

HYBRID OBJECTS

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
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of

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in

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to humanity,
in the hope that we can all work together, to actualize our best ideals.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge The School of Art and the Native American Studies Dept At MSU for their assistance and guidance during my studies.

I would like to thank the faculty for their patience as I worked my way through my research, and for allowing me to pursue my own path.

STATEMENT OF INDIGENEITY

My name is Casey Figueroa. I am a non-tribal person of indigenous ancestry.

My father's side of the family is from Mexico; my mother's, from Ireland.

I do not lay claim to any blood connection to any contemporary indigenous community at this time.

I claim my right to revise this statement pursuant to any change in knowledge of my family history.

I claim my connection to my indigenous ancestors, by right of blood connection, and verified by genetic testing, regardless of distance in time or place.

I claim my earned knowledge and relationships with indigenous communities and persons I have met in my travels.

I claim my earned knowledge in academia, and my lived experience, as sources of expertise and understanding.

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ABSTRACT

What follows is an exploration of praxis in Studio Art informed by research and application of methodologies and paradigms found within Indigenous culture. By examining the roles of Relationality, Sovereignty, and Positionality found in Native American Studies, and applied in conjunction with the methods found in Contemporary Art, insight can be gained into how art and culture responds to contemporary circumstances and future changes, as well as how this can provide value to the fields of Native American Studies and contemporary art.

HYBRID OBJECTS

Hybrid Objects is the culmination of the last five years of my research in Native American Studies, and Fine Arts. My research was centered around understanding paradigms and methodologies used in Native Studies, and applying those methodologies to the process of creating Art.

Hybrid Objects will examine how identity is constructed, how perspective changes with the observer, and the fragility of identity over time. The repurposing and recontextualization utilized in my work speaks to the process by which identity is continually reformed in response to environment and changes.

Hybrid Objects also speaks to the question of what praxis of Native American Methodologies can look like, and why that is of value to the conversation of Contemporary Art. By engaging with methodologies found outside the mainstream we will develop a more diverse set of tools with which to explore the questions we undertake as artists.

When I began my journey in Grad School, it began with Native American Studies. I first began my journey through online classes for the graduate certificate program offered online here at MSU. Upon my decision to pursue my Master's degree, I knew I would have to move here to Montana from Massachusetts in order to complete my NAS degree. I moved to Polson, Montana initially, where I continued to pursue my online degree before eventually moving to Bozeman. Prior to moving here, I had the opportunity to spend 6 weeks on campus here as a counselor for a Stem Camp for high school students. During that time I investigated the School of Art here, and found the

Grad program to be competitive and worth applying to. I applied, and was accepted, and made my move to Bozeman. Upon my acceptance, my initial standpoint for how I would approach my studies in the two fields was this: "Native Studies and Art are one and the same, in that Art pervades Indigenous Culture down to its very core, and is a fundamental part of expression of Indigeneity." I wanted to more closely examine the connection between these two, and how they inform each other, and how this knowledge can make me a better artist.

My thesis statement is as follows:

My Research in Native American Studies
Directly Informed
my Artistic Production, Process, and Understanding
in Studio Art.

The installation is titled Hybrid Objects to acknowledge the multiple forms of input involved in creating the work; the diverse multitude of sources from which Hybrid Objects is derived from, ranging from Indigenous paradigms, street art, cathedral stained-glass, to rave and club culture. A product of both the linear process of discovery and exploration that I have been undertaking in my graduate studies, and also the cyclical or spiral nature of knowledge; I have revisited elements and materials utilized in previous artistic productions to create these hybrid objects. The resulting objects speak to the evolving nature of identity, the multiple and changing perspectives embedded in these objects, the quantum nature of observation, and how our identity changes in response to pressures or changes in our environment.

The cyclical is well understood in Native Culture, and it's quite common to hear from Native folks that "everything in nature is round". This acknowledgment of the cyclical also speaks to the fashion in which I aim to engage with Native culture; that of a foundational manner upon which things can grow from, rather than utilization of the symbology and familiar visual forms of indigenous expression which are commonly thought to represent Native Art. I have made a deliberate choice to set aside visual signifiers of native culture in order to focus on the application of methods, rather than repetition of previous themes and symbology.

This paper will share the journey of my graduate studies as I sought to gain greater understanding of my place and obligations; it will detail the successes as well as the failures, and share some of the very difficult obstacles I had to face in order to achieve this deeper understanding.

One other consideration to be aware of when reading this paper, in Indigenous culture, it is quite common to hear a story or telling of a thing that seems to wander and be disconnected; it may seem rambling or vague; it requires a certain faith on the part of the listener or reader that the teller will have relevant or pertinent words to share, and that in the end it has importance. There is also an understanding that not everyone relates to every part, so it is important to be aware that if you do not connect, it is not something that one needs to be concerned about, you are free from a connection of this thing. All that is to say, that while some of the detours and revisitations and changes of perspective during the writing may seem out of place, it is necessary to take the entire

journey to derive full benefits of the travel. Furthermore to the point, this is another example of praxis of Indigenous Methodology, and the ways in which that is manifested. Another example of praxis is found in the positionality statement. In native communities, an introduction of oneself when beginning any new endeavour with others is the standard protocol.

I occupy the borderlands of several broad sections. My families come from Ireland, on my mother's side, and Northern Mexico, Arizona, and New Mexico on my father's side. Both sets of family groups moved to the United States in a similar time period, the early 1900's.

My mother's side, the Currans and the Laheys, moved to the Boston, Massachusetts area from county Donegal in Ireland. My father's side, The Figueroas and the Zapatas moved through the southwest from Sonora MX, until arriving in the Los Angeles area in the early 1900s.

I am unenrolled in any tribal community; I have been culturally educated primarily by members of the Mashpee Wampanoag tribe, and through my 20 years of service at the Wampanoag Homesite located at Plimoth Plantation living history museum.

