

Native Artists: Livelihoods, Resources, Space, Gifts

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Abstract

Native American artists face special challenges in making a living from their work. This paper explores Native artists training, mentoring, earnings, entrepreneurship and access to resources and markets based on interviews with dozens of Ojibwe artists and gatekeepers (managers of space and resources). In addition to the challenges of racism and geographic isolation (even in cities), Native artists' embeddedness in their communities and values such as gift-giving, cooperating and "not standing out" often clash with conventional norms of artistic aspiration and self-promotion. In addition, their uses of materials, rituals and sacred practices outside of the community are often controversial. Nevertheless, many Native artists successfully bridge traditional with contemporary artistic forms and content. Some make crucial contributions to local economies and cultural life. Some succeed in marketing their work to non-Native audiences. The paper explores ways that economic models of career development can be tailored to cover indigeneous artists and account for extraordinary challenges and non-monetized outcomes.

Indigenous artists create and present works that are unique in their treatment of contemporary urban and rural life. They preserve and celebrate the traditions of their people and offer opportunities for participation that would otherwise exist. They provide bridges to the future for their youth and bridges between Native and non-Native communities. They produce beautiful and moving music, images, spoken and written words. Yet in many regions, Native artists find it particularly difficult to make a living from their artwork.

In this paper, we summarize research findings on the nature of various challenges for Native artists and how their experiences are similar to and different from artists in general. Informed by a skimpy literature, we began with hypotheses about how and why their career trajectories might differ from non-Native artists and among tribes. In developing these, we reviewed secondary sources on the history of Native American art-making and its relationship to trading posts and the tourist trade in the 19th and 20th centuries. This exercise helped shape our expectations about Indian markets in general and to explore why Woodland Indians of the Northeastern quadrant of the continental US have not had access to the institutions that prepare Native artists and provide markets for them in other US regions, especially for the Southwestern Pueblo, Navajo, and Hopi.

We then designed a study of Ojibwe artists in Minnesota and conducted field research on six reservations and in nearby towns and larger cities. We supplemented these interviews with two-dozen interviews with commercial, nonprofit and community gatekeepers—people in a position to provide Native artists with access to resources and space both within and beyond the Native community.

Our findings cover the specifics of Ojibwe artists' livelihoods, training and mentoring; their access to space, materials, equipment, resources, technology, and markets; and the cultural, spiritual and spatial dimensions of their work. We summarize, too, pioneering gatekeeper initiatives that have made a difference to Native artists' careers. Our paper closes

with a series of detailed recommendations for artists, gatekeepers, and other actors in the larger cultural economic milieu.

I. Forerunners: Native artists and markets in the 19th and 20th centuries

The evolution of southwestern US Native American visual art into a popular American and now international art form illustrates challenges and potential for contemporary artists. Anthropologists and historians have created a body of work that reveals the broad outlines of emerging markets for Native art in that region. In the late 19th century, as Native Americans became increasingly compounded on reservations, Indian traders began to market Indian work baskets, rugs, pottery, and jewelry as barter on goods they supplied through their spatially monopolizing trading posts (Wheat, 1988). Middle class East Coast demand, cultivated by intermediaries (Dilworth, 1996), thus generated income in kind for artists.

The arrival of railroads and thick streams of tourists headed for Los Angeles brought Native artists face-to-face with customers and collectors. At Fred Harvey hotels, where train riders decamped for the night, Navajo women wove rugs on display to help bolster sales in gift shops (Weigle, 1992; Moore, 2001). As automobile travel developed in the region, Pueblo pottery artists set up markets within their own communities aimed at well-heeled tourists (Weigle, 1992). Indian markets sprang up in the growing settlements along tourists routes and in cities like Santa Fe.

From the beginning of this trade, Indian traders and buyers from the Harvey company were selective in the artwork they purchased, reflecting what sold to their relatively art-illiterate customers, which caused important shifts in the designs and materials used by Navajo, Pueblo and Hopi artists. Over time, these brokers brought new techniques into the Native American artistic community—synthetic dyes, for instance, for Navajo weavings (Wade, 1974). Artists still had considerable control over their work and choice of technique, but

market discipline changed the overall character of the work that they did (Brody, 1976, Deitch, 1989) .

The emergence of elite concern with historical preservation of “authentic” Indian art further complicated this trajectory. In the early decades of the 20th century, the Rockefeller family and other easterners became concerned that Native Americans were a dying people and that their traditional cultural forms were endangered (Gritton, 1992; Mullin, 2001). They 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 art work. This emphasis suppressed an appreciation for contemporary Indian artwork despite the expanding menu of techniques and materials at hand.

As an offshoot of this concern, some Euro-American patrons and artists began to encourage and even teach Native artists to recover and work in their traditional forms, shedding newer techniques. In 1932, non-Native Dorothy Dunn set up the Studio in Santa Fe, a painting program to instruct Native American artists how to draw and paint in a traditional fashion. Since other than pictographs, these particular art forms were not common among Native American tribes, Dunn taught only the flat styles derived from rock painting (Eldridge, 2001). Chiarascuro and related shading techniques, developed over centuries in European painting, were forbidden. Some artists trained under Dunn continued to honor her in their lifetimes, especially for giving them the opportunity to do artwork as their living and for their recovery of traditional techniques. Pablita Verde, for instance, commissioned during the New Deal to paint the beautiful scenes of Pueblo life in Bandelier National Monument, rediscovered many of the traditional dyes and paint hues that had been lost to synthetic colors.

