Cultural Protocol vs. Academic Privilege: researching Indigenous communities

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Researching Native American Art & Cultures
Indigenous Art & Culture

Since pre-contact, Indigenous people have had well-developed knowledge systems:

- tribal ontology,
- cosmology,
- philosophy,
- traditional environmental knowledge, and
- personal and tribal history.
Early Research: Ethnography

Ethnography studies cultures as a human experience and construction, including the arts by examining

- materials
- production protocol
- methods
- ritual uses
Contemporary Research: Native American Art History

Art History: emerges out of ethnography in late 19th century, examining artists and the arts through

- Culture
- materials
- styles/schools
- periods
- themes
- collections
Literature Review: Native American Art History

Indigenous perspective is only represented as “subjects” of research and often as scrutinized source, largely participatory research by non-Native researchers as “authorities”

- early research is ethnographic (Boas, 1938; Boas, 1940; Kubler, 1962)
- methodologies largely unchanged until 1992 [Columbus Quincentennial] & Postmodernism
- contemporary research is art historical (Berlo and Phillips, 1998; Rushing, 1999; Traugutt, 1992)
Literature Review: Indigenous Epistemologies

Indigenous perspective is represented as “subjects” of research and often as “authoritative” source, largely participatory research by Native researchers, rarely addresses contemporary art

- mostly as instructional texts for Native American Studies (Beck and Walters, 1977; Fixico, 2003)
- anthropologists who have been “adopted” to gain insider perspective (Basso, 1996; Martin, 2001)
- addressing topic of epistemology and philosophy (Allen, 1986; Cajete, 1995; Walters, 2004)
Literature Review: Indigenous Methodologies

Indigenous perspective is authority and cultural paradigms are primary resource, largely participatory research by Native researchers, on the cusp of applying this to art

- called for by Native artists (Walkingstick, 1992; Ginsburg, 1994; Kawagley, 1998; Woody, 1992)
- early Indigenous methodologies (Tuhiwai Smith, 2002; Weber-Pillwax, 2001; Wilson, 2008)
- methodologies to analyze Native art (ahtone, 2007; Rangel, 2012)
Using an Indigenous Perspective Reveals the Gaps within the Literature and Archival Records
“Indigenous culture and knowledge is coded within the oral histories, visual arts, and ceremonies/rituals. Each is necessary to create a full understanding of the culture.”
How to represent what is hidden?

Norman Akers
*Okesa II* (2010)
Oil on panel
48 x 44 in.
Indigenous Cultural Expression

Each type of cultural expression contains certain aspects of Indigenous knowledge that are both inter-related and inter-dependent.

- arts
- oral narratives
- drama
- music
- ceremonies and rituals
Cultural Protocols

A system of rules that explain the correct conduct and procedures to be followed in formal situations

Which protocols affect any oral interview:

- Seasonal restrictions
- Gendered knowledge
- Societal initiations
- Conventions of engagement
- Continued reciprocity
How Can Research Fill These Gaps?
Methodology

Case Studies

Developed as a result of research on materials, complimentary to the Indigenous Research Paradigm (Wilson, 2008):

• Materiality
• Kincentricity
• Metaphor & Symbolism
• Temporality
Culture

- Materiality
- Kincentricity
- Temporality
- Metaphor/Symbolism
Chokmashki
Thank You