jewelers at the high end, most continue to live in the same communities where they have thrived for more than a hundred years and where cultural integrity is still possible. US Indian policy and decades of deprivation continue to breed poverty and dysfunction in both urban and reservation settings in the region. But the ability to rely on artistic work, innovative yet anchored in one's own tradition, as a source of income brings pride, stability and a sense of the future to many Southwestern tribal communities.

Most of these conditions have not been present in Woodland Native American communities. Ironically, some of the best Minnesota Ojibwe visual artists have gotten their training in Santa Fe, at IAIA or its precursors—Patrick Desjarlait and David Bradley are examples. While Desjarlait returned to Minnesota, and relied on commercial work for Hamm's Beer and Land 'O Lakes for income, Bradley has settled in Santa Fe, where he paints both Ojibwe and Southwestern Indian satire. Ojibwe artists do not have dedicated Indian training institutions where they are mentored by Indian artists, nor do major art museums in their home regions purchase or exhibit more than tokens of their work. Although Canadian gallery owners and museums have been kinder to Ojibwe and other Canadian Native visual artists than in the US, Canadian Native artists' market experience has not matched the scale and variety of opportunities of the American southwest.

This comparative analysis is confined almost entirely to visual artists' work. Native musicians, performing artists and writers have not enjoyed particularly good career opportunities in the Southwest, despite the presence of IAIA in the region. Native writers from the woodland and plains are more prominent (e.g. Alexie, Vizenor, Northrup, Erdrich, Treuer). Native musicians are spread around the US, as the American Composers' Forum's First Nations Initiative has found in its work. The thin ranks of Native artists who have been able to build careers as playwrights, actors and filmmakers are similarly spread around the country. The market that Southwestern visual art found among emerging middle class households, tourists and patrons has not been reproduced for artists in other disciplines in that region.

Our summary has many implications for Woodland region artists and gatekeepers, our term for educators, patrons, funders and policymakers. Although tourism on the scale and distinctiveness of the Southwest is not likely, gatekeepers can, as Southwestern schools, museum, and market managers have, provide learning, exhibition and sales opportunities for Native artists of all disciplines. It is not unreasonable to imagine a larger audience for distinctive Woodland Indian visual art, plays, music and literature—Erdrich's avid readers have demonstrated this. As arts institutions everywhere increasingly reject a strategy of focusing on a Euro-American canon in their purchases, patronage, and curricula, Native artwork as a distinctive regional aesthetic may become more important to broader audiences, first within the region and then outside of it.



As we show in the rest of our larger study of Ojibwe artists in Minnesota, access to space, resources and markets is crucial to this development.

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