Many Native artists were restive under this regime. The New Deal generously funded artists, was less racist in its patronage, and encouraged vernacular arts for community consumption. As a result, some young Native artists went to Euro-American schools, learned contemporary art forms, and were eager to experiment and compete on a larger canvass. Modernism, and abstract expressionism, in particular, was attractive to many Native artists,

among them Ojibwe George Morrison who rejected the idea that a Native artist must paint in a Native way. Morrison famously said, “I’m Indian and I make art, so what I make is Indian art.” Yet innovative museums in the southwest, including the Philbrooke in Oklahoma, still rejected Native artists’ work as late as the early 1960s for not being Indian enough.

But the polar opposite – rejecting anything traditional in Native art as un-original – subsequently became fashionable, again by opinion setters and collectors from the east. At a national conference in 1959, funded by the Rockfellers among others, art critics argued that a dedicated national space for Indian artists was a great idea but that the students should be educated only in modernism. With this understanding, Eastern patrons funded a new Institute for American Indian Artists in Sante Fe. However, the first director of IAIA rejected this prescription and encouraged artists at the Institute to teach, learn and experiment in any art form and to use Native content or not as they wished (Anthes, 2006). The result is 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.

Markets and demand play important roles, past and present. Most Native artists do not live in communities where tribal members can afford to support their work. Historical work shows that the absence of a middle class market and wealthy patronage limited Native artists in the Northeast to low end sales of curios and souvenirs (Phillips, 1998). (Southwestern Natives also faced relatively less displacement from their lands and environments than did Indians in the East and Midwest).

The trajectory that southwestern US Native American artists travelled in forging livelihoods and experimenting with new art forms is instructive on the challenges that contemporary indigenous artists face in pursuing artistic careers. Issues of authenticity, commonly held community values, and artistic freedom of expression encumber these artists in

ways that Euro-American artists do not experience. Pressures on them come from both within and outside their own communities.

II. Hypotheses and methodology

Very little is written about contemporary US Native artists' careers and market experience. At the outset of our project, based on written research on artists' training and market experience in general (e.g. Alper et al, 1996; Alper and Wassall, 1999; Heilbrun and Gray, 1993; Jackson et al, 2003; Markusen, Gilmore et al, 2006; Markusen, Johnson et al, 2006; Markusen, 2010; Throsby, 2001; Towse, 1992), biographies of contemporary Ojibwe artists (e.g. DesJarlait, 1995; Hill, 2006; McLuhan and Hill, 1984; Morrison, 1998; Swann, 2005), and Rendon's experiences as a career Native playwright, poet and writer, we expected to find the following. That Native artists suffer high levels of self-employment, low incomes, and often rely on non-arts jobs. That explicit racism has restricted access to art training and market outlets. That the poverty of their communities restricts the home market for their work. That the larger society, its gatekeepers, and merchants under-value Native artwork. That spatial isolation, even in the city, throws up barriers to remunerative returns. That practices of non-Native funders and arts organizations, on the one hand, and tribal governments and casino managers on the other, constrain access to resources, space, and commissions. That the diminution of Native landholdings has blocked access to private and public land and makes it difficult to harvest traditional art-making materials. That the challenge of honoring tradition in artistic expression while addressing today's changing social and political circumstances complicates creative work.

While Census PUMS data can be used to explore the likely numbers of Native artists for larger geographic units, low Native populations in most regions hampers statistical reliability. In addition, many causal forces can only be explored with primary, qualitative data. We thus opted for a case study based on interviews. This choice enabled us to approach Native

artists (the labor supply side of the market) and gatekeepers who structure market demand for or offer artists support to build their careers.

Given our available resources, a Minnesota funder, and the ambition to spend time on several reservations and cities, we concentrated on Minnesota's Ojibwe artists. Minnesota hosts the United States' largest contingent of Ojibwe artists, a significant group of North American Woodland artists whose traditions are rooted in the temperate forest, lake, and river environment of the northeastern portion of North America. Many Ojibwe artists live and work in Canada, in the province to the north of Minnesota. In addition, many Dakota and other Indian artists living in Minnesota identify with their current home (and traditionally, many of them lived in the forested portions of Minnesota), while some Ojibwe artists have moved to the southwest, blending the artistic genres of that region with those from home.

Native Americans are the original inhabitants of the territory now called the State of Minnesota. The state's contemporary American Indians are members of tribes (and within them, bands) who since the incursion of Euro-American soldiers and settlers have been linked to sovereign territories called reservations under terms, often adverse, negotiated with the United States government in a long series of treaties between 1837 and 1889 (Figure 1, Giese, 1996, appended). Tribal membership is a matter of lineage but does not require residency on a reservation.

Minnesota's contemporary Native population lives and works on seven Ojibwe reservations and nearby towns, in four Dakota communities, and in the cities of Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Duluth (Figure 2; Minnesota North Star, 2006). Native presence is most prominent in the northern portion of the state, especially in those counties that host or are adjacent to the Grand Portage, Leech Lake, Red Lake, and White Earth reservations, where Native people account for more than 5% of the population (Figure 3).