My family on my father's side is representative of the effects of colonialism, as we are aware of our indigenous heritage, both through family history passed down, as well as DNA testing; but also separated from our communities and relatives, and are uncertain as to which specific tribal ancestry we come from. This is a goal of colonization, and by reclaiming that connection, colonization can be countered.

My family, like many Mexicans-Americans, are seeking to reconnect with traditional roots and reclaim their indigeneous identities.

I have worked with numerous tribal communities and populations throughout my career and in my personal life. I approach all interactions with Indigeneous communities and populations as if I am a guest in that area, and my behavior reflects upon the communities that educated me, and the individual teachers I learned from in cultural ways. I have always been treated with the same respect that I have given, and I am well-treated whenever I return to Massachusetts for powwow and to visit with folks. Any research I would conduct would most likely begin here, as this is where I have deepest connections, and is closest to what I feel comfortable claiming as my community, while understanding it is by a built relationship, not blood.

Through my cultural education, and specifically in historical methods of practice, as was utilized by the Wampanoag communities of the early 17th century, I have attained a level of proficiency and understanding of traditional techniques in various disciplines such as pottery, cordage-spinning, basketry, house construction, clothing, etc; this allows me to engage with modern materials and examine questions of identity and response through my artwork.

By applying indigenous systems to modern materials and circumstances, we can find answers that seem radically new and different, but are in fact, quite old and established to indigenous minds. Utilizing indigenous principles of balance and impact of self on place allows for a consideration in the artwork that may be difficult to explore without the understanding of indigenous ways of interacting and awareness.

I place myself along the borders of numerous spheres of existence, never being fully subsumed into one sphere or another. I am an artist, concerned with my own indigenous identity, who paints abstract works with no symbols. I am not enrolled, yet I have been highly culturally educated and allowed to speak on behalf of others. I have been given many opportunities for cultural engagement that many are not able to take advantage of. I would place myself as someone navigating the murky seas of identity in a world that has increasingly lost its definitions.

Hybrid Objects is a response to the process of placing these disparate foundational structures in proximity to each other and seeing how they can interact. Hybrid Objects also repurposes materials from previous works; this sort of quantum entanglement of intent, previous use and present expression helps to reiterate the foundational nature of the elemental interactions.

Hybrid Objects at its core speaks to the nature of identity; the fragility of the construction, the feel of imminent collapse or looseness of connection, the shifting and changing view as you make your way around the installation. This speaks to the ever shifting nature of identity and the quantum nature of its existence. The quantum nature of its existence in this case, is directly related to the viewer. The viewer determines the perspective; this is true in science experiments as well as our personal relationships. You may have your idea of your identity, but that is not necessarily how others see you. This disconnect between how we see ourselves and how others see us is reflected in current concerns over pronouns and gender.

Hybrid Objects engages with multiple aspects of how I assemble my identity. My research in NAS has affected how I see myself, in regards to what I can claim as my relationship to a recognized Indigenous community. With the many and recurring claims of fraudulency that occur in relation to cultural connection and spurious (or not) claims to connection, and post my understanding and application of positionality, it has become clear that I cannot claim to be Apache or Zapotec of any of these cultures which I had been told by my relatives that we have that in our ancestral blood. While I may have indigenous ancestry, I have no connection to that ancestry in my life. I do not live in the area, I do not speak the language, and no one who is from the area today would know me, if I even knew exactly what area that is today.

I can lay claim to my earned relationships, my cultural education, and the close relationship with the Mashpee and Aquinnah Wampanoag communities, as well as all other indigenous people I have met and interacted with along the way.

The end result of this sort of bifurcated identity, with a split between blood relationships and earned relationships, is that it is understood within Indian Country, but it depends on the personal relationships as to how claims of fraud will be addressed.

Hybrid Objects provides me a way to make sense of this morass of clashing and contradictory sentiments. It also provides me with a more nuanced way of understanding myself, and how I can make use of the sum of myself; all my experiences and knowledge and ideas to create in a way that is a more honest expression of my self. No longer bound by responding to expectations, it gives me the room to make use

of these elements of exploration in a less determined manner, and in a more responsive fashion to the circumstances.

Hybrid Objects also speaks to the place of “Quantum” in my experience. Quantum is often thought of as related to science, and the realm of the very small, or the realm of probability and possibility. In Native American Studies and culture the word “Quantum” refers to something quite different; it refers to the idea of “Blood Quantum”, which is a measure of purity of Native Blood as measured by intermarriage with non-native partners. The implication is that this math of dilution over time would lead to the extinction of the Native populations. A fundamentally racist worldview, and flawed in its reasoning for multiple reasons, Blood Quantum still nonetheless drives many cultural relationships and interactions with the federal gov’t today.

So while there seems to be a wide chasm in how these things are connected, upon closer examination what the quantum represents in this case is The Observer. In both blood quantum, and quantum physics, the observer has an impact beyond merely seeing an action; they often can change the results of the experiment by the action of their observation. In blood quantum, the observer is the federal government; depending on how you look you may be treated differently. Census takers in the past were often the ones dictating how someone would be classified, racially.

Hybrid Objects speaks to the role of the observer in the work. As one moves around the structure, the perspectives change, the lights are blocked or bring light into new angles and spaces, the lines blend into each other or pop out unexpectedly.

It also speaks to the fragility or inherent instability of identity. We are never all one thing at all times. We shift and flow through responses to our environment, the people we engage with, the troubles we encounter. Hybrid Objects addresses this through the feeling of precariousness and potential collapse encoded within the construction of the installation.

