

Derek Gillman considers three case studies—the Bamiyan Buddhas, Parthenon/Elgin Marbles, and the Lansdowne portrait of George Washington—for what they teach us about nationalist or culturalist claims on antiquities and works of art. In the first instance, the largest surviving early Buddhist figures in the world were severely damaged, in part destroyed, by the reigning Taliban authorities of Afghanistan. The international community was outraged. But didn't the Taliban, the legitimate authority in the region, have the legal and political right to do with the statues what they wanted? Can we assume that the Taliban, as conservative Muslims, had no claim on these Buddhist figures as their cultural property, or at least no less of a claim than the modern Christian Greek authorities have over the pagan Parthenon/Elgin Marbles? The Greek government has been calling for the return of the marbles to Athens on the basis that they are an integral part of "being" Greek, despite their having been in Britain for more than two centuries, since even before there was a Greek nation. The question is, on what basis can we accept that a cultural group has the character of a natural person and can be wounded by the loss of, or damage to, a national/personal symbol self-proclaimed as such.

Finally, John Henry Merryman proposes a "triad of regulatory imperatives" when considering constraints on the acquisition of antiquities. The first, and most basic, he argues, is preservation. How can we best protect the object and its context from impairment? Second is the quest for knowledge. How can we best advance our search for valid information about the human past, for "the historical, scientific, cultural, and aesthetic truth that the object and its context can provide." And the third is access. How can we best assure that the object is "optimally accessible to scholars for study and to the public for education and enjoyment." He calls this triad "preservation, truth, and access." Presenting this essay last in the current volume allows us to think back through the previous eight papers and ponder whether nationalist politics is in the service of protecting archaeological sites and antiquities or not. Merryman's sensible framework for considering the recent and current threats to our ancient material past is a fitting conclusion to this volume.

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Exhibiting Indigenous Heritage in the Age of Cultural Property

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AS NEIL MACGREGOR REMINDS US in his essay in this volume, the encyclopedic museum was an institution of the Enlightenment, committed to the proposition that "through the study of things gathered together from all over the world, truth would emerge." A corollary belief was that museums would broaden the cultural horizons of the general public in ways that might foster greater understanding of human cultural diversity. For the past quarter-century, however, an array of social forces has called these principles into question and turned the encyclopedic museum into a site of conflict. Global processes of ethnic assertion and redefinition, changing ideas about the nature of democratic pluralism, the intensifying struggle over anything defined as cultural property—all have converged on the museum to cast doubt on its legitimacy and public mission.

Previous essays in this volume have largely directed their attention to ethical dilemmas raised by antiquities of unknown or controversial provenance. Here I wish to shift the spotlight from objects to the intangible expressions of heritage, everything from language and music to basic information about a people's way of life. Inseparable from this are questions about the right of one group to speak authoritatively about the lifeways of another, especially in an era when cultural heritage has come to be envisioned as a form of property that should remain under the exclusive control of its presumed creators and their descendants.

A proprietary attitude toward culture is hardly unique to our age. Religious adepts and craft guilds have assiduously protected secret knowledge

from time immemorial. Today, however, it is ever harder to define and defend the boundaries of culture. Traditional methods of controlling the movement of information—and thereby maintaining a reasonably stable social identity—often collapse under the pressure of an interconnected world. Just as the Enlightenment created the Universal Museum, the digital age seems to be spawning something that approximates the Universal Library. For small, beleaguered populations, the effects of this are not entirely negative. They may no longer feel as marginalized from the cultural life of metropolitan centers, and they may find it easier to publicize their concerns to a global audience. At the same time, however, their traditional knowledge all too easily diffuses beyond community boundaries, making it available to powerful outsiders who may use it for their own artistic or commercial or political purposes.

Conflicts over the control and representation of heritage have become especially impassioned when the communities in question are indigenous ones, that is, comprising descendants of the earliest inhabitants of the New World, Asia, Africa, Australia, Oceania, and isolated corners of Europe.¹ The comfortable assumption that experts from the metropole are qualified to speak or write about indigenous cultures is being challenged everywhere. Just as some nation-states are drifting toward insistence that they are the only legitimate stewards of ancient artifacts found within their borders, so indigenous peoples maintain that they should be the sole arbiters of their own cultural history. Insider knowledge, in other words, is the only kind that counts. This drive for control of cultural representations—reflected in the rise of local heritage museums and, in the great metropolitan museums, the popularity of what has come to be called *community curation*—has brought new voices to the museum world, with novel and sometimes inspiring results. Nevertheless, the experience of the latest wave of heritage museums suggests that they confront many of the same problems as their predecessors, with equally mixed success, and that their participatory requirements create dilemmas of their own.

