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# Cultural Sovereignty and Cultural Violence: Native American Artists and the Dunn Studio, 1932-1962

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CULTURAL SOVEREIGNTY AND CULTURAL VIOLENCE: NATIVE  
AMERICAN ARTISTS AND THE DUNN STUDIO, 1932–1962

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Doctoral Program in Borderlands History

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AMERICAN ARTISTS AND THE DUNN STUDIO, 1932–1962

by

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## **Abstract**

The early twentieth century engendered a period of profound change within the United States as industrialization, post-World War I miasma, and vigorous imperialism transformed the nation. The Southwest's Santa Fe provided a haven for the influx of White scientists, affluent socialites, and artists who sought authenticity through reinvention. Lighting upon the neighboring Indian communities, White elites soon appropriated Native culture, production, and imagery, seeing these as sources for nationalism, commodification, and as outlets for reformist aims. Art educator Dorothy Dunn stands as exemplary of the latter, as she fervently believed that the new genre of Native American easel art answered the need for Native American cultural preservation as well as the authentic American counter to European cultural hegemony.

During her 1932 to 1937 stewardship of the Santa Fe Indian School Studio, Dunn built on the earlier efforts of her educator, artist, and anthropologist cohort in order to firmly control and codify the Studio style. In effect, this model became the norm for Native American art for the following thirty years; moreover, Dunn and her cadre set in place the White-controlled framework that continues, to a lesser degree, to define American Indian art.

Yet, this example of cultural imperialism involves more than Dunn and her White associates. Her Indian School students remain active players in this story as they, too, sought to negotiate the challenges and opportunities presented to them as they strove to carve out space for themselves as artists. Navajo painters such as Gerald Nailor, Narciso Abeyta, Quincy Tahoma, Harrison Begay, and Sybil Yazzie encountered expectations and biases that worked to restrict their self-expression. Yet, despite that they were able to create work that spoke to White and sometimes Native audiences. The canvases and murals they produced impart a wealth of information as they served to convey cultural communication, as platforms for resistance, and, not least, as evidence of the bitterness, love, and humor these artists felt as they engaged in the nascence of Native American fine art.

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## Introduction

In the spring of 2008 my husband and I spent a week escorting family and friends around the Four Corners region near our home in southwestern Colorado, ending our vacation with a visit to Mesa Verde National Park outside of Cortez, Colorado. At the park's excellent museum, I was immediately thunderstruck by a large and magnificent painting of horses—manes and tails flying. I believe I must have stood in front of it for twenty minutes at least; long enough, anyway, for the rest of my party to have nearly toured the museum. The image stayed with me for days. Upon my return home I eventually emailed the park staff in order to discover the artist's name. They kindly replied: Gerald Nailor. As I began a cursory investigation into Nailor's career and biography, it became clear that his was by no means a household name; indeed, relatively few people, even art aficionados, had heard of him. As I dug deeper into what little information I could find, I became increasingly intrigued not only by Nailor and his work, but by all of his fellow art students who had studied under Dorothy Dunn at the Santa Fe Indian School Studio.

Dorothy Dunn's 1932–1937 stewardship of the Santa Fe Indian School's [SFIS] fine art Studio left a lasting and profound mark on American Indian art. The rigid, homogenized-Indian parameters she imposed upon her students outlived her tenure, defining the field throughout the Studio's existence until its 1962 replacement with the Institute of American Indian Arts [IAIA]. Indeed, the genre of modern Native American fine art exists today as a result of a non-Indian construct manufactured by White antimodernists of the early twentieth-century who sought to control, exploit, and appropriate primitivism under the overlapping guises of altruism,

nationalism, and cultural pluralism.<sup>1</sup> In their desire to situate themselves within the American Southwest, thus affirming their own authenticity, Dunn's cohort of similarly minded antimodernists inflicted lasting, albeit covert violence upon the Native peoples who predated their arrival.<sup>2</sup> By delimiting the artists' subject matter through instruction, popular discourse, and the art-buying market, White elites ensured that Native artists worked within strict creative confines in alignment with White desires; non-Indian artists, while also restricted by the market, did not generally encounter such active interference and thus were afforded more opportunities for self-expression. The result of this control and restriction constitutes what I term "cultural violence"; a concept closely aligned with notions of cultural genocide, or the "systemic destruction of traditions, values, language, and other elements which make one group of people distinct from other groups."<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the Native artist-students who encountered the formidable bloc comprised of White intellectuals and reformers were able to negotiate avenues of opportunity and resistance. Native students' efforts to shape their education and development as artists came at great cost, however, as the constant need to reify White imaginings and unrelenting hegemonic control of the forces of production worked to tightly constrict the very same cultural and artistic sovereignty that the students sought to protect.

This struggle over cultural sovereignty forms the basis of my research and presents a number of questions I seek to address here.<sup>4</sup> In what ways were the Native artists able to resist

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<sup>1</sup> Historian T.J. Jackson Lears may have been the first to coin the term "antimodernism" in his book, *No Place of Grace*. He described it as a phenomenon that occurred around the turn of the twentieth century when a "spreading sense of moral impotence and spiritual sterility" begat a "broader transatlantic dissatisfaction with modern culture in all its dimensions" and encouraged a "desire for a freshening of the cultural atmosphere." T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 4–5.

<sup>2</sup> Some examples of individuals who interacted closely with Dunn include Margretta Dietrich, Kenneth Chapman, Amelia Elizabeth and Martha White, and Oliver La Farge.

<sup>3</sup> [www.culturalgenocide.org/join.html](http://www.culturalgenocide.org/join.html), accessed April 13, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> The conceptual underpinnings of the term "culture" are slippery and problematic. In this study I do not ascribe to the static notion as traditionally advanced by anthropologists; instead, I think of culture in terms such as

the cultural violence imposed upon them by Dunn and her cohort, and how do we “read” the artists’ resistance through the texts of their paintings? In what ways was this attempt to control Indian output comparable to similar projects of cultural genocide within the federal boarding schools and U.S. Indian policy more generally? How does contemporary discourse reveal the ways in which the artists as colonial subjects—and, by extension, their artwork—served the hegemony and facilitated both the mythologizing of the U.S. Southwest as well as early twentieth-century nation-building? Why were women so integral to this movement, both Native and non-Native, and how did ideas of gender influence and inflect the discourse and imagery? Finally, what are the long-term ramifications of this ongoing cultural colonization within the still liminal Native art community? By widening the aperture of the current historiography, both in temporal range and through a larger and more unconventional pool of source material, I hope to answer these questions through a look at the lives of four male Navajo artists and, to a lesser extent, three Diné women, each of whom studied contemporaneously under Dunn at the SFIS: Gerald Nailor, Harrison Begay, Quincy Tahoma, Narciso Abeyta, Sybil Yazzie, Ruth Watchman, and Mary Ellen. In this dissertation I argue that by closely reading these artists’ work against the grain, as well as interrogating contemporary popular discourse, we are better able to understand the conflictual forces; that is, cultural preservationists versus assimilationists, White “friends of the Indian” reformers versus those who sought to profit from Native peoples, and hegemonic demands versus Indian creative and professional aspirations, that attended this project and how both White and Native desires played themselves out upon paper and canvas.

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those delineated by cultural anthropologist Renato Rosaldo. On page 26 of *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), he wrote that culture “refers broadly to the forms through which people make sense of their lives. . . . It does not inhabit a set-aside domain, as does, for example, that of politics or economics. . . . Culture encompasses the everyday and the esoteric, the mundane and the elevated, the ridiculous and the sublime.” He concludes by asserting that “culture is all-pervasive.”

While scholars in a number of fields have examined various aspects of Native American art history and the commodification of Indian culture, the current body of work neglects many crucial aspects and ramifications of the interactions between the non-Indian hegemony and Native artists. Broadly speaking, these subjects invite an interdisciplinary approach; academics ranging from historians, anthropologists, art historians, literary theorists, and landscape architects have offered perspectives that illuminate small corners of the larger story of Native American art and its appropriation by the non-Indian social dominant. However, we have yet to see a study that looks specifically at the SFIS Native artists and their paintings as bellwethers of this act of ongoing cultural oppression. Furthermore, a focus on the non-Indian actors proves the common denominator within these studies; with very few exceptions no scholar has interpreted the texts left behind by the artists themselves—their paintings.

Within the field of history, Erika Bsumek, Flannery Burke, Ramón Gutiérrez, and Margaret Jacobs each explored how the early twentieth-century influx of affluent, White anti-modernists, artists, and intellectuals worked to commodify and other Indigenous peoples through the mythologizing and romanticizing of the American Southwest. In *Indian-Made: Navajo Culture in the Marketplace, 1868–1940*, Bsumek looked closely at the racialization of Navajos through cultural commodification, in particular the “frontier commerce” of Navajo weavings and jewelry.<sup>5</sup> Like Bsumek, Jacobs centered her study, *Engendered Encounters: Feminism and Pueblo Cultures 1879–1934*, on New Mexico’s Indigenous peoples, in this case, the Pueblo Indians.<sup>6</sup> These two historians employed varying methodologies; Bsumek structured her project as a cultural history, while Jacobs unpacked the complicated relationship between antimodernist

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<sup>5</sup> Erika Marie Bsumek, *Indian-Made: Navajo Culture in the Marketplace, 1868–1940* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Margaret D. Jacobs, *Engendered Encounters: Feminism and Pueblo Cultures 1879–1934* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999).

White women and Pueblo Indians using the lens of gender. Both studies situate the commodification of Indian culture against the backdrop of a White hegemony, although Bsumek did address the Navajo response to this process. Nevertheless, neither historian looked at art specifically, nor did they attempt to read the alternative texts left by Indigenous subalterns; that is, the actual Indian-made products.

In their studies, Flannery Burke and Ramón Gutiérrez took more theoretical approaches to the transcultural currents that infiltrated the American Southwest with the influx of the White elite. In *From Greenwich Village to Taos: Primitivism and Place at Mabel Dodge Luhan's* Burke discussed the conjunction of space and time that created a crucible for notions of primitivism that spread throughout the nation amongst this elite class.<sup>7</sup> Gutiérrez, informed by Edward Said's *Orientalism*, applied with great efficacy the latter's theory to early twentieth-century New Mexico in his essay "Charles Fletcher Lummis and the Orientalization of New Mexico."<sup>8</sup> In this text, Gutiérrez explored the ways in which influential Anglos' discursive promulgation of the American Southwest as a site of reinvention and exoticism worked hand-in-hand to both promote tourism and other the non-White population that pre-dated Anglo arrival. While both of these texts add to the body of knowledge on the early twentieth-century American Southwest as a colonialist project, neither study significantly taps the rich resource of Native-produced Indian imagery.

A slim but significant body of work by historians and anthropologists focuses exclusively on the Santa Fe Railway's impact and construction of the actual and mythic American Southwest, as well as the railroad's association with both the Harvey Company and the fine arts

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<sup>7</sup> Flannery Burke, *From Greenwich Village to Taos: Primitivism and Place at Mabel Dodge Luhan's* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Ramón Gutiérrez, "Charles Fletcher Lummis and the Orientalization of New Mexico," in *Nuevomexicano Cultural Legacy: Forms, Agencies, and Discourse*, Francisco A. Lomelí, Victor A. Sorell, and Genaro M. Padilla, eds. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007).

community. Historian Keith Bryant, Jr., wrote of the symbiotic relationship between the Atchison, Topeka, and the Santa Fe Railway and (non-Indian) artists who took advantage of free fares in exchange for depictions of the Southwest's exoticism, which the railway then used advantageously to "establish northern New Mexico as an internationally recognized cultural center."<sup>9</sup> Anthropologists Marta Weigle and Shelby Tisdale also discussed the repercussions of the railway's incursion into the Southwest. Weigle concentrated primarily on the efforts made by the railroad in conjunction with the Harvey Company to develop tourism through the marketing of the Southwest and their resultant responsibility for "developing middle-class tastes for Indian arts and peoples."<sup>10</sup> Foreshadowing Gutiérrez's later study, Weigle asserted several cogent points regarding the phenomenon of tourism as a by-product of imperialist expansion and, directly related, tourism's marketing and objectification of Native peoples. Tisdale took a more hypothetical stance as she considered the impact of tourism on autochthonous culture, comparing the effects of the railroads on the American Southwest's Indigenous peoples and the Mexico's Tarahumarans. Nevertheless, Tisdale made some interesting observations regarding the Harvey Company's influence on Native American arts and crafts production, arguing, for example, that the company encouraged Navajo silversmiths to alter their traditional jewelry style to one "lighter" and more appealing to tourists.<sup>11</sup> While these studies contribute to our knowledge of the early twentieth-century commodification of the American Southwest, they do not enter into discussions of Native American fine art and touch only incidentally on Indian imagery.

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<sup>9</sup> Keith L. Bryant, Jr., "The Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway and the Development of the Taos and Santa Fe Art Colonies," *Western Historical Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (October 1978), 437.

<sup>10</sup> Marta Weigle, "From Desert to Disney World: The Santa Fe Railway and the Fred Harvey Company Display the Indian Southwest," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 45, no. 1, University of New Mexico Centennial 1889–1989 (Spring 1989), 125.

<sup>11</sup> Shelby J. Tisdale, "Railroads, Tourism, and Native Americans in the Greater Southwest," *Journal of the Southwest* 38, no. 4, Southwestern Indian Art Markets (Winter 1996), 439.

At first glance this imagery appears to lie within the purview of art historians, and studies by art historians such as Bruce Bernstein and W. Jackson Rushing contribute to a sizeable body of work on Dorothy Dunn and her influence upon Native American art. Both Bernstein's solo monograph, *With a View to the Southwest: Dorothy Dunn and a Story of American Indian Painting*, and his joint project with Rushing, *Modern by Tradition: American Indian Painting in the Studio Style*, offer comprehensive, albeit eulogistic summaries of Dunn's career, focusing only secondarily on her Studio students and their output.<sup>12</sup> Both of these studies emerged shortly after Dunn's death and her daughter's subsequent bequeathal of her mother's papers to Santa Fe's Laboratory of Anthropology archives. In effect, Bernstein's and Rushing's laudatory treatments signaled the change in Dunn's embattled legacy that occurred shortly before and upon her death as art historians and art consumers reevaluated her contribution to the field. Consequently, these art historians emphasized Dunn's positive impact on the field rather than positioning the Studio and its artists within the larger context of U.S. nation-building and the consolidation of power by an unmarked hegemony.<sup>13</sup> In his monograph *Native American Art and the New York Avant-Garde: A History of Cultural Primitivism*, Rushing widened his focus from Dunn to the early twentieth-century ascension of modern art and its underpinnings in New Mexico's Euro-American arts community's appropriation of Native art, culture, and imagery.<sup>14</sup> Here again, though, we see an emphasis placed on non-Indian art and artists rather than the Native American experience. By othering Native artists, and Indians in general, the White elite

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<sup>12</sup> Bruce Bernstein, *With a View to the Southwest: Dorothy Dunn and a Story of American Indian Painting* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1995); Bruce Bernstein and W. Jackson Rushing, *Modern by Tradition: American Indian Painting in the Studio Style* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> By "unmarked hegemony" I refer to the concept of "White" as the unquestioned interpretive norm. That is, by refusing to acknowledge other groups, "White" becomes the silent standard. Thus, these historians forward a teleological argument that not only foregrounds White supremacy, but inadvertently perpetuates the colonization of non-White peoples.

<sup>14</sup> W. Jackson Rushing, *Native American Art and the New York Avant-Garde: A History of Cultural Primitivism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).

positioned itself as the unassailable, unquestioned arbiter of fine art. This continues today; foregrounding their studies within the White-controlled art world, art historians often make Indian artists incidental rather than vibrant, equally committed players. By neglecting to question their own perspectives and biases, White art historians, art critics, and collectors essentially relegate Native and other subaltern actors to roles as extras in the narrative of American fine art or sideline them into a category separate from the mainstream. Furthermore, art historians seldom, if ever, address the epistemological violence this cultural system perpetrated upon the artists.

Art historian Jennifer McLerran attempted to rectify this omission in her book *A New Deal for Native Art: Indian Arts and Federal Policy, 1933–1943*.<sup>15</sup> Using the New Deal policies of the Bureau of Indian Affairs as the framework by which she analyzed Indian art, McLerran cogently interrogated the seeming paradox between the ongoing colonization and primitivizing of Native peoples and Commissioner John Collier’s progressive policies. Nevertheless, while McLerran explicated work by Native artists such as Gerald Naylor, her perspective remained fixed upon the art’s non-Native reception rather than the intimate relationship between the artists, the art, and non-Indian consumers. In fact, her interpretation of Naylor’s 1942–1943 painting of the Navajo Council House murals focuses exclusively on the government restrictions Naylor encountered rather than the subtly subversive message incorporated within his work. Moreover, while the New Deal era undeniably proved pivotal in the construction of modern Indian art, her study’s temporal scope of a mere decade limits McLerran’s interpretation to no more than a snapshot of an ongoing process that both predated and outlived this period.

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<sup>15</sup> Jennifer McLerran, *A New Deal for Native Art: Indian Arts and Federal Policy, 1933–1943* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009).

Literary theorists, by contrast, have long worked to unpack mainstream United States' fascination with and appropriation of Native imagery. In *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination*, Shari Huhndorf looked at the long arc of Indigenous cultural pirating that occurred from the end of the nineteenth century onward alongside United States imperialism and nation-building.<sup>16</sup> Using world exposition exhibitions, film, fiction, and cultural trends such as “New Ageism” to craft her interpretation, Huhndorf contextualized her sources within the larger narrative of United States history, revealing the ongoing cultural violence that accompanied (White) modernity while foreclosing Native cultural sovereignty and denying Native Americans present-day legitimacy. Leah Dilworth, in her study *Imagining Indians in the Southwest: Persistent Visions of a Primitive Past*, trained her focus more specifically on the regional perpetuation and perpetration of primitivism within the American Southwest, tracing a line from late-nineteenth-century interest in ethnology to the 1920s appropriation of Indian imagery by modernist artists and writers.<sup>17</sup> Ironically, although Dilworth included a subchapter titled “The Indian Artisan,” and stated, “Indian artisans primarily appeared as anonymous figures in illustrations” and even though “artisans appeared physically [they] did not ‘speak,’” Dilworth made no effort to include the Native voice in her own text.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, both Huhndorf and Dilworth approached their subjects using the particular perspective of literary theorists, not historians. Thus, their emphasis on discourse rather than change over time invites abstraction and neglects the concrete consequences of cultural appropriation upon marginalized peoples.

Anthropologist Molly Mullin also weighed in on the subjects of cultural commodification, power, and gender within the context of Southwestern Native art. In *Culture in*

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<sup>16</sup> Shari M. Huhndorf, *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> Leah Dilworth, *Imagining Indians in the Southwest: Persistent Visions of a Primitive Past* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

*the Marketplace: Gender, Art, and Value in the American Southwest*, Mullin examined how the early twentieth-century rise of “anthropological notions of culture” lent itself to the legitimization of cultural dominance and appropriation under the guises of science and preservation, especially amongst affluent White women.<sup>19</sup> Her primary interests in this study are the alignment of anthropology to cultural domination, the phenomenal interest Indian arts and culture held for well-educated Anglo women, and the meaning of culture itself. While her trenchant analysis holds great value for understanding the critical connections between the American Southwest, anthropology, and the area’s Indigenous peoples, Mullin devotes no more than a paragraph to Dunn and never mentions the impact of the SFIS Studio upon Indian artists and the subsequent commodification of Native American fine art. Like the other texts included here, this study does not interrogate the early twentieth-century artists’ productions; however, Mullin briefly acknowledged present-day Native artists such as Tony Abeyta and Rachel Sakiestewa with regard to the genre’s continuing commodification of Indians.

Strangely, the sole scholar on record who seriously attempted to interpret an early twentieth-century Native artist’s work by reading it against the grain hails from none of the expected academics. Landscape architect Rachel Leibowitz, in her unpublished dissertation “Constructing the Navajo Capital: Landscape, Power, and Representation at Window Rock,” explicated Gerald Nailor’s murals in the Window Rock Tribal Council House in order to construe the artist’s deeper message.<sup>20</sup> Informed by interviews with Gerald Nailor, Jr., Leibowitz looked closely at the senior Nailor’s designs in order to glean the sub-textual meaning the artist tried to convey. While it is unclear whether she was informed by Spivak’s work on the subaltern,

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<sup>19</sup> Molly H. Mullin, *Culture in the Marketplace: Gender, Art, and Value in the American Southwest* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 5.

<sup>20</sup> Rachel Leibowitz, “Constructing the Navajo Capital: Landscape, Power, and Representation at Window Rock,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2008.

it is apparent that Leibowitz grasped the importance of reading against the grain to recover liminal voices. In spite of its significance, however, this study never reached a wider audience; thus, its impact upon the academy remains nominal. Furthermore, Leibowitz's training as a landscape architect delimited her analysis, whereas a perspective more informed by the previous work of historians and art historians would have fleshed out the gaps in her knowledge and added contextualization.

Thus, a gap exists within a historiography that illumines discrete corners of this story but never shines the spotlight on the unique conjuncture of time (early to mid-twentieth century), space (Santa Fe and the SFIS Studio), and actors (Dunn and her non-Indian cohort as well as the Native artists) that germinated this particular and profound occurrence of cultural violence. This is an omission I intend to address by consolidating and synthesizing the various interdisciplinary studies, as well as "reading" the artists' productions, in order to look at why and how non-Indians perpetrated cultural violence upon the Native artists and how the artists both resisted and complied with hegemonic directives. It is my contention that, while much discussion of Native American art and its commodification has taken place, little thought has been given to the responses of the artists themselves; in addition, there has been a lack of scrutiny directed at the ways in which this cultural violence damaged, and continues to impact, Native artists both physically and professionally.

It is important at the outset to make transparent my own limitations as a scholar of Native American history and art. As a White woman, I have spent countless hours painfully examining and questioning my motivations for choosing this subject. Historically, White women have much to answer for in their long and tortured involvement in Native American lives. Taking seriously the urging of such theorists as Linda Tuhiwai Smith for research that empowers marginalized

communities rather than perpetuates imperialist projects, I have asked myself repeatedly where my work falls on the spectrum.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, I cannot claim to “speak” for Native American artists who left little in the way of correspondence. My solidly middle-class upbringing in no way affords me insight into what it means to be an individual living in poverty and dealing with racism, prejudice, and oppression on a quotidian level. But I believe that, like all artists, these men and women produced work as a means of communication. They had something they wanted to say, and this was the way in which they said it. Thus, their paintings can serve as primary documents and interpreting primary documents—well, that is what we historians do. I sincerely hope that I am able, through their art production and supplementary sources, to elucidate their stories and to cast new light on their remarkable achievements.

In order to bring these stories to light, I primarily employ a cultural studies perspective for my analysis, looking specifically at the artifacts and material conditions that reveal a more nuanced story of Native trauma and opportunity, as well as White domination. Using an interdisciplinary approach that aligns itself to cultural studies, I hope to harness the work of cultural anthropologists, historians, art historians, and literary theorists in order to investigate the ways in which relations of power reveal themselves through avenues of culture; in this case, specifically through the art produced by the first cohort of Navajo artists who studied under Dunn. In order to do this, I base my argument on the conception of cultural hegemony as first elucidated by Antonio Gramsci in which he theorized that the dominant class maintains power through its ability to make its own self-serving ideologies and world view appear as the normative. In addition, prevailing theories of gender, identity construction, and race further elucidate my argument. Postcolonial and postmodern methodologies have influenced my thesis

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<sup>21</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd. ed. (London: Zed Books, 2012).

from its inception, including Gayatri Spivak's postcolonial subaltern studies and Michel Foucault's postmodernist work on subjectivity, discourse, and power. Most importantly, Spivak's work in postcolonial studies, particularly her paradigm-bending essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" altered my perception of source material and inspired me to look at the conventionally silent artists' products rather than to search for their non-extant correspondence.<sup>22</sup> As well, concepts of the salvage paradigm and imperial nostalgia, as articulated by historian James Clifford and anthropologist Renato Rosaldo, respectively, inform my interpretation, as does anthropologist Virginia Dominguez's views on the "culturalization of difference."<sup>23</sup> Closely related, Clifford's salvage paradigm reflects "a desire to rescue 'authenticity' out of destructive historical change," while Rosaldo defined imperial nostalgia as the phenomenon that occurs when "people mourn the passing of what they themselves have transformed."<sup>24</sup> Thinking more theoretically, Dominguez took to task the concept of culture itself, positing that it exists as a Western construct that serves to demarcate and separate peoples. She defined culturalization of difference as a "public discourse that promotes intergroup tolerance" by employing "the notion of cultural pluralism, not biological diversity, multilingualism, or class harmony"; thus foreclosing acknowledgement of human group differences engendered by such things as class, gender, language, or sexuality.<sup>25</sup> As well, art historian Timothy McCall's work on the gendering of imagery, especially his article "The Gendering of *Libertas* and the International Gothic: Carlo

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<sup>22</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Cary Nelson, ed. (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

<sup>23</sup> James Clifford, "Of Other Peoples: Beyond the Salvage Paradigm," in *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, Hal Foster, ed. (New York: The New Press, 1998); Virginia R. Dominguez, "Invoking Culture: The Messy Side of 'Cultural Politics,'" in *Eloquent Obsessions: Writing Cultural Criticism*, Marianna Torgovnick, ed. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994); Renato Rosaldo, *Culture & Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

<sup>24</sup> Clifford, *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, 121; Rosaldo, *Culture & Truth*, 69.

<sup>25</sup> Dominguez, *Eloquent Obsessions*, 249.

Crivelli's *Ascoli Annunciation*" proved particularly pertinent for my study.<sup>26</sup> In spite of the essay's focus on Gothic art, McCall's postmodern take on gender coding within the discourse of art criticism lends itself to a cross-genre application. Regarding identity construction, Ramón Gutiérrez's essay on Southwestern Orientalism has helped to structure my thinking in terms of the exoticizing and othering of the American Southwest's Indigenous peoples.<sup>27</sup>

Primary source material provides the foundation for my analysis. The bulk of my primary sources reside in Santa Fe: the Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, the Kenneth M. Chapman Papers, and the Margretta S. Dietrich Papers at the Laboratory of Anthropology Archives; the Laboratory of Anthropology Library; the Dorothy Dunn Art Collection at the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture; the New Mexico State Records Center and Archives Inventory of the Works Projects Administration Collection, 1909–1971; the Kenneth Chapman Papers at the School for Advanced Research, as well as the paintings of the Indian Arts Fund collection also held at the SAR; and the Edgar Lee Hewett Papers at the Fray Angélico Chávez History Library housed at Santa Fe's Palace of the Governors. In Albuquerque, New Mexico, the Elizabeth Willis DeHuff Family Papers at the University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research provided essential information for understanding the pre-Studio nascence of modern Indian painting and drawing. Additionally, the Santa Fe Indian School records held at the National Archives at Denver offered concrete and intriguing facts about the students as attendees of the Indian School.

Although the Navajo artists left little written documentation behind, the correspondence of others who stood on the periphery can contribute significantly to an understanding of the Diné painters. For that reason, primary documents in the form of archived letters provided much of the

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<sup>26</sup> Timothy McCall, "The Gendering of *Libertas* and the International Gothic: Carlo Crivelli's *Ascoli Annunciation*," *Studies in Iconography* 30 (2009): 168–197.

<sup>27</sup> Ramón A. Gutiérrez, "Charles Fletcher Lummis and the Orientalization of New Mexico"; Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

source material for this project. In particular, the decades-long correspondence between Dorothy Dunn and Margretta Dietrich contained in the Dorothy Dunn Kramer Collection at the Laboratory of Anthropology Archives in Santa Fe revealed a wealth of information. The interaction of these two women exemplified the meeting of Santa Fe's intelligentsia, the city's affluent class, and its surrounding Indigenous population; this early to mid-twentieth-century, cross-cultural mixing, unique to Santa Fe, created a vibrant montage that reveals many pertinent images of the prevailing Euro-American attitudes toward race and art as the non-Indian elite sought to create authenticity, both personal and national. Both in their content and their omissions, these letters offer the astute reader and researcher a look behind the façade of Santa Fe's White Indian activists. However, one may well ask why I did not directly examine the correspondence between Dunn and her students, if the research focus is indeed on Dunn's pupils. Interestingly, nothing of this nature exists within the collection. Throughout the files, one sees the Indians as the nexus of activity, and yet their voices are compellingly silent. However, Margretta Dietrich and Dorothy Dunn, acting as intermediaries, allow us a rare glimpse into the world the Native Americans shared with White socialites, Indian-rights activists, and artists. Also valuable were Dunn's exchanges with other correspondents such as Kenneth Chapman, Chapman's correspondence relating to his roles as Dunn's champion and special consultant to the Indian Arts and Crafts Board, Edgar Lee Hewett's museum papers that reveal the written exchange between his staff and the Indian artists, and Elizabeth DeHuff's extensive correspondence with her former student Fred Kabotie, Dunn, and such individuals as Mabel Dodge Luhan.

Newspaper articles, books, and art critiques written during the 1930s through the 1950s provided another source of primary documentation. Santa Fe's long standing eminence as an art

and cultural center, as well as its concentration of writers and artists, fostered numerous publications describing Indian art and the exhibits that showcased it. Newspaper articles, especially those from *The Santa Fe New Mexican*, proved especially helpful in providing some missing details of the artists' lives and deaths. Books written during the period examined, specifically Clara Lee Tanner's 1957 *Southwest Indian Painting* and Dorothy Dunn's *American Indian Painting of the Southwest and Plains Area* also reveal contemporary attitudes toward Native Americans in general and Native American artists in particular.

But it is the artists' voices that I wish to privilege, and I save my closest examination for the paintings produced by the artists themselves. Nailor, Begay, Tahoma, Abeyta, Yazzie, Watchman, and Mary Ellen knowingly produced imagery for a White market that had little interest in anything that did not already meet its expectations of Indianness or fulfill its desires for primitivism. In line with this effort to highlight a Native perspective, I also spoke with contemporary Navajo artists, in particular those descendants of Dorothy Dunn's original students such as Narciso Abeyta's son Tony Abeyta and Gerald Nailor, Jr., in order to glean insight into both their parents' experiences as Native American artists as well as their own.

I chose to include all Diné artists for a number of reasons. A significant number of the successful painters who emerged from the Dunn Studio were Navajo, and as anthropologist and Native American art scholar Lydia Wyckoff maintained in her book *Visions and Voices*, "Under Dorothy Dunn, the artists who perhaps best exemplify the Studio were Navajo."<sup>28</sup> While the Pueblo communities also produced numerous talents such as Pablita Velarde, Ben Quintana, Pop Chalee, and Gerónima Cruz, it is no coincidence that the work of Navajo artists often stands as the exemplar of the successful Studio style. As Tony Abeyta pointed out to me, while Navajo

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<sup>28</sup> Lydia L. Wyckoff, ed., *Visions and Voices: Native American Painting from the Philbrook Museum of Art* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press), 30.

cultural mores frowned upon the depiction of certain sacred ceremonies, Diné restrictions tended to be looser than those of the Pueblos.<sup>29</sup> This allowed the Navajo students more leeway in their choice of subject matter. Furthermore, the vastness of the Navajo reservation and the People's longstanding traditions of transhumance, horsemanship, and sheepherding lent themselves to the production of imagery that spoke with great wistfulness to the art-viewing public and fed its imperial nostalgia-fueled visions of a mythological Western past. Not least perhaps, Dunn claimed in her book that the Navajos' long tradition of sandpainting, as the "visual embodiment of Navajo religion," played and continues to play a pivotal role in Diné design and provided a foundation for art production.<sup>30</sup>

To assemble my study I utilized a thematic framework; this allowed for a deeper investigation into certain themes such as resistance, compliance, and identity construction and the ways in which they were manifested through contemporary culture and changed over time. While these first three ideas and the larger historical narrative weave throughout each of the individual artist's chapters, I also chose to discuss specific themes for each painter that seemed especially pertinent to his or her work or life. I divided my study into six chapters, each of which generally encompasses the years between the SFIS Studio's inception in 1932 and the opening of the IAIA in 1962. Chapter one sets the stage by contextualizing the phenomenal beginnings of Native American fine art through a snapshot of the post-World War I, industrialized United States and by offering a brief history of the Diné. Additionally, a look at early twentieth-century Santa Fe and its function as a cultural borderland serves to highlight the role of this specific landscape as the location for the cultural exchanges and conflicts that occurred. Understanding how Santa Fe itself played a crucial role in the colonization of Indian art and artists is imperative

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<sup>29</sup> Tony Abeyta, in discussion with the author, September 2015.