The form that Hybrid Objects takes is built upon my previous experimentation with the materials, and incorporating my acquired knowledge to create a work that speaks to my experience. Constructed from repurposed materials from previous series of works, Hybrid Objects is a recontextualization of materials and ideas. Built in a modular approach, with individual pieces constructed of a frame made from PVC pipes, which are then bent, folded or molded into various shapes. Echoing the motions and movements of Street Art, the white PVC acts as an outline to the clear, marine-grade vinyl used as the canvas. Painted using acrylic paint, in brash, vibrant colors, these vinyl canvasses, with an eye toward the play of translucency and opacity; the movement of light and shadow interacts to fill the gallery space, while the washes of color upon the environment created by projected light constantly shift and change in response to the audience and the light. The shifting light activates the color and creates an immersive and engaged space that envelops the audience within it.

Color Lodge presented a space that allowed the audience to step within a proscribed space. Hybrid Objects, on the other hand, does not present a proscribed space, but rather fills the location in which it is housed. An in-the-round installation, Hybrid Objects fills the space not only through large modular pieces, connected

together to create a cohesive whole, but also through the use of projected light. By passing light through the painted vinyl, color, shadows, and light reach outward from the object and engage the white walls of the gallery to create an immersive and expansive object.

The individual parts of this modular work range up to 12 feet in height down to about 3 feet. In total, the piece will occupy a space about 12 feet in height, 20 feet in length and 15 feet in depth.

Hybrid Objects is designed to be suspended from the ceiling; below the large modular pieces, set on the floor, are a number of small lego works. Reminiscent of stalagmites, or possibly possessing a totemic quality, these small works will activate the tension of the space between; the large modular pieces hover directly above the small lego works occupying the foundation, pressing down and seeming to overwhelm. This tension speaks to the tension found with expectations of identity and the desire to live one's life according to one's own terms.

Hybrid Objects has a quality of fragility or potential destruction. The tension found between the objects and the feeling of impending collapse brought on by the seemingly weakly connected parts, speaks to the inherent fragility of identity. Identity may seem strong and well-connected, but upon closer examination, and through changing observers, that identity can be seen to be a constructed entity, faced with collapse at any moment. By allowing this quality to manifest in the construction of Hybrid Objects, I am able to examine the fragility of my own identity, and what I have done to construct my self for the world.

Hybrid Objects engages with the idea of temporality, and in particular the ways in which identity changes over time, and as it responds to one's environment, one's choices, and obstacles. This is reflected in the act of livestreaming the installation. By presenting the process of the work, the audience can gain insight into the decision-making process; how an artist responds to adversity and the unforeseen, as well as how planning and preparation plays into the creation of an art object or event. This livestream will not be recorded as a whole, echoing the impermanence of the event in the space it will occupy, while speaking to the impact it can have by those who are able to witness it. This witnessing connects to the idea of the observer and perspective, as the temporal viewing will change the perspective of the viewer as much as the spatial viewing. Someone watching solely at the beginning of the installation will have a much different experience of the space than someone who views it a later time during the installation. Documentation will be done through the use of digital camera, echoing the performative works of postmodern forms of artistic expression, and the use of photographs as the only documentary evidence of these ephemeral and temporal events.

Hybrid Objects is the culmination of my research in Native American Studies and the praxis in Studio Arts. The evolution of my understanding of my relationship to indigeneity was directly impacted by my research, and that was made evident in my evolution of artistic expression through my studies.

Hybrid Objects presents the linear progression of my experience and subsequent artistic inquiries; it also speaks to the spiral quality of learning and artistic progress.

Cycling back to previous materials and series allows for a reconsideration of the relationship to those objects as objects, but also for the ideals which helped to inform their creation. Being able to reflect on previous work, and how it is incorporated in my present work is important to speaking to the process-oriented explorations which are one of the foundational elements found in my work. It also speaks to the evolved perspectives found in deeper exploration of methodologies utilized. Applied practice of these methodologies in a cross-academic setting creates interesting tensions and intersections of expression, which is reflected in the revisioned utilization of the materials and objects created previously.

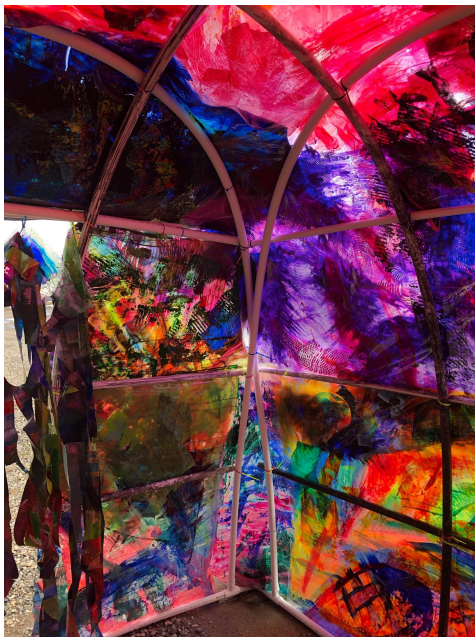
While my journey here was certainly not easy, the knowledge I have gained, and the renewed sense of my relationship to indigeneity, will be indispensable to my continued practice and evolution as an artist.

I put forward in the book that: 1. The shared aspect of an Indigenous ontology and epistemology is relationality (relationships do not merely shape reality, they *are* reality). The shared aspect of an Indigenous axiology and methodology is accountability to relationships. 2. The shared aspects of relationality and relational accountability can be put into practice through choice of research topic, methods of data collection, form of analysis and presentation of information. (Wilson pg. 7)

Variables Interacting in Color Lodge

1. Stained Glass Windows
2. Indigenous Designed Architecture
3. Contemporary Materials
4. Abstract painting

The first project I focused on, and the focus of my first year in the MFA program, was a piece called “Color Lodge”, which had been in my head for at least ten years. Borne out of my experiences with Plimoth Plantation, and my work experience on the Wampanoag Homesite, it was an attempt at an application of Indigenous Design principles, derived from the summer houses of the Wampanoag people of southeastern Massachusetts, and which were of the construction in use during the 1600’s, which was the time period we depicted at the homesite. Based on this design of a cedar-sapling based frame, covered by multiple reed mats, I sought to create a version making use of contemporary construction materials, such as one can find at Home Depot.