In June 2006 the Musée du quai Branly opened in Paris to fanfare and controversy (fig. 7.1). The new museum aims to be one of the world's pre-eminent venues for the art of—well, there lies a problem. A few decades



Fig. 7.1. French President Jacques Chirac, second left, flanked by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, left, greets Chief Laukalbi from Tanna of Vanuata Islands and his nephew Jerry Napat, right, during the inauguration of the Musée du quai Branly, Paris, 2006. In the background is museum curator Stéphane Martin. AP Photo/François Mori.

ago it might have been called a museum of primitive art, but the pejorative connotations of “primitive” are clearly unacceptable today. “Tribal art” is scarcely better. So planners proposed the term *arts premiers*, a neologism that eventually foundered, in part, because of the difficulty of finding an English equivalent that doesn’t sound patronizing. Hence the prudent decision to name the museum after its location.

This struggle over names is emblematic of more serious debate occasioned by the museum’s inauguration, with more surely to follow in academic journals. Although the French government has tried to present the new museum as an expression of the nation’s embrace of multiculturalism, cultural critics see it as a monument to France’s reluctance to grapple with colonial history. They decry everything from the museum’s decor,

said to be redolent of tropical exoticism, to the very idea of separating the indigenous art of Africa, Oceania, and the New World from European art. Some wonder why the French government didn't simply return the collections to the peoples whose ancestors produced it.²

The Musée du quai Branly may be the most recent target for rough treatment, but postcolonial and poststructural scholarship has subjected encyclopedic museums to unsympathetic scrutiny since the early 1980s. Critics insist that museums function primarily as theaters of power, deploying their cultural capital and sumptuous architecture to shape attitudes toward everything from artistic taste (thus ratifying the superiority of ruling elites) to the moral standing of the nation-state (thereby mobilizing public sentiment in favor of state power). Every cabinet, every elegant plinth, conspires to create what Tony Bennett, a professor of cultural studies, calls a "space of observation and regulation" designed to discipline a visitor's body and mind.³

The prevailing image of the museum as penitentiary or Maoist re-education camp is enough to make fretful parents consider rescuing their child from a school field trip to the National Gallery or the Met. But critiques of conventional art museums seem mild in comparison to the opprobrium heaped on institutions that traffic in art and artifacts from indigenous societies. It is invariably pointed out that the great natural history museums of Western Europe and North America arose in tandem with colonial empires. Efforts to organize, classify, and display the material culture of distant peoples therefore supported colonialist ideology. Or so it is argued, even if a compelling case also can be made that museums and disciplines such as anthropology played a key role in convincing citizens of the metropole that far-flung peoples possessed admirable qualities—tenacity, creativity, deep histories of self-governance, perhaps even an aesthetic or spiritual genius—that justified bringing their colonial subordination to an end.

Postcolonial scholarship on museums suffers from exasperating flaws. Its language is often overblown, depicting curators as foot soldiers in the trenches of colonial oppression. Its rhetorical strategy is tiresomely predictable: comb the archives for objectionable, racist declarations by long-dead museum employees, mix in a bit of authorial hand wringing

about a troubling exhibit label or two, flavor with a dollop of Foucault and a dash of Gramsci, shake vigorously, serve. From the sinister confines of the museum and the grasping hands of its expert staff, heritage—everyone's heritage, it seems—must be "reclaimed" and "liberated."⁴

To observe that the critique of museums has shortcomings is not to say that it is entirely wrong. Exhibitions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries *were* sometimes based on assumptions of cultural superiority that we now rightly deplore. Institutional inertia kept displays in place long after the ideas that animated them had been discredited. The durable, if dubious, distinction between art and artifact hindered Western recognition of the artistic sophistication of indigenous peoples.

All this began to change as indigenous peoples emerged as a force to be reckoned with, first in international forums such as the United Nations and then, with growing prominence, in the politics of advanced settler democracies, including the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand/Aotearoa. Indigenism, as it is sometimes called, takes distinctive forms in each region, but its general principles include the following:

- The original occupants of lands settled during the fifteenth through twentieth centuries were, almost without exception, cruelly dispossessed of their territory and political rights as sovereign peoples.
- It was long supposed that indigenous peoples would disappear as recognizable communities, either through physical extinction (advanced in some cases by explicit state policy) or assimilation into majority populations. This did not happen. The descendants of countless indigenous communities have survived, and they now demand political equality as well as recognition as distinct nationalities within the state.
- Acknowledgement of the survival of indigenous nations has inspired efforts to achieve reconciliation through policies of reparations, repatriation of lands and cultural property, and the restoration of some degree of self-determination.