More than 82,000 Native Americans reported living in Minnesota in 2000, a third of whom identified themselves as multi-racial (US Census, 2000). Ojibwe account for the largest

group, about 60% in 2000, not counting Canadian Ojibwe who live in the state (US Census, 2000). About 10% are Dakota and Lakota, and the rest come from an array of tribes, including Blackfeet, Cherokee, Iroquois, and tribes from Alaska, Canada and Latin America. The principal bands of Minnesota's Ojibwe residents have been recorded by the 2000 Census, with the largest numbers identifying as enrolled in the Red Lake, White Earth, Leech Lake, Mille Lacs, and Fond du Lac Bands, though these are complicated by the large numbers who report being enrolled in the Minnesota Chippewa tribe, an amalgam of non-adjacent bands from many reservations including White Earth and Leech Lake but not Red Lake¹ (Table 1). Many Ojibwe residents of Minnesota are enrolled in Wisconsin bands (Lac Courte Oreilles, Bad River, Red Cliff, St. Croix) and North Dakota's Turtle Mountain Band. Large numbers of Ojibwe from many bands live in the Twin Cities.

An estimated 400 to 800 Minnesota Native artists reported artwork as their major occupation in the 2005–6 American Community Survey.² Many more are doing artwork as a second job or in retirement and are not counted in these totals. As with other minority groups, Native artists are under-represented in the artistic workforce. Yet professional Ojibwe artists comprise about 1.5% of the Native workforce in Minnesota, a bit higher than the Native share of the state's workforce overall. Ojibwe writers, musicians, visual and performing artists are

¹ The Census Table on which this is based explains: "Respondents who identified themselves as American Indian or Alaska Native were asked to report their enrolled or principal tribe. Therefore, tribal data in this data product reflect the written tribal entries reported on the questionnaire. Some of the entries (for example, Iroquois, Sioux, Colorado River, and Flathead) represent nations or reservations. The information on tribe is based on self-identification and includes federally- or state-recognized tribes, as well as bands and clans." For an explanation of the concepts used in this table see "The American Indian and Alaska Native Population: 2000," U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Brief, C2KBR/01-15 at www.census.gov/population/www/cen2000/briefs.html.

² The range represents likely numbers based on a 1% sample of Minnesota residents each year averaged over two years. We pulled data from the 2005 and 2006 ACS surveys and estimated that 1.82% of artists in Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota are Native American. The estimate is 707 but because of the small sample size, could vary from as low as 400 to just over 1000. Most are writers and visual artists. The estimated total number of artists (all races) from these two ACS surveys is 38,876 for the three states, while estimated total population of Native Americans is 99,669 out of a total population of 6583000, or about 1.5%.

twice as likely to be self-employed in their artwork than artists in general. Although the Census sample is too small to map the residential locations of Native artists, we believe that these roughly reflect the distribution of the Native population as a whole. Many live on or near the state's Ojibwe reservations.

Between 1995–2000, due in part to the hope of prosperity brought by casinos, legal since 1989, and to poor employment prospects in cities, a net 10% of Minnesota's Native people reported moving from metro areas to other parts of the state (Wittstock, 2007: 21). Many artists interviewed for this study have moved back and forth between reservations and cities, including out of state and overseas. They move for education, to try out larger artistic communities and markets, to find jobs, to connect with family and kin, and to find affordable space and welcoming communities. Some are no longer living in the state but began careers and continue to exhibit or perform here. Since each Ojibwe reservation and band has a unique history and geographic orientation to larger population centers, the study explores artists' tribal affiliations and their current and past work and residential locations as aspects bearing on their work and impact.

To prepare for field research, we built an extensive matrix of Ojibwe artists in Minnesota, working through published sources, key informants and referrals. Although we could not interview anywhere near the total of identified artists, we sought to balance the set of interviewees by age, art form, career stage, market orientation, gender, and place of residence, spending time on each major Ojibwe reservation in Minnesota and in nearby towns and cities including the Twin Cities. Over two years, we interviewed, together, more than fifty Ojibwe artists in person, asking each how she/he came to be artist; what forms of training, encouragement, and mentoring they had received; what barriers they had encountered; whether they were able to make a living from their work and how; the extent to which their work reflects Native community needs and cultural practices and serves their own people; and what changes they could imagine that would substantially improve their ability to flourish as an

artist. We interviewed musicians, writers, and performing and visual artists, many of whom also worked non-arts jobs.

We also identified and interviewed individuals who had developed reputations as gatekeepers who provide Ojibwe artists with access to resources and/or space that has been important to them in their work. Some of these are members of the Native community: Native art gallery, performance space and casino managers and tribal leaders. Others head up Regional Arts Councils, serve as arts program officers for regional philanthropic foundations, run non-profit organizations with targeted programs for Native artists, host Native American art exhibits, run education programs and facilities, curate museum exhibits and collections, and program cultural space for music, drama, and spoken word presentation. We formally interviewed approximately twenty such managers and spoke informally with another dozen or so. Because the purpose of these interviews was to check artists' accounts of their experiences as well as to reveal the best in training, support and access offered to Native artists, we chose interviewees who had demonstrated a commitment to inclusiveness.

III. Findings and Implications for Livelihoods, Gifts, Resource and Space Access

All of the Ojibwe artists interviewed work at their art more than ten hours a week, market their work actively and for pay, and share it beyond their family and close friends. (Many others do creative work or consider themselves artists, musicians or writers but do not meet these criteria). In this section, we summarize our findings. Although we do not directly test our hypotheses, evidence for each is confirmed in a majority of cases. We also discovered insights we had not anticipated, including the extraordinary extent to which personal and community healing is a motivation for Native artists. In addition, since our research had policy ambitions from the outset, we include recommendations designed to improve prospects, many drawn from artist and gatekeeper insights. While Ojibwe artists share these needs with other artists, they face special challenges, including access to natural materials for working in

traditional art forms and cultural practices that make using traditional content and applying for grants traumatic for some.