Interior View, Color Lodge

Vinyl, PVC, Acrylic paint



Interior View, Wetu at Plimoth Plantation

Cedar saplings, Poplar Bark

The process of creating Color Lodge, coupled with my research in Native American Studies, began my reconsideration of my relationship to indigeneity. Relationality deals with relationships, obligations and responsibilities. Through the course of my work questions began to arise, both from internal and external sources. The first inkling of questions having to do with obligations began to arise; questions having to do with my right to make use of knowledge I had earned through my work at Plimoth Plantation, and questions having to do with my responsibility of the materials I was using.

Relationality makes us question and affirm our relationships with not only each other, but also our environment, our impact on the future and our responsibility to tradition.

Through the process of creating this structure, and as I began to apply my research in Native Studies, I began to question my rights to this expression. Questions began to arise in my consciousness concerning what rights I had to engage with these cultural aspects in this manner. Does knowledge alone give one the right to make use of that knowledge in any way one chooses? And this is where a fundamental difference between the understanding of art and its accompanying qualities begins to show itself, if only in the smallest hints. Artists who do not operate in a “cultural manner” are often given to understand that there is freedom to make use of, appropriate, twist, reimagine, rename, and many other processes in any fashion they so desire. We are constantly asked, “what are our inspirations? What are our influences?” As I continued to move forward, this question of “what right do I have to make use of these things?” became

more and more pressing. The questions spurred by completion of Color Lodge directly confronted my accrual of knowledge, and how my standpoint affected my place.

“If I am not Wampanoag, even though I have been educated by Wampanoag people, and accepted into their community, do I have any right to transform and translate this information into another form?”

“It’s collective, it’s a group, it’s a community. And I think that’s the basis for relationality. That is, it’s built upon the interconnections, the interrelationships, and that binds the group...but it’s more than human relationships. And maybe the basis of that relationship among Indigenous people is the land. It’s our relationship to the land. There’s a spiritual connection to the land. So it’s all of those things.” (Wilson pg 80)

SOVEREIGNTY AND INDIGENOUS FUTURISM

The future imaginary and its catalogue of science fictive imageries affords Indigenous artists a creative space to respond to the dystopian now ... Indigenous artists have no problem portraying possible undesirable futures wherein colonial capitalist greed has resulted in the subjugation of life within all creation, because these narratives are evocative of our known realities. ... we are living in a dystopian settler-occupied oligarchy fueled by resource extraction and environmental contamination, completely alternative to our traditional ways of being and knowing. - Lindsay Nixon

(Frick pg 110)

Variables interacting in Indigenous Futurism

1. Native-Directed Future
2. Science Fiction
3. Tradition
4. Materials Re-examined

After the completion of Color Lodge, I was nervous about how to move forward in my artistic studies; I did not have any specific projects I was seeking to explore. This is in contrast to my usual state of mind, in which new ideas and projects are constantly appearing in my brain. My studies in NAS were becoming more rigorous, and I began to explore the idea of a strict adherence to the tenets of Indigenous Research Methodology. I was not sure how applying the standards rigorously would affect my understanding and production in my artwork.

Indigenous Futurism appeared on my radar, and seemed to offer a lot of very strong possibilities for engaging with big topics.

Indigenous Futurism: So Just What Exactly is it?

“Dr. Grace Dillon (Anishinaabe), inspired by Afro-futurists, coined the term Indigenous Futurisms. Indigenous Futurisms is a term meant to encourage Native, First Nations, and other Indigenous authors and creators to speak back to the colonial tropes of science fiction—those that celebrate the rugged individual, the conquest of foreign worlds, the taming of the final frontier. Indigenous Futurism asks us to reject these colonial ideas and instead re-imagine space, both outer and inner, from another perspective. One that makes room for stories that celebrate relationship and connection to community, coexistence, and sharing of land and technology, the honoring of caretakers and protectors.”

(<https://uncannymagazine.com/article/postcards-from-the-apocalypse/>)

Indigenous Futurism derives from Afrofuturism, and from sci-fi literature, which envisions alternative futures directed by non-western cultures. Indigenous Futurism is a still developing form of communication, and so the definitions can change according to the needs of the artists engaging with the question of the future of indigeneity. By manifesting physical expressions of traditional culture, utilizing modern materials and techniques, and placed within the public sphere, the reach of indigenous culture becomes more tangible and undeniable. By presenting these questions to the public, those that feel the draw and compulsion to take responsibility to their place will feel empowered by the visible presence of a new perspective on how to engage.

My own work in Indigenous Futurism focused primarily on a piece called “Stone Bear”. Stone Bear came about due to my own experience working with soapstone in my capacity at Plimoth Plantation; Soapstone was a common material used by the Wampanoag in the 1600’s.