In the museum world, indigenous-rights advocates have vigorously advanced laws that require repositories to repatriate human remains and

religious objects to indigenous communities should the latter wish them returned. The American Association of Museum Directors now recommends that art museums enter into good-faith negotiations with groups who believe that sacred objects in museum collections deserve special treatment. More broadly, museums are under increasing pressure to consult with indigenous communities when planning exhibitions in which such communities are deemed to have a moral stake.

My contacts with curators in a range of museums suggest that although they sometimes regret the politicization of their chosen field, most enjoy the increased contact with indigenous people that has characterized museum work since the 1980s. There is little question, though, that collaborating with people who often have limited prior exposure to the practicalities of museum work can lead to time-consuming negotiations in which all parties struggle to educate one another. In a not-uncommon scenario, as Paul Chaat Smith, a curator at the National Museum of the American Indian, puts it, "You go out into one of 'the communities' and ask people who'd never thought twice about museum exhibitry to design exhibits."⁵ Inevitably, collaborative curation has narrowed the range of topics that museums are willing to tackle. Obvious sources of controversy, especially those involving now-abandoned practices regarded as repellent or morally troubling—slavery, ritual cannibalism, sorcery, cruel treatment of war captives, and the like—tend to be pushed to the margins in favor of exhibitions that focus on expressive arts, spirituality, or indigenous veneration of the land. When indigenous and nonindigenous curators are unable to agree about significant issues, a typical solution is to present their views side by side without attempting to reconcile them—hence the ubiquitous variations on the theme of "diverse voices." This often arises in connection with questions of cultural origins because indigenous oral traditions may deviate considerably from scientific understandings of historic migration patterns.

Curators and cultural critics who think of themselves as progressives see these shifts as inherently democratizing: by putting oral tradition and community sentiment on the same footing as professional expertise, indigenous peoples achieve something like cultural equality. Those committed to scientific rigor, in contrast, are likely to deplore the changes as

reflecting the triumph of relativism and identity politics over established fact. More centrist observers welcome the broader spectrum of views but often find themselves worried that by abandoning efforts to settle important historical or scientific questions museums are shirking their responsibility to provide the public with the best information currently available.

Strongly affecting contemporary debate about the representation of indigenous peoples is the relentless expansion of the concept of cultural property. A term originally applied rather narrowly to architectural monuments and portable items of national patrimony, *cultural property* is increasingly held to encompass intangible as well as material expressions of a distinct community, including its language, art styles, music, folklore, technical knowledge, and religious practices. Policy makers waffle about whether the expression *cultural heritage* is preferable to *cultural property*, but in practice the two amount to the same thing. Culture in all its manifestations is construed as something that cannot be imitated, borrowed, or even discussed without doing violence to the group that claims it.⁶

The current approach to intangible aspects of culture is inspired by policy reforms directed to human burials and objects of religious significance. The most familiar of these to Americans is NAGPRA, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990, which created a framework for the return of human remains, grave goods, and narrowly defined "items of cultural patrimony" when federally recognized Native communities request them and meet legal standards of prior affiliation or ownership. Public attention naturally focuses on high-visibility examples of repatriation, when looted objects or human remains are handed over to a Native community, usually with great ceremony. Less well known are the innumerable cases in which communities are content to establish title to collections while allowing them to remain in the care of museums. The most intriguing instances of this involve joint-stewardship agreements that permit the occasional use of artifacts for important ceremonies. Such arrangements are taxing for curators, but they also build relations of trust with indigenous people and enliven museums by drawing them into everyday Native life in ways never before imagined.

NAGPRA is hardly perfect legislation, and as museums and Native communities resolve the most straightforward repatriation claims they

will be forced to confront far more refractory ones. But the law's success has encouraged indigenous leaders to propose that knowledge and other intangible expressions of their cultures be subject to similar protection and adjudication. The conceptual link between tangible and intangible elements of heritage is foreshadowed in the work of Walter Benjamin. Benjamin famously observed that art objects possess an "aura" that in his view was undermined by technologies of mass production. Indigenous groups, especially those of North America, Oceania, and Australia, frequently complain that public display of objects held to be *sacred*—a term notable for its elasticity—violates their cultural rules and vitiates the objects' power. Information, which is far more reproducible than individual works of art, generates even greater anxiety because it can be circulated instantly through technologies such as the Internet. The unwanted movement of religious iconography or ritual knowledge generates a vague but persistent anxiety about the violation of social boundaries made increasingly porous by globalization and, among indigenous peoples themselves, by rising rates of interethnic marriage and bilingualism.