<sup>30</sup> Dorothy Dunn, *American Indian Painting of the Southwest and Plains Areas* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1968), 113.

for my argument. Thus, this chapter focuses on the early twentieth-century influx of White antimodernists, anthropologists, socialite-activists, and artists into the area. The expectations and aspirations of this White community, influenced by post-war miasma and disillusion, perhaps inexorably led them to appropriate and control Indian art and culture in the name of altruism. At the risk of privileging the non-Native voice once again, this is the point at which I introduce Dorothy Dunn as a pivotal member of this community and more fully examine her as the ultimate arbiter and codifier of the genre of modern traditional Indian art.

The next five chapters discuss, sequentially, the artists I spotlight in this book. Chapter two offers a brief biography of painter Harrison Begay and then looks at the ways in which his life and his work reflected his position as a cultural broker, albeit one pulled in different directions by both his desire for commercial success and his determination to impart critical information to the non-Navajo world. The imagery he favored, Native women weaving or herding sheep, contrasts intriguingly with the reality of the early twentieth-century Navajo world as the Bureau of Indian Affairs instituted a series of devastating herd reductions throughout the 1930s and 1940s that profoundly affected Navajo women in particular and traditional lifeways in general, yet aligns itself perfectly to the parameters set by the SFIS Studio. In addition, Begay's Indian Service boarding school experience highlights the remarkable transformation that occurred around 1930 when educational and racial ideologies shifted from attempts toward assimilation to influential notions of cultural pluralism. Chapter three showcases the painter Gerald Nailor and looks at the ways in which he incorporated resistance within his work, conveying messages both for his White audience and for Native viewers. Quincy Tahoma, another brilliant artist, lived a brief and turbulent life, outlined in chapter four. As White art critics and journalists struggled to categorize his evolving work, they employed a bounty of

gender-coded, trope-laden discourse that served to situate and delimit Tahoma both professionally and personally. Chapter five revolves around the woman artists I included here, Sybil Yazzie, Ruth Watchman, and Mary Ellen. For these Diné, the road to careers as professional painters was made infinitely more difficult by their gender. I argue that this was due in part to a prevailing assumption amongst the White art-buying public that assigned “arts” status to the production of men and the designation of “crafts” to work produced by women—a notion reinforced by Indian school curriculum and the overall infantilization of Native peoples. In addition, I look at the prevailing ethos of the fine art world, one defined by masculinity, and the restrictive gender roles and expectations inherent within the Navajo community, both of which foreclosed professional opportunities to women. In chapter six I discuss the artist Narciso Abeyta, or Ha-So-De. The choices he made regarding assimilation and his horrific experience of the Second World War shed light on the long-term ramifications of the cultural oppression that all of these Navajo artists encountered. Furthermore, his story continues the arc of American Indian fine art as we look at Abeyta’s post-war university training and the concomitant stylistic changes he employed within in his work.

I conclude the book chronologically with the opening of the IAIA, yet it is nevertheless important that we understand both the controversy this purported sea change engendered amongst the Native and White communities and the impact this institution had upon the artists I discuss. Finally, I end with some thoughts on the ongoing ramifications of what began as an essentially White-created and White-defined genre through the interviews I conducted with several modern-day Navajo painters such as Tony Abeyta and Gerald Nailor, Jr. My intention here is to offer some insight into the continuing colonization of Native artists and their struggles

as they attempt to craft careers within a White-constructed genre that remains controlled by non-Indians.

Thus, I hope to offer a study of the history of modern American Indian art and, by doing so, reveal the inherent violence and colonizing that accompanied this project. Art historians, even those attuned to the troubled nature of this topic, tend to consider Native American art within the larger narrative of United States art history, thereby trivializing both the genre and the cultural violence that underscored its inception and continuing existence. Indeed, they often point to the evolution of Indian art that occurred as a result of the Native American rights movement and the opening of the IAIA as proof of Native artists' autonomy. Historians and cultural anthropologists look more generally at the early twentieth-century commodification of Indian culture, while literary theorists and critics tend to dissect the appropriation of Native imagery within popular culture. Hence, we are often led to believe that the active oppression of Native artists and appropriation of their culture existed within a specific and finite span of time. Furthermore, scholars have made little effort to include the voices of Native actors.

It is this dearth of documentation originating from the artists that perforates the historiography. Only through speculation or by examination of the artifacts they left behind can we glean any insight into the artists themselves. In this era of turmoil, as their kinsmen were living through the devastation of their traditional lifeways, how did the work produced by Dunn's Navajo students reflect the challenges posed to the artists by both her instructions and the greater art-buying non-Indian population to depict nothing but Anglo-approved, commercialized depictions of traditional Indian life? If anthropologist Maureen Trudelle Schwarz is correct in her assertion of the Navajo view of synecdoche, then we can surmise that the paintings created by

the Diné artists contain much more than mere commercially successful imagery.<sup>31</sup> In short, these Navajo artists negotiated both the opportunities offered and the demands impressed upon them in a variety of ways: through the use of subtle, sometimes hidden, humor; by cautiously probing the edges of acceptability; through a persistent return to motifs and themes that held profound meaning for them; and through a shared cultural identity that included a sense of situational-fluidity.

The works of Gerald Nailor and Quincy Tahoma, in particular, often intriguingly hint at something darker than the complacent images of tribal life that Dunn encouraged her students to depict. Unfortunately, neither artist lived long enough to achieve all that his talent promised; Nailor met a violent death at the hands of a family member, and the ravages of alcoholism prematurely ended Tahoma's life. However, both left bodies of work that tellingly reveal the complexities of life for a Navajo man trying to resolve the tension inherent between the push of White-dominated society and the pull of his traditional culture. Nailor, even during his student tenure at the Studio, chronicled with cool humor the complexities he confronted as an aspiring Native American artist attempting to negotiate a career that relied for its success on the patronage of an alien culture so at odds with his own. Tahoma, by contrast, painted with an angry passion that captured on canvas the angst he experienced.

Narciso Abeyta, Sybil Yazzie, and Harrison Begay appear to have avoided the tragedies that shortened the lives of their fellow artists, and their work at first glance seems to offer a reciprocal complacency as the artists embraced uncomplicated themes of Navajo pastoralism and domesticity. However, they encountered similar challenges from the non-Indian mainstream as they strove to ply their trade within a cultural environment that by turns categorized, trivialized,

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<sup>31</sup> Maureen Trudelle Schwarz, "Snakes in the Ladies' Room: Navajo Views on Personhood and Effect," *American Ethnologist* 24, no. 3 (August 1997): 602.

and appropriated their work. Begay chose eventual self-segregation on the Navajo Reservation while he continued to paint commercially successful, Dunn-formatted imagery. Abeyta opted instead for a life of cultural assimilation while significantly diverging from those artistic norms, and Yazzie, along with her female Navajo classmates, largely shelved her professional artistic career as her male contemporaries achieved success. The contrasting responses of these painters also provide insight into the options and choices available to the Navajo artists.

We can avail ourselves of the material culture left behind in the form of the paintings produced by Dunn's Navajo artists to piece together their attitudes and lives as they negotiated the complicated Santa Fe milieu of the early twentieth century. But the pictures created by these artists offer much more than dry analysis; they were each enormously gifted talents. Had they not been Indian, they might have reached the zeniths of the international art world; but paradoxically, had these artists not been Indian, their work might never have been noticed at all. It was their "Indianness" that both propelled them to success and hindered them from achieving anything outside of the boundaries of the otherness placed upon them by mainstream culture. Indeed, the work of these artists demands recognition, not only for its intrinsic merit, but also for its value as representative of this fundamentally transitional period in Navajo and United States history. While honoring the legacy of these artists' work the opportunity also exists to tease out a thread of commonality that allows historians new insight into the impact this era had on the Diné.

In spite of their limited agency or self-expression within the confines of the modern Native American art genre, these artists made the most of the opportunities presented to them. We must not lose sight of the fact that they were in every sense of the word artists, not mere pawns of a non-Indian hegemony, and while their control over the means of production was

restricted, they nevertheless were able to use their considerable talents to convey messages of hope, bitterness, anger, and love. Their stories, missing from the historiography, demand that we draw connections between continuing hegemonic colonizing projects and give voice to Native art and artists, both present and past. Dorothy Dunn once wrote, “Countless volumes have been written about the Indian, yet he has rarely written; his truest record is in his art, particularly his modern painting.”<sup>32</sup>

A note on terminology: for the sake of consistency, in all but a few exceptions the text refers to the artists by their Euro-American names. The artists themselves often signed their work, when they did sign it, using both names at various times. Narciso Abeyta tended to use his Navajo name, “Ha-So-De” or “Ha-So-Deh,” when signing his paintings, but Nailor and Begay signed with their “American” names more often than not. Quincy Tahoma appears to have never used any name other than that aforementioned for both personal and professional purposes. When referring to the Navajos in general, the word “Diné” and the phrase “the People” (the literal translation of Diné) are often used interchangeably with “Navajo.” I also employ the terms “Native American” and “Indian” interchangeably. Throughout the book, I have given preference to the term “White” over “Anglo.” Even though many Native individuals commonly refer to White non-Indians as the latter, the former is more precise terminology as it does not imply a British or English American ethnicity.

As a final note, I feel it is necessary to explain why I have chosen not to include the stories of the *nuevomexicano* artists who played a critical role in the imperial project of early

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<sup>32</sup> Dunn, *American Indian Painting*, 367.

twentieth-century Santa Fe. Indeed, many among the influx of White elites who appropriated Indian art also strove to mine the region's Spanish culture as well; after all, this is the time period in which the White hegemony constructed and promulgated the notion of New Mexico's tri-culturalism. In fact, in her insightful monograph *From Greenwich Village to Taos*, Flannery Burke wrote quite extensively about the schism that developed between White "activists" who promoted Indian welfare and those more concerned with the Hispanic population. Undoubtedly, much remains to be written on this subject, but unfortunately it is outside the scope of this study. Nevertheless, by their omission I do not by any stretch of the imagination wish to imply that the *nuevomexicanos'* contribution to the field of fine art was unimportant to the historical narrative.

## Chapter 1: Setting the Stage

To set the stage for a study of the world that the first cohort of Navajo painters from the Santa Fe Indian School encountered, it is necessary to discuss a number of pertinent strands that intersected in order to create it. The complexities of the post-World War I era, especially within the newly powerful United States, stands foremost in significance. Changes that occurred within the realm of White-American Indian relations during the early twentieth century are emblematic of the more sweeping transformations that carried national and global implications. New systems of thought, industrialism and its close associate anomie, the debacle of global war, and the cresting of European and American imperialist projects profoundly altered the fabric of Americans' lives. The rapidly changing and modernizing nation engendered considerable anxiety amongst its populace; this frequently manifested in responses that either sought to push back modernity through an embrace of perceived authenticity or primitivism, or attempts to stave off change through efforts directed at homogenization.

The battle over Pueblo ceremonial dances that occurred during the 1920s offers one example of this clash of ideologies; while reformers such as local rancher and former teacher Clara True fervently sought to end the “grossly immoral” dances, other antimodernists like writer Mary Austin celebrated the “natural and healthy sexuality” they expressed.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes these two camps overlapped, however, rather than conflicted. We see this in the early twentieth-century movement to promote American Indian fine art as a nationalist genre; while White intellectuals lauded Native art production as an authentically “modern” United States phenomenon, they nevertheless positioned it as static and timeless, foreclosing Indian art and

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<sup>1</sup> Jacobs, *Engendered Encounters*, 113.

artists from the modern world. Indeed, Indian fine art, itself a result of the many intermingled strands that wove together to form the post-World War I American West, experienced a convoluted birth and childhood that reveals as much about White imaginings and desires as Native ones.

The Southwest, especially the newly minted state of New Mexico and its capital, Santa Fe, took a leading role in this birth as it served as a borderland replete with multiple sites of Indian-White interaction.<sup>2</sup> It is not a coincidence that Native American easel painting found its early florescence in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The coming together of different Indian communities and the newly arrived White elite cadre; including such individuals as Dorothy Dunn, John Collier Sr., and Kenneth Chapman; happened in this singular location, at this specific time. The resulting focus on Indian art spoke to the interest both Indians in general and American cultural production, especially in the realm of high culture, held for the recently ensconced White aristocracy. The first graduating class of Navajo artists from Dunn's SFIS Studio also sought to promote their own individual and tribal interests through their art production. As the world rapidly changed around them all of these players, both White and Native, fought to adapt to new challenges and to preserve that which mattered most to them.

Early twentieth-century Santa Fe proved to be a crucible for the mixing of disparate cultures and peoples, bringing together individuals from many of the hamlet's elite camps who turned their gaze toward the area's Native population, objectifying and orientaling it. As Euro-American artists, socialites, "friends-of-the-Indian" activists, intellectuals, and anthropologists

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<sup>2</sup> Like Samuel Truett and Pekka Hämäläinen, I conceptualize borderlands more as contact zones between peoples of differing worldviews rather than strictly as geopolitical spaces where nation-states meet. Furthermore, I understand borderlands as a shifting space where individuals constantly reinvent themselves while embracing a multitude of identities. Pekka Hämäläinen and Samuel Truett, "On Borderlands," *Journal of American History* (Sept. 2011), 347.

imposed their values and preconceptions upon Indians, they appropriated, fetishized, and commodified Native culture as well. Among those most vulnerable to White meddling were the young Diné studying at the SFIS, including those students under Dorothy Dunn's tutelage. Historians, art historians, and cultural anthropologists have written extensively about Santa Fe during its early twentieth-century transformation, both discussing White-Indian interaction as well as focusing on the town itself as the site for domestic colonialism. For example, Chris Wilson's trenchant study, *The Myth of Santa Fe: Creating a Modern Regional Tradition*, examines the ways in which the affluent elite led a campaign to reinvent the city as an "authentic" tourist attraction through the creation of the Santa Fe style of architecture and a self-conscious romanticizing of the nearby Indians.<sup>3</sup>

Unquestionably, Santa Fe provided the ideal environment for Dunn and anyone else interested in autochthonous artifacts and Native Americans in general. Overall, this small, exotic city, until quite recently part of a foreign country, offered an arena for a mixing of cultures, races, and classes. J.J. Brody elegantly summed up the rapid evolution of New Mexico's capital when he wrote, "The first decade of the twentieth century saw the beginning of Santa Fe's transformation from a dusty town with a population of less than six thousand into a center for anthropology, a health mecca, and artists' colony of national and international renown, and a tourist destination for the affluent."<sup>4</sup> Thus, Santa Fe served as a location for many individuals to enjoy the city's cultural tourism delights while escaping either poor health through the undertaking of a "rest cure" or when fleeing from the ugliness of urbanism. The cadre of East Coast and Midwestern artists, socialites, and intellectuals who flocked to the deserts of the

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<sup>3</sup> Chris Wilson, *The Myth of Santa Fe: Creating a Modern Regional Tradition* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> J.J. Brody, *Pueblo Indian Painting: Tradition and Modernism in New Mexico, 1900–1930* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1997), 47.

American Southwest to reinvent themselves hungered for an outlet that, by transference, provided them with a sense of their own authenticity. While pretending to live *la pura vida*, unsullied by the crass modernity that threatened their cities of origin, Santa Fe's non-Indian elites saw in the nearby Pueblo and Navajo Indians the primitivism they longed for. Serendipitously, the exotic aboriginals—so clearly different from themselves—needed guidance and protection, or so people like Margretta Dietrich, Martha and Amelia Elizabeth White, and Mary Cabot Wheelwright believed. Employing a mixture of paternalism and benevolent racism, wealthy socialites formed organizations intended to look after Indian interests such as the New Mexico Association on Indian Affairs and its attendant Indian Club, chaired by Margretta Dietrich, directed by Wheelwright and Elizabeth White, and in consultation with Kenneth Chapman. Viewing the Indians as the perfect foil for all of their overarching concerns regarding social reform and modernity, this cohort fetishized Native American culture in an attempt to quiescently preserve it even as they commodified and reified their vision of primitivism. While they constructed authenticity, elites purchased and attempted to manage the commodities produced by Indians. The pottery, weavings, and art that they used to decorate their houses provided the apparatus by which wealthy Whites framed their identities, and the paternalism they showered upon Indigenous peoples supported their notions of superiority. Thus, the appropriation and commodification of the surrounding Indians and their culture and wares served multiple purposes for a newly arrived White elite bent on creating a world for themselves that shunned industrialism and invited authenticity. This fresh influx of Europeans engendered a commensurate set of changes for the local Indian population; while the Indigenous peoples understood this most recent onslaught as one more attempt to dominate and profit from them,

they also carefully sought out the sometimes double-edged benefits that accompanied pervasive colonialism.

It was the Indians' suspicion and circumspection that White intellectuals profoundly misread at the beginning of the twentieth century. The unbounded goodwill of artists, activists, and educators who believed they had a messianic purpose in promoting and protecting Indians and their culture must have seemed ominously familiar to Pueblo Indians and Navajos long used to the exploitative machinations of non-Indians. While the White population often felt that they "understood" Native people; it is clear that their understanding hinged upon perceptions of Indigeneity that had more to do with romantic themes gleaned from popular discourse or the hypotheses of White anthropologists. Indeed, a profound disconnect exists between the Diné creation story and the western, anthropological account of the origins of the Navajos, but both narratives offer valuable insights into the early-twentieth century Navajo way of life. In many respects, these two worldviews, the Navajo and the Euro-American, epitomize the dialectic that informed the artwork produced by the Navajo artists trained at Dorothy Dunn's Studio at the Santa Fe Indian School. Their deeply held values pertaining to balance and equality shone through their paintings, and the Navajo artists' works speak to the importance traditional pastoralism and their homelands held for them. The course of Navajo history also points to the resourcefulness of the People and the fluidity of their culture as they navigated the obstacles and opportunities presented to them.

The prevailing western view, based on linguistic similarities between Athapaskan dialects in the Northwest and the Navajo language, holds that the Diné, along with other North American Indigenous peoples, crossed the land bridge over the Bering Strait from Asia during the Ice Age that occurred between 75,000 B.C.E. and 8,000 B.C.E. Archaeologists point to firm evidence of

human habitation in this continent beginning at least 12,000 years ago.<sup>5</sup> According to this theory, as the ice receded small bands of people struck out and dispersed in search of more hospitable climates and plentiful game. Specifically, scientific evidence for the Navajos' settlement of *Dinétah*, their traditional lands located in northern New Mexico and Arizona in an area bound roughly between Mt. Hesperus, Mt. Taylor, Blanca Peak, and the San Francisco Peaks, has generally pointed to the late 1400s or early 1500s, although more recent scholarship now posits their arrival occurring as early as the 1100s.<sup>6</sup>

The Navajo creation story refutes much of this. Indeed, Diné traditional beliefs assert that the People have lived in Dinétah since the beginning of their existence into this, the Fourth World. After much travail and arduous travel through the First World (the Black World), the Second (the Blue World), and the Third (the Yellow World), First Man and First Woman were carried in a flood to this, the Glittering World. It was here that Changing Woman was born and gave birth to her twin sons, Born for Water and Monster Slayer. Changing Woman and the twins brought livestock and medicine to the People, and Changing Woman created the original four clans from skin she rubbed from her breasts, back, and arms. As the Diné interacted and intermarried with other Indigenous peoples, including the Apaches and the Pueblo tribes, new clans formed and the People spread throughout Dinétah.<sup>7</sup> As they increased in number, the Diné offered and accepted cultural exchanges between themselves and the surrounding peoples; in general, both traditional beliefs and anthropology agree upon this. For example, anthropologists believe that the Navajo traditional home, the hogan, stands as an amalgam of Pueblo and

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<sup>5</sup> Colin G. Calloway, *First Peoples: A Documentary Survey of American Indian History*, 3rd ed. (Boston, Mass: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008), 16.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Iverson, *Diné: A History of the Navajos* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), 16, 20; Marsha Weisiger, *Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 62, 107.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 8, 11.

Athapaskan building techniques. This cultural fusion, along with the influences and contributions of the Spanish colonizers of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, formed the basis for the Navajo culture of today.<sup>8</sup>

While the isolation of Dinétah served initially to protect the Navajos from the early Spanish arrivals, by the early 1600s the Europeans began singling out and chronicling Navajo exploits in that location as the two cultures clashed over slaves, horses, and livestock.<sup>9</sup> The first Spanish soldiers and missionaries arriving in the Southwest tended to group all Indians who were clearly not from the Pueblo communities together. Thus, they only differentiated the local Navajos from Apaches, both of them Athapaskan speakers, through the former's propensity to farm and their semi-sedentary lifestyle, initially calling them the *apaches de Nabajú*, or the "Apaches with fields."<sup>10</sup> Marsha Weisiger asserts in *Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country* that the allure of the Spanish horses proved difficult for the Diné to resist. Horses developed as a symbol of masculinity and procuring them in raids affirmed manliness, while domesticated sheep, another Spanish novelty, were over time closely aligned to the feminine.<sup>11</sup> The Navajos quickly appropriated both of these animals, transforming them into integral parts of their culture. By the late seventeenth century and continuing throughout the next, the Navajos warred almost constantly with Spanish and Mexican inhabitants, the Navajos swooping out from their protected lands behind the rising reef of the Continental Divide to raid Pueblo villages or Spanish enclaves strung out along the Rio Grande River and the Spanish regularly sending forth troops bent on punishment.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 20–21. It is important to note, however, that Navajo myth does not in any way acknowledge Spanish contributions (such as sheep and horses) to Diné culture.

<sup>9</sup> Weisiger, *Dreaming of Sheep*, 109.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 111.

The arrival of the Euro-American population into the area in the mid-nineteenth century escalated the tension.<sup>13</sup> After the U.S.-Mexico War, the United States claimed the region as war spoils in 1848, and this changing of the guard translated for the Navajos into harsher, better-organized reprisals. This period, known to the Diné as “the Fearing Time” culminated in 1864’s Long Walk, or *Hwéeldi* in Navajo terminology, when Colonel Kit Carson rounded up thousands of Navajos and forced them to march three hundred miles south in a government plan to punish them for raiding.<sup>14</sup> Their forced four-year incarceration at New Mexico’s Bosque Redondo, a place so unlike their homelands that they could not successfully farm, or indeed, eke out any subsistence, caused the deaths of hundreds of Navajo men, women, and children from starvation, diseases such as smallpox and tuberculosis, and sheer homesickness.<sup>15</sup> Rather than support the Navajos indefinitely on government subsidies, federal policy soon deemed the plan a failure. The treaty Diné leaders Barboncito and Manuelito signed with the United States government in 1868 allowed the surviving Navajos to straggle back to a severely reduced version, one-tenth, of their original lands along with the promise of seeds, tools, and three sheep per family.<sup>16</sup> These provisions, however, were slow to arrive; the Navajos waited over a year for the promised sheep, and inclement weather destroyed many of the crops they planted with government seeds.<sup>17</sup> In the meantime, the Navajos rebuilt their destroyed hogans, cleared their wasted fields, and pieced together the remnants of their lives, overjoyed to be back on their sacred lands. This return to

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.; Raymond Friday Locke, *The Book of the Navajo*, 5th ed. (Los Angeles: Mankind, 1976), 361.

<sup>15</sup> Iverson, *Navajo Nation*, 9–10.

<sup>16</sup> Laura Gilpin, *Enduring Navaho* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), 19; Locke, *Book of the Navajo*, 384. Interestingly, Gerald (New Deer) Nailor, artist Gerald Nailor’s son, recounts this event much differently than the general historical narrative would have it. New Deer claims that the persuasive powers of Barboncito and Manuelito gradually eroded the U.S. government’s stance and, through their powers, the Navajo leaders were able to guarantee the Navajos’ return to their homelands rather than relocation to Indian Territory (Oklahoma). It is certainly true that the U.S. government did, for a time, consider moving the Diné to Indian Territory instead of back to Dinétah.

<sup>17</sup> Locke, *Book of the Navajo*, 395.

their homelands, now the officially sanctioned Navajo Reservation, marked the beginning of a period of rebuilding their pastoral and farming lifestyle.

Although the Navajos' relationship with non-Indian administration remained one of unrelieved contention, their dealings with their Pueblo neighbors displayed a fluidity that marked Navajo culture early on. Throughout modern history the Navajos had at various times formed alliances with the Pueblos against the Spanish—as was the case during the Reconquest of the mid-1690s when some Pueblo Indians fled reprisal and sought sanctuary with the Diné—or fought against the Pueblo peoples when the latter aligned themselves with Europeans against the Navajos in retaliation for raiding.<sup>18</sup> By the time the Spanish began their incursion into Indian lands, the Navajos already had a long and checkered history of interaction with the Rio Grande Pueblo villages—a history that included both trading and raiding and instigated a cultural exchange generally thought responsible for introducing many of the cornerstones of Navajo culture. The Navajo and Pueblo Indians' symbiotic relationship led to the former's adoption of a matrilineal clan system and an agriculturally-based, sedentary lifestyle, even as they rejected the Pueblo Indian languages and tendency toward a male-dominated society.<sup>19</sup> Their cultural interchange may also be responsible for Navajo sand painting and weaving as well, although the Diné creation story firmly refutes this theory, and some anthropologists assert that the Pueblo Indians learned weaving skills from the Navajos.<sup>20</sup> Here, anthropological evidence appears to support Diné legend. Gladys Reichard speculated that early Navajos may have brought their weaving skills with them to the Southwest, rather than having learned them from the Pueblo peoples. She pointed to similarities between Diné weaving methods and those of the Northwestern Salish people, while noting differences between Navajo and Pueblo methods,

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<sup>18</sup> Weisiger, *Dreaming of Sheep*, 113, 121.

<sup>19</sup> Iverson, *Navajo Nation*, 4.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, Dunn, *American Indian Painting*, 112.

including a variation in looms and the significant fact that in the Navajo culture women weave rather than men.<sup>21</sup> Over a period of several centuries, then, the Navajos evolved into a unique synthesis including influences from Apache horsemen and Pueblo farmers, taking aspects of both cultures and stamping them with their own inimitable style. Equally significant, deeply engrained animosities and mistrust developed between the Navajos and their non-Indian neighbors during the relatively short time, a mere three hundred years, that the Europeans had inhabited the region.

By the twentieth century, all of the Indigenous peoples of the Santa Fe area, including the Diné, resisted and accommodated White overtures; that is, resisted when their actions became too obtrusive and accommodated White intentions when they served a Native purpose. They accomplished this through a wide variety of strategies, most of which remained unreadable to White reformers. Despite their yearnings to play Indian and their contentions regarding their instinctual understanding of Indians, members of the White community often found Indians inscrutable. In their correspondence from the period, non-Indian reformers often displayed a sort of resigned frustration to Indian reticence, along with a fundamental paternalism. Ultimately, though, the allure of the Indians' "foreignness," their perceived exoticism in contrast to the modern homogenization of industry and urbanization, made them irresistible to a White elite class desperate for a sense of its own place and purpose. For the White bourgeoisie, exoticizing the Navajos and their Indigenous neighbors proved useful as a means of normalizing themselves and their own transplanted status.

Orientalist discourse pervaded the writings of anthropologists working in the Southwest and infiltrated the ideologies of both the literati and White Indian activist organizations. Ramón Gutiérrez contended that "by imagining the [Indigenous and Mexican] residents of New Mexico as frozen in the past, as echoing a remote and primitive place, writers and observers could ignore

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<sup>21</sup> Locke, *Book of the Navajo*, 12.

the present in which they lived.”<sup>22</sup> The epistemic violence produced by this orientalist discourse marginalized Native peoples by denying them a position within a modernizing world.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the exoticism provided by New Mexico and Santa Fe’s remoteness and isolation from urban centers aided in the orientalization of its peoples. Gutiérrez further elaborated that, “If New Mexico could be conceived as an oriental place, as an Egypt locked in a time warp in the past, New Mexicans could be romantically depicted as specimens of degenerate races destined to collection in museums and extinction on the earth.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, it was also imperative to the newly arrived elite that Native peoples, or at least their lifestyles, be seen as giving way to the new order, albeit one with a messianic *noblesse oblige* determined to save them.

The rise of social sciences such as anthropology and archaeology that took place during the previous century fueled the urgency felt by many within the White intelligentsia to study and preserve the putatively dying Native cultures through the early practice of salvage ethnography. Men such as explorer and geologist John Wesley Powell and anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan “stamped with the authority of science the assumption that the Indian was fated to disappear.”<sup>25</sup> When the Indians refused to vanish by the turn of the century, intellectuals contended that, regardless of population counts, the inevitable course of assimilation certainly doomed Indigenous cultures. By the 1920s, scientists and antimodern activists joined forces as they embraced the concept of cultural relativism, providing another wrinkle in the attitudes of some White elites toward Native peoples.<sup>26</sup> For Euro-American intellectuals, this often meant a reassessment of Indian culture as they mined it for symbols that spoke to their own

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<sup>22</sup> Gutiérrez, *From Nuevomexicano Cultural Legacy*, 20.

<sup>23</sup> For the concept of epistemic violence, I am indebted to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and her essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Cary Nelson, ed. (Urbana, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

<sup>24</sup> Gutiérrez, *From Nuevomexicano Cultural Legacy*, 25.

<sup>25</sup> Brian W. Dippie, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1982), 223.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

dissatisfaction with modernity. For the Indians, this translated into a newly aggressive White appropriation and appreciation of autochthonous cultures, along with the end of tribal land allotment through the extirpation of the 1886 Dawes Act and the steering of educational policies away from overt assimilation. John Collier's 1933–1945 stewardship of the Bureau of Indian Affairs under President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal administration exemplified this transformed perspective.<sup>27</sup> While this progressive viewpoint altered government policies, it proved unable to dislodge the intransigence of the “vanishing American” concept. Indeed, much of the impetus for individuals like Collier and Dorothy Dunn, as the 1932 creator of the first federally-sanctioned Indian fine art program at the Santa Fe Indian School, rested in their messianic determination to preserve what they felt to be the last vestiges of authentic American primitivism.<sup>28</sup>

The promotion and cultivation of Native American art seemed to many of these individuals to provide the ideal means of recording and preserving Indian culture. In 1922, for example, archaeologist Edgar Lee Hewett wrote in an essay titled “Native American Artists” that, “It has been customary to assert that the Indian as a race is doomed, but no race is doomed so long as its culture lives. When that is destroyed utterly, the soul of the people is dead, degradation through loss of self-respect is inevitable, and the race is beyond hope.” Hewett added, “it is not beyond reasonable belief that the growing intelligence of the stronger race will at last bring about an appreciation of this splendid people, one hundred per cent [sic] American

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<sup>27</sup> For more on the Indian Service Indian School policies, see chapter two of this study.