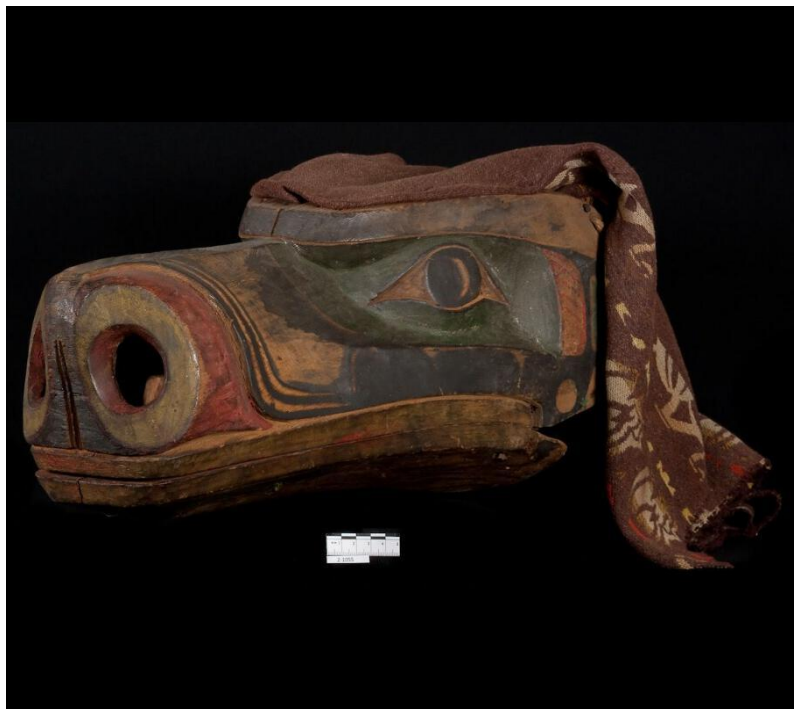
Stone Bear- Soapstone, Dry-Pigment based ink 22"x 20"x8", 60 lbs

At the time it was primarily found in use of tobacco pipes and jewelry, previous eras it had been used to make large cooking vessels prior to the use of pottery.

I was offered a large, 70 or 80 lb chunk of soapstone and I jumped at this opportunity to work on a larger scale, and utilize new techniques and tools for the creation of this work. As I worked on Stone Bear, I was considering how this sort of object might play a role in some imagined future; I called this a “Relic from the Future”. By seeking to understand how things might unfold through the future, we see our connections to the past and to the future. Stone Bear is best understood; if one believes that the understanding of the state of the artist’s mind is important to one’s understanding of the creation of the object; as an object, unearthed by archeologists from the year 10,000, made by someone in the year 3000. In other words, a future relic.



Charging Bear Stone Pipe Dakota 1800's



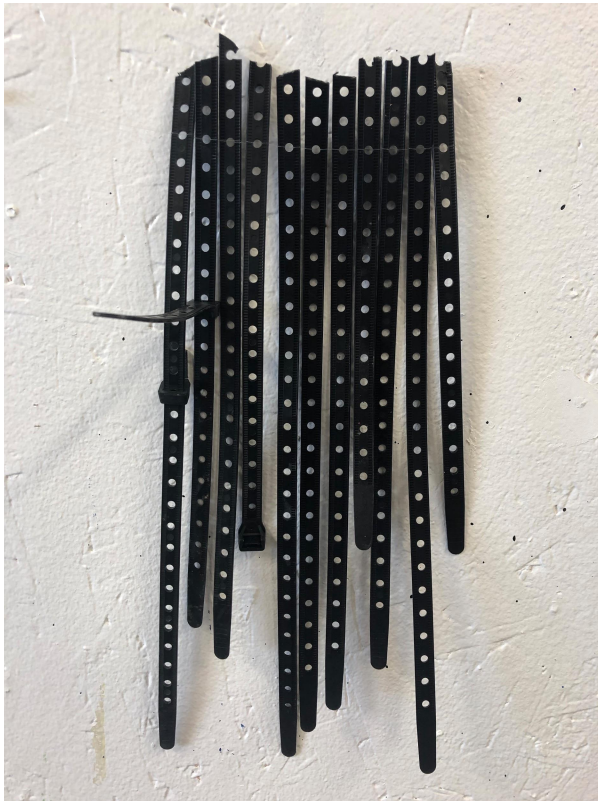
Grizzly Bear mask, Northwest coast, 1860's

The reason for undertaking this sort of mental exercise in the creation of this work was to seek an understanding of what a Native-Directed future could mean. How would it affect art creation? What may be the circumstances of Earth in the year 3000? If indigenous People live on other planets, how do they maintain their traditional connections? How long until the new planet becomes the ancestral home?

In addition to Stone Bear, other objects explored the idea of the future through the use of materials. One of the concerns that arose in Color Lodge was the use of plastic and its effect on the environment which led me to examine the ramifications of the use of traditional materials in a changing environment. What happens to traditional materials and the accompanying techniques when climate change affects an area, causing those materials which have been utilized for generations to no longer be available? Is there not some imperative to save traditional techniques by making use of

new materials?

*Broken Zip ties and fishing line,
utilizing splint basketry techniques*



Shan Goshorn, Hearts of Our Women

Indigenous Futurism also speaks about sovereignty, and the right of Indigenous communities to self-determine their own governance. This avenue of expression, coupled with the forward-looking perspective built into Indigenous Futurisms, presents an opportunity to not just react to current circumstances, but to envision a different path that honors the importance of balance over growth, of connection over consumption.

Again, here we see a split with my aims and goals, and with the facts on the ground. Sovereignty, in the case of Tribal Nations, refers specifically to the individual groups that are recognized by the colonial governments. The sovereignty of tribal governments also extends to enrollment of tribal citizens. I am not an enrolled citizen of any Tribal entity.

What this means, if I am to apply rigorously the tenets of Native American Studies, is that due to my non-enrolled status, is that I am left on the outside looking in, and if I were to pursue Indigenous Futurism, I would likely be called out as fraudulent. My work in Native Studies is seeming to push me further and further to the outside of the continuum of indigeneity, and this impacts the ways in which I can engage with Indigenous Art.

POSITIONALITY AND INDIGENOUS ABSTRACTION

Source: <https://sk.sagepub.com/reference/geography/n913.xml>

Positionality is the notion that personal values, views, and location in time and space influence how one understands the world. In this context, gender, race, class, and other aspects of identities are indicators of social and spatial positions and are not fixed, given qualities. Positions act on the knowledge a person has about things, both material and abstract. Consequently, knowledge is the product of a specific position that reflects particular places and spaces. Issues of positionality challenge the notions of value-free research that have dismissed human subjectivity from the processes that generate knowledge and identities. Consequently, it is essential to take into account personal positions before engaging in research, especially qualitative research.