A. Livelihoods: employment, self-employment, and entrepreneurship

Minnesota's Ojibwe artists are more likely to do their artwork on a self-employed basis than artists in general. Fewer of them work for commercial or non-profit employers, the legacy of poorer access to arts training, discrimination, and location far from employment centers. Some live in poverty, while others find non-arts-related day jobs—in casinos, on construction, as retail or fast food workers--to pay their bills. Some have full-time teaching positions in K–12 schools, often tribal, a few in community colleges and even fewer in universities. Two or three of those interviewed work in arts-related roles in museums or cultural centers or for tribal governments. The vast majority of artists, however, are self-employed. A very high percentage of artists interviewed would like to concentrate more on their art and make more income from it.

Several Ojibwe artists have become entrepreneurs and are now providing work and/or presentation space for other artists. Nationally-known writer Louise Erdrich's Birchbark Books in Minneapolis and Keith Secola's Wild Band are cases in point. These artist entrepreneurs have achieved visibility and good markets for their work and are able to hire and support other artists. Other Ojibwe artist entrepreneurs have a good enough day job that they can underwrite new businesses. Musician Richard Shulman holds down a job as the IT person on his reservation and in his spare time has built and manages a North Star Coffee Bar performance space on the Leech Lake reservation. Some artists travel to market work at powwows and art fairs, selling their own work as well as others.

More opportunities to work as an artist for pay would be welcomed by Ojibwe artists and would encourage more young Natives to pursue artwork as a career. Employers and nonprofit and public organizations could hire more Native artists as curators, producers,

designers, and cultural space managers—their ranks are severely under-represented in these occupations. The same is true of K-12 and college arts teaching jobs. In higher education, Native artists deserve active recruitment into graduate research and professional degree programs that would enable them to teach in universities and colleges. A Native artist roster could be created for each state that enables schools to approach them for artist-in-the-school programs.

Since Ojibwe artists are more likely to create their work outside of formal jobs than are artists in general, they face formidable challenges in making income from it. Help with the business side of art was perhaps the most often cited desire among the artists interviewed, a need compounded by poorer than average educational attainment and spatial isolation. Native artists deserve targeted business-of-art classes, preferably taught in their own communities and by Native artists. Funders and public small business and workforce development programs could train and pay Native artists to run such sessions and act as long-term mentors. States and their nonprofit arts organizations could also create a roster of working Native artists targeted to state businesses in creative industries to help them identify arts talent.

B. Training, encouragement, and mentoring

Many Ojibwe artists enjoyed the encouragement and support of parents, elders, siblings, teachers, and other role models in developing their art. Others recounted terrible stories of dismissal and discouragement, some personal, some cultural, some institutional. Many are self-educated or apprenticed to elders. A few benefited from years of high quality, Native-taught arts curricula at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe. Experience in colleges was mixed, with some encountering blatant racism or dismissal of their Native aesthetic, while others flourished. Though few have benefited from formal mentorships, tutoring and mentoring by more experienced Native artists has been critical for many, and in turn, the receiving artists mentor others. Most Ojibwe artists, especially those living and

working in more remote areas of the state, long for more opportunities to network with other artists and learn from each other.

Steps could be taken to amplify encouragement and training, crucial conditions for launching young artists. For one, educators, students and arts advocates are challenging art world practices that privilege formal Western-centric art training. Formal art training, as in other creative fields like software development, does not guarantee quality or success in the artist corp. Many self-taught artists, including Ojibwe, have created exceptional bodies of work. Yet many gatekeepers, including faculty, gallery managers, museum curators, publishers, and funders, place a premium on formal educational experiences that reproduce reigning conventions (Becker, 1982). An artist's formal education often operates as a subtle tag for distinguishing between art and craft regardless of the originality and power of the work.

Artists, patrons, customers, and gatekeepers should broaden their conceptions of the high arts to acknowledge the uniqueness and beauty of traditional and contemporary Native art forms, musical expression, writing (including in Anishinaabe), and performance. They could also signal to parents and communities that an arts career is viable and valued. Teacher training in Native literature, music, art, performance, and media should be expanded, and more college programs and scholarships expressly for Native arts students could be created.

C. Access to space, materials, equipment, resources, technology

Poverty, low earnings from artwork, absence of mentors, and isolation from markets often mean that aspiring Ojibwe artists do not have space to work, adequate materials and equipment, a financial cushion to create new work that they can then sell, or knowledge of and access to technology. Many Ojibwe artists lack good workspace, making do in their garages, kitchens, and living rooms, or writing in coffee shops. Many dream of a room of their own or a communal space to work in with others. Artists who use traditional materials like birchbark, sweetgrass, or porcupine quills face increasing difficulties procuring or buying them. Low

incomes make purchase of supplies and equipment prohibitive for some. A few established artists receive commissions, advances and grants, but generally these are not enough to support their work. Few are adept at digital technology that would help them make and market their art.

Initiatives could include re-use of under-utilized spaces for creation of artwork; developing collective work/marketing spaces for Native visual artists; amending and enforcing public land use regulations to permit gathering of Native materials; and providing multiple and larger funding pots for Native artists, including targeted funds for equipment, materials, services, skill upgrading, and travel. To improve access to grants, funders and artist service organizations could mount Native artist-led workshops for funders to review issues of aesthetic content, artistic process, and communication from a Native point of view. To improve the very low levels of internet literacy on the part of Native artists, Native-taught digital training services could be offered to artists to improve their on-line learning and marketing ability.