<sup>28</sup> Winona Garmhausen asserts in her book *History of Indian Arts Education in Santa Fe* that the Chilocco Industrial School in Oklahoma offered a class in “fine and applied arts” beginning in 1932 and predating the Studio by one academic year. She does clarify, though, by writing that the instruction of Native arts was “in the planning stage” although “a wide variety of music courses were taught.” Winona Garmhausen, *History of Indian Arts Education in Santa Fe* (Santa Fe, NM: Sunstone Press, 1988), 46.

in ancestry and culture, and feel a vast pride in its survival and culture.”<sup>29</sup> While White scientists and artists looked to Indian art initially for its perceived ethnologic value, by the 1930s full-blown efforts involving the United States government and a multitude of well-meaning and perhaps not-so-well-meaning reformers, educators, artists, and socialites had transformed Indian painting into a distinct genre—an exemplar of which was the 1931 nationally touring “Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts” organized by artist John Sloan and writer and anthropologist Oliver La Farge and credited as “the first exhibition of American Indian art selected entirely with consideration of esthetic value.”<sup>30</sup> More than altruism or scientific curiosity drove the movement to control Indian art, however. Non-Indian intellectuals also looked to American Indian artistic production to provide an authentically American answer to European cultural dominance and, just as importantly, as a valuable commodity. As a result, the hegemony jealously guarded and controlled Native art production, fearing that it would be sullied by miscegenation with European styles or even by the mingling of different Indian cultures.

Popular discourse from the first half of the twentieth century reveals a fixation upon Indian art as a uniquely American response to Europe’s longstanding position as the western world’s arbiter and producer of high culture, and concurrently, the focus gradually shifted during this period from Indian art’s ethnologic importance to its aesthetic value. From its inception, the United States had looked longingly to Europe, comparing itself and angling for cultural credibility.<sup>31</sup> America’s late-nineteenth-century foray into global imperialism and its heroic presence in World War I seemed to cement the idea in many influential minds that the point of

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<sup>29</sup> Edgar L. Hewett, “Native American Artists,” *Art and Archaeology: The Arts through the Ages* 13, no. 3 (March 1922), 109.

<sup>30</sup> John Sloan and Oliver La Farge, as quoted in Jeanne Snodgrass King, “Dorothy Dunn and the Studio,” *Southwest Art* (June 1983), 72.

<sup>31</sup> For more on this subject, see, for example, Kariann Akemi Yokota, *Unbecoming British: How Revolutionary America became a Postcolonial Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

United States' equal cultural standing needed to be driven home. Even as modernists in New York struggled to compete with the dominance of European artists, White painters such as Sloan, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Marsden Hartley converged upon New Mexico and, fueled by romantic notions of exoticism already well-established by both the popular and scholarly press, orientalized the Indigenous peoples through romantic depictions of Indians in traditional pursuits, or paired notions of Indigeneity with "vanishing American"-inspired modern themes such as buffalo bones and skulls.<sup>32</sup> A 1931 article by Oliver La Farge, "An Art Really American," referred to Indian painting when it stated, "With critics, artists and the public alike constantly regretting our lack of an art independent of Europe, or at least an art not merely imitative of what is going on in the old world, it is strange that so little attention has been paid to an artistic movement devoid of any direct European influence, alive, vigorous and very modern, going on under our noses."<sup>33</sup> Indeed, La Farge's essay displays an interesting schism; while he spent considerable effort throughout the piece attempting to separate Indians and Indian artists from mainstream artists—othering them, essentially, as primitives—he concluded his article with a sudden embrace of Indian art as "our artistic heritage" and summed up his exegesis by writing, "Today the Indian artist, the aboriginal, primitive American, stands ready to demonstrate, if we will let him, that out of his ancient tradition and present aspiration he has an important contribution to make to the richness of our modern life."<sup>34</sup> In its attempt to position Indian art as "modern" and equal to European production, La Farge's essay is also indicative of this ideological transition of Native-made imagery from the realm of ethnology to high culture.

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<sup>32</sup> Wanda M. Corn, *Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915–1935* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1999), 260.

<sup>33</sup> Oliver La Farge, "An Art Really American," *Santa Fe New Mexican*, 10 March 1931.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

Not surprisingly, Dunn situated herself as one of the most vocal acolytes of this new perspective on Indian art as an authentically American offering, and one ranking a fine art categorization as well. As early as 1935 she introduced her article on the “American Indian child” for the periodical *School Arts* by writing that, “His culture is old, developed, deeply rooted in his home land, honestly American,” and concluded by stating, “with such forces as the Laboratory of Anthropology and the Indian Arts Fund of Santa Fe, the enlightened policies of recent Indian administration and the progressive attitude of modern education at work, the outlook for American Indian art is very much brighter. In fact, it seems quite possible that it may yet occupy its well deserved position as one of the great arts of the world.”<sup>35</sup> The editor of *School Arts*, Pedro Lemos, heartily seconded Dunn’s assertions a year later in his editorial, “Have we any American Art?” While reverberating with the “vanishing American” trope, Lemos’s essay urges the promotion of Indian art as the double answer to both that dilemma as well as the United States’ second-class cultural status. He complained, “Just why we love to follow the style of every art fashion that is propagandized into popularity is still a mystery. We really have a wealth of source material, and while young as a nation, history and legendry is everywhere if we will only look for it.” He further elaborated, “From the time that the land-grabbing and gold-hunting instincts of the white race considered ‘a dead Indian a good Indian,’ Indian art and culture has barely survived. . . . Only a small percentage of appreciation exists today for American Indian Art, but as the art centers in Europe take their hats off to the arts of our Indians, it will not now be long before it will be the fashion for all of us to do likewise.” After this nod to Dunn, “Today at the government school [Dunn] is giving many bright-eyed Indian students from different tribes a new reason living,” Lemos concluded with, “We can have

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<sup>35</sup> Dorothy Dunn, “Indian Children Carry Forward Old Traditions,” *School Arts* 34, no. 7 (March 1935), 426, 435.

a North American Art only when we truly believe in creative expression to the point where we will create and not borrow from Mexico or France.”<sup>36</sup>

The move to glorify Indian art as the United States’ contribution to global high culture continued into the 1940s. Dorothy Adlow asserted in an article written in 1940 for the *Christian Science Monitor* that American artists painting in the “European academic tradition” appear “diffuse in character” and lacked the “forceful graphic design that was unobscured in the Indian drawings.”<sup>37</sup> Driving home her point, Adlow remarked, “The work of the Santa Fe School seems interesting and valuable.”<sup>38</sup> A year later, Adlow again evinced approval in an article written for the *Monitor* in her review of a traveling exhibition of Indigenous art from New York’s Museum of Modern Art. She proselytized, “We today must accept, willy nilly, synthetic materials, plastics, and substitutes. The Indians operated imaginatively with roots and grasses . . . pure wool, vegetable dyes . . .” and then self-consciously stated, “Some of us feel a nostalgia for these textures and surfaces made meaningful by the sensitive touch.” Even more damning, Adlow contrasted European modern to Native American art and found the former lacking: “Picasso, Braque, Klee, Brancusi have taught us to understand our indigenous art. And surrealism, in its pretentious exploration of the realm of thought and feeling, dream and race memory, becomes a pallid salon exotic, compared with the inwardness and transcendency of American Indian art.”<sup>39</sup> Adlow’s criticism, like much of this era’s discourse, reveals the promise Indian art held not only as an answer to Europe’s, and more specifically Paris’s, seemingly

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<sup>36</sup> Pedro Lemos, “Have we any American Art?” *School Arts* 36, no. 3 (November 1936), 131. Lemos’s mention of borrowing from Mexico concerns an earlier comment he made in his editorial regarding United States artists who “by the score have become imitators of Riviera, Orosco, and other Mexican artists.”

<sup>37</sup> Dorothy Adlow, “Indian Artists of Santa Fe,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 24 August 1940.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Dorothy Adlow, “Long Neglected Native Work Now Prized by Collectors,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 27 October 1941.

unnegotiable role as the West's cultural center, but also its potential to assuage the vicissitudes of modernity and the coldness of modern art.

Yet, the value of Indian art lay not only in the intangible; Indian-made products were big business and had been for some time. Indeed, French, English, and Spanish merchants had traded with Native Americans virtually since first contact. In the United States Southwest, the burgeoning of the tourist trade engendered by the construction of the Santa Fe Railway and the early twentieth-century's Harvey Houses and Indian Detours, along with increasingly affordable automobiles and improved roads, opened up the region to hordes of sightseers and amenity-seekers and vastly intensified White-Indian interaction and commerce. Native Americans eagerly participated in the explosion of capitalism incurred by these manifestations of modernity, selling their often speedily made goods to tourists happy to own a piece of the exotic American West. These transactions flew in the face of the moneyed few who worried that their investment in Native American pottery and art would be compromised by a market glut of tourist trinkets. Furthermore, those of the White elite who had early on established themselves as New Mexican aristocracy sought to cement their social standing by acting as arbiters of Indian arts and craft production through the creation and imposition of standards. Indian fine art in the form of easel painting served as an easily controlled commodity, since this was a category of artifacts that the White hegemony constructed, so to speak, from scratch at the beginning of the century.

Under the guises of altruism and benevolence, non-Indians from the start determined which Native artists received commissions, set the price of their paintings, and tightly controlled the imagery the painters produced through instruction and the market. Archaeologists working in the United States Southwest, who were themselves striving to create a truly American field rather than turning to the predictable study of ancient Roman or Greek civilizations, led the

charge. During the final decade of the nineteenth century, Jesse Walter Fewkes began commissioning an unnamed Hopi artist to paint pictures of Katsinas, and at the turn of the century, artist Kenneth Chapman, working alongside the legendary archaeologist Edgar Lee Hewett, “found” depictions of Navajo dancers drawn by Api Begay and, supplying him with superior paper, commissioned Begay to create additional pictures with ethnologic content.<sup>40</sup> Around 1910, Hewett once again “found” watercolors of San Ildefonso Pueblo dancers produced by Crescencio Martinez and began providing the artist with better supplies while encouraging him to continue painting ceremonial imagery.<sup>41</sup> Meanwhile, influential White women such as poet Alice Corbin Henderson and artist Olive Rush were also venturing out to the nearby Pueblos and purchasing work by Tesuque, Santa Clara, and San Ildefonso artists.

Although Native Americans of every nation had unquestionably painted throughout their histories for any number of purposes and on a myriad of surfaces, including kiva walls and buffalo hides, the emergence of pictorial art created on paper, using colored pencils or watercolors, was a fresh endeavor that not coincidentally aligned itself with the burgeoning tourist trade and the influx of artists and archaeologists into the region. By 1917, the White intelligentsia had taken firm hold of the embryonic field of modern Indian painting.<sup>42</sup> That year, Hewett, in his role as director of both Santa Fe’s School of American Archaeology and the Museum of New Mexico, hired Martinez to paint ceremonial scenes for his institutions. The following year witnessed the efforts of Elizabeth DeHuff, folklorist, teacher, writer, and wife of

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<sup>40</sup> Kenneth Chapman, “Notes on the development of pictorial art among the Pueblo, Navajo, Apache, and other Southwestern tribes,” unpublished, Kenneth M. Chapman Collection, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM. The American Southwest’s horde of anthropologists included such luminaries as Adolph Bandelier whose 1890 publication of *The Delight Makers* profoundly influenced followers like Edgar Lee Hewett, inspiring Hewett to lead the first archaeological field camps into the Pajarito Plateau as he successfully lobbied for the 1906 American Antiquities Act and directed both the School of American Archaeology and Museum of New Mexico. Dorothy Dunn credits Hewett as being the first non-Indian to “discover” and encourage Indian painting.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

the recently appointed SFIS superintendent John DeHuff, as she handpicked seven male students who, with permission from her husband, spent afternoons painting in the DeHuff home in lieu of the usual vocational work. These seven boys, among them Velino Shije Herrera (or Ma Pe Wi, Zia Pueblo), Fred Kabotie (Hopi), Otis Polelonema (Hopi), Manuel Cruz (Ohkay Owingeh, then known as San Juan Pueblo), Guadalupe Montoya (Ohkay Owingeh), and Juan Jose Montoya (San Ildefonso Pueblo), later became known as the founders of the Modern Pueblo School, and were largely self-taught as the Indian Service forbade the instruction of fine art at that time. Indeed, Elizabeth mentioned many years later that it was her “encouragement of ‘pagan paintings’ that caused misled, missionary-minded persons, with a bombardment of such complaints, to have Mr. DeHuff transferred from the Santa Fe Indian School.”<sup>43</sup>

Elizabeth DeHuff’s interests went beyond mere encouragement; she may have been one of the first to envision a larger sphere for the reception of Indian painting. After “explaining” to the boys that “they must paint pictures to frame as works of art; not to draw just single figures, as the Hopi had done for Dr. Fewkes; nor must they imitate paintings of White artists; but that they should visualize a whole dance movement and paint it as if the participants were dancing,” DeHuff promised to pay them for the specified works.<sup>44</sup> After completion, DeHuff declared herself so thrilled with the resulting paintings that she contacted Hewett at the museum and convinced him to exhibit them; thus, in 1919, the first showing of these works as art—granted, as

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<sup>43</sup> Letter from Elizabeth DeHuff, Augusta, GA, to Dorothy Dunn Kramer, June 6, 1963, transcript in the hand of Elizabeth DeHuff, Elizabeth Willis DeHuff Family Papers, 1883–1981, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research, Albuquerque, NM. This same year, 1918, was notable for the concurrent founding of the Kiowa School. Indian Service matron Susan Peters worked unofficially with twenty-three interested Kiowa students, among them notable painters Stephen Mopope, Spencer Asah, James Auchiah, and Jack Hokeah. Peters later aided these four, along with Monroe Tsa Toke and Bou-ge-tah Smokey, to enroll as non-degree-seeking students in the University of Oklahoma’s art department in order to study under Professor Oscar Brousse Jacobson. The Kiowa School style is similar to the Studio style in its use of flat planes of color and two-dimensional perspective—indeed, nineteenth-century Plains ledger drawings makes sense stylistically here as a direct antecedent—but the Kiowa School style differs from Studio work in a number of subtle ways, including its brighter palette. See Dunn, *American Indian Painting*, 218–223.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

art valued primarily for its ethnographical detail—occurred in Santa Fe. DeHuff proudly recounted the review, “Exhibit by Indian Pupils,” published in Santa Fe’s *El Palacio*:

An unusual exhibit at the Museum is that of the art class of Mrs. J. DeHuff of the United States Indian School. It is quaint, colorful, and naïve. The various winter and summer dance ceremonials of the Pueblo Indians, ranging from the Snake Dance of the Hopi to the Corn Dance at Santo Domingo, and including the Deer, Buffalo and other dances, are depicted. One is struck with the rhythm of the moving figures, as if the artist had been humming the ceremonial song at the same time he was drawing the figures. The grouping as well as the color, even though limited in their scope, are expressive of harmony and are beautifully decorative. The symbols and emblems are correct to the smallest detail although drawn from memory rather than living models. The entire exhibit seems to prove that with the Pueblo Indian art is racial rather than individual and that beautiful results are obtained if the Indian is given free scope to express himself.<sup>45</sup>

Tellingly, DeHuff recalled later that while the paintings hung at the museum, Awa Tsireh (or Alfonso Roybal), Crescencio Martinez’s nephew, remarked after viewing them that he, too, could paint pictures like that. After encouraging him to do so, the tubercular, non-Indian artist Carlos Vierra, then part of the museum staff, cautioned Awa Tsireh, “These are not true Indian art. The figures should not be three-dimensional. They should be painted flat like paintings on old kiva walls.”<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, DeHuff added that appreciative visitors to the exhibit immediately and overwhelmingly wished to purchase the paintings, “the most persistent of whom was Mabel Dodge Stern [sic] (later Mrs. Tony Luyan [sic], of Taos),” who promised to

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. This group of painters, later referred to as the San Ildefonso School, which included Martinez, Awa Tsireh, Tonita Peña, Alfredo Montoya, Julian Martinez, Oqwa Pi (Abel Sanchez), and Romando Vigil (Tse Ye Mu), grew out of the San Ildefonso Pueblo’s day school and the loose, unofficial instruction of teacher Esther Hoyt. This generation of painters, preceding the first cadre of Studio artists, was exceptionally influential on the public’s perception and expectations of Indian art, as well as on the Studio painters; which, in turn, proved critical for the course of Indian fine art up until today. For more information, see J.J. Brody, *Pueblo Indian Painting: Tradition and Modernism in New Mexico, 1900–1930* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research, 1997).

send the pictures to New York for inclusion in the Independent Art Show.<sup>47</sup> The result of Mabel Dodge Sterne's sweeping purchase of the Indian art exhibit in its entirety is chronicled in a letter she wrote to the art curator at the Museum of New Mexico. In her large, loopy handwriting she described the reception of the SFIS paintings at the John Sloan-organized Society of Independent Artists Show, displayed along with works by Crescencio Martinez, Awa Tsireh, and John Concho (Taos Pueblo):

When I went to the Independent Art Exhibition soon after the opening, Walter Pach exclaimed to me, "Ah—Mrs. Sterne—we can't thank you enough for sending these things to us. They have been the success of the show." . . . There were many attempts to buy them but of course I did not care to sell them. . . . Also several people conjured me to keep a watch out for Fred Kabotie's work—and—in passing, I would like to ask if he has done anything more & if I may be given a chance to secure them?<sup>48</sup>

DeHuff continued her association with the artists, especially Kabotie, long after her husband's 1926 dismissal from the SFIS; indeed, the two enjoyed a warm and enduring friendship, addressing each other in their correspondence as "Mother" and "my dear son."<sup>49</sup> In 1922, shortly after Kabotie had begun painting depictions of Indian dances for Hewett at his School of American Research, DeHuff hired Kabotie to provide illustrations for her book *TayTay's Tales*, one of the first children's storybooks illustrated by a Native American artist.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Letter from Elizabeth DeHuff, Augusta, GA, to Dorothy Dunn Kramer, June 6, 1963, transcript in the hand of Elizabeth DeHuff, Elizabeth Willis DeHuff Family Papers, 1883–1981, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research, Albuquerque, NM..

<sup>48</sup> Letter from Mabel Dodge Sterne, Taos, NM, to Mrs. Wilson, April 21, 1920, transcript in the hand of Elizabeth DeHuff, Elizabeth Willis DeHuff Family Papers, 1883–1981, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research, Albuquerque, NM, underlining in original.

<sup>49</sup> Fred Kabotie, c. 1900–1986, was possibly the most influential (along with Ma Pe Wi) and certainly the most successful of the Modern Pueblo School painters. He painted until his mid-thirties and then directed his attention to education, teaching art at the Hopi High School. He also served throughout his life as an unofficial promoter and ambassador of the Hopi nation, working to ensure its economic and cultural well-being. Like most of the Hopi artists, Kabotie employed a three-dimensional, modeled style that differed significantly from the flat planes of color and two-dimensional look of the Studio style. For more information, see J.J. Brody, *Pueblo Indian Painting: Tradition and Modernism in New Mexico, 1900–1930* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1997).

<sup>50</sup> Rebecca C. Benes, *Native American Picture Books of Change: The Art of Historic Children's Books* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2004), 7. At one point, DeHuff became quite embittered over the

Meantime, Edgar Hewett had garnered an impressive coterie of Native American artists whom he employed at his Museum of New Mexico; along with Martinez and Kabotie he hired Awa Tsireh, San Ildefonso artist Tonita Peña (Quah Ah), and Ma Pe Wi to paint pictures which he continued to exhibit both locally and, still working with the artist John Sloan, with New York's Independent Society of Artists. For the 1921 ISA show, Hewett somewhat imperiously advised Sloan, "As to sales from the collection of Indian drawings, I would recommend that you receive orders from anyone wanting them, you fixing the price at whatever you deem proper. Then send the order to me and I will have the drawing wanted duplicated as nearly as possible. You will kindly explain to purchasers that the Indian artists rarely make exact duplicates of anything, and this, I think, we wish to encourage." Hewett added, "However, it can be promised that the drawing sent will be a faithful rendering of the same theme, and that it will certainly be equal or better than the original, for we notice a steady improvement in the work of all these youngsters."<sup>51</sup> Hewett maintained firm control over his artist fold, supplying paints and paper and even providing housing at the museum for Awa Tsireh and Ma Pe Wi. In a 1922 letter to his assistant director, Lansing Bloom, Hewett, although away overseeing the fledgling San Diego Museum, revealed his intimate involvement in his Native employees' lives: "If Alfonso [Awa Tsireh] has come in put him to work on another painting of the corn dance, similar to the two large ones that he has already done, and of the same size. . . . Please note about the time it takes Alfonso to do it, so that we will know what to charge for it. Better make some arrangement for

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attention paid to both Dunn and Hewett as the "founders" of Indian painting, feeling that her efforts had been ignored and detailed her feelings in a letter written to Fred Kabotie in 1940. Perhaps Dunn's 1963 request for information regarding DeHuff's contribution to Indian art mollified her somewhat; she seemed to have forgiven or forgotten her dudgeon by the time she penned her very cordial response to the former SFIS teacher.

<sup>51</sup> Letter from Edgar Hewett, Santa Fe, NM, to John Sloan, March 12, 1921, transcript in the hand of Edgar Hewett, Edgar Lee Hewett Collection, Fray Angélico Chávez History Library, Palace of the Governors, New Mexico History Museum, Santa Fe, NM. A catalog from the 1920 ISA show, while using Kabotie's *Corn Dance* as its frontispiece and including a page long exegesis on its Indian Exhibit as representative of the "last autochthonic [sic] artists of America" nevertheless fails to list the Native artists by name as it does the other exhibiting, non-Indian artists.

Velino [Ma Pe Wi] so that he and Alfonso will not have to occupy the same room together.” He added ominously, “I think they should not do their own cooking together either. The reason for this will be obvious to you.”<sup>52</sup>

San Ildefonso painter Tonita Peña, who as one of that first group of Santa Fe-based Indian painters was also significant for being the first commercially successful female artist, resided at her home in Cochiti Pueblo but still contributed greatly to Hewett’s museum and to the fledgling field of Indian easel art. A remarkable series of letters between Peña and Bloom underscores the vibrant, albeit uneven commercial relationship between the Native artist and the White intelligentsia—in this instance, embodied by the museum’s assistant director. Beginning in January 1921, Peña wrote “Dear Lansing B. Bloom,” asking him “what kind of dances you want me to paint. [J]ust tell me of the dances. Of what I paint the dances: I paint just the way they wear their dresses and I haven’t paint this other kinds of dances yet.” She cautioned Bloom that she would only be able to paint through March, because the flies were too thick in April, and also demanded that “if you want me to paint some more you must sent [sic] me some more paper.” Peña further asserted, “And I will tell you Mr. L.B. Bloom I want you to sent [sic] me some money about \$20 or \$25. I got the \$10 but I haven’t got enough to buy flour. I just buy coffee and thing to eat and cloth and I haven’t got enough for flour.”<sup>53</sup> Bloom’s terse reply, sent three weeks later, included this message, “We have already sent you three checks for the paintings which you have made for us, \$20.00 in November, \$10.00 in December, and \$10.00 in January, besides the money we have paid for the paints and paper which we sent to you. . . . I am

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<sup>52</sup> Letter from Edgar Hewett, San Diego, CA, to Lansing Bloom, February 4, 1922, transcript in the hand of Edgar Hewett, Edgar Lee Hewett Collection, Fray Angélico Chávez History Library, Palace of the Governors, New Mexico History Museum, Santa Fe, NM.

<sup>53</sup> Letter from Tonita Peña, Cochiti Pueblo, NM, to Lansing Bloom, January 22, 1921, transcript in the hand of Edgar Hewett, Edgar Lee Hewett Collection, Fray Angélico Chávez History Library, Palace of the Governors, New Mexico History Museum, Santa Fe, NM.

sending you a check for \$20.00, which will pay for the paintings you have sent us and also will be an advance of \$10.00 for the ones which you are going to do. From what you wrote me, this will help you to buy the flour which you need.”<sup>54</sup> Bloom also included in his package to Peña both paper and the specific paints “found by Mr. Chapman” that he wished her to use. Perhaps sensing or assuming Peña’s entrepreneurialism, Bloom concluded his letter by writing, “A large sheet [of paper] costs us at least twenty cents, and if you sell any of them to your friends, you had better ask them twenty-five cents each.”<sup>55</sup> Peña’s following letter displays a more conciliatory tone, assuring Bloom that “I will be glad to paints [sic] all that you need,” and further adding, “I know when a man is good like you he always feel sorry with the poor lady.”<sup>56</sup> The remainder of the correspondence between Bloom and Peña continues this dance of negotiation; with Peña cloaking her demands in the expected obsequiousness and Bloom straddling an awkward line between authoritarianism and professionalism.

Bloom’s paternalistic stance echoed the position assumed by many within Santa Fe’s White intelligentsia, including his close associate at the Museum of New Mexico, Kenneth Chapman. Most historians have overlooked Chapman, despite his significance within the fledging genre of modern Indian painting. Indeed, in many ways Chapman’s overlapping social circles that included the Santa Fe cadres of White intellectuals, scientists, and artists ideally

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<sup>54</sup> Letter from Lansing Bloom, Santa Fe, NM, to Tonita Peña, February 15, 1921, transcript in the hand of Edgar Hewett, Edgar Lee Hewett Collection, Fray Angélico Chávez History Library, Palace of the Governors, New Mexico History Museum, Santa Fe, NM. It is difficult to discern what amounts art patrons spent on the Indian paintings created by Peña and her cohort, as extant invoices are rare to nonexistent and the ISA catalogs did not list prices. However, it seems safe to assume that buyers paid more than the ten or twenty dollars the artists received for their copies. According to art historian Melissa Warak, most dealers received fees of between 20 and 25 percent in agreement with the artists, but, in alignment with long-standing issues regarding art dealers and their ethics, it is certainly possible that they took advantage of the Native artists’ lack of sophistication by failing to disclose to the Indian artists the prices they were charging for their work. Melissa Warak, unpublished comments, April 3, 2016.

<sup>55</sup> Letter from Lansing Bloom, Santa Fe, NM, to Tonita Peña, February 15, 1921, transcript in the hand of Edgar Hewett, Edgar Lee Hewett Collection, Fray Angélico Chávez History Library, Palace of the Governors, New Mexico History Museum, Santa Fe, NM.

<sup>56</sup> Letter from Tonita Peña, Cochiti Pueblo, NM, to Lansing Bloom, February 18, 1921, transcript in the hand of Edgar Hewett, Edgar Lee Hewett Collection, Fray Angélico Chávez History Library, Palace of the Governors, New Mexico History Museum, Santa Fe, NM.

situated him as a linchpin bringing together these factions and the Indian artisans. After his 1899 relocation to New Mexico due to health concerns, Chapman spent the rest of his sixty-odd years there, joining with other White reformers to preserve Indian arts as a means toward Native cultural survival. Through his position in the museum, Chapman sought to interact with Indian artisans and artists, while both overtly and inadvertently working to control their production. For example, while searching for buckskins as a teaching aid “for the use of the Pueblos and other tribes of Indians of the Southwest” who “formerly made various beaded garments and other articles,” Chapman wrote in 1924 to a potential supplier, “we are doing all we can to encourage the revival and improvement of Indian arts and crafts, and our results show that this is a sure means of bettering the condition of the Indians by helping them to help themselves.”<sup>57</sup>

When he perceived that the quality of Indian potters’ wares suffered due to high tourist demands and low levels of consumer discernment, Chapman worried that unless something was done to preserve and promote the pottery “least influenced by white folk’s notions,” the craft would suffer irrevocably.<sup>58</sup> Subsequently, in 1923 he and several other members of the Santa Fe elite co-founded the Indian Arts Fund with the expressed purpose of “revitalizing the native crafts through assembling a representative collection of them, and through education of Indian craftsmen by means of that collection.”<sup>59</sup> The IAF grew out of an earlier collaboration between Chapman, journalist Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, and physician Harry Mera (known for designing the New Mexico state flag), which they dubbed the Pueblo Pottery Fund and which, in its later incarnation, grew to encompass possibly the most prestigious collection of Native

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<sup>57</sup> Letter from Kenneth Chapman, Santa Fe, NM, to Tom Fernald, September 17, 1924, transcript in the hand of Kenneth Chapman, Kenneth M. Chapman Collection, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 70, 80.

<sup>59</sup> “Indian Art: Preservation and Development by the Indian Arts Fund of Santa Fe, New Mexico,” pamphlet, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM.

American pottery in the world.<sup>60</sup> In addition, Chapman founded Santa Fe's Laboratory of Anthropology in 1929 and piloted it as de facto leader until his 1968 death. Moreover, Chapman's expertise on Indian designs and handiwork led to his ubiquitous position as an esteemed judge at a plethora of competitions throughout the Southwest, including the prestigious Indian Market, from the 1930s onward.<sup>61</sup> As "Special Consultant" for the Bureau of Indian Affairs Arts and Crafts Division, appointed in 1932, he wielded tremendous influence throughout the Indian school system.<sup>62</sup> During the whole of the 1930s, Chapman advised the Indian Bureau's superintendent of boarding schools, H.C. Seymour, on everything from purchasing school art supplies to the merits of potential employees. In fact, Chapman often weighed in on the merits of not only pottery, but silversmith work and weavings as well. He took his work as an Indian arts judge seriously; at a 1935 Cochiti Pueblo fair Chapman handed out criticism instead of prizes after determining that the quality was "so disgracefully poor."<sup>63</sup> At the same time, he consulted for the New Mexico Association on Indian Affairs, now the Southwestern Association on Indian Arts, and served as the University of New Mexico's first professor of Indian art, where his path crossed that of his long-time protégée, Dorothy Dunn, generally credited as the force behind the genre of modern American Indian art and the soon-to-be-founder of the Santa Fe Indian School's [SFIS] monumental fine arts program, the Studio. After working to secure Dunn a teaching job at the SFIS, Chapman acted throughout his long life as her sounding board and cheerleader and continued to use his considerable influence to ensure the 1968 publication of her magisterial book, *American Indian Painting of the Southwest and Plains Areas*. Correspondence

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<sup>60</sup> Janet Chapman and Karen Barrie, *Kenneth Milton Chapman: A Life Dedicated to Indian Arts and Artists* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 174; "Harry Mera Obituary," *Santa Fe New Mexican*, 16 April 1951.

<sup>61</sup> Mullin, *Culture in the Marketplace*, 116, 195.

<sup>62</sup> Letter from Atwood Maulding, Chief of Appointments, Mails and Files, Bureau of Indian Affairs, to Kenneth Chapman, March 11, 1932, transcript on the hand of Kenneth Chapman, Kenneth M. Chapman Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM.

<sup>63</sup> Mullin, *Culture in the Marketplace*, 114.

between Chapman and Dunn throughout the years reveals the immense respect they held for one another, even as their roles changed from teacher and student to trusted friends.

In terms of American Indian art no other early twentieth-century figure casts a shadow as large as Dorothy Dunn, instructor of art at the SFIS from 1932 to 1937. Crafting the first federally sanctioned Indian fine art program at the Santa Fe school, Dunn proved to be the single most influential individual to engineer the modern genre of Indian painting. Indeed, an article published shortly after her 1992 death in the *Santa Fe New Mexican* credits her “widespread” influence and mentions that “virtually every American Indian painter born between 1915 and 1940 trained at the Studio or with Studio alumni.”<sup>64</sup> Jeanne Snodgrass King, former curator of American Indian art at the Philbrook Art Center and author of *American Indian Painters: A Biographical Directory* asserted that “For anyone unfamiliar with Native American painting, a review of the subject cannot be written without some mention of Miss Dunn!”<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, during her lifetime Dunn helped to grow and sustain a market for this new genre through her tireless promotion and exhibition organizing, as well as via her many connections to wealthy art patrons and reformers like Margretta Dietrich, Martha Elizabeth White and her sister Amelia White, and Alice Corbin Henderson.<sup>66</sup> Setting a precedent with extremely long-lived ramifications, Dunn enforced rigorous standards for her Native students at the Studio by insisting her pupils paint with strict adherence to her vision of traditional Indian art. Indeed, her influence

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<sup>64</sup> Candelora Versace, “Dorothy Dunn: A Memorial Tribute,” *Santa Fe New Mexican*, 11 September 1992.