Source: Thompson, Sherwood. [*Encyclopedia of Diversity and Social Justice*](#). Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. Kindle Edition, p. 568.

Positionality is a critical understanding of the role a scholar's background and current (socially constructed and perceived) position in the world plays in the production of academic knowledge, particularly in qualitative research in the social sciences. Multiple epistemologies—ways of knowing or understanding the

world—exist as researchers come from varied vantage points. Undermining positivist constructions of knowledge, the theoretical construct of positionality refutes dominant notions of objectivity in the academy. Instead, it highlights that the way an academician is situated in space and time fosters a specific understanding of social reality. Positionality provides a space to critically interrogate the researcher's motivations, assumptions, and decisions at each and every stage of the research process.

Positionality is a vital parameter of Native Studies; for myself it was the most personally difficult for me to face, and contributed most directly to my current understanding of my relationship to indigeneity, as well as having a direct and powerful impact on how I approach my art now. Positionality in Native Studies made me directly confront and explicate exactly my place in relationship to Indigenous Culture. There are multiple aspects of positionality, which are all based on identity in relationship to various facets of humanity. The most immediate relationships in indigeneity all relate to one's relationship to a community, and by extension, to a specific place. The first relationship, would of course be immediate blood family. Then, the larger community, and then the place in which the community was located.

My relationship to indigeneity was already on uncertain terms before I began my research in positionality. As an abstract painter, I had been eliminating much of the usual subject matter related to "Indigenous Art" for much of my previous work.

In addition, my extensive time spent working at Plimoth Plantation taught me about the importance of acknowledging cultural ownership of symbols and the problems of cultural appropriation. As a legal matter, I cannot call my work “Native American Art”, due to the Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990.

Bring into the equation the subject of my abstract paintings, which are often technical studies, or materials studies, where the subject is the paint and the materials themselves, imagery is non-existent, and the palettes are hyper-modern, exotic mediums and paints, and it becomes ever more difficult to find something that would qualify my work as “Indigenous Art”.

That is, if you only look at the surface. The conscious removal of imagery and symbolism associated with Indigenous Art allows me the freedom to explore not *what* is presented, but rather *how* it was created. My research in positionality would seem to indicate that I am in a non-place of non-identity presently, a liminal space, it could be said. But this does not count the many years of cultural education I received by tribal members across the United States.

The other question of my studies here at MSU, in addition to the question of “How will my research in Native American Studies affect my art process and production?”, is the question of “What does it mean to teach in an indigenous way?”. I don’t just mean, how do you teach Native Studies, but rather, are there fundamental ways of communicating information for the sake of building community that are inherent in Indigenous Societies, and how would that be used to teach, say, algebra? Or, foundation drawing?

Are there specific qualities that are valued in Native societies that can offer an alternative form of pedagogy for subjects that are not inherently considered to be in the realm of Indigeneity?

When I apply that thinking to my own art, and especially in the algorithmic and generative process of creating evolution of iterations, utilizing parameters, such as “cooperative” or “observation” we begin to see a way that these foundational indigenous principles can be applied broadly into our education system for another way of engaging with art.

By utilizing these principles as a seed, rather than a suit, art can be created that can be understood as springing forth from the original source, while occupying its own space as an individual object. The utilization of foundational design principles, or ways of doing that are valued within indigeneous societies, can provide an avenue of inquiry that allows for examination of indigeneous issues that arise from application of those principles. Rather than focusing on the appearance or surface qualities of art, “the suit” as it were, using these principles as “the seed” from which art is allowed to unfold in an organic fashion speaks to a celebration of indigeneity that is not constrained to repeating what has been done before. It allows for the maintenance of tradition, while also allowing those traditions to expand and respond to the living experience of the times they occupy.

It also gets to some of the deeper issues of cultural engagement and cross-cultural communication. By presenting an alternative set of design parameters, we can help to design a different society. By bringing more Native Parameters into the cultural process, it will be easier to achieve some of the big cultural changes we need to effect.

Art, as always, leads the way and shows us possible futures, and allows us to imagine our existence into manifestation. By making use of these parameters and ways of thinking in my own work, I can show how indigeneity can be engaged with in such a way as to honor the source while evolving new forms into their own entity.

As I continued my research in Native American Studies, it became more obvious that placing myself within the Indigenous Art Sphere was going to be problematic for my continued art production. Numerous factors contributed to this realization and acceptance. If I were to follow through and apply the research I have done to my practice, and especially to apply these standards in an academically rigorous fashion, for the purpose of making the research I have done carry some weight, regardless of what that outcome may be for myself personally, then to apply these standards means I must respect the community's definitions for indigeneity. That means according to the self-defined parameters of Indigenous Communities, I cannot call myself an Indigenous Artist. The reality of all this though, is that the people in the communities who I have developed my relationships over time, have no hesitation in calling me indigenous. They understand and accept the ramifications of colonialism, and how it affects those

populations over time. So there is the paper reality, which prevents me from accessing many aspects of contemporary tribal life experience, and there is the lived existence of earned cultural identity. This is earned by time and experiences with tribal communities.

You may have noticed that I have not shared any images of Indigenous Abstraction. This is due to several factors. Firstly, it was vital to explore what positionality means, and the role it plays in Native Studies, and Indigenous Research Methodology. By underlining the importance of respecting positionality, through a rigorous adherence to a strict interpretation of positionality, I am not even free to engage with certain topics; this highlights the confusing and contradictory nature of the Contemporary Indigenous Art World. The Contemporary Indigenous Art World is bounded on two sides; the paper side of federal regulations and the lived side of personal experience. These two sides, when they intersect, create difficult and confusing territory to navigate. There is no one standard of how any artist will be received at any time, and the same artist may be celebrated and then turned around and be denigrated. Jimmie Durham is just one example, and there are countless others who have been said to be engaging in ethnic fraud.