D. The marketing and sale of Native work

Despite lack of know-how, many Ojibwe artists are creative in their search for venues in which to present, exhibit, market, and sell their work. Performers and musicians find audiences at college campuses, clubs, and coffee shops, bookstores, powwows, and community centers, and sometimes radio and film. Visual artists exhibit and sell at powwows, art fairs, museums, galleries, and gift shops. Many market to managers of tribal buildings, hotels, and casinos, and some to non-Native commercial enterprises. However, many artists are not earning what they would like or selling all that they have created. Some are forced to sell fast at low prices just to recoup costs and put food on the table.

In contrast to the multiplicity of outlets that southwestern Indian artists have for their work, Ojibwe artists face a paucity of selling and performing venues, complicated by market failures in information and marketing. The potential constituency for Native artwork is likely

much larger than it is currently. A number of interventions and initiatives could raise the visibility of Native American artists, helping supply meet demand and expanding the numbers of artists who can live on their artwork earnings. A state or region could build a non-profit organization to market Native artists' work. The effort could include an on-line website featuring Ojibwe art and traditional crafts linked to artists' own sites. Tribes could adapt "buy local" policies for artwork in tribal buildings, including casinos, community centers, clinics, and hospitality complexes. They could also revamp participation and pricing policies for powwows, tribal events, and casino gift shops. Native and non-Native local and state agencies could commission and publicize more Native public art. More presentation space for Native music and performance could be developed, including use of tribal facilities.

E. Cultural and spiritual dimensions

A strong community orientation colors the work of many Ojibwe artists. Many do not see themselves as just individuals pursuing a career, but anchor their artwork in community cultural practice, whether urban or rural. Native values such as gift-giving, cooperating, and "not standing out" clash with Western norms of artistic aspiration and self-promotion. Artists' work is often embedded in rituals and sacred practices. Use of certain symbols and materials and the sharing of sacred cultural content beyond one's own community or within it by gender or age, is sometimes prohibited. Nevertheless, Ojibwe artists have been successful in bridging traditional with contemporary artistic forms and messages, often through sustained efforts to work within their communities, especially with elders, for understanding and permission to innovate.

Ojibwe artists' livelihoods bear the scars of the ravages of racism, dispossession of land, boarding schools, and other cultural annihilation policies, and are poor as a result. Many artists live close to or below the poverty line. Many spend time and resources supporting extended family members. Compared to artists in general, more Ojibwe artists testify to the

profound healing power of their artwork. Some Ojibwe artists feel a mission to interpret Native life and culture for a largely indifferent or even hostile Euro-American world, while others use their work to address problems within their communities that are rooted in internalized oppression, including addiction and political corruption.

Some of these burdens on Native artists are also sources of their creativity and expressiveness. Funders are beginning to use community orientation as a positive rather than disqualifying criterion for making awards--this could make a big difference. Native gatekeepers could encourage greater integration of Native artistic practice and artwork into community healing and celebration activities. Internal community debate and patience on questions of sacred content could help artists develop a strategy. Similarly, communications with elders regarding permission for younger artists to pursue the blending of traditional with modern and post-modern aesthetics would encourage the latter to pursue artistic careers.

F. Spatial isolation

The ability of Native artists to develop their work depends significantly on the physical, economic, and social character of the places where they live. The vast reach of Ojibwe reservations in Minnesota, their relative distance or proximity to large urban populations and tourists, and their unique landscapes demonstrate how places can shape the creative and financial possibilities for artists at different stages in their careers. Many prominent 20th century Ojibwe artists left their remote reservations for training, apprenticeship, and work opportunities but continued to weave tribal and environmental themes into their life-long work—Patrick DesJarlait, George Morrison (Anthes, 2006; DesJarlait, 1995; Morrison, 1998; Williams, 1975). Many of the contemporary artists interviewed have moved to large cities or nearby towns to pursue artistic training or work, resulting in experiences ranging from the dismissive to the sublime. Many move back toward their reservations as more established artists. Some have been born and raised in cities and have benefited from more abundant

resources, both within their own communities and from non-Native institutions, though racism continues to thwart full access.

Each Ojibwe reservation/band in Minnesota is distinctive, and each has its own unique history with nearby Euro-American towns. Those that have casinos better-positioned to serve broader regional audiences and tourists have a better chance of supporting their own artists. There is a wide-spread perception among rural and urban artists that adjacent towns are the most racist and resistant to including Native artists in their cultural offerings. In our larger study, we confirmed this for the town of Grand Marais, close to the Grand Portage reservation (and where all Grand Marais children go to school). Despite its long history as art colony, gallery town and folk art training ground, Grand Portage artists have little or no visibility in commercial and nonprofit spaces.

The many dozens of artists profiled here possess a remarkable store of skills and insights about their work and careers, including ways of accessing resources and markets outside of their own communities. But few find it easy to share these with their peers or learn from them. Self-education and spatial and digital distance minimizes chance encounters that forge the networks and mentorships which have proven so important to self-employed artists at large. A number of innovations and practices could raise Native artists' stature and access to support in the state and forge working relationships among them. Ongoing convenings of Native artists would be one way to increase the sharing of experiences about obstacles and what has worked and to foster durable networks. To improve visibility in local and city arts worlds, galleries and exhibitions of Native artwork could be underwritten, with a goal of mainstreaming them into the local arts infrastructure.