<sup>65</sup> Jeanne Snodgrass King, “Dorothy Dunn and the Studio,” *Southwest Art* (June 1983), 72.

<sup>66</sup> Cultural anthropologist Molly H. Mullin described Dietrich as “suffragist-turned-Indian-policy reformer and art patron.” Mullin, *Culture in the Marketplace*, 4. In addition, Dietrich chaired the influential New Mexico Association on Indian Affairs during the late 1920s and 1930s. Dunn considered her to be “one of the most capable and constant friends the Indians of the Southwest have ever had.” Dunn, *American Indian Painting*, 230. Interestingly, Mullin’s study reveals that Dietrich was an alumna of Bryn Mawr, as were both of the White Sisters. Martha Elizabeth White and Amelia White, wealthy socialites who relocated to Santa Fe early in the century, were also representative of this group of White, East Coast “patrons of art and anthropology.” Mullin, *Culture in the Marketplace*, 4. Alice Corbin Henderson, wife of architect William Penhallow Henderson, was a renowned poet and a “friend of the Indian” reformer associated with Santa Fe’s literati and anthropologic community.

on Native American painting cannot be underestimated. As she fully embraced the Vanishing American trope, Dunn, like other antimodern intellectuals, believed the Indians were doomed to assimilation and that their art held the key to the preservation of Native culture by providing an ethnological record and an avenue toward Indian self-pride.<sup>67</sup> In ways similar to the contemporary writers and anthropologists of her day who constructed an imaginary Orient to satisfy Western desires for a romanticized other, Dunn strove to disseminate her notion of Indian life through the work of the artists she instructed.<sup>68</sup>

Dunn traveled to the Southwest for the first time in 1928 and took a job at Santa Fe's Bishop's Lodge Resort, but her interest in Indians and Indian art predated her arrival.<sup>69</sup> Between the years of 1925 and 1928, she became fascinated with American Indigenous culture while still a student at the Art Institute of Chicago after viewing Indian artifacts at the city's Field Museum of Natural History and, concurrently, both her painting instructor's musings on the "wonders of New Mexico" and Dunn's love of Willa Cather's books fueled her obsession with the Southwest.<sup>70</sup> Shortly after her arrival in New Mexico, Dunn crossed paths with artist and anthropologist Kenneth Chapman and began studying informally under him while conducting researching at the Indian Arts Fund collection at the Museum of New Mexico. She continued under Chapman's tutelage during the following summer, taking his course on American Indian art at the University of New Mexico.<sup>71</sup> Although her original intention was to remain in New Mexico for a year and then return to Chicago to finish her art degree, Dunn resolved to stay in

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<sup>67</sup> Dunn, *American Indian Painting*, 362.

<sup>68</sup> For the seminal study regarding the concept of orientalism, see Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

<sup>69</sup> Bruce Bernstein and W. Jackson Rushing, *Modern by Tradition: American Indian Painting in the Studio Style* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1995), 5.

<sup>70</sup> Dorothy Dunn, "Notes Requested by Jane Rehnstrand for *School Arts*," unpublished, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM.

<sup>71</sup> Letter from Dorothy Dunn, State College, NM, to Boaz Long, Dec. 12, 1951. Transcript in the hand of Kenneth Chapman, Kenneth M. Chapman Collection, School for Advanced Research, Santa Fe, NM.

the Southwest and do her part to promote and encourage Indian art, only returning to finish her degree several years later. Offered a teaching post first on the Santo Domingo Pueblo, then later on the Navajo Reservation, in 1932 she eventually secured a position instructing sixth-graders at the SFIS after directly appealing to the school's superintendent, Chester E. Faris, for a position as an art instructor. Faris, who, along with Chapman, Indian Service Elementary Educational Supervisor Rose K. Brandt, Olive Rush, and artist Gustave Baumann, was supportive of Dunn's mission, advised her to accept the school's only opening and teach extracurricular art classes on the side.<sup>72</sup> No fine art program existed at the Indian school at this time, and Dunn was required to formulate a curriculum that stressed "applied arts" in order to eventually receive federal permission to instruct officially sanctioned art classes.<sup>73</sup> If there were misgivings within the Indian Service regarding the wisdom of teaching Indian students fine art, certainly there were few doubts among the students themselves; forty young women and men, ranging in age from fifteen to twenty-two, attended the opening session of the Studio in the fall of 1932.<sup>74</sup> Although the Indian Service would not sanction Dunn's classes as official curricula until the following year, the pioneer group of students enthusiastically attended Dunn's painting classes in addition to the mandatory vocationally directed classwork. Enrollment grew exponentially during Dunn's tenure; over four times the original number enrolled in its fifth year of operation.<sup>75</sup>

During her surprisingly brief SFIS tenure Dunn ruled the Studio with an iron fist, albeit one cloaked in velvet. Correspondence with former students and interviews conducted years later

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<sup>72</sup> Michelle McGeough, *Through Their Eyes: Indian Painting in Santa Fe, 1918–1945* (Santa Fe, N.M.: Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian, 2009), 35–36.

<sup>73</sup> Letter from Rose K. Brandt, Washington D.C., to Dorothy Dunn, c. 1932. Transcript in the hand of Dorothy Dunn, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology Archives, Santa Fe, NM.

<sup>74</sup> Dunn, *American Indian Painting*, 251. The Indian Service did not officially recognize the Studio program as school curriculum until the 1933 school year.

<sup>75</sup> McGeough, *Through Their Eyes*, 40.

reveal her to have been a compassionate yet rigid taskmaster.<sup>76</sup> Like other members of the White intelligentsia, Dunn viewed the preservation of Indian culture as paramount, and strongly encouraged her pupils to paint themes she considered truly “Indian.” Recounting some of her teaching experiences in her magnum opus, *American Indian Painting*, Dunn asserted that three of her goals had been to:

foster appreciation of Indian painting among students and public, thus helping to establish it in its rightful place as one of the fine arts of the world; to study and explore traditional Indian art methods . . . and to evolve new motifs, styles, and techniques in character with the old . . . [and] to maintain tribal and individual distinction in paintings.<sup>77</sup>

As this passage implies, Dunn possessed a firm conception of what constituted traditional Indian art, as well as an underlying belief that her Native students were unable to “know and speak for themselves.”<sup>78</sup> Although Dunn’s dedication is unquestionable, and her papers suggest she truly held her students in the highest regard, her instruction to her pupils reflected an agenda of promoting a primitivistic Indian imagery and an attempt to control Indian representation. Examples of “good” design employed the traditional flat-planed, two-dimensional depictions of Indian life historically painted in ledger books and ancient Pueblo Indian pottery designs; “bad” designs were anything that appeared too naturalistic by Dunn’s standards.<sup>79</sup> By her own admission she abhorred “mongrelized” art and wrote, “Any production which revealed copy of unworthy exotic [non-Indian] influence was discouraged, not by forbiddance, but by suggestion

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<sup>76</sup> See, for example, Bruce Bernstein’s interview with Gerónima Cruz Montoya in Bernstein and Rushing, *Modern by Tradition*, 14; Jamake Highwater’s interview with Allan Houser in *Song from the Earth: American Indian Painting* (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1976), 149; and Pablita Velarde’s interview in Tryntje Van Ness Seymour, *When the Rainbow Touches Down: The Artists and Stories behind the Apache, Navajo, Rio Grande Pueblo, and Hopi Paintings in the William and Leslie Van Ness Collection* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988).

<sup>77</sup> Dunn, *American Indian Painting*, 252.

<sup>78</sup> Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” 279.

<sup>79</sup> Bernstein and Rushing, *Modern by Tradition*, 17.

of a variety of tribal elements which might make a particular painting more authentic and interesting.”<sup>80</sup>

Dunn admitted that many of those first students desired to paint academic art of the European variety, forcing her to reeducate them to value their own artistic traditions. She wrote that she often suggested themes that correlated to this tradition: animals, dancers, hunters, or women working.<sup>81</sup> When students appeared unsure of what to paint, Dunn recommended “everyday happenings” that “would make a nice picture” such as “planting corn, or hoeing it, or husking it. . . .”<sup>82</sup> She did not advise painting depictions of school life, cars, trading posts, or any other aspects of modern life familiar to the Indians. The catalog for the 1996 exhibit “With a View to the Southwest: Dorothy Dunn and a Story of American Indian Painting,” mentions that “Dunn was slightly naïve to believe her students could obliterate the Anglicized world they were becoming increasingly exposed to,” because, “After all, most every civilization has undergone both benign and malicious influence, whether or not we deem it ‘right.’ On the other hand, Dunn’s initial impulse was to urge her students to recapture their life at home—and that’s what they did.”<sup>83</sup>

At the beginning of Dunn’s reign at the SFIS Studio art critics lauded both her achievements in bringing attention to an “authentic” American art genre and the works of her Native students. In a 1937 article written for the Santa Fe Museum periodical, *El Palacio*, artist and art critic Olive Rush critiqued the Annual Indian Art Show at the Museum of New Mexico, exclaiming, “A continued amazing development in the art of painting by the students of the United States Indian School at Santa Fe, under the direction of Miss Dorothy Dunn, is again

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<sup>80</sup> Dunn, *American Indian Painting*, 261.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 255–57.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 283.

<sup>83</sup> Bruce Bernstein, *With a View to the Southwest: Dorothy Dunn and a Story of American Indian Painting* (Santa Fe, NM: Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, 1995).

evident in the magnificent display.”<sup>84</sup> Another newspaper article of that same year, written sans byline, approvingly mentioned the “amazing” work of the students of the SFIS and stated that the output of these artists’ “unique, flat paintings has increased under government school management,” continuing with, “Santa Fe people who view this exhibition are seeing an incredible expansion and development of an aboriginal American art which has no competition and an unlimited field.”<sup>85</sup> Through her close professional relationship with Chapman and her long friendship with Margretta Dietrich, Dunn connected with Santa Fe’s wealthy art patrons, as well as those Euro-Americans interested in protecting and appropriating Indian culture. To say she was successful is an understatement; influential socialites, among them Dietrich and the White Sisters, purchased hundreds of paintings, and the artists benefitted as well. The student-artists earned half of their paintings’ purchase prices while the remainder went toward school art supplies.

Dunn claimed until her death to have never overtly influenced her students, either through her own authoritarian instruction or by exposing them to historic works she believed embodied authenticity. Indeed, she consistently reiterated throughout her life that her mission had been to elevate Indians by fostering within them a deeper appreciation of their own culture. As early as 1935 Dunn maintained in an article titled, “Indian Children Carry Forward Old Traditions,” that “painting and design classes . . . provide an opportunity for the Indian child to become conscious of and to gain a respect for his cultural birthright if he has not already done so.”<sup>86</sup> However, in her magisterial *American Indian Painting*, she admitted to showing students Plains Indian hide paintings and lecturing on “the whole world of art.” In addition, Dunn worked

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<sup>84</sup> Olive Rush, “Annual Indian Art Show,” *El Palacio* 62, nos. 19–20–21 (May 12–19–26, 1937), 105.

<sup>85</sup> “Forty Indian Artists, from Ten Pueblos, Navajo and Apacheland, Sioux and Arapaho, Paint Pictures,” *Santa Fe New Mexican*, 15 May 1937.

<sup>86</sup> Dorothy Dunn, “Indian Children Carry Forward Old Traditions,” *The School Arts Magazine* 32, no. 7 (March 1935), 427.

closely with Chapman by bringing students to Chapman's Laboratory of Anthropology to view pottery designs and inviting him to lecture at the SFIS.<sup>87</sup> She also encouraged especially gifted students, such as Gerald Nailor, to work directly under Chapman's tutelage. In a 1959 letter to Dietrich she adamantly claimed in response to those she felt were trying to "discredit [her] Santa Fe work" that her Studio lectures aimed to "cover the whole world of art" and that, "That was the nearest I ever came to 'teaching' Persian or any other non-Indian art in the studio. . . . Actually, the boys and girls had more pride than even [sic] in Indian art after they had this fleeting glimpse of art of many peoples."<sup>88</sup> Dunn consistently reiterated that she considered herself a guide rather than a teacher. In a 1965 letter to writer and photographer Laura Gilpin, Dunn commented on Navajo painting: "I have never called myself the authority, nor even an authority, but I think of myself as a student with socially oriented aims arising from it."<sup>89</sup>

Although the Studio was a stunning success and proved critical for the long-term course of Indian fine art, Dunn's project early on encountered obstacles thrown up by the staid Indian Service bureaucracy. By 1937, those administrators who had backed her early efforts, such as Faris and Brandt, were no longer in positions of direct influence, and Dunn's achievements sometimes incited resentment among her coworkers. Utterly frustrated, Dunn handed the reins of the Studio over to her former student Gerónima Cruz Montoya in 1937, married her co-worker, Max Kramer, a former science teacher at the SFIS, and moved with him to the Taos Pueblo after he had secured a position there. In spite of her bitterness toward the Indian Service, however, Dunn remained passionately committed to Indian art. In just five years, between 1932 and 1937,

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<sup>87</sup> Dunn, *American Indian Painting*, 283, 287.

<sup>88</sup> Letter from Dorothy Dunn, Los Altos, CA, to Margretta Dietrich, November 4, 1959. Transcript in the hand of Dorothy Dunn, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology Archives, Santa Fe, NM.

<sup>89</sup> Letter from Dorothy Dunn, Los Altos, CA, to Laura Gilpin, January 22, 1965. Transcript in the hand of Dorothy Dunn, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology Archives, Santa Fe, NM, underlining in original.

Dunn's Studio had incubated the rapidly ascending genre of modern Native American painting, and she was by no means willing to cede her successes or abandon her cause.

Both during and after her tenure at the SFIS, Dunn made it her mission to promote Indian art, thereby disseminating her own Euro-American constructions of Indianness, to the greater art-buying public. She organized exhibition after exhibition, locally, nationally, and internationally. In addition, Dunn devoted many years to the writing and publication of her masterwork, *American Indian Painting*. Even after leaving Santa Fe and New Mexico, she persisted in her efforts to create a market and an audience for Native American art, and she continued to feel a connection to the area and the artists. In 1948, after her recent move to Illinois, Midwestern-native Dunn wrote Chapman: "I'm beginning to readjust to life in this town which is so completely different from my natural habitat, the Southwest. I still plan to work with Indian art down there and I 'feel in my bones' that I shall."<sup>90</sup> In spite of her peripatetic lifestyle after leaving Santa Fe—relocating to Las Cruces, New Mexico, and California, among other places—Dunn continued to lecture and work on her book, which eventually saw publication in 1968.

In short, much of Dunn's legacy, both during and after the SFIS, rests in her success as a promoter of this modern mutation of traditional Indian art. Under Chapman's aegis, Dunn connected with Santa Fe's art-buying elite; in addition, she wrote articles, and consulted and organized national and international exhibitions. Throughout her fifty-year career Dunn worked to legitimize Indian art and artists in the minds of non-Indian art promoters, dealers, and patrons; moreover, she strove to create a space for them unbounded by race, even as she herself struggled to see past her own paternalism. Both her success and her failure reveal themselves in the careers of some her most talented students, among them Gerald Nailor, Quincy Tahoma, Harrison

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<sup>90</sup> Letter from Dorothy Dunn to Kenneth Chapman, October 27, 1948, transcript in the hand of Kenneth Chapman, Kenneth M. Chapman Collection, School for Advanced Research, Santa Fe, NM.

Begay, Pop Chalee, Narciso Abeyta, Pablita Velarde, and Allan Houser. While all of these artists achieved commercial success, they each, in their own ways, struggled against the constraints imposed upon them by a system that acknowledged them as Indians far more readily than it acknowledged them as artists.

The first four decades of the twentieth century saw the coming together of a range of variables that profoundly impacted the Santa Fe region's Native communities as well as germinated the nascent genre of modern Indian painting. A newly dominant White elite, fleeing the miasma of post-World War I and urban industrialization, transformed the sleepy town both physically and discursively, and as they did so they craved authenticity and legitimacy. They sought to accomplish their transformation into westerners through the cultural colonization of the surrounding Indians. Indian pictorial art proved a malleable means of achieving the White elites' stated objectives to preserve Indian culture and that same cadre's less altruistic goals of control, commodification, and appropriation. The Native peoples and their artists also looked to the nascent medium of easel painting to attain their goals, which included profitability, credibility, and, not least, as a means of expression. It remains to be seen how the students themselves negotiated the challenges and opportunities presented by a rapidly changing world, United States, and American Southwest; I hope to address this in the remainder of this study. The Navajo artists who trained under Dunn at the Santa Fe Indian School present through their work all of these interconnecting strands that weave together to form a unique perspective on cultural representation, identity, and the Southwest colonial project as manifested in the newly created American Indian fine art.

## Chapter 2: Harrison Begay, Navajo Cultural Broker

Blessed with both talent and a long life, Harrison Begay (Haskay Yahne Yah, meaning “The Wandering Boy”) avoided much of the tragedy that shortened the lives of many of his fellow artists and painted well into his nineties.<sup>1</sup> Of that first cadre of Studio-trained artists, Begay remains perhaps the best known professionally and was certainly one of the most commercially successful during his lifetime and beyond. To some degree, however, Begay remains a mystery; little is known about the details of his long life, in spite of the thousands of pictures he painted and sold. The vast majority of his prodigious artistic output embraced the seemingly uncomplicated themes of Navajo pastoralism and domesticity; overwhelmingly, Begay chose to depict women weaving or herding sheep. This was in spite of the fact that he initially knew relatively little about Navajo culture or history, having spent most of his childhood in boarding schools, and became inspired to paint only after viewing the work of Hopi artist Fred Kabotie.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, it was not until Begay’s White employer introduced him, post-World War II, to the 1897 book *Navaho Legends* that a “whole new world opened up for him.”<sup>3</sup> In spite of the compliance of his imagery, however, Begay encountered challenges similar to his fellow classmates as he strove to ply his trade within an environment that relentlessly situated him as an Indian first and an artist second. Nevertheless, Begay faithfully promoted Diné culture and insisted throughout his career that his primary goal was to preserve Navajo lifeways through the

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<sup>1</sup> Adobe Gallery, “Harrison Begay (1914–2012) Haskay Yahne Yah – The Wandering Boy,” accessed December 19, 2015, [www.adobegallery.com/artist/harrison\\_begay1637300](http://www.adobegallery.com/artist/harrison_begay1637300); Most secondary sources translate Begay’s Diné name as “Warrior Who Walked Up to His Enemy,” but the Adobe Gallery, which is located in Santa Fe, NM, and regularly exhibits Begay’s work, mentions on its website that Diné bizaad expert Jim C. Hunt pointed out the inaccuracy of the former, correctly translating the Navajo name to “The Wandering Boy.”

<sup>2</sup> Gary Auerbach, “Harrison Begay, Navajo,” *We Walk in Beauty*, last modified 2007, accessed December 21, 2015, <http://www.garyauerbach.com/wwib/harrisonbegay.php>.

<sup>3</sup> Katherin L. Chase, *Indian Painters of the Southwest: The Deep Remembering* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 2002), 42.

dissemination of an art that built upon sandpainting traditions. Eventually, Begay self-segregated on the Navajo Reservation while continuing throughout the decades to paint commercially successful, Dunn-sanctioned imagery. With this artist's work we see the tensions inherent within a career pulled in one direction by commercialism and contrivance, as the desire to impart critical cultural information to the outside world pulled it in another.

Like most of the artists discussed in this study, Begay's first few years reflected the remoteness and insularity of early twentieth-century life on the Navajo Reservation. When quite aged, Begay remarked in an interview that the date of his birth was "not recorded"; he continued, "My parents did not have a calendar. They only know I was born in the fall of the year 1914. So my date of birth—I made it November 15, 1914."<sup>4</sup> Throughout his life, however, Begay often claimed either 1914 or 1917 and, similarly, either Greasewood Springs or White Cone, Arizona, as the year and place of his birth. His father, Hosteen Blackrock, a stockman by profession, and Begay's mother, Ah-Hin Nil-bah, a housewife, raised Begay and his eight siblings in a three-room house.<sup>5</sup> When Begay's mother died, Hosteen Blackrock packed his young son off to boarding school at Fort Wingate, New Mexico, where, at around the age of seven, Harrison heard English spoken for the first time.<sup>6</sup> As a small boy, Begay must have found the federal boarding school system, still extraordinarily harsh in the early 1920s, untenable. Arduous labor, scanty provisions, and endemic disease took their toll on many of the pupils; Begay contracted tuberculosis and spent three years in the school hospital.<sup>7</sup> After completing grades seven and

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<sup>4</sup> Gary Auerbach, "Harrison Begay, Navajo," *We Walk in Beauty*, last modified 2007, accessed December 21, 2015, <http://www.garyauerbach.com/wwib/harrisonbegay.php>.

<sup>5</sup> Harrison Begay, Student Case File, Santa Fe Indian School Records, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Denver Federal Records Center, Broomfield, Colorado. Greasewood Springs and White Cone, Arizona, both located in a remote part of the Navajo Reservation, are only about fifteen miles apart as the crow flies.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Sublette, "Harrison Begay (1917–2012)," *Medicine Man Gallery*, accessed December 21, 2015, [www.medicinemangallery.com/bio/bio.lasso?url=Harrison-Begay](http://www.medicinemangallery.com/bio/bio.lasso?url=Harrison-Begay).

<sup>7</sup> Gary Auerbach, "Harrison Begay, Navajo," *We Walk in Beauty*, last modified 2007, accessed December 21, 2015, <http://www.garyauerbach.com/wwib/harrisonbegay.php>.

eight at Fort Wingate, Begay, like many of the Indian students, ran away and headed back to his home.<sup>8</sup>

As a young man, Begay made the fateful decision to enroll in the Santa Fe Indian School in order to complete his education and study art. By 1934, at the time of his enrollment, the boarding school regime had evolved into a system far less nightmarish, and Begay thrived in an atmosphere where he could essentially study what he wished. His SFIS records indicate a student who earned straight A's in art under both Dunn and her successor, Gerónima Cruz, dabbled in silversmithing, and enjoyed participating in the school's Dramatic Club.<sup>9</sup> In line with the vast majority of his classmates and fellow artists, Begay admired Dunn and appreciated her efforts on their behalf. He remembered later that "Dorothy Dunn (White woman) was a good teacher and helped a great deal to promote Indian art, especially paintings."<sup>10</sup> After his 1939 graduation from the SFIS, Begay spent one year attending, via government scholarship, the newly inaugurated Black Mountain College in North Carolina, an "experimental school that combined classes and community life" founded on progressive educational ideas.<sup>11</sup>

However, like so many of his cohort, the promise of Begay's early life collapsed in the face of World War II. After four years of active duty in the U.S. Army Signal Corps serving throughout Europe, including Germany, Iceland, and the Czech Republic, as well as participating in the D-Day storming of the Normandy Beachhead, Begay came home to Santa Fe in 1945. Upon his return, though, the former private first class grew despondent over his inability to sell his paintings, undoubtedly compounding the grief he felt over the recent death of his wife whom

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Harrison Begay, Student Case File, Santa Fe Indian School Records, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Denver Federal Records Center, Broomfield, Colorado.

<sup>10</sup> Gary Auerbach, "Harrison Begay, Navajo," *We Walk in Beauty*, last modified 2007, accessed December 21, 2015, <http://www.garyauerbach.com/wwib/harrisonbegay.php>.

<sup>11</sup> Benes, *Native American Picture Books of Change*, 122; Mark Sublette, "Harrison Begay (1917–2012)," *Medicine Man Gallery*, accessed December 21, 2015, [www.medicinemangallery.com/bio/bio.lasso?url=Harrison-Begay](http://www.medicinemangallery.com/bio/bio.lasso?url=Harrison-Begay).

he had married shortly before the war.<sup>12</sup> Deciding to give up his brushes, Begay joined the throngs of post-war Indian veterans who migrated to urban areas looking for work. In Denver, he began taking classes in radio repair.<sup>13</sup> Not surprisingly, this proved less than fulfilling work, but Begay nevertheless made the most of his Colorado sojourn by studying for a short time under Gerard Curtis Delano, a White New Englander known for his illustrations of western themes, particularly Navajos.<sup>14</sup>

After once again returning to his Arizona-New Mexico homeland, Begay fortuitously encountered Tucson Indian trader and anthropologist Clay Lockett. As a mentor, Lockett encouraged the artist to take up his paintbrushes in earnest by offering him employment at the trader's Indian arts and crafts shop. While Begay undoubtedly benefitted from Lockett's mentorship, the merchant also enjoyed Begay's service as an "artist in residence" who provided "local color" while "introducing shop visitors to the Indian painting tradition."<sup>15</sup> Most interestingly, during a period in the 1950s when Begay began feeling artistically drained, Lockett introduced the painter to his friend, western-genre artist Don Perceval. The latter, taking Begay "under his wing," gave the Navajo artist a book titled *Navaho Legends*, written at the end of the nineteenth century by White army surgeon and ethnographer Washington Matthews.<sup>16</sup> Matthew's interpretation of Navajo mythology "opened a new field of interest to the painter," inspiring him to portray with increasing frequency subject matter corresponding to Diné lore—or at least Navajo cum White analysis of autochthonous mythology.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Gary Auerbach, "Harrison Begay, Navajo," *We Walk in Beauty*, last modified 2007, accessed December 21, 2015, <http://www.garyauerbach.com/wwib/harrisonbegay.php>.

<sup>13</sup> Dorothy Dunn, "America's First Painters: Indians Who Once Painted Rocks and Buffalo Hides, Now Use Paper and Canvas to Preserve Ancient Art Forms," *National Geographic* 107, no. 3 (March 1955), 373.

<sup>14</sup> Benes, *Native American Picture Books of Change*, 122.

<sup>15</sup> Chase, *Indian Painters of the Southwest*, 42.

<sup>16</sup> Katherin Chase, "Navajo Painting," *Plateau* (Museum of Northern Arizona) 54, no. 1 (1982), 9.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

The 1950s saw Begay's star rise as he ascended to the height of the Native American Modern Traditional genre. Alongside the sales of his popular paintings, Begay displayed great entrepreneurialism by founding Tewa Enterprises in 1951 with his associate and fellow (non-Indian) artist Charles Barrows. This successful printing company worked with other Indian painters such as Gerald Nailor, Quincy Tahoma, Pop Chalee, Andrew Tsihnaahjinnie, and Allan Houser to produce affordable, quality silk-screen reproductions of the artists' original paintings.<sup>18</sup> The accomplishment of Begay's venture remains especially impressive in light of considerable backlash from the non-Indian community which, quite ironically, voiced concern over Begay's turn toward commercialism.<sup>19</sup> Clara Lee Tanner mentioned that, "Some have criticized Begay for this venture, but certainly the far lower prices have made his ever popular work available to many who could not pay the price of an original painting."<sup>20</sup> Tanner's comment likely indicates the prevailing Euro-American reluctance to pass on any control of the art form they had coopted, if not created, to a Native American.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, Peter Iverson contended that "Begay's placid images fit the 1950s and he enjoyed great popularity"; this is further borne out by a recitation of the many prestigious awards and honors bestowed upon the artist during this period.<sup>22</sup> In 1954, for example, Begay received the *Palmes de Academiques* from the French government for his contribution to the arts, and throughout the forties and fifties he exhibited widely around Santa Fe and at the esteemed Philbrook Indian Annual painting

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<sup>18</sup> Margaret Cesa, *The World of Flower Blue: Pop Chalee: An Artistic Biography* (Santa Fe, NM: Red Crane Books, 1997), 131.

<sup>19</sup> Clara Lee Tanner, *Southwest Indian Painting* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1957), 112.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> There was a longstanding tradition already in place of White attempts to control Indian art through the perceived maintenance of "standards." Kenneth Chapman and the Indian Arts Fund, for example, existed ostensibly for the purpose of maintaining the quality of Native arts and crafts, fearing that Indian people, left to their own devices, would succumb to the allure of the tourist trade, cheapening their products accordingly. See chapter one of this study for more on this.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Iverson, *Diné: A History of the Navajos* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), 226.

competition.<sup>23</sup> In 1957, Begay provided illustrations for Ann Nolan Clark's children's book, *The Little Indian Basket Maker*, "one of the loveliest of the [Native American-illustrated] children's books." The following decade saw Begay pair with the writer again when he illustrated her volume, *A Hogan for the Bluebird*.<sup>24</sup>

In the face of considerable professional success, however, Begay, like many returning veterans, struggled postwar with alcoholism. In fact, he remained a close friend and drinking partner of fellow SFIS classmate and artist Quincy Tahoma up until Tahoma's 1956 death. Both painters' afflictions were well known within Santa Fe circles. In a 1955 letter to Dunn, now living in Las Cruces, New Mexico, Dietrich wrote regarding a Santa Fe exhibition, "Harrison Begay came in while I was there—He is to paint pictures while the visitors circulate—The paid worker told me they were having a time with him because he is drinking—he looked all right & was certainly cold sober then, but it was morning."<sup>25</sup> When Tahoma died of alcohol-related causes in October 1956, Begay was again near his friend's side. Tahoma's biographers Charnel Havens and Vera Marie Badertscher contended after many interviews with both Begay and others that two different but similar stories circulated regarding Begay's involvement in Tahoma's death. Begay's more recent memories of that morning revolved around his happenstance encounter of the police at Tahoma's apartment after he woke up "and went to little bar" because he "liked to see a guy" for a beer before going to work. An alternate story, supposedly an earlier version told by Begay himself, recounted that after a night of partying with his friend, Begay had gone out the following morning to buy more beer in order to calm

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<sup>23</sup> Mark Sublette, "Harrison Begay (1917–2012)," *Medicine Man Gallery*, accessed December 21, 2015, [www.medicinemangallery.com/bio/bio.lasso?url=Harrison-Begay](http://www.medicinemangallery.com/bio/bio.lasso?url=Harrison-Begay).

<sup>24</sup> Benes, *Native American Picture Books of Change*, 121–22.

<sup>25</sup> Letter from Margretta Dietrich, Santa Fe, NM, to Dorothy Dunn, March 3, 1955, transcript in the hand of Dorothy Dunn Kramer, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM, underlining in original.

Tahoma's delirium tremens. He returned to the apartment just in time to see the police responding to Tahoma's death. When telling the latter version, Begay mentioned to acquaintances that he felt tremendous guilt for not being with his old comrade at the end.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps it was this experience that provided the impetus for Begay to remove himself from Santa Fe and relocate to the Navajo Reservation. It would appear that the move was a healthy one for the artist; a 1966 letter to Dunn from Gallup trader Marion Leonard "Woody" Woodard mentions that "Harrison Begay has been doing some good things lately and is sober most of the time."<sup>27</sup>

After his relocation to Dinétah, Begay continued to paint in much the same way, choosing similar subject matter and adhering to the Studio format, throughout the following decades. Even as controversy swirled around the replacement of the SFIS Studio with the IAIA, and even as Dunn's professional reputation rose and fell and rose again, Begay maintained the singularity of his vision. Indeed, after Allan Houser's defection to the IAIA, Gerald Nailor's and Quincy Tahoma's early deaths, and the devastation wrought by World War II, which included the demise of such promising Studio-trained artists as Ben Quintana (Cochiti Pueblo) and the effectual curtailment, at least temporarily, of Narciso Abeyta's output, few of Begay's cohort remained. The limited number of women within this group had all, with really just one or two exceptions, discontinued painting professionally.<sup>28</sup> Thus, one could say that Begay had, in some way, cornered the market. And regardless of any efforts, particularly during the sixties and

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<sup>26</sup> Vera Marie Badertscher and Charnell Havens, *Quincy Tahoma: The Life and Legacy of a Navajo Artist* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 2011), 172, 173.