There are extensive articles written on cultural appropriation, as well as exposing those who are said to have staked a false claim to heritage. Elizabeth Warren is a well-known example of someone that has an indigenous ancestor, but is not considered to be Native or of a indigenous community. This is a common occurrence in the Native art world, with identities and right-to-claim being questioned constantly.

So because of my positionality, it became more clear to me that I do not have the right to make determinations of what Indigenous Abstraction may be. More specifically, I was not in a position to determine aesthetics of Indigenous Abstraction.

This ties back into my conclusions from my previous applied research, if it is to be applied in a rigorous fashion; which is that while these are worthwhile topics to explore from an artistic standpoint, I cannot explore these topics due to my positionality, as I am unable to make a determination about what forms these subjects should take.

While certainly there is discussion to be had about how rigorous these parameters need to be applied, seeing as an artist is often thought to have free reign and is not bound by rules and strictures, if I am to honor the spirit of Native American Studies, and what that is hoping to achieve, then I must honor the standards imposed by the Native World, rather than the art world, in my art practice.

Now this is not to say that I am eternally bound to these principles. My research showed me that I am most effective with my art production when I am not entirely constrained by parameters imposed upon me, by something I am not protected by, but am obligated to. In other words, by no longer placing myself within an art sphere that was not a good fit for my inquiries and explorations, I can make use of the knowledge I have earned, while also acknowledging the whole of my existence.

By seeking to place my cultural education as a foundation upon which to build my art, alongside the other aspects of existence that make up who I am, I now have much greater latitude in how I approach my art and practice. Hybrid Objects directly arose

from the action of synthesizing my research over the last 5 years here in Grad school and expressing the hybrid nature of my own self.

THE PRAXIS OF INDIGENOUS PARADIGMS

Hybrid Objects is the culmination of five years of graduate research, undertaken with the purpose of gaining a deep understanding of what it means to be indigenous, my relationship with indigeneity, what native methodologies consist of, and how to put into action those paradigms and methodologies in the creation and production of my studio art.

As I have shown in this paper, and in the construction of the installation of Hybrid Objects, Native Methodologies have a place in the world of Contemporary Art and they can be engaged with in such a way as to honor tradition while still allowing for critical response. The intersection of Contemporary Art and Native Paradigms opens the space for multiple important lines of inquiry investigating questions of obligations, relationship, and perspective.

Through praxis of native methodologies in my own studio art production, I have come to a better understanding of the potential and power inherent in Native forms of artistic expression, while also acknowledging my own position and how that affects my artistic process.

Hybrid Objects represents identity with its constructed nature that changes with the observer and perspective, and communicates the fragility of that identity through tension and weakness.

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HYBRID OBJECTS DOCUMENTATION



Installation view front, Hybrid Objects
PVC, painted Vinyl, LEDs, Cellophane, craft paper



Installation View left side, Hybrid Objects



Installation View Right Side, Hybrid Objects



Installation View from front gallery room, Hybrid Objects
On pedestals; acrylic and dry media on cellophane, water, acrylic containers



Installation view, front room
Painted vinyl on floor, legos, projector
Wall pieces, bamboo skewers, acetate sheets, paper



Color cubes, wall pieces, painted vinyl wall hangings, vinyl floor pieces with lego works
Projection and digital artwork on back wall



Craft paper and tacks on rear wall of large room with vinyl modular pieces on floor