The intense emotions provoked by the dissemination of highly charged information were evident in an archivists' conference that I attended in Washington, DC in 2006. One speaker, a young professional woman from a federally recognized Indian nation in the western United States, described her tribe's efforts to assert control over tape recordings of songs performed by a now-deceased ritual specialist. The songs, recorded in a language that members of her tribe can no longer understand, are by virtue of their age and subject matter considered too powerful to be reproduced safely or even heard by unauthorized persons. In a tense moment at the same conference, a woman from another tribe complained because two non-Native speakers had presented music and images whose religious content, she insisted, potentially exposed her to spiritual harm. No matter that the information in question was from Australia and the Caribbean and thus bore no plausible link to her own religious tradition. Moments such as these dramatize the growing belief that knowledge—particularly religious knowledge, but other kinds as well—should reside only at its presumed point of origin.

The proprietary drift of ethnic assertiveness has led to demands that information held by repositories, including museums, be repatriated to the source communities said to be its rightful owners. Sharing *copies* of field notes, images, and audio tapes is judged insufficient; indigenous people want complete control over the material regardless of the competing claims of its author, be it folklorist, ethnographer, photographer, or missionary. This sensibility is captured in policy documents circulated among professional curators, archivists, and cultural-resource managers, who increasingly accept that claims of ownership by indigenous communities should be given greater weight than other factors when determining the uses to which documents can be put by the general public.⁷

Academic discourse has long wrestled with similar issues under the more ambiguous rubric of cultural appropriation, which in the most general sense signifies the transfer of cultural elements from a weaker group to a more powerful one. The range of situations in which critics now raise the red flag of appropriation is startling. A philosopher worries that European aesthetic or scientific ruminations on prehistoric rock art might be ethically questionable. Maori activists denounce the use of Maori tattoo motifs by tattoo artists abroad. The United Kingdom's Prince Harry becomes the focus of intense criticism because his paintings appear to be influenced by the art styles of Aboriginal Australians. The National Aquarium in Baltimore finds itself assailed because its indoor re-creation of a waterfall from Australia's Northern Territory allegedly constitutes an act of cultural theft, although no visitor could possibly mistake the replica, however dazzling, for the real thing.⁸

Accusations of cultural appropriation are appealing to their authors because they cast a shadow of moral and even legal doubt over the representation of indigenous heritage. This shadow has hardened into statute here and there. A First Nation in British Columbia has obtained "official mark" protection for ten ancient petroglyph images, thus removing them from the public domain. Australian law now limits the commercial use of images of the continent's most familiar natural feature, Uluru (Ayers Rock), which has been redefined as the intellectual property of its Aboriginal "owners"; public displays of some Uluru images have been successfully

contested by Aboriginal groups. As I write, the Waitangi Tribunal in New Zealand is deliberating the question of whether the Maori own the nation's indigenous plant and animal species. Much of what is at issue concerns intellectual property rights, but the breadth of Maori claims, at least according to government attorneys, raises the possibility that the Maori will be recognized as having exclusive control over everything from the propagation of native flora and fauna to the activities of field scientists who study them. The full impact of this propertization of culture remains uncertain, but there is little question that it has dramatically complicated the work of museums that represent the art and culture of indigenous peoples.

The move toward indigenous self-representation is reflected in the remarkable proliferation of museums focused on Native history and culture. These fall into two broad categories: local, community-level institutions that, in the words of James Clifford, "function as cultural centers, sites for community education, mobilization, and the continuity of tradition"; and regional or national museums, which try to bridge the primarily inward-looking quality of community-based museums and the encyclopedic ambitions of metropolitan institutions.⁹ Examples of the latter include the new Paris museum, the Canadian Museum of Civilization, the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, and the recently opened National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC.

An assessment of the hundreds of community-based museums and cultural centers focused on indigenous identity is beyond the scope of this essay. I believe it is fair to say, however, that when Native communities run their own museums, as they tend to in the United States and Canada because of a long (if checkered) history of self-governance, these institutions are likely to enjoy a high level of local participation and serve as catalysts for cultural renewal and collective pride. As James Clifford points out, they also offer a laboratory for innovative collaborations between anthropologists and the indigenous communities they have long studied. Clifford describes the catalog of one recent Alaska Native exhibition as "part genuine coalition, part respectful truce," which neatly summarizes many similar experiments in interweaving scientific and indigenous views.¹⁰

When a group's struggle for recognition turns on questions of cultural difference, local museums offer opportunities to display and perform difference under conditions the community controls. The pivotal role of these institutions in representing local culture may sometimes give rise to unfortunate side effects—among them, the exacerbation of internal divisions and promotion of the interests of an emerging indigenous elite. On balance, however, heritage museums under local management do a good job of reconciling the aspirations of their communities with the demands of regional tourism. Most of these local facilities are modest in scale; a handful are opulent. (In the latter category, the \$193 million Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center in Connecticut, funded largely from the Pequot tribe's gaming proceeds, stands at the zenith.) Their grass-roots orientation helps them do a better job of representing community sentiment in all its richness than can institutions at greater remove.