<sup>27</sup> Letter from Marion Leonard "Woody" Woodward, Gallup, NM, to Dorothy Dunn, March 23, 1966, transcript in the hand of Dorothy Dunn Kramer, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM.

<sup>28</sup> Pablita Velarde (Santa Clara Pueblo) also continued to paint throughout the decades until her 2006 death and is widely regarded as the most successful—perhaps the only commercially successful, along with Pop Chalee (Taos Pueblo) and, to a much lesser extent, Gerónima Cruz Montoya (P'otsúnú, Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo)—female painter to emerge from the Dunn Studio.

seventies, to undermine or denigrate the Studio genre, enough appreciative non-Indian art buyers and tourists to the Southwest remained in order to afford Begay a comfortable living as a painter.

So, what are we to make of a Navajo artist who employed Dunn's format to so faithfully depict traditional Diné themes for over sixty years—this, in light of the fact that his knowledge of Navajo culture resulted in large measure from his training with White, western-genre artists and his familiarity with non-Indian anthropological studies? Was it duplicity and sheer commercialism that motivated Begay or something else? I argue that a number of complex motivations and influences underpinned Begay's remarkable art production and served to establish him as a significant and legitimate cultural broker, including his boarding school experience, the Navajo concept of synecdoche, and the devastation caused by John Collier's Bureau of Indian Affairs administration, all in tandem with Begay's desire to support himself as an artist. Begay chose to paint within Studio directives dictating subject matter throughout his career. Because of that, his work more than any of the others, presents the both most authentic and the most contrived portfolio of all the painters discussed here—most contrived because he never ventured from Dunn's instruction to paint something culturally representative, and most authentic because, in an admittedly static way, he presented a quiescent snapshot of Diné cultural values.

Begay's sojourn in Indian Service boarding schools cannot be discounted as a factor in his development as an artist and cultural broker. Indeed, David Wallace Adams contended that in spite of a myriad of variables that worked against the Indian schools' attempts to detribalize and assimilate Native children, including the students' and their parents' resistance as well as sheer mismanagement by the BIA, "most . . . students were agents of cultural change," while paradoxically, "one of the chief consequences for students . . . was an enlarged sense of identity

as ‘Indians.’”<sup>29</sup> Begay’s early experience with government boarding schools, arguably the most challenging of any of the artists discussed in this study, reveals not only the inhumane physical treatment Indian children suffered, but also the systemic and pervasive cultural violence that attended an Indian Services education. While the SFIS predated the 1928 Meriam Report in its abandonment of certain of the more heinous militaristic trappings inherent within the system, the Fort Wingate School students, Begay among them, did not enjoy the same progressivism. Furthermore, the physical plant of Fort Wingate itself represented a dark period in Navajo history. First established in 1862, the fort served as the Navajos’ surrender point as General James H. Carleton and Colonel Christopher “Kit” Carson launched the 1863 scorched earth campaign that succeeded in the forced, four-year relocation of thousands of Diné from their homelands to eastern central New Mexico’s Bosque Redondo. In 1925, the Indian Service recommissioned the deactivated fort and utilized the old barracks as classrooms and dormitories for Zuni and Navajo children.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, the location of the school in one of the more severe areas of the reservation, including Fort Wingate’s elevation of almost 7,000 feet, resulted in incredibly harsh winters. This, coupled with scanty provisions and strenuous physical labor, meant misery for the many Native students interned there. But even the Fort Wingate School proved the happy exception when it came to most Native students’ early twentieth-century boarding school experiences; the school was housed on the reservation, thus allowing for more visits to and from family, and for some of the most destitute children within the region Fort Wingate School meant the difference between eating and starving. Nevertheless, the primary goal of the institution, like all of the federal boarding schools, was not to provide a useful

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<sup>29</sup> David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875–1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 336.

<sup>30</sup> Harold L. James, “The History of Fort Wingate,” New Mexico Geological Society Guidebook, Eighteenth Field Conference, Fall 1967.

education for Indian students, but was instead a means of detribalization through the imposition of White values, including hierarchical gender roles and the tenets of capitalism. By the early twentieth century, both White and Indian reformers sought to assimilate Native Americans into the mainstream via the inculcation of hegemonic values through the education of Native children.

However, efforts toward assimilation took root earlier in the late nineteenth century at the effective close of the Indian Wars, symbolically embodied by Apache leader Geronimo's 1886 surrender. Once the bloody path to Euro-American westward expansion appeared clear, the tide of public sentiment turned away from actively destroying Indian lives. The press began printing heart-wrenching stories recounting Native communities' poverty and despair alongside the standard bloodthirsty paeans to U.S. Army military campaigns or lurid accounts of Indian attacks.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, by 1880 the general consensus, especially expounded by affluent and influential eastern elites and intellectuals was that "Indians not only needed to be saved from the white man," but that they "needed to be saved from themselves."<sup>32</sup> Numerous White-led organizations formed around the close of the century, including the Indian Rights Association, the Friends of the Indian (the prime mover in the 1887 Dawes Act), and the Philadelphia-based Women's National Indian Association, which concerned itself primarily with the education of Indian children.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Two significant examples of this are Helen Hunt Jackson's 1881 path-breaking and widely read *A Century of Dishonor: A Sketch of the United States Government's Dealings with Some of the Indian Tribes*, as well as her novel *Ramona*, published three years later.

<sup>32</sup> Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 8.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 10; the Dawes, or General Allotment, Act was legislation that worked to break up the reservations into individually owned plots of land that the Indians could farm, thereby hopefully assimilating them into White civilization. By allotting either 160- or 80-acre parcels to individual Native Americans, the scheme made the remaining land available for non-Indian ownership. Although the government slapped the perfunctory safeguard of a twenty-five-year trust upon allotted lands to protect them from hasty sales, avarice won the day as a combination of corruption, coercion, and ignorance worked to swindle the Indians. During the years in which the Allotment Act was in force, between 1887 and 1934, three-quarters of the nation's existing tribes lost a total of almost ninety

As early twentieth-century modernity swept across America, the Navajo Indians found themselves swept up in it along with other Native Americans, and the country struggled to place its Indigenous population within the context of a rapidly modernizing United States. During this fin-de-siècle period, Indians often appreciated the fruits of modernity, for example automobiles and moving pictures, as thoroughly as their fellow Americans in spite of the increasing discomfort this caused in White intellectuals anxious to situate the Indian into a static, primitivistic state while they mourned with great *Schadenfreude* the inevitable demise of Indian culture. This cohort hailed the Indians as the ideal modern embodiment of primitivism; paradoxically, however, many of the reformers of this era, both Native and non-Indian, passionately persisted in their belief that the destruction of Native culture could not happen quickly enough; they deemed the solution to the reservation Indian's plight to be assimilation through education.

In spite of emerging organizations like John Collier's American Indian Defense Association and the New Mexico Association on Indian Affairs, formed in 1923 and 1922, respectively, by antimodernist intellectuals in order to protect the rights and lands of Native Americans, the assimilationists continued to represent a strong political force. Although by the 1920s White missionaries made up the controlling element of this latter cohort, they were aided by countless others, including some Native reformers.<sup>34</sup> In the arena of education, Indians such as Charles Eastman, a Sioux and co-founder of the Society of American Indians, and Navajo

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million acres—nearly two thirds of their legal lands. Serendipitously, this legislation had little impact on the Navajo Reservation lands, which actually grew during the late nineteenth century as most White settlers deemed it relatively worthless desert unfit for agribusiness or resource extraction; furthermore, the Navajos were, in general, quite economically self-sufficient until the combined effects of the Great Depression and unusually severe weather brought them, metaphorically speaking, to their knees. Thus, the government did not target their lands as it did many other Native nations. There was, however, some wrangling over the Eastern “checkerboard” region between Navajo, Hispanic, and White ranchers, but this was due to a conflict between traditional grazing areas and tenuous property claims.

<sup>34</sup> Calloway, *First Peoples*, 440; McGeough, *Through Their Eyes*, 30.

councilmember Jacob Morgan vociferously espoused school curriculum that trained Native Americans to live in a White world.<sup>35</sup> Both men were products of the government boarding school system, and both earnestly believed in the promise that assimilation held for the advancement of their people.

“Survivors” may be a more accurate word than “products” when referring to Indian school graduates, however. Even into the first three decades of the twentieth century, Indian agents or militia often forcibly abducted children in order to meet school funding quotas, sometimes sending them off to boarding schools hundreds of miles away.<sup>36</sup> Understandably, parents resisted; it was not uncommon for seized children to go for years without seeing their families again. Once there, staff separated siblings, deloused the children, took away their traditional clothing and fitted them into wool uniforms, and cut off their hair—all in an effort to disorient and “de-Indianize” them. The government boarding schools of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries employed a harsh, militaristic regime that exploited and mistreated the students. Two prototypes commenced Indian education during the late 1870s: the Hampton Institute in Virginia and the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania. Both facilities modeled themselves on military academies, believing that strict discipline was necessary in order to drum out the Indians’ imagined tendency toward indolence. The children lived in barracks-like dormitories, drilled regularly, and marched everywhere on campus. Policy strictly forbade the speaking of native languages; indeed, any infringement of the ironclad rules resulted in harsh punishments that sometimes included whipping and leg-chains and always demanded extra work detail.<sup>37</sup> Even the compliant students, and most were compliant, worked long hours on the school

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<sup>35</sup> Calloway, *First Peoples*, 393.

<sup>36</sup> Sally Hyer, *One House, One Voice, One Heart: Native American Education at the Santa Fe Indian School* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1990), 6.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

grounds or in the school kitchens on top of their vocational-training schoolwork.<sup>38</sup> The combination of hard physical work, cheap and scant food, and close living quarters led to rampant disease. Homesickness and tuberculosis claimed a disgraceful number of student lives.<sup>39</sup>

The Santa Fe Indian School (SFIS), opened in 1890, modeled itself after these seemingly successful institutions. Those first ninety-three students, composed mainly of Pueblo, Apache, and Navajo Indians ranging in age from around five to twenty, encountered strict military discipline, as did the following generations of incoming pupils. Upon admission, the school staff separated the children into battalions, forced them to wear uniforms, and marched and drilled them continuously.<sup>40</sup> Homesick children often ran away, sometimes their only option for seeing families they had not seen in weeks or months, only to face sanctions that included public ridicule, extra work, and corporal punishment. Mimicking Carlisle and Hampton, SFIS policy segregated boys and girls, not even permitting brothers and sisters to fraternize. Indeed, every aspect of the school's regime reflected this ideology of gender separation. Girls and boys studied widely different subjects: White teachers instructed girls in domestic arts and boys in farming, carpentry, and saddle-making. Boys enjoyed significantly more freedom than girls; they engaged in athletics and band while female students took enforced afternoon naps.<sup>41</sup> All of this was an attempt to drill out Indianness and instill White values and gender norms that would aid in assimilation.

The trend toward an appreciation of Indigenous culture and art unofficially began in the Santa Fe educational system with the 1918 appointment of John DeHuff to the position of superintendent of the SFIS. He and his wife Elizabeth both advocated the new teaching

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Calloway, *First Peoples*, 387–88.

<sup>40</sup> Hyer, *One House*, 5.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 20, 24.

principles of John Dewey, a progressive educator who believed in classroom interaction and allowing room for student expression.<sup>42</sup> Folklorist and writer Elizabeth DeHuff, in particular, championed the Indian school students who displayed artistic talent, among them Fred Kabotie (Hopi), Otis Polelonema (Hopi), and Velino Shije Herrera (or Má Pe Wi, Zia Pueblo). Elizabeth encouraged those students and a few others to pursue their talents, providing them with paper and paints and allowing them to meet at the DeHuff home after school to paint and draw.<sup>43</sup> The culmination of Elizabeth's efforts occurred in 1922 with her publication of *TayTay's Tales*, a children's book of Pueblo Indian folklore illustrated by her protégée, Fred Kabotie, but even before that she had worked to introduce the Indian students' art to Santa Fe's intellectual elite, working with Edgar Lee Hewett to exhibit their work at the Museum of New Mexico in 1919.<sup>44</sup>

Even as the DeHuffs strove to align the SFIS with the movement toward cultural pluralism, a strong contingent of assimilationists akin to the Friends of the Indians, even within the relatively progressive New Mexico capital, still determined government policy regarding the education of Indian children. DeHuff's stated goal to "foster and preserve the Indians' native culture" perfectly enmeshed him within the nascent intellectual movement to preserve Native lifeways, but it also placed him squarely in the crosshairs of those advocating the status quo.<sup>45</sup> Mounting tension between DeHuff's progressive reforms and conservative assimilationist policy reached a boiling point in 1926, resulting in the superintendent's transfer and demotion.<sup>46</sup>

Two years later, however, the results of the enormously influential Meriam Report of 1928 vindicated the former superintendent's practices. This government-sponsored report, undertaken by the Brookings Institution, castigated Indian schools for their abysmal living

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<sup>42</sup> McGeough, *Through Their Eyes*, 18–22.

<sup>43</sup> Dunn, *American Indian Painting*, 201.

<sup>44</sup> Benes, *Native American Picture Books of Change*, 7.

<sup>45</sup> McGeough, *Through Their Eyes*, 22.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 23, 29.

conditions, flagrant violations of child labor laws, and ineffective curriculum.<sup>47</sup> Instead, the recommendations of the report reflected the recent nationwide move away from rote and discipline-based teaching methods toward a more sensitive, individually focused methodology.<sup>48</sup> Widely disseminated, the findings of the Meriam Report led to sweeping reforms of both the Office of Indian Affairs and Indian school policy. Assimilationists and cultural pluralists alike agreed that the present Indian educational system was at best ineffective and at worst criminal.

The 1930 installation of Will Carson Ryan Jr. as Director of Indian Education proved a catalyst for the implementation of the Meriam Report's recommendations. Seeing boarding schools as a large part of the problem, Ryan closed many of them; the SFIS was one of the few to remain in operation, interestingly due to Indian protest.<sup>49</sup> The surrounding Pueblo Indians appreciated the sense of pan-Indian unity the school fostered; children from isolated communities were now able to interact with other Native Americans, providing a vibrant cultural exchange.<sup>50</sup> Coinciding with the onset of Ryan's administration was the local appointment of Chester E. Faris, an educator sympathetic to the Indians' concerns, to the position of superintendent of the SFIS. These two bureaucrats oversaw reforms that transformed, albeit slowly, government Indian education. Faris's dictum, "I always made it a rule never to tell an Indian what to do . . . I waited until he told me what he wanted, and then I helped him get it," may sound patronizing to modern sensibilities, but it was shockingly progressive for the time.<sup>51</sup> Although relatively strict discipline and rigid structure remained under Faris's leadership, marching and drilling stopped, food rations increased, and the school moved to a high school format and no longer housed young children, who instead attended day schools closer to home.

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<sup>47</sup> Hyer, *One House*, 30.

<sup>48</sup> McGeough, *Through Their Eyes*, 31.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 31–32.

<sup>50</sup> Hyer, *One House*, 31.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

Faris also had the boys' vocational training program updated to reflect a changing job market, allowed students to speak their native languages, and expanded the curriculum to include Indian culture, history, and arts and crafts.<sup>52</sup>

By 1932 Faris had the financial and political support of a new, progressive presidential administration. Franklin Delano Roosevelt's choice of John Collier Sr. as Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1933 cemented the centrality of cultural pluralism in government Indian policy, and Faris and his school became an exemplar of this now dominant ideology.<sup>53</sup> In accordance with his favorable view of Indian arts, Faris happened upon the idea of recruiting students, working under professional artists, to paint murals in the SFIS cafeteria. In the spring of 1932, local artist and art critic Olive Rush worked with an assemblage of adult Native American artists and SFIS students to create a series of murals that stretched across the expanse of the room's walls (Begay worked to repair these same murals some five years later). Rush wrote afterward that:

With the sure instincts of artists and that blessing of childlessness natural to them, they meet their problems with almost no hesitation or fear; and because it is a part of their lives, their art expression has the ease of the singing of the birds. This is a precious thing, and he must move softly among them that would help them adjust their art to our modern world.<sup>54</sup>

Rush's passage serves to firmly situate the origins of the Santa Fe view of Indian art, one paternalistic to its core. The rise of White-supported Indian art coincided with these new trends already percolating in Santa Fe at this time: the sense of Indian culture as being something precious, unique, and endangered to the point that it sorely needed White intervention.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Olive Rush, "The Young Indians Work in Old Forms," *Theatre Arts* 17, no. 8 (1933): 635, as quoted in Dunn, *American Indian Painting*, 245.

Thus, we can see that Begay, who experienced both the old military regime that employed harsh measures in an attempt to assimilate Indian children and the newer model of the 1930s which, in equal proportion, sought to “preserve” Native culture, through his work embodied the schism that these two diametrically opposed ideologies created. As well, we see a physical manifestation of the tensions between White domination and Native identity; Begay’s pictures display in equal measure the dictates of the Dunn Studio and the foundational tenets of Navajo culture. It must be reiterated, though, that Begay was no mere victim of the system. His choice of subject matter was also self-reflexive and reveals sound business practice. In a 1950s interview anthropologist Clara Tanner wrote, “When asked what he liked to paint, Begay answered with vigor, ‘Anything that sells.’”<sup>55</sup> From his response to Tanner’s query, it becomes apparent that, like all artists, he was aware of the tastes of his clientele and profited from that. He proved able to meet the expectations of “Indianness” foisted upon him by Euro-American teachers, critics, and buyers, and used them to his own advantage. While his homeland suffered under New Deal herd reductions that threatened traditional gender roles and lifestyles, Begay painted idyllic scenes of women sheep-herding and weaving—paintings the non-Indian art-buying public eagerly snatched up, seeing in them a tangible means of preserving the “endangered” Indian culture.

In this era of turmoil, as his kinsmen were living through the devastation of traditional lifeways, how did Begay’s work reflect, or deflect, the challenges posed by both Dunn’s instruction and the greater art-buying population to depict nothing but sanitized depictions of traditional Indian life? It may be that Begay’s chosen imagery reflects more than simple capitulation to those same mandates or venal profiteering. If Maureen Trudelle Schwarz is correct in her assertion of the Navajo view of synecdoche, then we can surmise that the paintings

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<sup>55</sup> Clara Lee Tanner, *Southwest Indian Painting* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1957), 112.

created by the Diné artists in general, and Begay in particular, contain much more than commercially driven subject matter.<sup>56</sup> Schwarz posited that items made by Navajo hands offer evidence for the sense of synecdoche that impresses itself on every aspect of Diné life. In this way of thinking, not only are all beings a balance of the feminine and masculine, they also affect and are in turn affected by every word and act they send out to the universe. This idea encompasses the belief that every tangible item the Diné produce contains within it the power to impact both its producer and its recipient. Begay's paintings of sheep, women weaving, and Navajo homeland fauna speak to those elements of Diné culture that underpinned its existence for centuries. In essence, traditional beliefs assign a piece of the individual maker's spirit to every rug, pot, or painting the artist creates.<sup>57</sup> This concept casts an intriguing light on the paintings produced by the Navajo artists; it is certainly possible that, for those artists painting traditional subject matter for the non-Indian-driven market, much more was at stake than simply churning out popular themes. Viewed this way, the ever-present images of women, sheep, and horses that Begay painted appear as more than the sum of their parts; indeed, it may be the case that the artist chose these themes as a paean to his time-honored traditions—homages to those most beloved and important aspects of everyday life—even if those same traditions may have been initially unfamiliar to him. If these artworks truly held a piece of the artist's self, then the paintings sent out into the public realm may have also been an extraordinarily intimate way to disseminate the Navajo psyche.

Furthermore, there may have been a particular *raison d'être* for Begay's consistent choice of women and sheep as subject matter. By the early twentieth century the Navajo culture seemed an ancient one to outsiders, and certainly one of those components, sheep, had figured

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<sup>56</sup> Schwarz, "Snakes in the Ladies' Room," 602.

<sup>57</sup> Schwarz, "Snakes in the Ladies' Room," 603.

prominently in Diné history for hundreds of years. The Spanish colonizers introduced both sheep and horses to the semi-nomadic Navajos they encountered in the sixteenth century (although Diné myth refutes this), and by the early 1700s herding had become a mainstay of Diné existence.<sup>58</sup> Although anthropologists argue that sheep were a novelty to the Navajos, unknown before Spanish intervention, Diné legend, as noted above, claims that sheep existed in the Navajo world since time immemorial: a testimony to their importance.<sup>59</sup> Sheep quickly became the linchpin of the Indians' subsistence, and Diné women proved themselves to be extraordinarily adept shepherders. Women especially benefitted from this pastoral-based economy; through the possession of their sheep they were able to procure wool for weaving, meat during lean agricultural times, and money or trading post goods from the sale or barter of lambs.<sup>60</sup> Children born on Navajo lands soaked in this atmosphere of pastoralism and understood the importance of both their women kin and the family livestock to the People's survival. Begay thus realized the tenuousness of the traditional Diné lifeways as John Collier's 1930s and 1940s BIA-enforced herd reductions devastatingly altered the Navajo economy, gender roles, and landscape. When government agents mercilessly culled sheep and demarcated areas of pasture land for soil conservation, Navajo women, many of whom based their wealth and prestige on the sheep that they owned, were particularly and negatively impacted.

While the Navajos' success as pastoralists and their resultant independence from government intervention had stood them in good stead for more than a half-century after their 1868 return to their homelands from the Bosque Redondo, the onset of the 1930s brought new challenges for the People. Although rightfully proud of their longstanding tradition of self-sufficiency, the Navajos found themselves in the midst of an unprecedented crisis by the early

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<sup>58</sup> Weisiger, *Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country*, 115.

<sup>59</sup> Weisiger, *Dreaming of Sheep*, 63.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

1930s. As a people who depended on herding and farming for subsistence, they were reeling from the combined impact of two successive years of unusually harsh weather conditions. The winters of 1931–1932 and 1932–1933 saw blizzards so severe that livestock by the tens of thousands starved. Significant drought followed these punishingly frigid winters. Tensions increased in the eastern “checkerboard” region as Hispanic, White, and Navajo ranchers squabbled over land claims. Furthermore, while years of explosive population growth had overturned the sickening drop in human numbers caused by the Long Walk and successive four years of captivity, the sustained population growth that had occurred during the last fifty years without a corresponding sustained herd growth had caused the per capita holdings to decline by 40 percent between the late 1880s and 1933.<sup>61</sup>

The collapse of the Navajos’ self-sufficiency during the Great Depression encouraged reformers like John Collier, in his role as the newly-appointed commissioner of Indian Affairs, to intervene with strategies like herd reductions and soil conservation. Collier, not lacking hubris, believed he intrinsically understood the Navajo culture enough to turn the Navajo Reservation into his New Deal test project; instead, he fundamentally misunderstood it, causing long-lasting anguish and disruption for the Diné. The Navajo Reservation offered a vast and virtually untapped arena for realization of Collier’s aspirations overall. As another member of the Santa Fe cadre zealously determined to preserve the primitivism of Native American culture as an anodyne for modernity, Collier focused his reform policies on the Diné. Collier himself had unbridled enthusiasm for the Navajo people; he wrote in June 1934 that although they were a mostly non-English speaking, nomadic desert tribe living in poverty, “their psychological standard is high, their *élan vital* is irrepressible. They are esthetes, adventurers, gamblers, sportsmen and

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<sup>61</sup> Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change Among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 222.

nature-mystics.”<sup>62</sup> According to historian Marsha Weisiger, focusing exclusively on the male members of the community would prove to be one of Collier’s most significant cultural *faux pas* and exemplifies the degree to which he fundamentally misunderstood Navajo culture.<sup>63</sup>

But Collier had not always felt that herd reduction and soil erosion were at the root of the Navajos’ problems. Immediately before becoming commissioner, Collier, in his role as leader of the American Indian Defense Association, had lobbied extensively in Washington to provide the Navajo with replacement livestock. In the face of critics who insinuated that overgrazing might be partly at the root of the Indians’ problem, Collier staunchly defended his relief efforts, managing to raise over five hundred thousand dollars with which to purchase new stock.<sup>64</sup>

With good reason then, the Navajos looked to the Indian Service, and to the new administration of John Collier, to provide the answers they felt were appropriate: increased reservation land and improved water resources. Strong evidence existed showing that these tactics had worked in the past. The reservation had tripled in size during the final quarter of the nineteenth century as legislators freely ceded lands considered worthless to the burgeoning tribe, and the drilling of new wells and development of natural springs on Indian land had also contributed to the Navajos’ success as herdsman. By the early decades of the twentieth century, however; there was simply not enough productive rangeland on the reservation to accommodate Navajo stock.

By far the most serious problem facing the Diné, however, was the condition of the land upon which they lived, farmed, and herded their livestock. New Deal-era geologists, lacking

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<sup>62</sup> John Collier, “Indians at Work,” *Survey Graphic* 23, no. 6 (June 1934), <http://newdeal.feri.org/survey/34261.htm>.

<sup>63</sup> Weisiger, *Dreaming of Sheep*, 223–24.

<sup>64</sup> Lawrence C. Kelly, *The Navajo Indians and Federal Indian Policy, 1900-1935* (University of Arizona Press, 1968), 158.

sophisticated understanding of geomorphology, attributed this alarming erosion solely to the undeniably overgrazed condition of the landscape. Government reports dating from early in the decade pinpointed the problem and painted a dire picture of erosion and degradation of the land, conditions they firmly believed resulted from too many animals. There was also concern that silt from Navajo Reservation erosion, running down the Colorado River, might foul the tremendously important Boulder Dam Project.<sup>65</sup> Collier was determined to rectify the situation and make up for his earlier, admitted gaffe that had worsened the problem when he had naively provided for more livestock; consequently the primary focus of his Navajo program, along with eventual Native self-empowerment, was the remediation of the rangeland. In line with his vision of Native independence, Collier saw the restoration of tribal land as paramount, and worked closely with another New Deal government organization, the Soil Conservation Service, to rehabilitate Navajo grazing areas.

Meeting with the Navajo tribal council at Tuba City, Arizona, on October 30, 1933, the new commissioner, armed with charts and graphs, outlined his plans for reform and concluded his message by mentioning that the Navajos would need to reduce their livestock over the next four to five years by at least two hundred thousand sheep and an equal amount of goats.<sup>66</sup> The resultant cautious and noncommittal stance of those Diné present at the meeting, which did little to dampen Collier's determination, had at its base a long-standing tradition of negotiation and debate among the People. Indeed, the tribal councilmen were unaccustomed to speaking authoritatively for others; the Navajo traditionally structured decision-making within clans or small communities and had little use for White-structured government. In fact, the Navajo

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<sup>65</sup> Hugh G. Calkins, "Navajo Project," Soil Erosion Service, United States Department of the Interior pamphlet, 1935. The Boulder Dam, now known as the Hoover Dam, provides water to the Los Angeles/southern California area. Construction began in 1931 and continued until its 1935 completion.

<sup>66</sup> Donald Lee Parman, *Navajos and the New Deal* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976), 24.

council had scant decision-making experience; the federal government had only just constructed the Indian government body the decade before as a tool to push through oil leases. The council members who were present in Tuba City assumed that they would be given as much time as they felt was required to debate the issue and discuss it within their constituencies; but Collier, well-prepared and seemingly with an eye toward Indian best interests, overtly strong-armed the council to accept his proposals. Although the council members repeatedly asked for more time to discuss the issues at hand, the government stance was implacable, implying the curtailment of New Deal funds if the council did not immediately approve Collier's measures.

Disregarding Navajo ambivalence, Collier succeeded in his mission, and the first herd reduction began in the spring of 1934; the hesitant council had reluctantly agreed to Collier's plans after hearing assurances of new roads and schools, as well as further expansion of the reservation into Arizona. Although, as Lawrence Kelly pointed out, "This first attempt at reduction was statistically a success, but psychologically a failure," the initial round-up, resulting in the sale of over 80,000 sheep, proved to be less traumatic than might have been expected, even though the net result had been devastating to small herders, especially women, while minimally affecting the few large ranchers, generally men, who simply culled their undesirable stock.<sup>67</sup> New Deal money flowed into the reservation; the government, in essence, purchased the surplus sheep, and in spite of any underlying distrust, the Navajos by and large continued to support the new commissioner. Collier's enthusiasm remained unabated, and this initial herd reduction led to several more over the remainder of that decade and into the next.

The Navajos, of course, had not realized that an intrinsic part of Collier's plan included continuing herd reductions. At the March 1934 Fort Defiance, Arizona, meeting of the tribal council, Collier again presented the members with his plan to decrease herd sizes annually by at

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<sup>67</sup> Kelly, *The Navajo Indians and Federal Indian Policy*, 160; Weisiger, *Dreaming of Sheep*, 176.

least eighty percent.<sup>68</sup> This time the council members displayed reactions of obvious discontent, but Collier, in spite of his disavowal of autocracy, brooked no dissention. Bluntly threatening a withdrawal of two million dollars of New Deal conservation funds and the sure defeat of proposals to enlarge reservation lands while assuring the council that poorer families would escape targeting, Collier again overran the frustrated council.

In almost every way possible, this second reduction was a disaster. In the end, the government proved unable to even honor the terms of the agreement; subsistence ranchers were targeted as well, especially along the unincorporated eastern boundary, which not only forced them to accept future welfare in order to avoid starvation, but allowed non-Indian ranchers to expropriate the now vacant lands.<sup>69</sup> The debacle of the second herd reduction created a bitterness that pervaded Dinétah. When Collier returned to face the council on June 10, 1935, to present them with his masterwork, the Indian Reorganization Act [IRA], he met with a council adamantly opposed to any more federal strong-arming. The IRA, also known as the Wheeler-Howard Act or the Indian New Deal, was the crown jewel in Collier's quest to preserve and protect the Indian way of life. Among its provisions, the IRA prohibited further allotment and sales of allotted tribal lands to non-Indians; it also provided a means by which Indians could construct local governments via a written and Secretary of Interior-approved constitution. Theoretically, once ratified by tribal referendum, the IRA allowed tribes to function much like small city governments, giving them the power to pass ordinances and wield limited authority over annual budgets and tribal funds. Although Collier attempted to placate the irate councilmembers, and campaigned throughout the reservation to win support for the IRA, the Diné voted to defeat the act on June 17, 1935. When the Navajos rejected the IRA, an act that

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<sup>68</sup> Kelly, *Navajo Indians and Federal Indian Policy*, 161.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

encompassed almost all of Collier's most cherished ambitions of preserving Indian culture, self-government, and traditional lands, they struck a blow that resounded throughout Indian country and cut the commissioner to the quick. Collier's Navajo Reservation superintendent, E. Reeseman Fryer, contended that Collier assigned blame to the animosity that arose from the admittedly mishandled second herd reduction and the consequent association by the tribe of conservation with stock reduction.<sup>70</sup> Thus was the centerpiece of Collier's grand plan defeated by the tribe most targeted for its benefit.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, in a letter written in 1938, a few years after the first herd reduction, Collier displayed a steadfast conviction in the efficacy of his soil conservation policies, as well as a sense of his own messianic mission, when he wrote, "We sincerely believe that the Navajo program is aimed in the right direction. It is the only direction which promises a hope of saving the Navajo Reservation and of preserving and of rehabilitating the Navajo Indian."<sup>72</sup> Yet, the governmental blow of stock reduction resulted in a number of unintended and negative consequences: poverty on the reservation increased, the introduction of a wage economy served to ruin the older barter system, and possibly most devastating of all, the forced movement away from stock herding targeted women, depriving them of their traditional societal roles.<sup>73</sup>

Herd reductions imprinted terror and anguish onto generations. A treatise published by the Navajo Community College in 1974, *Navajo Livestock Reduction: A National Disgrace*, contains a wealth of interviews with Diné survivors of this era. The Diné women described the

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<sup>70</sup> E. Reeseman Fryer, as quoted in *Indian Self-Rule: First-Hand Accounts of Indian-White Relations from Roosevelt to Reagan*, Kenneth R. Philp, ed. (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1995); 148.