Interior view of Hybrid Objects



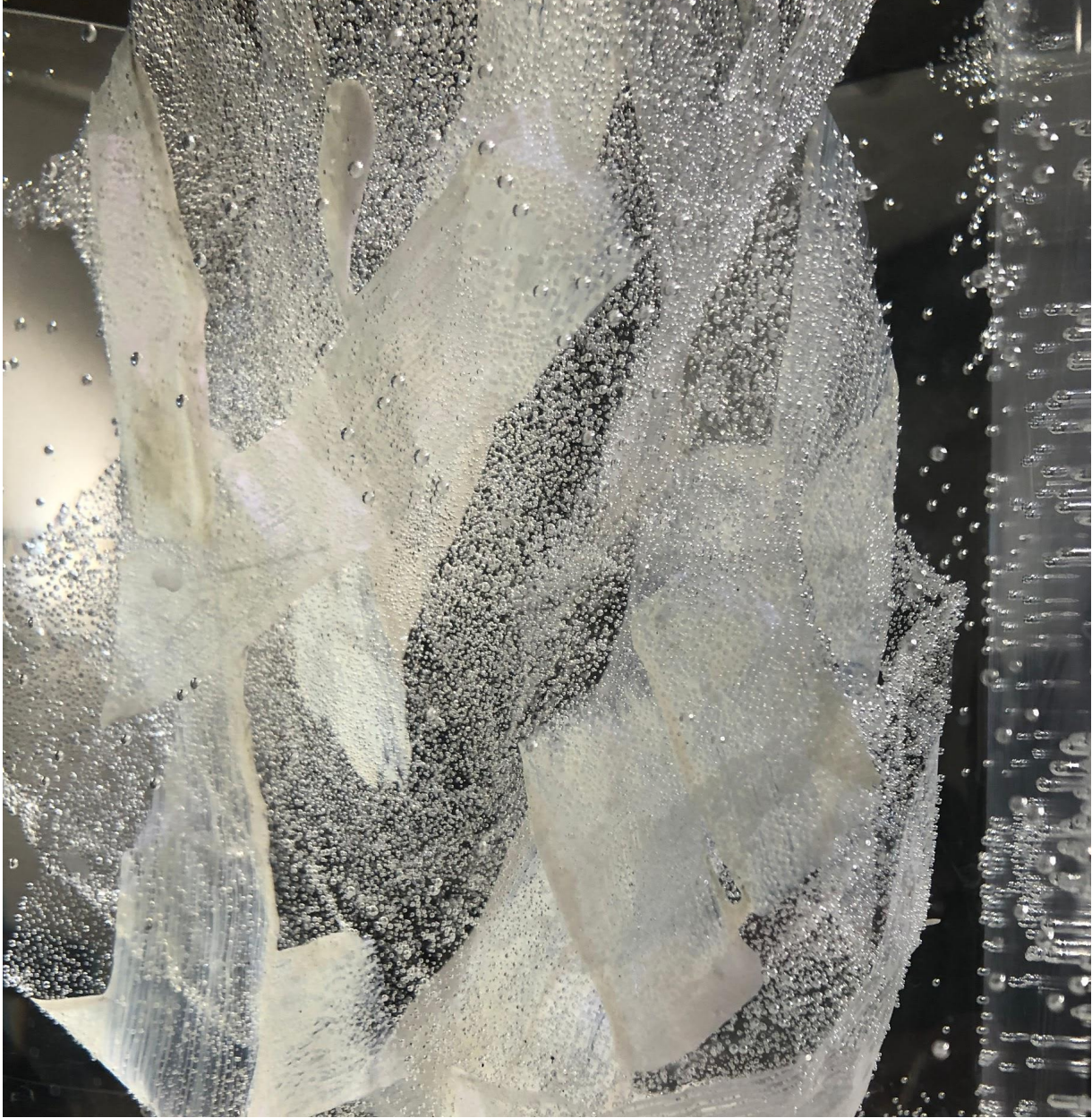
Vinyl floor piece with lego works



Color Cube, acrylic container, cellophane with acrylic paint, water



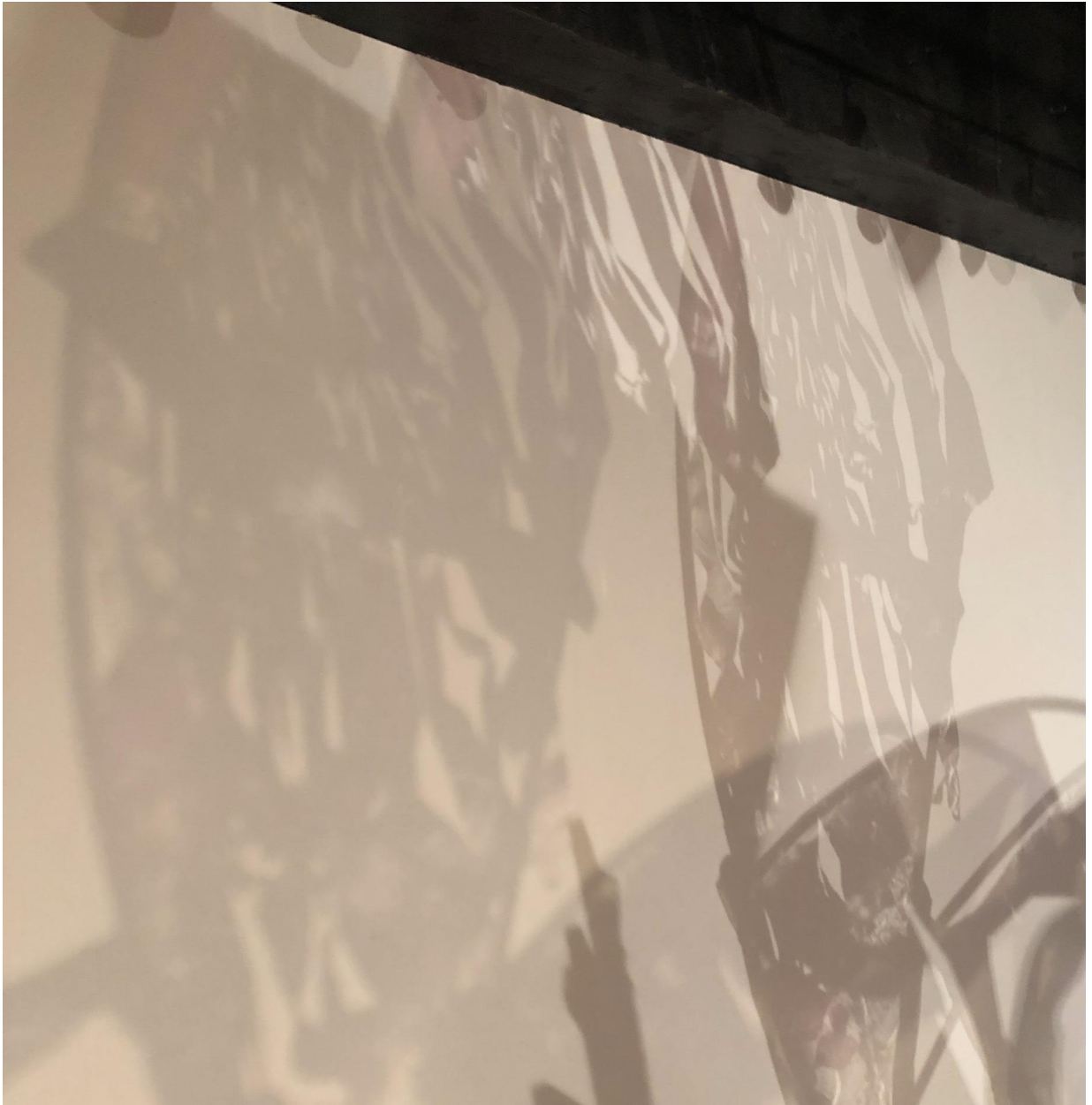
Color Cube, acrylic container, cellophane with acrylic paint, water



Color Cube closeup



Hybrid Objects installation



Shadows on left wall created by Hybrid Object installation



Shadows on right wall



Interior shot of Hybrid Objects



Vinyl floor installation with lego works



Vinyl floor piece with legos



Interior view of Hybrid Objects



Interior view from right

Hybrid Objects

Casey Figueroa