Where national museum bureaucracies control local heritage museums, as is the case in many parts of Asia and Africa, the picture is more ambiguous. Local experts are likely to be subordinated to professional administrators from the nation's capital, just as the celebration of local culture is subordinated to an ideology of modernization and nation-state unity. The now-familiar link between museums and development in tourist economies may lead to the creation of ersatz "village museums" that put the state in charge of a heritage that local people are presumed to be incapable of managing themselves. In such cases, heritage is almost completely commodified, to the detriment of the people whose culture is ostensibly being protected.

In contrast to locally run museums and cultural centers, metropolitan museums focusing on indigenous heritage usually enjoy more secure funding and more impressive facilities. Nevertheless, their scale, distance from Native communities, and obligation to serve multiple masters give rise to formidable challenges. How can an institution offer an upbeat picture of Native peoples while at the same time communicating their legitimate grievances? Will exhibitions be directed primarily to Native museumgoers or to the general public? If the museum is to be a site of performance as well as static display, how can such decontextualized events retain authenticity?

The National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), whose principal facility opened on the Washington Mall in 2004, exemplifies this predicament. The NMAI's mission statement, as well as the many speeches and interviews given by its founding director, W. Richard West Jr., make clear that its ambition is to transform museums and museology. Authority is to be shifted from curators to Native communities. Exhibitions serve not just to educate museumgoers but also to redefine the way they relate to the hemisphere's indigenous peoples. Interior and exterior spaces are unified to express the link between people and the land, hence the museum's outdoor minienvironments, which include a field of Native cultivars (corn, beans, sunflower, tobacco), a wetland, and a forest. According to Amanda Cobb, a professor of American Studies, "The museum was expressly designed to celebrate—not to observe, study, or judge but to *celebrate*."¹¹

The successful completion of the NMAI's Washington museum is a tribute to the dynamism of the institution's leadership and the energetic support of Native leaders across the United States. By all accounts, the colorful ceremonies that marked the opening of the museum fulfilled public expectations. There the honeymoon ended, for early reviews of the opening exhibitions were mostly negative, and sharply so, although for reasons quite different from the complaints leveled at the Musée du quai Branly. Critics contended that the uniformly celebratory quality of the exhibits' message, when combined with their rejection of anything reminiscent of conventional scholarly depth or detail, reduced the majestic diversity of Native American cultures to a set of feel-good platitudes. As Edward Rothstein observed in the *New York Times*, "The result is that a monotony sets in; every tribe is equal, and so is every idea."¹² Other reviewers expressed disappointment that so much of the museum's space was given over to shops and a large restaurant. Among Native Americans, I'm told, there was frustration because certain Native nations seemed overrepresented—notably, the gaming tribes that were major donors to the NMAI—whereas far more populous tribes were scarcely to be seen in the opening-day exhibitions.

Such criticism evoked rejoinders that would delight even the most jaded connoisseur of irony. Native critics have long complained that when

museums present indigenous art purely for its aesthetic qualities, they decontextualize the objects and silence the many stories that give them meaning. Yet when the NMAI does the same thing, we are told by one defender that "the exhibits convey the 'big picture' whilst admitting the possibility of multivalent interpretations," because the objects are "freed from the over-arching curatorial voice." Another apologist justifies the amount of space devoted to retail activities as an important object lesson in the link between tourism and Native American cultural survival. The NMAI's spacious restaurant looks like a profit center to critics, but sympathetic observers portray it as a heartfelt expression of Native hospitality. Parisian intellectuals may be disconcerted by the Musée du quai Branly's identification of indigenous people with nature, but their counterparts in the United States praise the NMAI for its emphasis on the spiritual connection between American Indians and the land.¹³

Defenders insist, rather more convincingly, that the NMAI is venturing into new territory and therefore should be forgiven for losing its way once in a while. Early reviews also failed to note that the NMAI is not simply an updated, democratized version of a traditional museum. It has joined the ranks of institutions that offer what the historian Alison Landsberg calls "prosthetic memories," artificial remembrances transferred through the use of sophisticated audio-visual resources.¹⁴ Objects are exhibited not to be contemplated individually but to serve as stage props for the creation of dreamlike understandings of the past. An example is an NMAI installation organized around the theme of the "storm" of conquest, missionary work, and indigenous resistance (fig. 7.2). It features a low display cabinet full of enigmatic objects, encircled by a dimly lit wall of video monitors that play endless film clips and a ghostly voice-over about the injustices visited upon Indian ancestors. During my time in the installation, other museumgoers drifted through, rarely spending more than a minute. I could only conclude that, like me, the installation taught them nothing specific, only that Native Americans are spiritual people who have survived despite great odds.