<sup>71</sup> Although around 40 percent of the country's Indian communities ended up rejecting the IRA, including the Crow and the Pueblo Indians, it was, however, efficacious for a number of other Indian nations; for example, the Blackfeet Tribe of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation.

<sup>72</sup> Memo from John Collier to Eric Howard, September 17, 1938, in *Native Americans and the New Deal: The Office Files of John Collier, 1933–1945*, ed. Robert E. Lester (University Publications of America, 1994). Microfilm.

<sup>73</sup> White, *Roots of Dependency*, 219–54; Weisiger, *Dreaming of Sheep*, 226.

herd reductions as an unmitigated horror; accompanying the interviews are heartbreaking illustrations of Navajo women openly weeping as nonchalant, White federal workers cruelly seize and slaughter their sheep and goats.<sup>74</sup> The affront to their status engendered by herd reductions enormously devastated women, to a large degree because the structure of Navajo life revolved then, as it does now, around a matrilineal, clan-based system. Married couples resided with the bride's mother after the groom's parents provided her family with a sizeable dowry, normally consisting of livestock.<sup>75</sup> Stripping women of their primary asset, sheep, worked to further isolate and impoverish them within the economy of the family as they subsisted on the vast reservation, a land where scattered families bonded together in clans rather than in discrete, heterogeneous communities. By impoverishing women, the Collier administration struck a blow at the cords supporting Navajo well-being. When women who shouldered the burden of child-raising became impoverished, the underpinnings of the Navajo clan-based society faltered as well. Unlike the Pueblo Indians, who resided in tightly-knit, often dense groups, the Navajos could not always rely on community networks; instead, their communal strengths rested on extended families.

The illustrations contained in *Navajo Livestock Reduction: A National Disgrace* serve as an antithesis to the artwork produced both during and after the New Deal Era by Begay. In a wistful hearkening back to a time predating the strife of this period, the artist produced scene after idyllic scene of healthy sheep and lush meadows in stunning contrast to the stark reality of the situation. This was not happenstance. Begay understood the ramifications of herd reductions on the Navajo community generally and on women in particular. By disseminating imagery that

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<sup>74</sup> Ruth Roessel and Broderick H. Johnson, eds. *Navajo Livestock Reduction: A National Disgrace* (Chinle, AZ: Navajo Community College Press, 1974), 46.

<sup>75</sup> Patricia Janis Broder, *Earth Songs, Moon Dreams: Paintings by American Indian Women* (New York: St. Martin's, 1999), 82.

served to highlight the most threatened aspect of Diné life, it seems likely that Begay hoped to pique the interest and compassion of the affluent art-buying public along with creating a lasting tribute to this fragile pillar of Navajo culture. Furthermore, in line with the Navajo notion of synecdoche, Begay may well have felt a sincere need to create pictures that honored his ancestors and his Diné identity.

Begay, in many ways the most enigmatic of all of the artists discussed here, proves intriguing for a number of reasons. He was adept at playing the role of Indian for White audiences. In a 1956 *Arizona Highways* article, Linzee King Davis described Begay as having a personality “as pleasing as his paintings,” further mentioning that, “He has warmth, friendliness, and charm, and a handsome smiling face.”<sup>76</sup> In an interview with Clara Lee Tanner, published one year later, the anthropologist wrote of Begay regarding Dunn, “The Indian is justly appreciative of the splendid efforts of this most influential of all the teachers of the Southwest’s native children and young people in the realm of art.”<sup>77</sup> Tanner concluded that Begay enjoyed painting because, as he told her “with a twinkle in his eye and never failing Navajo humor, ‘It is easier to do than anything else.’”<sup>78</sup> Begay’s choice of subject matter may indeed lend itself to the simple belief that he either painted to his audience or simply followed Studio directives. However, a closer look at Begay through his work, especially when contextualized, reveals a deeper motivation. He was the consummate performer, a sophisticated painter, and a successful professional artist and businessman. His pictures transcend Studio directives in subtle, but significant ways. A look at Begay’s 1947 *Night Chant Ceremonial Hunt*, for instance, uncovers the artist’s compositional mastery. John Anson Warner contended that this painting stands as

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26. <sup>76</sup> Linzee W. King Davis, “Modern Navajo Water Color Painting,” *Arizona Highways* 23, no. 6 (July 1956),

<sup>77</sup> Tanner, *Southwest Indian*, 112.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

“one of the most effective two-dimensional presentations of constrained dynamics in Native American painting. It is a masterful work of contrasts.” He went on to elaborate that the “uniformity of the gray deer is balanced by the marked individuality of the gaily colored horses and their riders,” and the “fleeing prey, who hang surrealistically in an indeterminate space, are in stark opposition to the aggressive wedge of pursuing horsemen, who are placed firmly in a real ground.”<sup>79</sup> Further, Begay’s unusual success as an artist; indeed, he was one of the few Native Americans then or since to support himself through his painting, flew in the face of the massive impediments caused by the Great Depression, as well as ongoing societal efforts to contain and minimize him as an artist. Perhaps most importantly and poignantly, Begay worked as a cultural broker, offering loving snapshots of a way of life threatened by government intervention. Yet, it would be doing a disservice to Begay to assume that he was unaware of the expectations of his market. J.J. Brody asserted:

Many of those who collected, talked, or wrote about the art were urban-raised people who romanticized and promoted it as an internally generated tribal product while knowing perfectly well that practically all of it was a native-made commodity to be marketed by Euroamericans to Euroamericans.<sup>80</sup>

Begay would certainly have understood and agreed with Brody’s contention, but at the same time, he also comprehended the rare opportunity and responsibility he had as a Diné artist to deliver important messages and cultural information to his non-Indian viewers.

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<sup>79</sup> John Anson Warner, “The Individual in Native American Art: A Sociological View,” in *The Arts of the North American Indian: Native Traditions in Evolution*, Edwin L. Wade, ed. (New York: Hudson Hill Press, 1986), 193.

<sup>80</sup> J.J. Brody, as quoted in Havens and Badertscher, *Quincy Tahoma*, 136.

### Chapter 3: Gerald Nailor and the Art of Resistance



**Figure 3.1: Photograph of Gerald Nailor by Milton Snow, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs**

Gerald Nailor (Toh Yah, or Walking by Water/River), arguably the most critically and commercially successful Navajo painter to emerge from the Dunn Studio, proves the exemplar of this first-generation SFIS Studio cadre in a number of ways.<sup>81</sup> Nailor married his impressive talent, his training under Dunn, and the opportunities she and Santa Fe offered to construct a

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<sup>81</sup> At various points during his life and career, Gerald Nailor also referred to himself as “Harold Nailor” or “Gerald Naylor.” By the late 1930s, the artist most often used the spelling “Nailor” self-referentially. Like many of the Indian students during this period, Nailor chose his English name and perhaps experimented with different versions of it before deciding on one in particular. This was also confirmed through discussion with Nailor’s son, Gerald Nailor, Jr., in March 2010. Also, regarding the above photograph of Nailor—it is interesting to me that virtually every extant photograph of this first cadre of Dunn-trained Native American easel painters is black and white. Certainly color photography existed well before the 1940s and 50s, and White painters were typically photographed in color. Perhaps this is another attempt to situate Native Americans in the past and deny them entry into the modern age.

career as a Native American artist. Along the way, he encountered many of the same challenges faced by his fellow Studio painters as he both capitulated to and chafed under the highly restrictive parameters of the modern traditional genre as well as the social expectations imposed upon him by the hegemony of the surrounding society. However, Nailor's response to the world in which he lived deviated from that of many within his cohort; rather than attempt to assimilate into a White-dominated community, Nailor expressed his resistance through isolation. After marrying Santana Simbola from Picuris Pueblo, Nailor turned his back on the Anglo community as much as pragmatism allowed. Except for interacting with his art broker, he seldom involved himself in the Santa Fe art circles. Furthermore, Nailor actively countered White directives; from the beginning of his career a thread of subtle defiance ran through his pictures.

While possessing a style distinctively his own, Nailor's work remained fairly true to Studio parameters; nevertheless, he incorporated imagery and symbolism that discomfited the Santa Fe elite through its inversion of the colonial gaze. Like all of the Navajo artists trained under Dunn, Nailor produced paintings of traditional subject matter: sheep; women performing such tasks as weaving, washing their hair, and tending to their children; and horses, deer, and antelope. But in other ways, both subtle and obvious, he defied simple categorization. Nailor transformed the Studio model into a genre all his own, painting mostly Dunn-sanctioned subject matter while employing sophisticated palettes, skilled draftsmanship, and—surprisingly often—a subversive message directed at his non-Indian viewers. Likewise, in the limited commissions he undertook for Diné audiences, Nailor's imagery diverged significantly from the work he produced for White buyers, imparting information that held meaning solely for the People.

Nailor also differed from his classmates in his early life and education; instead of beginning his government boarding-school education at the SFIS, he entered the institution as a

post-graduate student specifically to study under Dunn. Furthermore, Nailor hailed from the off-reservation town of Gallup, New Mexico, rather than Dinétah; thus from the start he almost certainly encountered and interacted with non-Indians more frequently than many other Navajos during this period. This conjecture is also borne out by the fact that he listed both “Indian” and English as the languages spoken at his childhood home—an unusual occurrence at this time. Born in San Antonio, New Mexico, in a four-room house circa 1918, Nailor was the product of a Navajo father and a half-Navajo, half-Spanish mother, and the sibling to seven brothers and sisters.<sup>82</sup> After completing grade school at Rohobeth Mission School, Nailor attended a public school in Gallup during eighth and ninth grade, and graduated from the Albuquerque Indian School in 1934.

Even the earliest school records highlight Nailor’s impressive talent and charisma. It appears that Albuquerque school officials simply could not find enough positive things to say about him. Indeed, under his school Certificate of Record, divided into three categories, “personality,” “character,” and “citizenship,” normally stoic bureaucrats swooned as they awarded him an unvarying string of A’s for appearance, attitude, initiative, leadership, neatness, accuracy, speed, care of property, cooperation, study habits, deportment, effort, and lastly, health. Under the descriptor “type,” his teachers wrote “pleasant—interested in his work” and

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<sup>82</sup> Gerald Nailor, Student Case File, Santa Fe Indian School Records, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Denver Federal Records Center, Broomfield, Colorado. Like all of the artists discussed in this study, Nailor had no real way of knowing his actual birth year. Census-taking was sporadic and unreliable on the Navajo Reservation during the early twentieth century, and the Diné did not, at this time, find mainstream schedules and calendars particularly useful or necessary. Various documents list Nailor’s birth year as 1914, 1917, or 1918. Nailor himself usually wrote 1918 as the year of his birth. Furthermore, it is interesting that Nailor claimed his birthplace as San Antonio, New Mexico, as this tiny town is located relatively far from the Navajo Reservation, but quite close to the Navajos’ nineteenth-century internment site of Bosque Redondo in eastern central New Mexico.

“Artistic.” As a high school senior, Nailor won the Boy’s Vocational Award in art and also served as Home Room Vice President.<sup>83</sup>

Even before enrolling in the SFIS post-graduate art course, Nailor amassed considerable success as a professional illustrator. The summer after graduating from the Albuquerque Indian School, the Fort Defiance, Arizona, school district employed him as an artist, earning teenaged Nailor the princely sum of \$140. Consequently, after receiving Nailor’s polite and neatly penned letter, dated June 8, 1934, and asking for information regarding the SFIS’s art department, school principal Joseph B. Vernon replied with great alacrity and encouragement. Vernon’s response: “If you are interested in Indian art you can make no mistake in enrolling here for I am sure there is no more outstanding teacher of that subject than Miss Dorothy Dunn.” After promising to immediately send Nailor the train schedule he followed with, “Hoping you may be with us Sept. 7 and I am sure you will not be disappointed in the course.”<sup>84</sup>

Nailor attended the Santa Fe Indian School for two years of post-graduate training beginning in 1935 and, as he did during his tenure at the Albuquerque school, showed tremendous promise and won several commissions and accolades while there. He studied under both Dunn and her mentor, Kenneth Chapman, who encouraged the young Diné to enroll in college and work toward a position as a laboratory expert.<sup>85</sup> Nailor, though, had other ideas. On a United Pueblos Agency “personnel card” he completed in May 1937, he wrote, “At the present time I am not interested on receiving further education, as I am qualified to go on, on my own with my art education I have receive [sic]. . . . I have done illustrations and also did some free lancing [sic]. . . . I have had exhibits of my paintings in different states in colleges and

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<sup>83</sup> Gerald Nailor, Student Case File, Santa Fe Indian School Records, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Denver Federal Records Center, Broomfield, Colorado.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Letter from Allan Hulsizer, Fort Defiance, AZ, to C.E. Faris, March 2, 1953, transcript in the hand of Kenneth Chapman, Kenneth M. Chapman Collection, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM.

museums.”<sup>86</sup> Nailor’s self-confidence rested on a solid foundation, while still a student at the SFIS he worked under the direction of writer Aileen Nusbaum, wife of Mesa Verde National Park Superintendent Jess Nusbaum, as an artist and illustrator.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, he, like all of Dunn’s chosen elite, exhibited widely and sold his paintings to private collectors. In December 1936, Charles Amsden of Los Angeles’s Southwest Museum (now part of the Autry Center), wrote this missive to Dunn praising her student’s work: “The entire staff of the Museum is deeply grateful to you and Mrs. Nusbaum for getting us this beautiful painting. . . . Everyone who saw it praised it highly. . . . Your young man comes pretty close to rating the title of genius, in my opinion.”<sup>88</sup>

Like many of Dunn’s pupils, Nailor first attempted to paint realistic landscapes under her tutelage.<sup>89</sup> She quickly discouraged him, as she did all of her students who wished to paint in a naturalistic, “European” style. Although Dunn consistently asserted in later years that in her role as art instructor she functioned merely as a guide rather than an authoritarian, in a *School Arts Magazine* article published the year Nailor enrolled, Dunn wrote, “In spite of the fact that many young Indian artists come to them and ask to be taught drawing and design ‘like the American artists do,’ the Indian schools must refuse to do so.”<sup>90</sup> But for those talented students who followed her directives, singular opportunities beckoned. Aside from Dunn’s tireless work organizing exhibitions and promoting her students’ art, she ensured that those she considered the most gifted received better paper and more plentiful supplies and featured their work on school

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<sup>86</sup> Gerald Nailor, Student Case File, Santa Fe Indian School Records, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Denver Federal Records Center, Broomfield, Colorado.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Letter from Charles Amsden, Los Angeles, CA, to Dorothy Dunn, December 26, 1936, transcript in the hand of Dorothy Dunn, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM.

<sup>89</sup> Bernstein and Rushing, *Modern by Tradition*, 20; Cesa, *The World of Flower Blue*, 53.

<sup>90</sup> Benes, *Native American Picture Books of Change*, 26; Dorothy Dunn, “Indian Children Carry Forward Old Traditions,” *School Arts Magazine* 34, no. 7 (March 1935): 435.

murals.<sup>91</sup> Nailor undoubtedly understood that the most direct route, possibly the only route at that time, to success as an Indian artist lay in Dunn's mentorship. Hence, while referring to her as a "teacher who did a great deal to develop Indian art," he adopted her prescribed format, painting traditional fauna, domestic tableaux, and the occasional ceremonial scene.<sup>92</sup>

After his 1937 graduation, in what may have been a pioneering event, Nailor, along with fellow artists and classmates Allan Houser and Pop Chalee (Merina Lujan), opened up their own Native-owned Indian art studio after receiving free space from local Santa Fe realtor and art patron, Ann Webster.<sup>93</sup> The painters undertook this bold move in the midst of the Great Depression. Houser recalled in an interview years later that he and Nailor struggled to make ends meet, "We tried to be professional artists and just about starved. . . . That's the way it was. And a lot of our work sold for two or three dollars apiece, maybe five. Eight dollars was exceptional."<sup>94</sup> In spite of this hardship, though, Nailor, Houser, and Lujan funneled 30 percent of their sales into a fund that supported other aspiring Indian artists through exhibit sponsorships.<sup>95</sup> Their efforts to achieve equal standing amongst Santa Fe's arts community met with resistance and paternalism, however. In a letter to Dunn, who had initially encouraged the

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<sup>91</sup> Tony Abeyta, in discussion with the author, September 2015.

<sup>92</sup> Gerald Nailor, Student Case File, Santa Fe Indian School Records, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Denver Federal Records Center, Broomfield, Colorado.

<sup>93</sup> Letter from Margretta Dietrich, Santa Fe, NM., to Dorothy Dunn, January 4, 1938, transcript in the hand of Dorothy Dunn Kramer, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM; Calla Hay, "Artists Perpetuate Heritage," *Santa Fe New Mexican*, 4 November 1937. Pop Chalee (Taos Pueblo) was a contemporary of this first cadre, although she was a year or two older than most of her cohort. Many credit her with inspiring Walt Disney to create his Bambi character after he visited her Santa Fe studio and viewed her renditions of fauna. Furthermore, her uncle was Tony Lujan, Mabel Dodge Luhan's fourth and final husband. Allan Houser (Apache), one of the most successful Native American artists of the twentieth century, transitioned from the Studio style and moved into, primarily, sculpture in his later career. In addition, he became a pivotal member of the IAIA faculty and, as such, spoke out strongly against Dunn and her Studio style.

<sup>94</sup> Tryntje Van Ness Seymour, *When the Rainbow Touches Down: The Artists and Stories behind the Apache, Navajo, Rio Grande Pueblo, and Hopi Paintings in the William and Leslie Van Ness Denman Collection* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), 91.

<sup>95</sup> Hay, "Artists Perpetuate Heritage."

three to strike out on their own, her good friend and president of the New Mexico Association on Indian Affairs, Margretta Dietrich, gossiped:

The other problem concerns Gerald Nailor, particularly, and probably other Indians who are making money from paintings, etc. New Year's Eve he was arrested for drunkenness and put in jail. I am told that early in the afternoon he and another Indian were seen reeling up Canyon Road. I have not investigated the special charges against him. Ann Webster has given those Indian boys that studio rent-free, which is generous of her but I think not too good for the boys. They must have made quite a little money before Christmas. . . . At any rate, they are handling quite a sum of money for Indians. . . . Ann wanted me to talk to the boys about putting their money into the bank or postal savings so they wouldn't be such easy prey to bootlegging Mexicans.<sup>96</sup>

This sort of imposition and lifestyle apparently did not agree with "the boys"; both artists gave up their studio and went their separate ways a year later. Shortly afterward, Nailor married a fellow SFIS alumnus, nursing student Santana Simbola, and relocated to the quiet confines of her Picuris Pueblo homeland sixty miles north of Santa Fe where he resided for the remainder of his all-too-brief life.<sup>97</sup>

Nailor and Houser did, however, work together on at least two more occasions. Beginning in 1938, the pair spent three weeks in Washington D.C. producing murals for the Indian Arts and Crafts shop located in the new U.S. Department of the Interior building. After visiting their Santa Fe studio, Willard W. Beatty, the director of Indian Education for the Indian Service, ensured that Nailor and Houser received these commissions. Houser later remarked that, "The timing was ideal. We didn't have any money. . . . Sometimes we were down to just a cup

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<sup>96</sup> Letter from Margretta Dietrich, Santa Fe, NM., to Dorothy Dunn, January 4, 1938, transcript in the hand of Dorothy Dunn Kramer, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM. For more on Indians and wealth, see Alexandra Harmon, *Rich Indians: Native People and the Problem of Wealth in American History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010). While Harmon cogently argued that the ongoing economic colonization of Native peoples by Euro-Americans is both a function of occupation as well as a result of centuries of conditioning and creates a discourse that discomfits both White and, often, Native communities, I contend that, in this instance at least, the sudden wealth of these artists concerned the White elites, as exemplified by Dietrich, because it signaled the possible end of White meddling in Native lives.

<sup>97</sup> Jeanne O. Snodgrass, *American Indian Painters: A Biographical Directory*, (New York: Museum of the American Indian Heye Foundation, 1968), 129.

of coffee and a slice of bread for meals.”<sup>98</sup> Although the two painters appreciated the work, they were apparently less than enthusiastic about their time spent in the nation’s capital. In a brief article written for the *Santa Fe New Mexican*, the journalist mentioned that while “Both boys have done ‘a lot of sightseeing,’” they “did not seem overly impressed with the capital.”<sup>99</sup>

On the heels of their stint painting murals for the building’s gift shop, Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, a strong proponent of Indian art and the preservation of Indian culture, commissioned both Nailor and Houser, along with Zia Pueblo painter Velino Shije Herrera, and Stephen Mopope, James Auchiah, and Woodrow Crumbo of the Kiowa School, to paint additional murals in the Department of the Interior Building the following year.<sup>100</sup> Around the same time, Nailor, again along with Houser and several other Indian artists, prepared for the commission by studying fresco painting under the influential muralist Olof Nordmark, who was slated to supervise the Interior Building murals, at the Bureau of Indian Affairs Indian Art Center, located in Fort Sill, Oklahoma.<sup>101</sup> All of the Native artists, recommended by Dunn and Oscar Brousse Jacobson of the University of Oklahoma, underwent a rigorous preliminary process that also included first sending pencil sketches in for approval, then color sketches before they signed government contracts.<sup>102</sup> Indeed, Dunn’s views influenced the murals almost from their conception; she suggested subject matter, warned about maintaining authenticity, and proposed a master color palette. She also advised the project coordinators to watch the Indian artists carefully as they habitually worked independently and if left to their own devices might

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<sup>98</sup> Allan Houser, as quoted in Christine Nelson, “Indian Art in Washington: Native American Murals in the Department of the Interior Building,” *American Indian Art Magazine* 20, no. 2 (Spring 1995), 77.

<sup>99</sup> “Two Indian Mural Artists Sightsee in Washington, D.C.,” *Santa Fe New Mexican*, 13 September 1938.

<sup>100</sup> Nelson, “Indian Art in Washington,” 70. Velino Shije Herrera was one of the group of students allowed to paint in Elizabeth and John DeHuff’s home a generation before the first class of Studio alumni. Others of his cohort, later referred to as the founders of the Modern Pueblo School, included Fred Kabotie and Otis Polelonema. For more on the Kiowa School, see n. 43.

<sup>101</sup> Lydia L. Wyckoff, ed., *Visions and Voices: Native American Paintings from the Philbrook Museum of Art* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 36.

<sup>102</sup> *Indians at Work* 7 (December 1939): 7; Leibowitz, “Constructing the Navajo Capitol,” 302.

deviate from the government-approved schema.<sup>103</sup> Although Ickes instructed the project managers to pay the Indian artists salaries commensurate to federally hired Anglo artists, the painters received their payments, per Bureau of Indian Affairs Commissioner John Collier's instructions, in several installments in order to "assist the Indians who have less experience in budgeting expenses."<sup>104</sup> Regardless of the conditions attached to the work, Houser and Nailor realized how fortunate they were to have commissioned work during the depths of the Great Depression, even though government paychecks did not always arrive on time and Nailor, in particular, ran up against criticism of his work that sometimes forced him to bow to arbitrary aesthetic demands. In a rare example of Nailor's correspondence, he wrote in 1939 in a letter to the Interior's Section of Fine Arts Administrator Edward Rowen: "I'm low on finances and have a family to support and I am not working any place now excepting the murals I am doing for the Department."<sup>105</sup>

Yet, Nailor remained remarkably fortunate throughout his career in his ability to find work as an artist. In 1939, he, along with Houser and Quincy Tahoma, provided illustrations for "one of the most beautiful children's books ever to come out of the Southwest," *I am a Pueblo Indian Girl*, written by E-Yeh-Shure (Louise Abeita) and introduced by Oliver La Farge.<sup>106</sup> Although William Morrow and Company published *I am a Pueblo Indian Girl* for White readers, a year later Nailor obtained work illustrating the Indian Service-produced primer, *Little Man's Family*, a bilingual children's book written by J.B. Enochs and directed at Navajo youths attending reservation day schools with the "frankly experimental" intention of "speed[ing] up modern life" amongst a people who, at that time, remained mostly monolingual and

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<sup>103</sup> Nelson, "Indian Art in Washington," 73.

<sup>104</sup> John Collier in a letter to Rear Admiral C.J. Peoples, 1938, as quoted in Nelson, "Indian Art in Washington," 74.

<sup>105</sup> Gerald Nailor in a letter to Edward Rowen, 1939, as quoted in Nelson, "Indian Art in Washington," 80.

<sup>106</sup> Benes, *Native American Picture Books*, 26.

preliterate.<sup>107</sup> Two years after the completion of the Department of Interior Building murals, Nailor received perhaps his greatest opportunity thus far—another government commission to paint a series of eight murals, depicting “The History and Progress of the Navajo Nation,” for the Navajo Tribal Council House in Window Rock, Arizona. In 1951, Nailor worked with his friend and former classmate Harrison Begay, submitting paintings to be reproduced in silkscreen for the newly formed Tewa Enterprises, a commercial enterprise founded by Begay and fellow artist Charles Barrows that sought to bring more Native American art into homes through the production of affordable prints.<sup>108</sup>

The following year, 1952, saw Nailor’s life come to a tragic and premature end. On August 18 of that year, the artist died in a Taos hospital as a result of a beating he received from his brother-in-law, Cruz Simbola. When the artist attempted to intervene after witnessing Simbola beating a woman, either Nailor’s wife or sister-in-law, Simbola turned on Nailor. Newspaper articles mentioned that a kick to the abdomen caused internal injuries that resulted in Nailor’s death two days later. Simbola was by all accounts a brutal and violent man; he had already served seven years in the state penitentiary for two previous murders.<sup>109</sup> After pleading innocent to charges of murdering Nailor, Simbola was convicted of involuntary manslaughter and sentenced to ten more years in prison.<sup>110</sup> Three days after Nailor’s death, Dietrich’s letter to Dunn contained this brief aside: “Has word reached you of Gerald Nailor’s death? He was murdered in Picuris by Cruz Simbola, the paper said his wife’s uncle, but I think he was her father.”<sup>111</sup> Dunn’s response, written less than a week later, evinces a great deal more sympathy:

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<sup>107</sup> Willard W. Beatty, in J.B. Enochs, *Little Man’s Family* (Washington DC: U.S. Office of Indian Affairs, 1940), 2.

<sup>108</sup> Cesa, *World of Flower Blue*, 131.

<sup>109</sup> “Picuris Indian Given 10 Years for Manslaughter,” *Albuquerque Journal*, 28 October 1952.

<sup>110</sup> “Indian Enters Two Pleas of Innocent,” *Albuquerque Journal*, 23 September 1952.

<sup>111</sup> Letter from Margretta Dietrich, Santa Fe, NM. to Dorothy Dunn, August 21, 1952, transcript in the hand of Dorothy Dunn Kramer, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM.

“Poor Gerald had far more than one man’s share of violence . . . . The mortality of our artist group points up the abnormal hazards of being an Indian.”<sup>112</sup> Nailor died at the age of around thirty-five, leaving behind a wife and three children.

In spite of his brief career, Nailor’s relative prolificacy provides us with a singular view into the ways he as a subaltern artist was able to use his work and his life choices as a means of resistance as well as, in the case of his output, a way to convey clandestine information. Nailor often employed symbolism within his imagery, and not simply the expected Navajo symbols of thunderhead rainclouds and stylized corn plants. Instead, Nailor frequently hearkened to the Navajo rug as a symbol of Navajo modernity and commodification. Indeed, at that time, much of the United States non-Indian population thought in terms of the iconic Navajo rug as the exemplar of all that was Navajo. Beginning around the early twentieth century, large-scale retail businesses worked with local traders to distribute the enormously popular textiles throughout the nation. Erika Bsumek, in her book *Indian-Made*, contended that this became a form of domestic imperialism that ultimately served to empower affluent White homemakers and inscribed primitivism onto racialized Native weavers.<sup>113</sup> Clearly, Nailor appreciated the central role that Navajo rugs held in both Diné culture and White desires to own and control that culture. This becomes evident when we look at an untitled painting Nailor exhibited early in his career at the New Mexico Art Museum’s 1937 Annual Indian Art Show.

This painting proves interesting for a number of reasons; as was obviously intended, it served to discomfit White viewers and send a message regarding the commodification of Diné culture. In her review of the exhibit for *El Palacio*, local artist Olive Rush referred to Nailor and this work when she wrote:

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<sup>112</sup> Letter from Dorothy Dunn, Berkeley, CA, to Margretta Dietrich, August 25, 1952, transcript in the hand of Dorothy Dunn Kramer, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM.

<sup>113</sup> Bsumek, *Indian-Made*, 4,12.

We hope this Navajo boy will keep to the proud Indian beauty, more and more, his eyes on the straight road. It must be hard in a world where garish lights beckon on all sides. He has humor as well as a feeling for line. "Tourists" were never depicted so touristy before, never before so funny!<sup>114</sup>

If one looks closely at Rush's message it becomes obvious that a distinct tone of nervousness underpins her blatant paternalism. Either choosing to ignore or completely missing Nailor's cultural critique, Rush nevertheless appears anxious here to remove herself from the subject of Nailor's picture; by referring to the overfed shoppers as tourists, she created a coy conspiracy of sorts, aligning herself with the artist rather than with his unflattering portrayal of White buyers. Her review, however, with its weak attempt to dismiss Nailor's subtle social criticism with a sort of humorous chastisement, also contains an implied warning. In effect, she cautioned Nailor to stay within the expected cultural and social stratum, to "keep to the proud Indian beauty" and focus on the "straight road."

In this painting, Nailor stepped outside of Dunn's playbook by depicting Navajos interacting with modernity; in addition, he offered up a tableau that speaks to White desires for Indian culture and the forced collaboration of the People with that manifestation of commodification. Like all of the antimodernists, Dunn disliked subject matter that smacked of the quotidian mingling of Indians and non-Indians, undoubtedly because this brought Native peoples into the mainstream and out of the mythic realm of the primitive. But Nailor understood the symbiotic, albeit unequal relationship between the Navajos and those who purchased their wares. Instead of the nineteenth-century colonialist system employed by the United States government that subjugated Indians by forcing them on to reservations, Nailor depicted a contemporary form of cultural domination. As the Navajo family stands in bowed-head deference while the non-Indian couple examines their rug, they are aware that they, too, are

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<sup>114</sup> Olive Rush, "Annual Indian Art Show," *El Palacio* 62, nos. 19–20–21 (May 12–19–26, 1937), 107.

colluding in the commodification of their ancestry. They are selling a tiny bit of their culture, and in line with the Navajo sense of synecdoche, a small piece of themselves. The balding, White husband reels back from the Indians, protectively clutching his wife as he puffs on a cigar. His position in the frame, his suit creating a strong black line that draws audiences' eyes toward him, marks the White man as an important figure. By contrast, although Nailor centered the Navajo husband in the composition, the rug the man holds nearly covers his body in its entirety, sending the message that the rug is of more importance. The Navajo man also stands apart from his family, but this is no "Noble Savage" image excluding women in a deliberately masculinized scenario. Instead, Nailor depicted this figure as an androgynous, defeated character forced to bow to those anxious to possess the trappings of his culture. Alternatively, it may also be the case that the Navajo family's display of deference stands more as an intentional means of cultural survival. Jeffrey Shepherd contended, in fact, that within the field of subaltern studies there exists a notion of passivity as a "form of intentional and measured survival" where "there is an acknowledgment of power inequalities and a reluctant engagement with whites and capitalism, but the long term goal is perseverance and survival. It is a kind of performance where subalterns strategically perform passivity and use 'the system' against the whites, and thereby survive beyond dominant assumptions of demise and disappearance."<sup>115</sup>

Nailor revisited the theme of the Navajo rug again and again. One of Nailor's proposed designs for the United States Department of Interior building murals he painted two years after creating this first Navajo rug image also depicted a White couple purchasing Native textiles. Nailor titled it "Eastern Tourist Admiring an Unfinished Rug," and wrote on his proposal that "It is quite comical sometimes to see tourist [sic] trying to buy from the Indians themselves."<sup>116</sup> The

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<sup>115</sup> Jeffrey P. Shepherd, unpublished comments, December 21, 2015.