IV. Exceptional gatekeepers and their institutions

Many tribal and non-Native arts venues (museums, theatres, music clubs, galleries) have been inaccessible to Ojibwe artists. Interviewed artists related multiple instances of

encounters and outcomes that revealed an explicit racial bias. Among their frustrations are 1) the dismissal of traditional themes and materials as “craft,” or just the opposite, 2) a rejection of Native work that is thoroughly modernist and without Indian content. However, many artists credited certain key gatekeepers as having found creative ways of training, funding, presenting, and paying for contemporary Native work.

Among Native-controlled spaces, the Minneapolis American Indian Center hosts the Two Rivers Gallery, a first exhibition opportunity for many Native artists. The Min-No-Aya-Win clinic on the Fond du Lac reservation has for two decades bought contemporary Ojibwe artists’ work to mount on its walls, believing that art is key to healing, and simultaneously providing income and validation for artists. In its gift shop, White Earth’s Shooting Star Casino showcases work by area Native visual artists, financially supporting them and making more money than any other casino shop in the state. The Grand Portage Casino annually hosts a Native musician from the region, now internationally known, while most other casinos only headline Euro-American country music. The Hinckley Grand Casino commissioned a tribal artist to do paintings and murals for its walls and held a Native-juried competition that paid half a dozen Native artists to create artwork for every hotel room. Tribal community centers and tribal summer camps host Ojibwe artists to run art, music, craft, and spoken word workshops.

Among non-Native venues, Fargo’s The Plains Museum and University of Minnesota Duluth’s Tweed Museum are developing expertise in Woodland Indian art, mounting exhibits, occasionally purchasing work, and engaging in educational outreach. Here and there, a coffee shop, nightclub, and Minneapolis cabaret present Native musicians, dancers, and performers. Annual visual arts exhibits at University of Wisconsin Superior and jointly between Bemidji State University and Leech Lake Tribal College offer artists a chance to show their work, win awards, and network. College circuit music and poetry series have invited a few artists and

performers to exhibit and perform with compensation. These are exceptional cases. They could be role models for others.

Some funders, public and non-profit, express concern about the low levels of Native artist application and awards. Two of the state's eleven regional arts councils—Arrowhead and Region 2 (Bemidji)—have created Native-tailored small grant programs, while another, the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council, explicitly asks artists to identify the community they are addressing, rewarding rather than punishing community orientation. A few Ojibwe artists have competed for and won substantial one-shot fellowships from Minnesota-based Jerome, McKnight, and Bush Foundations and the Minnesota State Arts Board. Some have been supported through Foundation re-grants to organizations like the American Composers' Forum and the Loft Literary Center that provide Native-targeted resources and mentoring.

Ojibwe artists and funders alike perceive a communication gap. Many Ojibwe artists have no idea what funding resources exist. The ways that funding programs are structured often discourage submissions. Burdensome application procedures require digital technology and expertise that older artists, in particular, do not have, and that neither younger nor older artists can afford. There is the touchy matter of traditional artistic form and content versus “innovative” (and often socially detached) work. Ojibwe artists sometimes interpret a Foundation's invitation to apply for a grant as a message that “yes, you will be funded.” Turned down, these artists vowed never to apply again. A lack of trust between Native artists and funders perpetuates low application award rates.

A key insight for gatekeepers from our research is that Native-only or Native-focused programs, convenings, mentorships, curricula, and venues are often a crucial stage for an Ojibwe artist's development of skills, networks, and his or her determination to pursue artwork as a livelihood. Such “gateway” platforms should be encouraged. In addition, to ensure that artists move through these experiences and into mainstream venues and opportunities, both

tribal and non-Native, resource and space providers and managers should cultivate greater appreciation for the unique and varied facets of Native economic and cultural life.

V. Conclusions and further research

Contemporary Native art, music, performance, and literature have the potential to become an honored and distinguishing features for their regions, serving Native communities, residents, and tourists. Our field research suggests that there is quite a bit of work to do, by many parties, to improve the livelihoods of Native artists. In our policy counterparts to this research, we counsel lots of discussion, strategizing, communication, and institution-building. We suggest ways of doing productive things with the modest resources available to create and disseminate more art work. We stress the need to educate a broader public as well as gatekeepers on the values and uniqueness of Native art forms and what they offer. The full study (Rendon and Markusen, 2009) is available on our website:

<http://www.hhh.umn.edu/projects/prie>.

There is also more research to be done. Comparative work would be very welcome, especially as it might cast light on how various challenges can be overcome. Where are there better-developed and broader markets for Native work, performance, writing, music, and how did they evolve? Canadian indigenous artists have been much better treated by their governments in recent years. Australian and New Zealand Maori artists, too, have been relatively more successful in developing markets. Africa, Latin American and Asia also harbor unique artistic cultures that are under stress.