However praiseworthy the NMAI's ambitions, it faces the same harsh realities as museums elsewhere. Space, personnel, and funds for exhibition development are limited. This means that even in an ostensibly

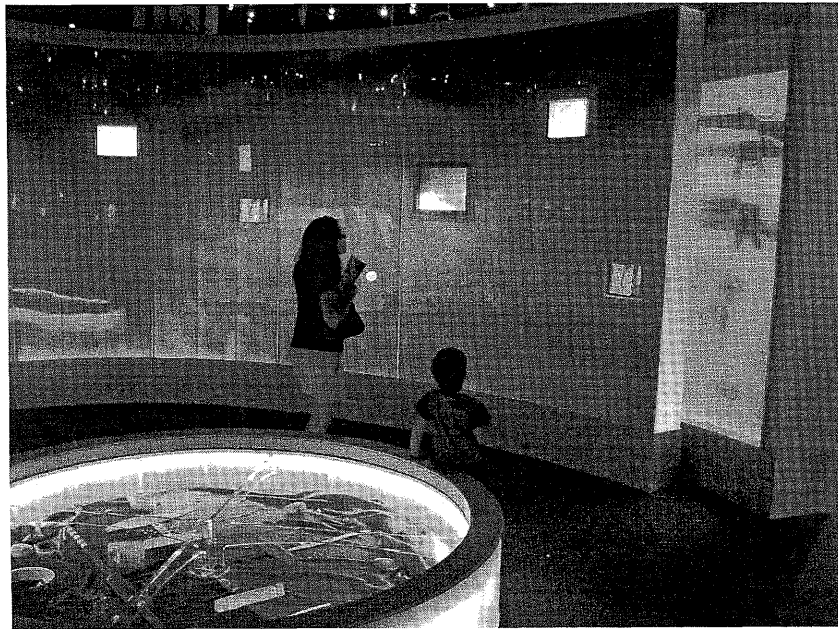


Fig. 7.2. "The Hurricane," a video installation in the exhibition *Our Peoples: Giving Voice to Our Histories*, which opened in 2004 at the National Museum of the American Indian, Washington DC. Photograph © Michael Brown.

democratic, community-oriented museum, administrators must make difficult choices about which communities are to be represented. Like other public museums, the NMAI needs a dependable revenue stream, leaving it little choice but to lure as many visitors as possible to its gift shops and café. "Community curation" is an admirable goal, but consultation cannot resolve all representational dilemmas or reconcile divergent opinions; Native people are just as likely to hide inconvenient facts and silence dissenting voices as any other human group. Finally, the proprietary impulse that now defines attitudes toward traditional knowledge makes it difficult to represent indigenous heritage in anything other than the blandest, most stereotyped terms. Basic descriptive facts, especially about religion, are deemed "culturally sensitive" and unsuitable for public discussion, leaving accounts of Native religion with little to report but generic spirituality. The NMAI and other museums devoted to the documentation of indigenous

heritage are thus faced with the awkward prospect of being obliged to say more and more about less and less.

The current passion for community-controlled museology is understandable in light of colonial history. Its insights have already injected new energy into the museum world. Regrettably, however, postcolonial scholarship gravitates to the conclusion that there is now only one defensible way for museums to deal with the objects and information entrusted to them. In the words of Amy Lonetree, a professor of Native American Studies, "If [museums] want to be part of the twenty-first-century museum world, they must produce their exhibitions with the full involvement of the Native communities they propose to represent and must involve them in all aspects of their development."¹⁵

The view that community curation is a universal panacea echoes the claim of dissident anthropologists of the 1980s and 1990s that ethnographers were obliged to renounce their authorial power by turning books over to their research subjects. This typically meant presenting field material as minimally edited dialogue and, whenever possible, avoiding synthesis or comparison, which were rejected as deplorable power plays on the author's part. A handful of these experiments proved interesting, the rest unreadable. Whatever truth emerges from them is what the German filmmaker Werner Herzog calls "the accountant's truth," an unprocessed collection of facts, which Herzog contrasts with deeper truths that must be laid bare by a writer, director, or scholar—who of course is ultimately accountable for a work's errors and excesses.

To reveal deeper truths in a museum setting, community involvement may be indispensable in some cases and little more than a distraction in others, especially when the goal of the exhibition is comparative and analytical rather than celebratory. Even in the most-participatory exhibitions, museumgoers have reason to expect tactful intervention by the "overarching curatorial voice" that the NMAI has thus far tried to silence.