<sup>116</sup> Leibowitz, "Constructing the Navajo Capitol," 309.

approval committee sent back a stern reply intimating that the design was inappropriate and that Nailor should instead focus on traditional portrayals of Indian women weaving or spinning.<sup>117</sup> This was not the only criticism Nailor received. Secretary Ickes, who remained involved throughout the process, felt that Nailor's Navajo faces did not look "Navajo" enough, nor, he maintained, were his female figures dressed authentically; he also took exception to one of Nailor's depictions of a child, writing that, "the one figure of a girl with her finger in her mouth is particularly objectionable The face might be construed as that of an idiot."<sup>118</sup> To all of these criticisms, Nailor meekly replied in a letter, "I have made the changes. . . . I hope they will meet with your approval. I thank you for your criticism [sic]."<sup>119</sup> However, in spite of his outward show of submissiveness and his forced scratching of the rug negotiation scene, Nailor did not change his designs for the Navajo profiles, or dresses, or the child with her finger in her mouth.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Nelson, "Indian Art in Washington," 79.

<sup>119</sup> Leibowitz, "Constructing the Navajo Capitol," 313; Nelson, "Indian Art in Washington," 80.

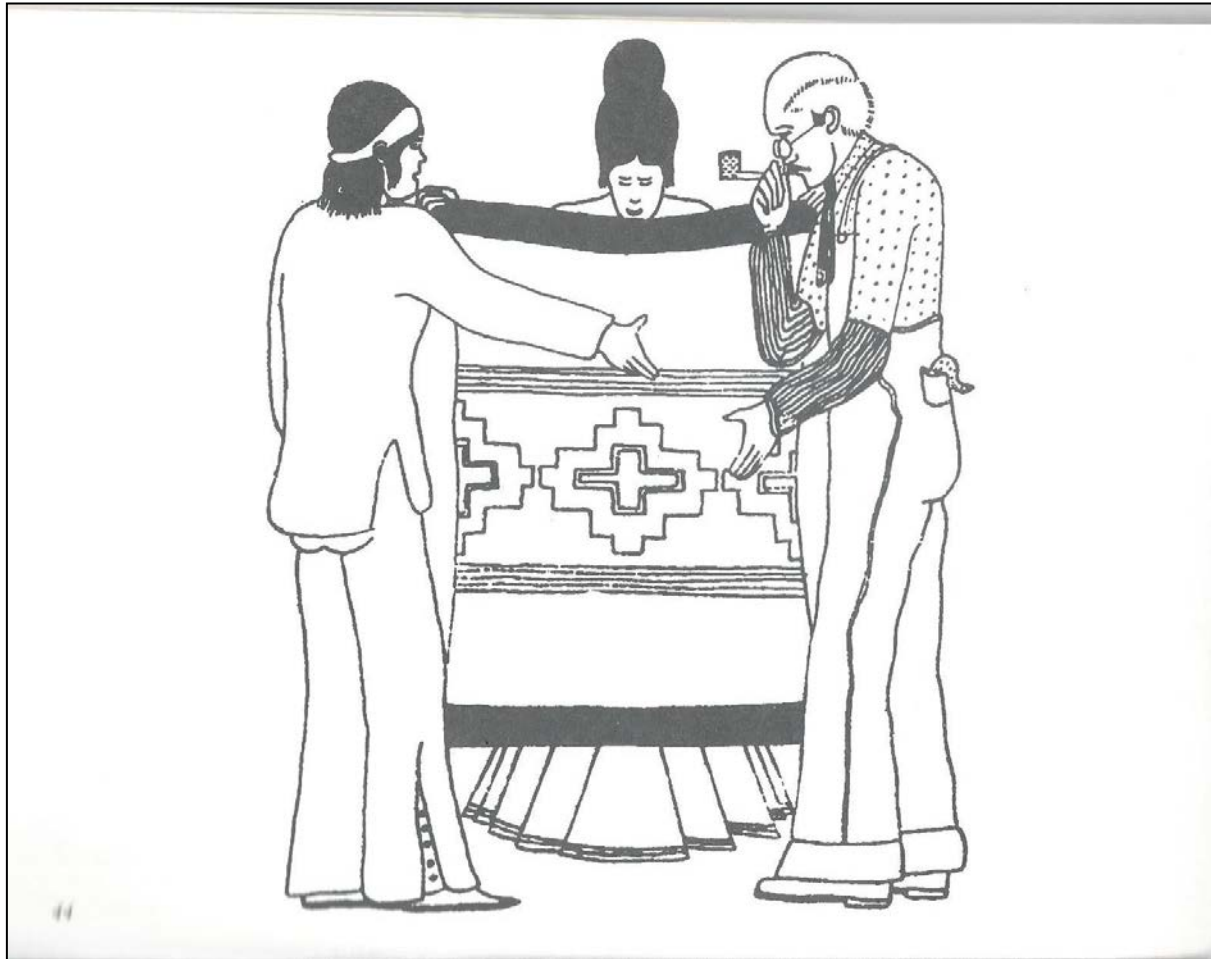
<sup>120</sup> Leibowitz, "Constructing the Navajo Capitol," 321.



**Figure 3.2: Gerald Nailor, Department of the Interior Building Mural, c. 1939, Washington DC.**

Interestingly, when recreating the Navajo rug theme for Diné audiences, Nailor's composition differed significantly. In the Indian Service primer *Little Man's Family*, a book written for Navajo schoolchildren in an attempt to bring English into Diné homes, Nailor's illustrations show a family moving through its daily existence—tending sheep, cooking, weaving, participating in a sweat lodge, and building a hogan, as well as negotiating with a trader to sell a rug. The Diné family portrayed here, along with the trader, (figure 3.3) form a

harmonious triad. The Navajo man stands on equal terms with the White trader and sweeps his



**Figure 3.3: Gerald Nailor, from *A Little Man's Family*, by J.B Enochs, 1940.**

his right arm out as if to orchestrate the transaction, or, perhaps, to shake hands with the merchant. The Diné weaver, centered in the composition immediately above her husband's outstretched hand, looks down at her creation, but not in shame. Instead, she gazes proudly at the rug she has produced, perhaps happily contemplating the income her work will bring into her family. Clearly the message here differs from Nailor's earlier rug selling picture. Here, the Navajo family comfortably and advantageously joins into the modern capitalist system.

The murals Nailor painted for the Navajo Tribal Council House, possibly his life masterwork, also display a markedly different message than the work Nailor produced for White

audiences. The Navajo Nation capitol, erected by United States government directive in 1936, was not without controversy and engendered a myriad of conflicting views for the Diné. Rachel Leibowitz argued that many Navajos soon saw the “traditional,” albeit Anglo-designed and impressively stolid, building as the “most blatant display of colonial oppression in their homeland,” while in others of the Diné the building created a feeling of pride because “their elders built it, stone by stone, and because today it is the place from which the Navajo Nation determines its own path for the future.”<sup>121</sup> When the Indian Service awarded Nailor the commission to paint a series of murals depicting Diné history inside the eight-sided “hogan,” he was aware of the conflict the Council House generated and with that in mind, designed pictures intended for his own people rather than the non-Indian, art-buying public.

Nailor incorporated a great deal of information directed toward Navajo viewers within these eight murals, completed in 1943 and titled “The History and Progress of the Navajo Nation.” In contrast to his work in the Interior Building, Nailor enjoyed considerable artistic freedom while designing and painting the Window Rock murals, and he took full advantage of that in order to create a pictorial representation with poignant meaning for his kinsfolk. Like all of his artist brethren and in keeping with the Navajo worldview, Nailor chose sheep as a major theme in this work. Nailor’s message here, acknowledging the importance of sheep in the Navajo worldview, was a reminder to the Bureau of the massive violence of the herd reductions as well as the fact that they were still regularly occurring, devastating the traditional pastoral Diné way of life.

Leibowitz pointed out several other instances where Nailor incorporated sly commentary in his artwork. She contended, for example, that Nailor deliberately painted the historical narrative in a counter-clockwise direction—a direction traditionally taboo in a hogan. Whether

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 3.

his intent was to imply that “the People have been going backward since meeting outsiders” and “moving in a less-than-positive direction,” or that the constructed hogan was “not a sacred or ceremonial space as the OIA [Office of Indian Affairs] publicized it to be, but only a secular space” remains unclear; what is clear, however, and what would be visibly conveyed to Diné visitors is Nailor’s derision.<sup>122</sup> In another example, Nailor placed his depiction of the signing of the 1868 treaty authorizing the Navajos’ return to their homelands directly above the entrance and exit, a reminder to both Navajos and Anglo visitors of government promises.<sup>123</sup> One especially interesting detail pertaining to the signing of the treaty involves the two characters surrounding the signer. The two men look directly at one another while one man points to the signer and the other character’s hand appears to touch the signer’s buttocks. The message here is clearly one conveying Nailor’s dissatisfaction with the federal treatment his people received.<sup>124</sup> Finally, on the north wall of the Tribal Council House Nailor painted a panorama representing the 1922 tribal-federal government oil lands leases, and this mural is significant for a number of reasons. In this scene, an incomplete barbed wire fence lies on hardscrabble, desolate land as thunderclouds roil above; esteemed Navajo leaders Manuelito and Chee Dodge look down grimly from on high. These two elements, the unrolled barbed wire and thunderclouds, symbolize the “turmoil and the unbalancing of traditions.”<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 326.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 327.

<sup>124</sup> Gerald (New Deer) Nailor, Jr., in discussion with the author, August 2009.

<sup>125</sup> Gerald (New Deer) Nailor, Jr., “Gerald Nailor, Sr. Painting History of Navajo Nation at Navajo Nation Council House, Window Rock, AZ (1941),” (unpublished manuscript), transcript in the possession of the author. Henry Chee Dodge, a prominent and wealthy Navajo rancher during the early twentieth-century, proves a fascinating character in Diné history. He often assumed the role of negotiator, diplomat, and mediator in Navajo-federal government interactions. While his motives may have been, on occasion, somewhat questionable, ultimately he served to protect Navajo interests by opposing herd reductions, the forced enrollment of Navajo children in off-reservation boarding schools, and the reduction of reservation lands. For more on Dodge, see Peter Iverson, *Diné: A History of the Navajos* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002).

Aside from Nailor's covert messages contained within the Council House murals, but equally significant, is his departure here from Studio style mandates. Leibowitz summed this difference up in her dissertation, "Constructing the Navajo Capitol":

The heavy outlines and graphic quality of the Studio style remains in these images, but the scenes are much more dynamic, much more active than the frozen, still forms painted in the Interior Building; the colors, too, are much more vivid and exciting than the Studio palette of muted earth tones. Here in the Navajo capitol, Nailor's figures are constantly in motion. The People gesture emphatically, they pound grinding stones and hammers and they shoot guns, they ride fast horses and raise clouds of dust. Navajo people also do things that were not represented in the Interior Building murals: they interact with people different from themselves—including other Natives, Spanish colonizers, Mexicans, and Americans; they also sign legal documents, attend schools, and use technology, as represented by a steam locomotive, plows, water pumps, barbed wire, and drafting equipment.<sup>126</sup>

What is interesting about Leibowitz's passage is her use of masculine descriptors. Rather than using words such as "delicate" or "decorative" she employed words like "dynamic," "active," "exciting," and uses the phrases "shoot guns" and "ride fast horses" that denote masculinity. In doing so, she inadvertently highlighted a significant schism in the work Nailor produced for the Anglo market and the murals he painted for his own people. In his crafting of these murals, Nailor was able to move beyond the rigid parameters insisted upon by Dunn and the art-buying public. When no longer forced to play the part of the primitive, he freely painted Navajos engaged in the modern world using bold colors and dynamic forms. Dunn's comparison of Nailor's Interior Building murals to his work in the Navajo Council House proves telling. Referring to the Washington DC murals, she wrote, "Gerald Nailor, who presents ceremonial motifs, animals, hunters, and a Navajo weaver at her loom, leaves his best record in this particular room. . . . Here, in sandpainting hues, his well-composed, deftly drawn and painted *Antelope with Birds and Corn* makes fine and appropriate decoration." She added in parentheses,

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<sup>126</sup> Leibowitz, "Constructing the Navajo Capitol," 329.

“Incidentally, Nailor soon afterward tried a modified style, depicting tribal events and persons on the walls of the Navajo Council chambers. . . in which he incorporated popular mural modes of the day.”<sup>127</sup> It is not surprising that Dunn preferred the work she essentially directed and that conformed to her “traditional modern” style to that which Nailor produced mostly autonomously for an Indian audience; imagery that incorporated contemporary elements and presented Navajo people as an ongoing part of history as well as modern actors.



**Figure 3.4: Gerald Nailor, Navajo Tribal Council House Murals (excerpt), c. 1943, Window Rock, AZ.**

Even when Nailor depicted ceremonial motifs, so applauded by Dunn and her ilk, he sometimes chose to conceal or misrepresent Diné rituals. J. J. Brody argued that Nailor’s 1949 *Yeibeichai Dancers* contained false information, asserting that the dancers’ masks, costumes, and

<sup>127</sup> Dunn, *American Indian Painting*, 321.

arrangement are all inaccurate. While Brody used this as a platform to condemn Studio painting et al as “fatally marred by subject dishonesty,” further remarking that Nailor “either did not know or did not care about the documentary accuracy of the ceremonial figures that he painted,” it seems obvious from Nailor’s earlier instances of resistance that he well understood the ramifications of representing a marginalized people for a hegemonic audience.<sup>128</sup> Although the Navajos tended to be more open-minded regarding the sharing of their sand painting and other ceremonies than the Pueblo communities, here Nailor closely guarded sacred details, never placing Anglo curiosity or obtrusion above his Indian self-identity.

It was not only through his art that Nailor resisted White directives. Nailor’s tendency to shun the White world in favor of his own culture is well-documented in Dunn’s correspondence, particularly those exchanges between her and Margretta Dietrich, president of the Santa Fe-based New Mexico Association on Indian Affairs (NMAIA), later the Southwest Association on Indian Affairs. Several of Dietrich’s letters concern the artist, beginning in 1938 when she wrote Dunn regarding Nailor’s propensity toward “boot-legging Mexicans.” Later that year she referred in a letter to her “Indian Club,” a social organization under the auspices of the NMAIA, and as if ticking off a list mentioned that it was “going slowly but I am satisfied it is a good thing—4 little Cochiti boys—2 Blackfeet—Houser & some Navajos fairly regular attendants. Not Gerald Nailor as yet.”<sup>129</sup> Soon after Dietrich wrote this, Nailor permanently relocated to Picuris Pueblo,

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<sup>128</sup> Brody, *Indian Painters & White Patrons*, 146. Many examples exist within Dunn’s correspondence that evidence her outrage at Brody’s castigation of the Studio style and its artists. It is certainly the case that Brody’s book was published during the heyday of the IAIA florescence and was part of a canon of art criticism produced during the 1970s that signaled a downturn in both Dunn’s legacy and the popularity of traditional modern Indian art. Indeed, Brody went on to write of Nailor’s work in particular and the Studio output in general that, “The resultant painting was decorative but emotionally sterile, and lacked the saving grace of being informative” (146).

<sup>129</sup> Letter from Margretta Dietrich, Santa Fe, N.M. to Dorothy Dunn, 1938, transcript in the hand of Dorothy Dunn Kramer, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM. A supporter of the Studio and its artists from its conception, Margretta Dietrich used her connection as president of the New Mexico Association on Indian Affairs, now known as the Southwest Association on Indian Affairs, and alliances with Santa Fe’s wealthy, art-buying circles to further Dunn’s goal of disseminating awareness of modern Indian art

only journeying to Santa Fe to sell his art or for exceptional reasons such as the arrest of his oldest son in 1951. A note to Dunn in April of that year contains this passage of Dietrich's:

Gerald Naylor's [sic] oldest son, Alfred, killed another Picuris boy and is now in the Santa Fe jail accused of murder. Gerald and his wife came to see me about it yesterday and . . . we think we have persuaded Judge Chavez to take the case and get the boy out on bond from the Santa Fe jail. Indians are still inexplicable to me. With their son in jail, even the possibility of the electric chair, Gerald feels that his first duty is to the Governor of the pueblo, so instead of seeing Judge Chavez today or tomorrow he is going to Albuquerque with the Governor and the rest of the Council on pueblo business, and said casually that he would come down someday next week.<sup>130</sup>

What Dietrich could not understand was Nailor's refusal to place his forced reliance on NMAIA legal resources before his Indian identity. She apparently also did not realize the great honor bestowed on Nailor by the Picuris Council by allowing him, an outsider, to participate in tribal government activities—an honor clearly very meaningful to him. Nailor's son, Gerald New Deer, confirmed the unusual position his father held within the Picuris community, mentioning that Nailor, Sr., earned the Puebloans' respect through his sharing of Navajo farming techniques and his willingness to immerse himself in Pueblo life.<sup>131</sup>

Furthermore, Nailor often evinced a savviness and assurance that belied the White myth of the passive, childlike Indian. As previously discussed, Nailor resisted early on his White patrons' plans for his future, preferring to carve out his own career as an artist. He also made the rare decision to protect his ownership of his work. When Yanktonai Dakota artist Oscar Howe

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to the public. The New Mexico Association on Indian Affairs was organized in 1922 by a group of well-heeled Santa Feans, including philanthropist Martha White (sister to Amelia Elizabeth), and members of the art community, among them Gustave Baumann, with its primary mission being the defeat of the infamous Bursum Bill legislation that aimed to open up Pueblo lands to non-Indians. But Dietrich later focused much of her energy on Native art, pooling efforts with such luminaries as Oliver La Farge, Mrs. John D. Rockefeller Jr., and John Sloan to organize 1931's Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts, a two-year tour that brought attention to Indian art throughout the nation. Dunn credited this exhibition as the door-opener for the resurgence of Indian art as an acknowledged, credible style.

<sup>130</sup> Letter from Margretta Dietrich, Santa Fe, NM. to Dorothy Dunn, April 19, 1951, transcript in the hand of Dorothy Dunn Kramer, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM.

<sup>131</sup> Gerald (New Deer) Nailor, Jr., in discussion with the author, August 2009.

wrote Dietrich in 1956 protesting the unapproved use of one of his paintings that she owned as a book illustration, she responded that although she had “never given permission to anyone to use it for commercial purposes,” she nevertheless believed that although she “knew the Indian artists’ work was being reproduced without their consent” it was legal because “the person who bought the picture had the rights to it and not the painter.” She then discussed Tewa Enterprises and its arrangement with Indian artists, writing, “Before Gerald Nailor died [Charles Barrows of Tewa Enterprises] had made arrangements with him to have first chance at any of his work, and he goes on, I think, paying royalties to Gerald’s family.”<sup>132</sup> Nailor knew the value of his work, along with his understanding of his role as a Native American artist working within a non-Indian controlled genre.

Ultimately, we must acknowledge that while Nailor both capitulated to and resisted non-Indian directives, his work stands alone in its transcendence beyond the rigidity of the Studio mandates. Shortly after his untimely death in 1952, Museum of New Mexico art curator Hester Jones concluded his obituary for *El Palacio* by writing that “His work was so fine that something more specific should be said about its quality. He produced compositions integrating combinations of symbols with such originality and refinement that they often equaled or surpassed the best modern art. . . . He struck always for the height of his standard and kept seeking refreshment for a new approach.”<sup>133</sup> Even decades later, critics still regarded him as possibly the finest of the artists from this school. Katherin Chase wrote that “A typical Navajo scene transcends the commonplace in Nailor’s hands,” and his distinctive style is “easily

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<sup>132</sup> Letter from Margretta Dietrich, Santa Fe, N.M. to Oscar Howe, February 6, 1956, transcript in the hand of Dorothy Dunn Kramer, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM. Sadly, a half-century later, Gerald (New Deer) Nailor, Jr. remarked in an interview with the author that Nailor’s murder had left the family largely in poverty and that it had retained none of Gerald Sr.’s art, as the family’s penury forced it to sell all it held throughout the years following his death.

<sup>133</sup> Hester Jones, “Gerald Nailor, Famous Navajo Artist 1917–1952,” *El Palacio* 59, no. 9 (September, 1952), 294.

recognized for its technical facility, deep and rich colors, its clear embodiment of certain classical ideals, and its mythological overtones,” and journalist Jamake Highwater considered Nailor’s work to have been “consciously beautiful in a manner not found elsewhere in Indian painting.”<sup>134</sup> Writing in 1986, John Anson Warner also admired Nailor’s skill and believed him to be “one of the masters of traditional Native American painting.”<sup>135</sup>

Liane Hall Adams, the Santa Fe art dealer who mainly represented his work after his departure from the city, remarked in an interview many years after his death that, “Gerald Nailor was a favorite. Nailor was young. He was a very gentle person. He liked to talk. But he was very shy. When he first came to me, he wouldn’t come into the house. Finally he did and we had tea in the kitchen, and then it was all right.”<sup>136</sup> His son, Gerald New Deer Nailor Jr., now an accomplished artist in his own right and governor of Picuris Pueblo, although only nine years old at the time of his father’s 1952 murder, remembers Gerald Sr. to have been a “very loving man. He was tender. A good man.”<sup>137</sup> In spite of a career and life cut short by violence, Nailor nevertheless lived his years according to his own standard of ethics, making space for his Navajo identity within a world dominated by non-Indians. When the White arts community imposed restrictions upon his art production, Nailor resisted through his use of symbolism and covert information, sometimes even turning the colonial gaze on its head as he depicted non-Indians engaged in the colonial project. When that same hegemony attempted to control and censure his personhood, Nailor removed himself, as much as possible, from the reach of its domination. In

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<sup>134</sup> Katherin Chase, “Navajo Painting,” *Plateau* (Museum of Northern Arizona) 54, no. 1 (1982): 14; Jamake Highwater, *Song from the Earth: American Indian Painting* (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1980), 80.

<sup>135</sup> John Anson Warner, “The Individual in Native American Art: A Sociological View,” in *The Arts of the North American Indian: Native Traditions in Evolution*, Edwin L. Wade, ed. (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1986), 193.

<sup>136</sup> Seymour, *When the Rainbow Touches Down*, 91.

<sup>137</sup> Wyckoff, *Visions and Voices*, 198.

spite of the tragic circumstances of his death, Nailor, both in his artist and his Navajo persona, shattered the prevailing myths regarding Indian passivity and victimhood.

## Chapter 4: The Gendering of Quincy Tahoma

In her 1957 book, *Southwest Indian Painting*, archaeologist Clara Lee Tanner described Quincy Tahoma (or Tohoma, meaning “Water Edge”) as “one of the most dynamic, imaginative, and gifted of Southwest Indian artists,” and Dorothy Dunn remembered him as a “really lovely, gentle person, uniquely talented.”<sup>1</sup> But in spite of Tahoma’s formidable gift, his far-reaching influence on other Indian painters, and the accolades he received throughout his career, his life reads far more convincingly as a tragedy rather than a success story, as a combination of personal challenges and his obvious chafing against the restrictions imposed upon him as an Indian artist contributed to a promising life cut short by the ravages of alcoholism.<sup>2</sup> Tahoma left little behind in the way of correspondence, but his paintings reveal a wealth of information about his feelings toward both his own Navajo culture and his frustration with and scorn for the White world in which he resided. As Tahoma matured as a painter his style underwent a significant change, moving from the depiction of benign Navajo imagery to violent scenes pitting man against nature. The White-controlled art world found this turn somewhat unpalatable, and strove to resituate Tahoma and his work into a less threatening milieu. As antimodernists such as Dunn and Tanner promoted and constructed what they believed to be the pure American primitivism of Navajo and Pueblo Indian fine art, seeing Indians as the ideal foil and antidote to modernity, this transplanted sub-culture fetishized Native Americans and strove to quiescently preserve and

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Dorothy Dunn, Los Altos, California, to F.H. Tutt, transcript in the hand of Dorothy Dunn, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM; Clara Lee Tanner, *Southwest Indian Painting* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1957), 117.

<sup>2</sup> There is significant and compelling research regarding the impact of generations of historical trauma and how that translates to increased alcoholism within Native communities. Unfortunately, this discussion is outside the scope of my study. For more information, see Bonnie Duran and Eduardo Duran, *Native American Postcolonial Psychology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995); for more recent scholarship see Tom Ball and Theresa O’ Nell, “Square Pegs and Round Holes: Understanding Historical Trauma in Two Native American Communities,” in *Culture and PTSD: Trauma in Global and Historical Perspective*, Byron J. Good and Devon E. Hinton, eds. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

commodify Indigenous culture. One strand of their project rested on control of both Indian artists and their art; antimodernists achieved this goal through a gender and racial-coded discourse that served to contain the Native artists within a non-threatening, White-constructed imaginary realm. Hand-in-hand with the gendering of Native American art went a commensurate infantilization and racializing of the artists.<sup>3</sup> The non-Indian elites' assiduous promotion of Native American art also both assuaged White guilt and confirmed their superior social standing by relegating the Native artists to a dependent, childlike status; along with the masculine "noble savage" trope, these supporters imposed an image of simple, feminized passivity.<sup>4</sup> A close reading of the contemporary, popular discourse referring to Tahoma and his work provides ample evidence of this project and underscores the human misery associated with this form of cultural violence. Furthermore, both Tahoma's professional and personal responses to the White-created discourse that worked to emasculate him reveal the torment he suffered. As the non-Indian hegemony strove to feminize and infantilize him through a discourse that situated him as a harmless boy, Tahoma's subject matter became increasingly violent and masculinized; moreover, Tahoma's angst-filled and problematic relationships with women, especially White women, are symptomatic of the rage and futility he experienced. Thus, the emasculating ethos that surrounded the Indian painters, coupled with Tahoma's extraordinary life challenges, led to a personal narrative of tragedy.

Tahoma's early childhood epitomized the sad tale of quicksilver Indian mortality and draconian federal boarding schools. Born on Christmas Day, 1918, in Tuba City, Arizona, Tahoma's parents died or abandoned him soon after, leaving him orphaned at an early age. In

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<sup>3</sup> A growing body of scholarship exists that addresses the intersection of gender studies and Indigenous studies. For more on queer Indigenous studies, see, for example, Qwo-Li Driskill, Chris Finley, Brian Joseph Gilley, and Scott Lauria Morgensen, eds., *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 65.

addition, young Quincy suffered from what may have been a birth accident, causing his left arm to atrophy and ankylose in a ninety-degree position.<sup>5</sup> Fellow classmate and close friend Harrison Begay later mentioned that relatives adopted Tahoma, but that Quincy was never afforded the opportunity to know his mother's, and thus his own, clan.<sup>6</sup> Although he completed grades one and two at the Tuba City Day School, the following year relatives sent him to board at the Albuquerque Indian School, and in 1930 an individual listed as his brother, Manual Sigantizo, dropped Tahoma off at the Santa Fe Indian School.<sup>7</sup> There he languished, without a single visit home for at least the following eight years. One heartbreaking letter, written in June 1931 by SFIS principal Seymour Anderson to the Tuba City Indian Bureau superintendent states in a dry, institutional tone, "Last fall one of your boys, Quincy Tahome [sic], was sent up here. . . . We have no regular enrollment blank for him and can not say what his term of enrollment may be. He is asking to go home and we shall be glad to have you let us know what arrangement you can make for his transportation."<sup>8</sup> Superintendent Walker's reply points with searing clarity to the loneliness the twelve-year-old Tahoma must have felt: "Receipt is acknowledged of your letter of June 6<sup>th</sup> regarding one of the Navajo boys, Quincy Tahome (or Tohannie) who is enrolled at this jurisdiction under the enumeration number 71,254. Our records indicate that Quincy was transferred October 1, 1929, and therefore is not entitled to return home this year at Government expense, and we do not have any funds to defray his expenses home. If he wishes to come from

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<sup>5</sup> Quincy Tahoma, Student Case File, Santa Fe Indian School Records, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Denver Federal Records Center, Broomfield, Colorado. Like the other Navajo artists discussed here, this date may be held in question. At various points in his life Tahoma referred to his birth year as 1921, rather than 1918.

<sup>6</sup> Vera Marie Badertscher, "Woman on Quest to Unravel Mystery of Navajo Artist's Life," *Santa Fe New Mexican*, 24 August 2004, Sec B, 4.

<sup>7</sup> Quincy Tahoma, Student Case File, Santa Fe Indian School Records, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Denver Federal Records Center, Broomfield, Colorado.

<sup>8</sup> Letter from Seymour E. Anderson, to C.L. Walker, Tuba City, Arizona, June 6, 1931, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Denver Federal Records Center, Broomfield, Colorado.

personal funds, however, we have no objections.”<sup>9</sup> It is perhaps unsurprising that Tahoma later claimed to have no family living on the reservation and never returned to live there. Further adding to Tahoma’s unhappy first year at the SFIS was the school’s decision to fail him for fourth grade, due to his poor English skills.

Eventually, however, Tahoma carved out a space for himself at the SFIS, finding in the art department and through the school’s athletic program arenas in which he could excel and earn the respect and admiration of both the faculty and fellow students. School transcripts described him as having “good habits and character and loyalty,” and his report card shows a string of A’s for his Studio art classes. Furthermore, and in spite of any physical handicap, Tahoma enjoyed good health (with only one hospital admittance for impetigo) and impressive athleticism during his stay, playing football and basketball and setting the state high school high jump record, a feat which remained unchallenged for a decade.<sup>10</sup> By his junior year of high school, 1939, Tahoma the artist was already amassing a string of accolades; that year he joined Studio classmate Narciso Abeyta at San Francisco’s Golden Gate Exposition demonstrating painting techniques and exhibiting his pictures, and worked with both Abeyta and Harrison Begay painting murals for the John Gaw Meem-designed Maisel’s Indian Curio Store in Albuquerque.<sup>11</sup> In addition, Tahoma exhibited his works regularly locally, nationally, and internationally. During the 1941 Santa Fe Fiesta, for example, Tahoma exhibited alongside Begay and other rising Native artists at the city’s Hall of Ethnology in a prestigious and important show which earned national

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<sup>9</sup> Letter from C.L. Walker to Seymour Anderson, Santa Fe, NM, June 9, 1931, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Denver Federal Records Center, Broomfield, Colorado.

<sup>10</sup> Memo from W. Hemsing to Mr. Beggs, Santa Fe, NM, September 14, 1950, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Denver Federal Records Center, Broomfield, Colorado; Santa Fe Indian School Monthly Medical Records of Students, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Denver Federal Records Center, Broomfield, Colorado; Quincy Tahoma, Student Case File, Santa Fe Indian School Records, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Denver Federal Records Center, Broomfield, Colorado.

<sup>11</sup> Jill Mellick and Jeanne Shutes, *The Worlds of P’otsúnú: Geronima Cruz Montoya of San Juan Pueblo* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 79.

acclaim.<sup>12</sup> By the time he graduated from the SFIS in May, 1940, Tahoma had already attained the status of a moderately successful professional artist.