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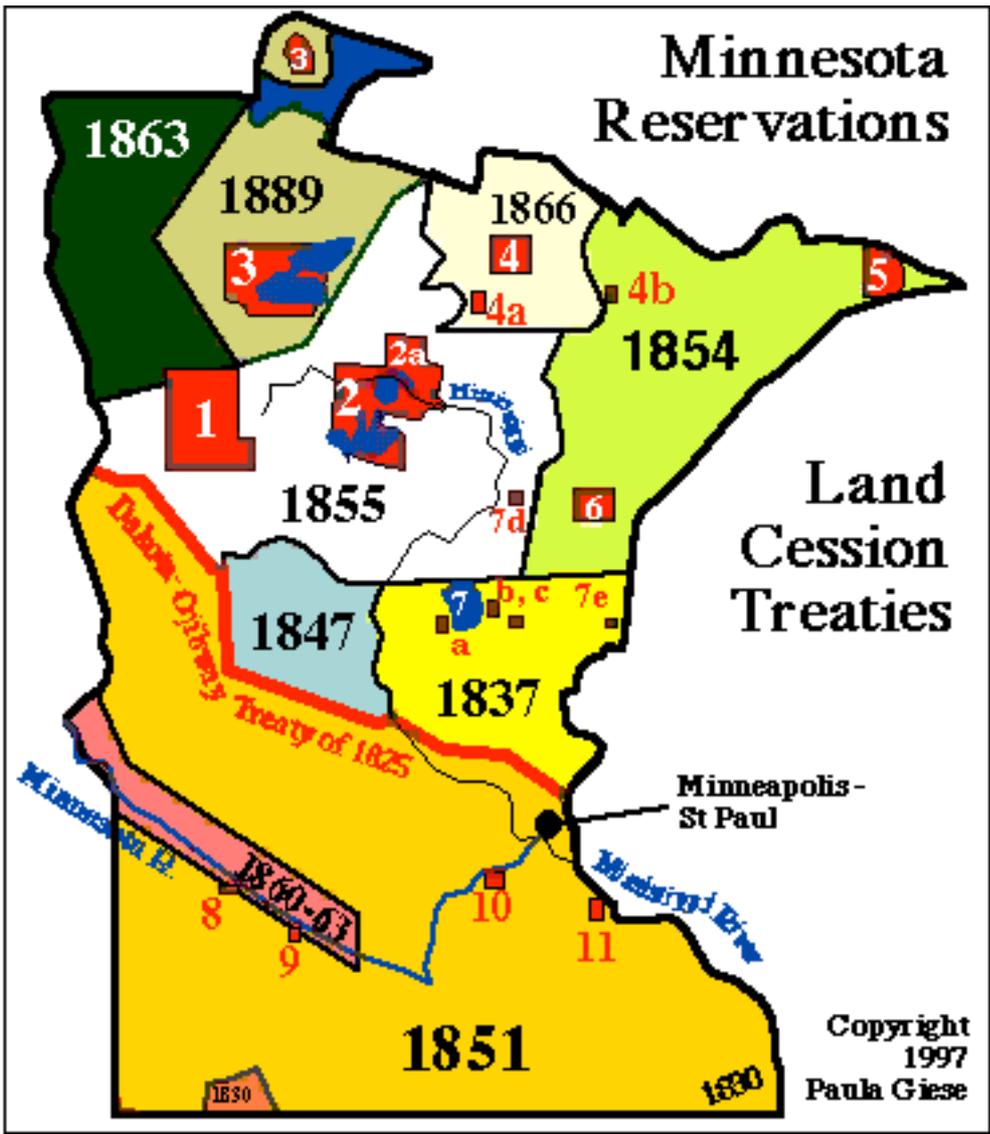