If today's ferment in the museum world is about the promotion of diversity, why should the essentially therapeutic approach embraced by the NMAI be seen as the only acceptable model of museum practice? Don't institutions have a right, perhaps even a duty, to draw on their inherent strengths in the interest of promoting the widest possible public

discussion on important social issues? The strength of most natural history museums lies in their scientists and collections. For art museums, it is their expertise in formal aesthetics and global art history. This is not as inconsistent with indigenous views as it might seem. True, some Native intellectuals contend that indigenous art can be understood only when fully contextualized. Others go beyond that to assert that art itself is an arbitrary Western category incompatible with indigenous holism. Nevertheless, many Native artists insist that their work bears comparison to the best art produced anywhere in the world, and they welcome opportunities for it to be viewed and judged next to the work of their non-Native counterparts.

Contemporary indigenous art, in fact, reminds us of the extent to which creativity is the result of lively intercultural exchanges rather than the unfolding of a single society's distinctive vision. Few American Indian tribes had a developed tradition of painting on fabric or wood, and even fewer shared a notion that art should be undertaken for its own sake. The work of today's American Indian painters is as likely to have been influenced by German expressionism as by elements of Diné or Seneca or Haida heritage. An example of such hybridity is found in "traditional" Navajo rugs, an art form that emerged from the intersection of Old World animal husbandry (in the form of sheep and the wool they produce), weaving techniques learned from the Navajo's Pueblo Indian neighbors, patterns and color schemes suggested by Anglo traders, and the Navajo's own impeccable sense of visual harmony. There is every reason to admire this art as an expression of Navajo creativity, but that is only part of a bigger story of innovation inspired by contact and strategic borrowing.

The most vexing question provoked by the rise of a participatory museology that exalts identity above all else is how this advances an understanding of the larger We—the We of Canadians, Peruvians, and Australians, or, more important still, the We of humanity. In a recent appraisal of cosmopolitanism, Kwame Anthony Appiah refers to this as "connection not *through* identity but *despite* difference."¹⁶ Like other observers who puzzle over today's identity politics, Appiah recognizes that local loyalties—to family, to community—are essential elements of global citizenship. In times of crisis, however, they readily slide into parochialism and xenophobia.

How can museums foster the optimal balance of the local and the global, admiration for one's own and openness to the virtues of strangers?

Questions of this sort tend to be dismissed by postcolonial scholars and indigenous activists alike. Appeals to universalism evoke a skeptical response because so much harm has been done to indigenous peoples in the name of allegedly universal values, including individual freedom and the right to private property. Where cultural heritage is concerned, the standard response is something on the order of, "When we're in full control of our cultural heritage once again, we'll talk about sharing it with the world on our own terms." The difficulty, of course, is that no one can specify exactly what it means to "control" heritage. There are reasons to doubt that *any* group can manage its cultural heritage in the sense the expression is used today, even if functionaries at UNESCO insist on talking about culture as if it were a rationally managed resource akin to water or electricity. Indeed, a handful of skeptics hold that once we have concretized the full range of human expression into a term like *cultural heritage*, the battle is already lost. By being pulled into the current mania for repatriation and cultural boundary drawing, David Lowenthal says, "things fluid by their very nature are ossified into factitious perpetuity." We endorse this process, he declares, "at our own personal and collective peril."¹⁷

I share Lowenthal's concern, if not his pessimism. When untempered by recognition of historical complexity or a willingness to compromise, the logic of heritage protection invites fantasies about returning to a mythical zero-point in which every culture is restored to a prior state of perfection. This is discernible in the frequently voiced opinion that the former colonial powers "should just repatriate all that stuff" to the descendants of its original owners. No matter that only a handful of advocacy groups demand wholesale repatriation of all artifacts held by the world's repositories. Most recognize that this would be both impractical and irresponsible. Far better that museums use inspiring works of art to define common ground and encourage a more nuanced appreciation of cultural differences.

As the critical fireworks occasioned by the opening of Musée du quai Branly fall back to earth, their energy spent, some observers are finding

themselves grudgingly won over by the new museum's presentation of indigenous art. The more thoughtful among them acknowledge that no consensus yet exists about how best to frame indigenous creations within the context of ongoing efforts to achieve political reconciliation with Native nations. Some innovative approaches, including community curation, show promise, but none has proven immune to failure. All that can be said for certain is that diverse strategies, rather than one-size-fits-all solutions, stand the best chance of promoting wider appreciation of indigenous heritage and encouraging frank public discussion about the enduring legacy of colonialism.