Figure 1. Native American Land Cessions, Minnesota, 1825-1889

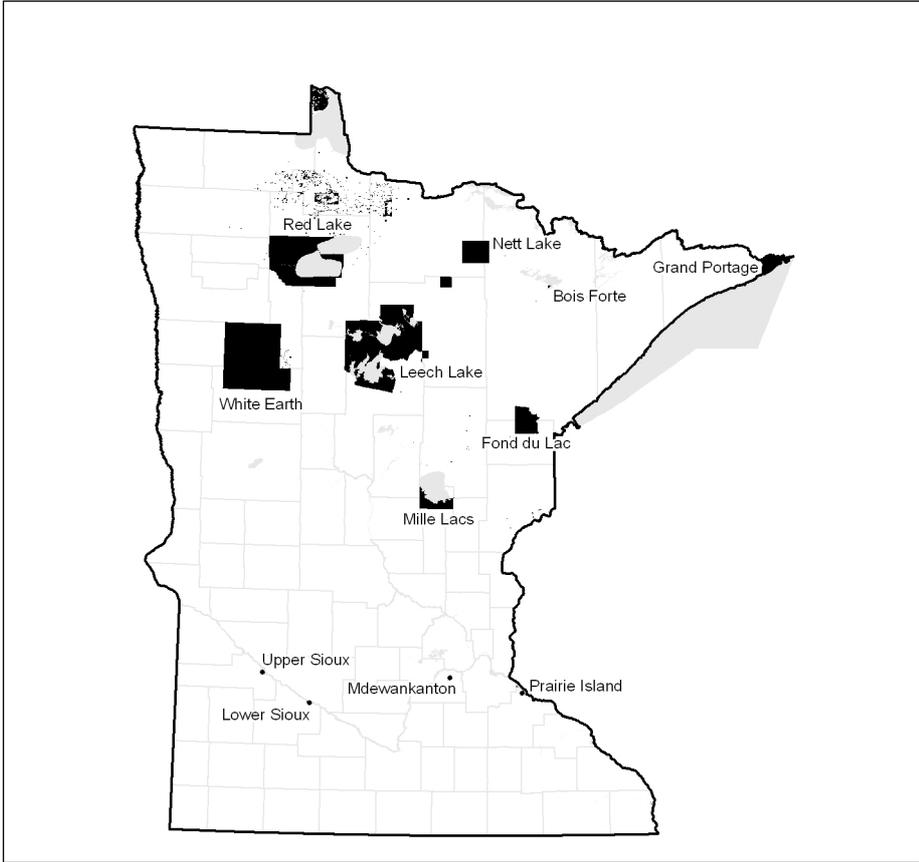
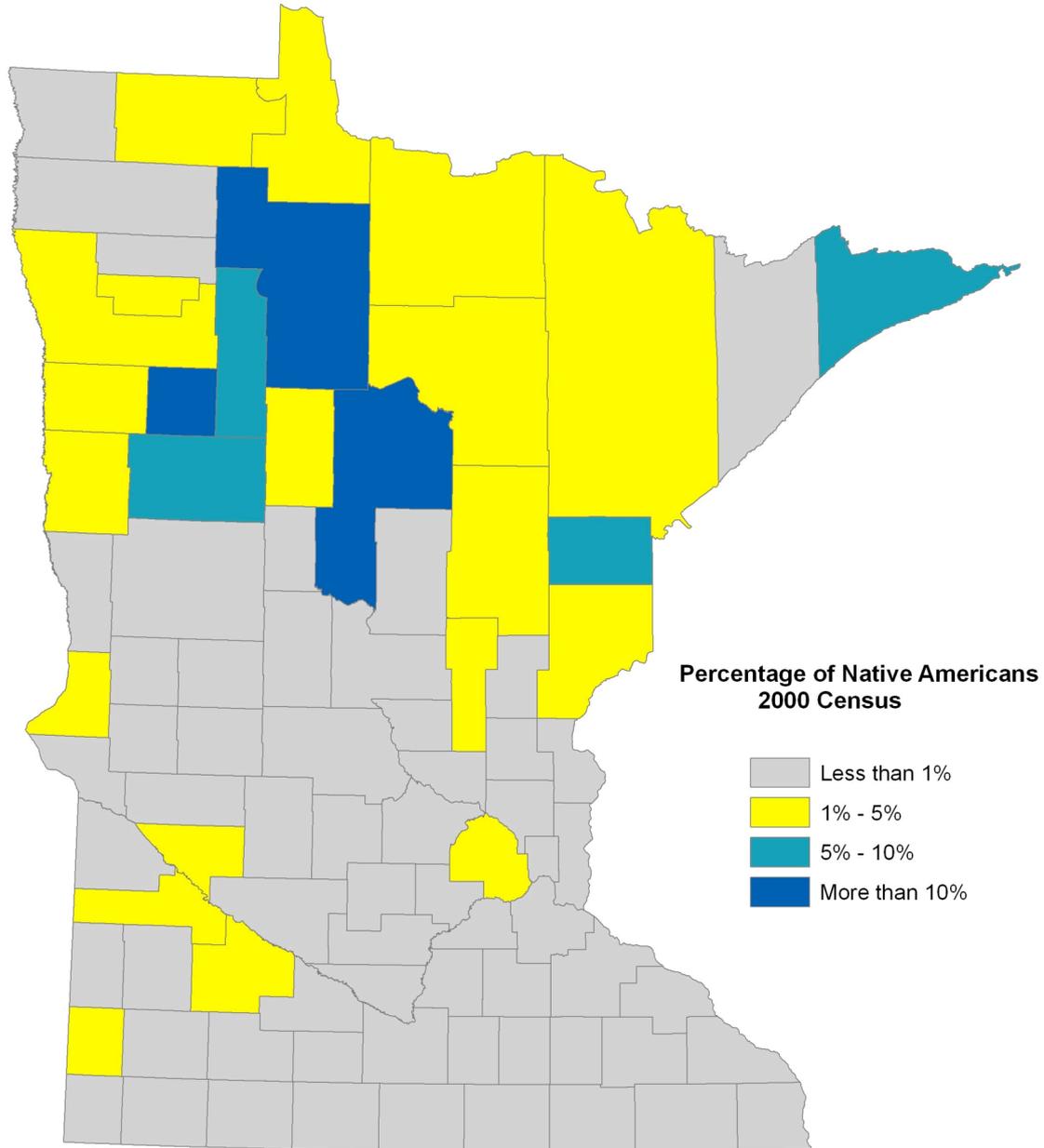


Figure 2. Contemporary Minnesota Native Reservations

Native American Population As A Percentage of Total Population



Source: Census Bureau, 2000

Figure 3. Native Population as Share of County Totals, Minnesota, 2000

Table 1. Minnesota Ojibwe Tribal Membership, Census 2000

Tribe/Band	Total
Chippewa Tribe	11777
Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians	7474
White Earth	6087
Leech Lake	4686
Mille Lacs	2097
Minnesota Chippewa	1905
Fond du Lac	1473
Bois Forte/Nett Lake Band of Chippea	1204
Turtle Mountain Band	1081
Grand Portage	480
Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa	425
Bad River Band of the Lake Superior Tribe	351
Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa	309
St. Croix Chippewa	173
Sault Ste. Marie Chippewa	145
Lake Superior	142
Other Ojibwe Tribes	181
All Chippewa (US Government term for Ojibwe)	39910

Source: US Census, *Census 2000 PHC-T-18. American Indian and Alaska Native Tribes in Minnesota: 2000*. Revised June 30, 2004. The numbers include those identifying themselves as multi-tribal and multi-racial, reporting enrolled or principal tribe.