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NOTES

1. In this essay I use the terms *indigenous*, *Aboriginal*, and *Native* more or less interchangeably. In some countries one of these terms may be favored over the others; conventions about their capitalization also vary. Here I follow the most common usage in the United States in 2008.
2. On the political and ideological roots of the new Paris museum, see Sarah Amato, "Quai Branly Museum: Representing France after Empire," *Race and Class* 47, no. 4 (2004): 46–65, and Sally Price, "Art and the Civilizing Mission," *Anthropology and Humanism* 30, no. 2 (2005): 133–40.
3. Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 24.
4. See, e.g., Christina F. Kreps, *Liberating Culture: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Museums, Curation, and Heritage Preservation* (London: Routledge, 2003),

- and Joy Hendry, *Reclaiming Culture: Indigenous Peoples and Self-Representation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
5. Paul Chaat Smith, "The Terrible Nearness of Distant Places: Making History at the National Museum of the American Indian," in *Indigenous Experience Today*, ed. Marisol de la Cadena and Orin Starn (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 393.
 6. For broad surveys of the links between developments in intellectual property law and indigenous politics, see, among others, Michael F. Brown, *Who Owns Native Culture?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), and Mary Riley, ed., *Indigenous Intellectual Property Rights: Legal Obstacles and Innovative Solutions* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004).
 7. See the policy document "National Museum of the American Indian Policy Statement on Native American Human Remains and Cultural Materials," which states that along with human remains and religious objects, "all culturally specific information . . . must be treated as the sole property of the affected Native American culturally affiliated group." *Museum Anthropology* 15, no. 2 (1991): 25–28.
 8. On petroglyphs, see Thomas Heyd, "Rock Art Aesthetics and Cultural Appropriation," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 61, no. 1 (2003): 37–46; on Maori tattoos, Ngahua Te Awekotuku, "More Than Skin Deep: *Ta Moko* Today," in *Claiming the Stones, Naming the Bones: Cultural Property and the Negotiation of National and Ethnic Identity*, ed. Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2002), 243–58; on Prince Harry's art, Peter Shadbolt and Peter Collins, "Harry Paints His Way into Outback Row: Prince Accused of Stealing Aboriginal Motifs in Work," the *Guardian*, August 19, 2003, 3; on the controversy over the National Aquarium's new waterfall, David Lowenthal, "Why Sanctions Seldom Work: Reflections on Cultural Property Internationalism," *International Journal of Cultural Property* 12, nos. 3 and 4 (2005): 393–424, on 410.
 9. James Clifford, "Four Northwest Coast Museums: Travel Reflections," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 248.
 10. James Clifford, "Looking Several Ways: Anthropology and Native Heritage in Alaska," *Current Anthropology* 45, no. 1 (2004): 5–30, on 19.
 11. Amanda J. Cobb, "The National Museum of the American Indian: Sharing the Gift," *American Indian Quarterly* 29, nos. 3–4 (2005): 367; punctuation and emphasis in original.
 12. Edward Rothstein, "Museum with an American Indian Voice," *New York Times*, September 21, 2004, E1.

13. Claire Smith, "Decolonising the Museum: The National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC," *Antiquity* 79 (2005): 424–39, on 429–30; Amanda J. Cobb, "National Museum of the American Indian," 372–73.
14. Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).
15. Amy Lonetree, "Continuing Dialogues: Evolving Views of the National Museum of the American Indian," *Public Historian* 28, no. 2 (2006): 61.
16. Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 135.
17. David Lowenthal, "Why Sanctions Seldom Work: Reflections on Cultural Property Internationalism," *International Journal of Cultural Property* 12, no. 3 (2005): 411–12.

Heritage and National Treasures

Derek Gillman

THE BARNES FOUNDATION

Heritage creates a perception of something handed down;
something to be cared for and cherished. These cultural
manifestations have come down to us from the past; they are
our legacy from our ancestors. There is today a broad
acceptance of a duty to pass them on to our successors,
augmented by the creations of the present.¹

THE BAMIYAN BUDDHAS

"It is not a big issue. The statues are objects only made of mud or stone." Thus spoke Qudratullah Jamal on March 3, 2001 as the militia began its systematic annihilation of the Bamiyan Buddhas, the largest surviving early Buddhist figures in the world. The elimination of the two Buddhas by the Taliban regime in Afghanistan shocked many people, and especially those who highly value the material culture of Asia. "The destruction work is not as easy as people would think. You can't knock down the statues by dynamite or shelling as both of them have been carved in a cliff."² Destroying the "gods of the infidels" was evidently a pious act for Taliban soldiers drafted from outside the Bamiyan valley when local members refused, yet one cannot but think that the chief of the Taliban Foreign Ministry press department, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, was being somewhat disingenuous when he commented that: "This decision was not against anyone. It was totally a domestic matter of Afghanistan. We are very disappointed that the international community doesn't care about the suffering people but they are shouting about the stone statues of Buddha."³ As indeed they were.