At the outbreak of World War II, Tahoma remained a post-graduate student at the SFIS, painting and working part-time in the school's laundry, but although he proved unfit for active duty in the armed forces due to his withered arm, the United States Army nevertheless called on him to serve his country. Tahoma explained his brief war relocation to California by asserting that he spent time working in an oil refinery until, as one flowery article asserted, "homesickness for his own land and his paint brushes brought him back to Santa Fé."<sup>13</sup> A letter dated March 1943 and sent to the SFIS from Major Myles B. Ellis, an intelligence officer in the U.S. Army Air Corps, reveals otherwise. In his letter to the SFIS registrar, Ellis requested Tahoma's transcripts and a description of his character, stating, "Q. Tahoma, a civilian, is being considered for confidential work at this time." As it happened, the army apparently employed Tahoma and several other non-White painters in a series of "art demonstration" propaganda films "by American men of different racial and national backgrounds."<sup>14</sup> In addition, the army commissioned Tahoma, along with other Native artists, to create a series of "Indian War Posters" that circulated throughout the country in order to muster support for war bonds.<sup>15</sup> At war's end, Tahoma received an honor that may have marked the high point of his career: a January 1949 news clipping covers the painter's recent full-page entry in the *Britannica Junior* encyclopedia.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Winona Garmhausen, *History of Indian Arts Education in Santa Fe* (Santa Fe, NM: Sunstone Press, 1988), 58.

<sup>13</sup> Ina Sizer Cassidy, "Art and Artists of New Mexico: Quincy Tahoma, Navajo," *New Mexico Magazine*, January 1944, 40.

<sup>14</sup> Letter from Myles B. Ellis, Office of the Intelligence Officer, Hammer Field, Fresno, California, to the Santa Fe Indian School registrar, March 19, 1943, Santa Fe Indian School Records, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Denver Federal Records Center, Broomfield, Colorado.

<sup>15</sup> Cassidy, "Art and Artists," 40.

<sup>16</sup> "Britannica Junior Honors Tahoma," *Santa Fe New Mexican*, 15 January 1949.

The end of the war also signaled the beginning of Tahoma's personal downward spiral as alcoholism gradually stole away his health and a series of crises became the norm. On New Year's Eve, 1946, a young White woman accused the artist of rape, and sans defense attorney, witnesses, or signed statement the court sentenced Tahoma to two to five years in the state penitentiary.<sup>17</sup> Tahoma's close friend, fellow Studio painter Pop Chalee recounted later that "He was framed! No trial or nothing!"<sup>18</sup> Even the White community understood the tenuous nature of the case; the Museum of New Mexico's art curator Hester Jones wrote this terse missive to Dunn:

You are right about Quincy's case. Actually the judge did get a lawyer to talk to Quincy. I later talked to that lawyer, and he says Quincy insisted on pleading guilty. I told the lawyer the story as I knew of it of the girl taking the initiative—coming to the store, etc.—and for a while he seemed to think he might get the judge to reconsider the sentence. Then just the day before the deadline, he said he simply didn't have time and we'd have to get someone else. We did go to another lawyer—a fine person, but he said he was afraid such a request would make things worse, under the circumstances. It might look like criticism and they'd make things harder instead of better. He said he was sure we could get a paroll [sic] at the end of 6 months. That's what we're going to try for.<sup>19</sup>

In spite of considerable local support from Tahoma's many non-Indian friends and associates, the artist spent fourteen months behind bars.<sup>20</sup> Incarceration forced Tahoma into sobriety, but

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<sup>17</sup> Charnell Havens and Vera Marie Badertscher, *Quincy Tahoma: The Life and Legacy of a Navajo Artist*, (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, Ltd., 2011), 98–110.

<sup>18</sup> Margaret Cesa, *The World of Flower Blue: Pop Chalee: An Artistic Biography* (Santa Fe, NM: Red Crane Books, 1997), 141.

<sup>19</sup> Hester Jones, Santa Fe, NM, to Dorothy Dunn, transcript in the hand of Dorothy Dunn, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM.

<sup>20</sup> Incarceration of Native Americans, along with other people of color, has historically been indicative of the overall, systemic discrimination they have faced throughout U.S. history. Currently, for example, the United States Commission on Civil Rights asserts that Native Americans are 38 percent more likely to serve time in federal prisons and four times more likely to serve in local jails; this is especially alarming in light of the fact that Native Americans make up only about 2 percent of the overall population. In addition, statistics indicate that Native Americans suffer as victims of violent crimes far more than non-Native people. There is a growing body of research on the incarceration of non-White people as a newly invigorated form of oppression, much of it focusing on the African American population. See, for example, Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010). Much work remains to be done on those other marginalized groups who suffer from the same form of discrimination.

once released, his drinking binges grew progressively severe. Between benders he painted, often creating his most masterful pieces while incarcerated either in the state prison or the local jail for minor offenses such as “drunk and disorderly,” but his work became increasingly reflective of his inner turmoil. In spite of Tahoma’s struggles, he maintained several close friendships with other artists, both Indian and non-Indian, and these individuals regularly stepped forward to offer him housing, studio space, bail money, and art supplies.<sup>21</sup> But by 1950, Tahoma’s troubles had become common knowledge amongst Santa Fe’s small arts community. That year, as it prepared to launch a campaign using the art demonstration films made during the war in order to promote “our American democracy in action” to U.S.-occupied Japan, New York’s Harmon Foundation requested information about Tahoma from the SFIS. In response the school’s principal circulated an internal memo that read, “I believe they were distressed in the answer by his rather unfortunate history in the penitentiary and his tendency toward drunkenness in recent years.” He added, “I am wondering whether the choice of this character rather than another outstanding Indian was a wise one.”<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, the popularity of Tahoma’s work remained unaffected by his troubles, but while his paintings sold for upwards of two hundred dollars each in the Santa Fe galleries—a respectable sum in 1950s America—the artist would often auction them off at the local bar for just enough money to buy a drink or two.<sup>23</sup> By 1952, Tahoma’s life had become untenable; although he continued to paint, Margretta Dietrich reported to Dunn that Tahoma was rumored to have incurable cancer and was “spending his last days as drunk as possible.”<sup>24</sup> Indeed, by that time his doctor had diagnosed Tahoma with acute nephrosis of the liver and,

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<sup>21</sup> Badertscher, “Woman on Quest,” 4.

<sup>22</sup> Letter from Mary Beattie Brady, Harmon Foundation, New York, to the superintendent of the Santa Fe Indian School, July 26, 1950, Santa Fe Indian School Records, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Denver Federal Records Center, Broomfield, Colorado; Memo from W. Hemsing to Mr. Beggs, Santa Fe, NM, September 14, 1950, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Denver Federal Records Center, Broomfield, Colorado.

<sup>23</sup> Havens and Badertscher, *Quincy Tahoma*, 145–153.

<sup>24</sup> Letter from Margretta Dietrich, Santa Fe, NM, to Dorothy Dunn, August 21, 1952, transcript in the hand of Dorothy Dunn, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM.

although the physician urged Tahoma to attend Alcoholic Anonymous meeting, the artist was, in his words, “not very cooperative.”<sup>25</sup> A tiny insert titled “Navajo Artist Dies” in the *Albuquerque Tribune* announced his death on October 11, 1956: “A well known [sic] Navajo artist, Quincy Tahoma has been found dead in his apartment. . . . Tahoma’s latest award was the grand prize at the State Fair for the best entry in the Indian art exhibit. Friends say they know of no survivors.”<sup>26</sup> Dietrich followed this up with a short, hand-written note to Dunn about her former pupil, “I know very little more except that he didn’t die in the Ind. Hosp—Dr. Johnson there had told him that he couldn’t live over 6 mos. unless he stopped drinking—The police called me to ask if I know anything about his family—probably his landlady (?) thought he had a sister on the reservation & Harrison [Begay] thought so too but no one knew her name or whereabouts.”<sup>27</sup> Quincy Tahoma was in his mid-thirties at the time of his death.

The changing imagery Tahoma produced during the course of his career provides evidence of the rage and frustration he increasingly felt as he encountered more than his fair share of challenges and setbacks. Like his classmates Nailor and Begay, he accessed his training and talent to achieve unusual success, but Tahoma differed in his resistance to the happy, non-threatening normative. Sometime around the mid-1940s he began depicting violent, hyper-masculine scenes of buffalo hunts and buckskin-clad warriors who more closely resembled Plains Indians, both sartorially and culturally; although, interestingly, Tahoma himself had never seen a buffalo first-hand until well after he began painting them.<sup>28</sup> This rejection of the feminized, decorative style so beloved by Dunn and her cohort discomfited the Santa Fe art

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<sup>25</sup> Cesa, *World of Flower Blue*, 137.

<sup>26</sup> “Navajo Artist Dies,” *Albuquerque Tribune*, 11 October 1956.

<sup>27</sup> Letter from Margretta Dietrich, Santa Fe, NM, to Dorothy Dunn, October 14, 1956, transcript in the hand of Dorothy Dunn, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM. Underlining in the original.

<sup>28</sup> Havens and Badertscher, *Quincy Tahoma*, 29.

circles; as was, perhaps, Tahoma's intent. Instead of a hearkening back to imagery depicting Navajo culture as one of women tending sheep, blindered to the harsh realities of the modern world, much Tahoma's newer work manifested itself as a scream of rage. If Begay's and Nailor's pictures of sheep and serene Indians generally represent the feminine, the accepted, the fluid, and the non-threatening, Tahoma's art suggests the betrayed, the masculine, the violent, and the unacceptable. Native American art scholar John Anson Warner contended that the first of these pictures "epitomized the white vision of the virile barbarian. . . . [although it] was intended as an encapsulation of idealized masculine Navajo life and as a vision of the proud and fierce hunter before his subjugation by the white man."<sup>29</sup> Ironically, the non-Indian market purchased these works with great alacrity as well—works made harmless and only slightly titillating by relegating Tahoma to a childlike status and firmly placing him and his "noble savage" motifs into the acceptable Indian category. To the art-buying public, all of these artists' works, consigned like all Indian art to a position outside the mainstream, presented a mirror image of society's constructed view of Indian culture. In order to preserve this illusion, the White elite maintained control over autochthonous lives through a myriad of ways financially and legally; more subtle and invidious was the way that media discourse served to trivialize Indian production and situate Native painters into a tightly defined genre that foreclosed movement into the mainstream.

Popular discourse from this period unabashedly gendered, othered, racialized, and infantilized the artists and their work; its treatment of Tahoma provides ample evidence of this. Beginning in 1938, an article from the *Santa Fe New Mexican* discussed the Navajo painters included in an Indian school exhibit being held at the city's art museum: "The Navajo seems to

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<sup>29</sup> John Anson Warner, "The Individual in Native American Art: A Sociological View," in *The Arts of the North American Indian: Native Traditions in Evolution*, Edwin L. Wade, ed. (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1986), 194.

paint with the greatest elegance, as the tradition of sand painting may have given them delicacy and sureness of line.” When describing Tahoma’s entry, the journalist wrote, “A picture that would delight a child is of clumsy fat bears climbing fragile spruce trees painted by Tahoma, a Navajo.”<sup>30</sup> The descriptors “elegant” and “delicate” connote femininity, while the connection to Diné sand painting contains the students’ work within a rigid cultural framework. Furthermore, conflating Tahoma’s picture with childhood serves to infantilize the artist as well. Ina Sizer Cassidy’s profile of Tahoma for *New Mexico Magazine*, written several years later during an exhibit at the New Mexico Association on Indian Affairs’ Indian Club, continued this practice. Cassidy rhapsodized, “Like an Arab, Quincy loves horses, and has always been an expert horseman; and like the nomads of the African deserts, from earliest babyhood he was brought up with them.”<sup>31</sup> This passage, which alludes so overtly to the Orient, once again feminizes and others Tahoma. Moreover, it was common practice to conflate maternal femininity with horses in the Indian culture; a critic for the *Santa Fe New Mexican* wrote in 1944, “No one can paint horses better than a Navajo who rides with his mother before he can walk.”<sup>32</sup> Art historian Timothy McCall, in his work re-contextualizing early Renaissance art through the uncovering of gender biases embedded within critical discourse, asserts that terms such as “delicate” and “decorative,” as well as comparisons to an “indulgent, Oriental luxury” are unquestionably gendered language and are “likewise deployed to distinguish this style from the normative or ideal.”<sup>33</sup> In her article, Cassidy further defined Tahoma as having been born “near the spot where the giant tracks of the dinosaur have been found, in about as wild a part of the reservation as

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<sup>30</sup> “50 Students of Indian School Show Paintings at Museum,” *Santa Fe New Mexican*, 7 May 1938.

<sup>31</sup> Cassidy, “Art and Artists,” 40.

<sup>32</sup> “Exhibit Navajo Artists’ Work to Remain until after Wheelwright Lecture,” *Santa Fe New Mexican*, 3 May 1944.

<sup>33</sup> McCall, “The Gendering of *Libertas*, 175.

exists—wild and free from the impositions of the white man.”<sup>34</sup> Quite obviously, the connotation of dinosaurs to Indianness, as well as her romanticization of the isolation of the Navajo reservation, others Tahoma and relegates him and all Diné to an essentialist, unchanging plane of existence, thereby denying them claim to modernity. Cassidy went on to praise the “decorative qualities of his work,” while including the racializing assertion that “Art is second nature to the Indian, and unlike the white artist, he needs no arduous study to bring it to its fullness, for art is the free expression of his native and original talent.” Cassidy concluded her 1944 article by quipping that this exhibit “is the first exhibition to be held in a year, as about all of the Indian artists who call Santa Fé headquarters are now serving in the armed forces where they are proving to be as good warriors as they already have proved themselves to be good artists.”<sup>35</sup> Aside from its unfortunate paternalism and stereotyping, this line raises some interesting questions. Why, for example, did Cassidy chose the word “headquarters” over “home”? Were Indians only valid as denizens of reservations and not the urban environment? Moreover, Cassidy’s earlier emphasis on Indians’ natural artistic talent not only serves to essentialize, but also places Native American artists within nature and outside of the more serious oeuvre of classically trained, White artists.

Two articles written in 1949 in response to Tahoma’s inclusion in the *Britannica Junior* prove that infantilizing and othering discourse continued throughout the decade. In a brief 1949 *Christian Science Monitor* article on Tahoma titled, “Navajo Youth Wins Fame,” the author used the words “young” or “lad” six times in as many paragraphs to describe the thirty-year-old artist, whose “canvases are in constant demand as they are spirited, colorful and truly Indian.” Later, the article states, “Modern artists say [Tahoma] is the finest draftsman among all Indian

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<sup>34</sup> Cassidy, “Art and Artists,” 40.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

artists.”<sup>36</sup> This line achieves two things: it strongly delineates between “modern” artists and Indian artists, and it minimizes Tahoma’s standing from a fine art painter to a draftsman/craftsman. Less overtly biased, journalist John Alexander’s article for the *Santa Fe New Mexican* stated that, “The more modern of the artists uphold him as the greatest draftsman among the Indian artists, while the conservatives say he paints much in the style of the white man.”<sup>37</sup> This is an interesting statement in its peculiarity. While still foreclosing the possible inclusion of Tahoma into the ranks of modern, non-Indian artists, Alexander nevertheless allowed that “conservatives” believed he painted “much like a white man.” It is unclear to whom the journalist was referring, although the juxtaposition of “conservatives” to “modern” implies that the former, like Tahoma, were not of the modern age. If the intent of Alexander’s language to other Tahoma were in question, this line near the end of his essay would surely assuage any doubts: “Tahoma, in addition to hobbying with leatherwork, also is adept at the ancient art of sand painting and, once in a while can be persuaded to dance and sing as does his brother Navajo on the lonely reservation.”<sup>38</sup> This, in spite of the fact that Tahoma lived his life as a Santa Fe urbanite, sets the painter apart from Alexander and the rest of the non-Indian city dwellers.

By mid-century, the ascendancy of the United States as a global power and New York as the undisputed art capital of the world led to the increased trivialization of Indian art and artists on the whole. For example, when Linzee King Davis wrote about Navajo watercolorists for *Arizona Highways* in 1956, she described Navajo painting as “decorative,” “delicate,” and “enchanting.” In her article, Davis employed a rash of gendered-coded language to position the Navajo artists she profiled within a childlike, feminized perspective. Davis gushed, “The Navajo transforms his sagebrush and juniper, as the Persian transforms his cypress and flowering trees,

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<sup>36</sup> D.L.P., “Navajo Youth Wins Fame” *Christian Science Monitor*, 4 April 1949.

<sup>37</sup> John Alexander, “*Britannica Junior Honors Tahoma*,” *Santa Fe New Mexican*, 15 January 1949, 10.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

into something straight out of a fairy tale—fantastic, imaginative, and sheer design!”<sup>39</sup> By comparing the Indian work to Persian miniatures, Davis succeeded in exoticizing, and consequently feminizing, the Navajo painters and their production. The use of words such as “action,” “rational,” “forceful,” and “muscular,” noticeably missing here, was common practice in modern art criticism. Contrast the discourse surrounding this “fairy tale” American Indian art to that regarding 1950s abstract expressionism associated with the likes of Willem de Kooning and Jackson Pollock, described as “Action Painting,” and it becomes readily apparent that critics found myriad forms of gendered language with which to categorize all modern art.<sup>40</sup> To wit, a 1959 book written on de Kooning defined him by his “Michelangelesque conscience,” and continued with, “he aims straight at the mark—to grab the real by the throat,” but “he is just another guy who faces art and other artists and looks from a man’s-eye view.”<sup>41</sup>

Davis availed herself of similarly gendered terminology when describing Tahoma’s work specifically. In her *Arizona Highways* article, she mentioned that his early production was “small,” “quiet in mood,” “delicate,” “tiny,” and “exquisite.” She detailed Tahoma’s use of color in another of his early paintings by using the phrase “soft shades of olive green, chartreuse and apricot.”<sup>42</sup> Color, described in this way, softens and feminizes. McCall referred to Patricia Reilly’s groundbreaking study of the subject, when he wrote, “color—closely connected to pleasure, emotion, the irrational, and the bodily—was feminized and constructed as ornamental [and] supplemental.”<sup>43</sup> Davis approvingly mentioned that during Tahoma’s “peaceful early

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<sup>39</sup> Linzee W. King Davis, “Modern Navajo Water Color Painting” *Arizona Highways* 32, no. 7 (July 1956), 11.

<sup>40</sup> Harold Rosenberg, “The American Action Painters,” *Art News* 51, no.8 (December 1952): 22–23, 48–50, in Patricia Hills, *Modern Art in the USA: Issues and Controversies of the 20th Century* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001), 151.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas B. Hess, *Willem de Kooning*, Great American Artist Series (New York: George Brazziller, 1959), 7.

<sup>42</sup> Davis, “Modern Navajo,” 12.

<sup>43</sup> McCall, “Gendering of *Libertas*,” 168.

phase, he painted some charming Navajo mothers,” and described one in particular of a “young and beautiful woman holding a smiling baby strapped to a cradleboard”:<sup>44</sup>

In this picture of the mother a little lamb is stretching his neck to the utmost to peer at the baby above him. Curving his neck from behind the woman’s full skirt, is another lamb also trying to get a peek at the baby. Every line of the picture is rhythmically inter-related. The color scheme of the woman’s native costume is intricate and unusual but the colors are never harsh and the effect of the whole picture is one of quiet beauty.<sup>45</sup>

Davis’s use of the words “little,” “curving,” “full,” “intricate,” and her phrase, “quiet beauty” all acted as feminizing. The terms “unusual” and “never harsh” again suggested the contrast of intricate, decorative, and feminine art to art that was more classic, political, and aggressive.

By contrast, when referring to Tahoma’s evolved, post-World War II style, Davis was far less flowery. She wrote, “Tahoma is obviously a man of many moods and some of his later pictures show great vital force and boldness with a tremendous effect of dramatic action.” She targeted Tahoma’s recently favored depictions of buffalo hunts, describing them as “horrendous things” and remarked that the artist “tends more and more to pictures of action and violence.”<sup>46</sup> Utilizing words connoting masculinity, “force,” “boldness,” “violence,” and “action,” Davis sharply delineated between Tahoma’s earlier, more pleasing work and his later production. Lest any reader mistake her intention, though, as one of reassigning masculinity to this thoroughly emasculated genre, Davis hastened to add, “However, his style is always completely Indian and would never be confused with that of a white artist.”<sup>47</sup>

Davis also hoped Tahoma would return to his earlier style, even as she detailed the “bulging muscles” and “verve and dash” of his latest work. She described one of his later paintings as “more in his early style” of a “coal black mare twisting around to lick a pure white

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<sup>44</sup> Davis, “Modern Navajo,” 25.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

colt—a lovely thing in design and pattern.”<sup>48</sup> Moreover, Davis mentioned the recent “long lapse in his painting,” and added, “It is to be hoped that his versatile talent will continue to express itself with no more long and unfortunate lapses in production.”<sup>49</sup> It seems likely that Davis was making oblique reference to Tahoma’s alcoholism here; she would almost certainly have known of his affliction, notorious as it was within the Santa Fe art world.<sup>50</sup> Tahoma’s struggle with alcoholism surely did not square well with depictions of delicate beauty and “fairy tale-ness.”

However, another liminal thread runs throughout the Davis piece perhaps even more pervasively than her gender-coded language. Patronizing terminology fixing the Navajos in a dependent, childlike stasis also figures prominently in her article. Indeed, this portrayal of the artists as subjects of Anglo cultural colonization began on the very first page of the magazine with editor Raymond Carlson’s introduction. Deftly removing autonomy from the artists themselves while efficiently exoticizing and racializing them, he opened by writing of the Navajos “inherent artistic ability,” but continued with:

A few dedicated teachers have worked with them and taught them the basic fundamentals of brush and paint. A few traders and dealers have given them encouragement. As they develop and grow they will contribute something vital to American art. Considering all the handicaps these artists have overcome, what they have achieved has been almost phenomenal.<sup>51</sup>

In essence, what Carlson claimed is that although the Navajos gravitated naturally to art, they were incapable of achieving anything of importance without outside, non-Indian assistance. The editor continued by lauding the work of Davis and her husband who were “spending considerable time and effort in helping worthy artists among the Navajos and to more widely

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Vera Marie Badertscher, “Woman on Quest to Unravel Mystery of Navajo Artist’s Life,” *Santa Fe New Mexican*, 24 August 2004, sec. B, 1,4.

<sup>51</sup> Raymond Carlson, “Navajo Art” *Arizona Highways* 32, no. 7 (July 1956): 1

publicize their work.”<sup>52</sup> Davis, in her article, expanded on this racializing theme by writing that the “artistic ability of the Navajo is definitely innate and not acquired from the white man or from the Oriental,” and, “a white artist would not think of painting foreground and background as the Navajos do.”<sup>53</sup> Coinciding with this exegesis of Navajo difference are numerous references to Indian childlikeness. Two separate anecdotes regarding Navajo child artists “discovered” by “kind” traders or Indian school personnel follow her introduction, and, indeed, for each of the successful artists mentioned in her article, Davis pointedly assigned a white patron who was “aiding him” or “giving him kind advice.”<sup>54</sup>

Clara Lee Tanner, in her 1957 book *Southwest Indian Painting*, similarly employed gendered language to feminize Indian art in general and Tahoma’s work in particular. Tanner, an archaeologist, assumed a more scientific stance in her review of Native art, but biased language persists. Although Tanner maintained that pre-modern Navajo art expressed “virility” previously unknown in the Southwest, by the turn of the twentieth century she felt Diné paintings had turned to whimsical and vivacious representations of horses and ceremonial figures.<sup>55</sup> Thus, her take on Tahoma’s changing choice of imagery proves interesting. Contrasting Begay’s rare hunting scenes to Tahoma’s, Tanner asserted that “there is rarely any of the gore which is so characteristic of Tahoma.”<sup>56</sup> Echoing Davis, Tanner wrote of Tahoma’s “dynamism,” “violence,” “wildness,” and “action.” Although not as overtly critical of Tahoma’s insistence on a shift away from traditional non-threatening subject matter, Tanner nonetheless employed similarly gender-coded language in her discussion of the artist. Careful to reassign Tahoma to the non-threatening “Indian” category, Tanner included, “Realistic paintings of horses reflect much

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Davis, “Modern Navajo,” 11.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 11–12.

<sup>55</sup> Tanner, *Southwest Indian Painting*, 111.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 114.

of his early life, plus the Navajo's unfailing love for this animal. No matter how violent his portrayals became in later years, Tahoma still painted horses with affection and in great beauty."<sup>57</sup> She also included many more criticisms of Tahoma's problematic foreshortening, awkward proportions, and "cluttered" compositions when discussing his more violent works, and reserved her most lavish praise for one of his "most charming" paintings, that of a Navajo wedding procession. She wrote derogatorily of his other work, "About 1945–46, Tahoma leaned more heavily in the direction of wilder and bloodier subject matter . . . any subject which offered the opportunity to depict 'blood and gore' seemed to appeal to him at this point."<sup>58</sup> Summing up her section on Tahoma, Tanner concluded, "Regardless of subject matter, Tahoma painted in harmonious colors and in clean-cut and graceful lines."<sup>59</sup> Hence, with this qualifier, Tanner succeeded in firmly placing Tahoma, irrespective of his subject matter, within the easily understood and managed genre of idealized Indian art.

Dorothy Dunn was not immune to gendered language, either. In her magnum opus Dunn wrote briefly on Tahoma's style progression. Assuming a tone tinged with disappointment, Dunn wrote that Tahoma "changed from serenity to one expressive of near violence—from quiet, pastoral scenes and orderly ceremonial patterns to highly agitated portrayals of animals, hunts, and battles that glorified struggle and cruelty."<sup>60</sup> Dunn went on to write that Tahoma, "through his individual studies of foreshortening and anatomy . . . won high praise from academically trained artists of note, and the admiring response of the public."<sup>61</sup> Foreshortening and anatomy studies were two aspects of painting Dunn discouraged in her instruction as she strove to preserve the "Indianness" of Native American art. She admitted, though, that it was this work

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>60</sup> Dunn, *American Indian Painting*, 352.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

that brought Tahoma the most recognition but concluded with, “Whatever one may think of these later paintings as Indian art, he must recognize the command of techniques and devices of the artist’s own making which convey the opposition and impact of brutal contests in all sorts of situations on the hunting ranges of the old days.”<sup>62</sup> Later, Dunn tried again to square Tahoma’s divergent style with his early Studio production in her response to an article written by J.J. Brody: “Tahoma’s tragic post-Studio career can certainly be explained in terms of anthropology—with emphasis on influences of non-Indian origin. Changes in his art are all understandable in the light of his complex cultural experiences.”<sup>63</sup> Thus, while assigning the descriptor of “tragic” to Tahoma’s post-Studio career rather than to his life, Dunn points the finger of blame at non-Indian influences.

Dunn’s reliance on paternalistic rhetoric reveals itself throughout her book, as well. She felt a messianic calling to re-educate her Indian students to value their cultural heritage and “tap the latent force of [their] group pride.”<sup>64</sup> When discussing the course of Indian art, she compared it to a child drawing “first the body and then the clothing over it, with primary lines showing through,” and introduced the Indians as a race “varying in intellect from the Maya and Aztec to the ‘Digger’ Indians of Nevada.”<sup>65</sup> It is worth noting, however, that Dunn generally remained remarkably restrained in her use of patronizing and exoticizing language when she wrote of her students. When, for example, the rest of the Santa Fe art world valued Indian art solely for its contrived Indigeneity, Dunn argued for its eventual rightful place in the modern art canon. She desired the eventual expansion of Indian art away from the “bounds of Indian culture into the

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Dorothy Dunn, “Notes on a Study by J.J. Brody: *Modern Indian Painting and the Collections of the Museum of Northern Arizona*,” unpublished, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM.

<sup>64</sup> Dunn, *American Indian Painting*, 254.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 28, 13.

whole culture which belongs to everyone for the knowing.”<sup>66</sup> In a 1952 letter to Margretta Dietrich, Dunn declared, “One of the present artists must prove the point that the Indian painter is a bona fide modern. It will take just such art . . . to break through the smoke screen that apparently still surrounds those who insist the Indian is being shackled to an ‘old’ art.”<sup>67</sup> Dunn’s complicated feelings regarding Indian art as modern art, though, still rested on her dogmatic notions of what constituted authenticity; and authenticity, in her view, could only be determined via the essentialist, antimodern parameters she had instilled twenty years before. As painters such as Fritz Scholder and T.C. Cannon emerged during the 1970s—artists whose work did not lend itself so easily to the same time-honored, paternalistic discourse—Dunn felt betrayed by the public’s embrace of these men whom she considered inauthentic frauds.

Even the impact of the Civil Rights Movement and the explosion of and new respect for modern Native American art during the 1960s and 1970s could not shake the impenetrable thicket of racist, infantilizing, and gendered discourse that surrounded the Studio painters and their production. In 1982, Katherin Chase wrote of Tahoma that “All of his art reflects the Navajo’s instinctive love of homeland, particularly an abiding feeling of kinship with the animals, both wild and domestic, so important to the Navajos’ livelihood.” She further elaborated, stating that, “He was a bit of a caricaturist, even a cartoonist. . . . Humor and action keynote Tahoma’s major works.” When discussing the artist’s unique vignette signature, Chase asserted that they “reveal the whimsical nature of this artist-storyteller.”<sup>68</sup> Again, we see an attempt to situate Tahoma as a reservation-dwelling Indian, regardless of the fact that he lived his life, virtually in its entirety, in Santa Fe. But to allow him that consideration would be to include

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>67</sup> Letter from Dorothy Dunn Kramer, Berkeley, CA, to Margretta Dietrich, 25 August 1952, transcript in the hand of Dorothy Dunn Kramer, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology Archives, Santa Fe, NM.

<sup>68</sup> Katherin Chase, *Navajo Painting*, 12.

him into the non-Indian cohort of Santa Fe artists and thus deemphasize his race. Furthermore, Chase, like those writers before her, conflated Tahoma's work with humor and whimsicality, thereby denying his maturity; and by characterizing his work as "cartoonish," Chase relegated Tahoma to a place outside the world of serious art.

Clearly, Tahoma understood the way in which he and his work were being objectified, and many of his paintings reveal the bitterness he felt toward his White clientele and the pervasive non-Indian fascination with Native cultures. For example, one painting presents an exemplar of a theme Tahoma often painted.<sup>69</sup> The hindquarters of two donkeys confront the viewing audience—an audience that Tahoma was fully aware was composed of Whites. The young girl in the foreground points to the smaller donkey, leading the viewer's eye toward both the two burros and the boy standing between them. The boy reaches out to a butte in the distance, clearly directing the audience's eyes to up to the geological formation. The play on words is significant. "Butte," in this painting obviously associated with the donkeys' back ends, conflates the two images, conveying a sly and derisive message to the viewers about themselves. The next picture, *Tourist Season*, painted in 1947, offers an even more openly disdainful view of non-Indians. In it, we see an Anglo tourist couple, almost ghostly white, snapping a photograph of a Navajo mother and her two children. The Diné family calmly leans against a tree eating ice cream cones as they, too, gaze upon the tourists. Tahoma's painting asks the viewer to consider which group, the tourists or the Navajos, is the real spectacle here. Interestingly, the date of this picture, 1947, situates it as having been painted during Tahoma's fourteen-month prison stay. Finally, an undated painting titled *The Artist's Model* depicts a Navajo cowboy, dressed in contemporary clothing, laughing down at a White couple as the woman intently examines him

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<sup>69</sup> Like many of the images included within this study, this one is of poor quality. It is often the case that extant photographs, particularly of works that reside in private collections, are sparse and of subpar quality.

through her pince-nez and the man, dressed in the jodhpurs and accoutrements of an artist, earnestly sketches the horseman in the notebook he holds. In the background a small Diné child peeps from behind the opening of his hogan, witnessing the scene. While Dunn and her cohort encouraged Native painters to portray Indian characters, they were far less sanguine about the inclusion of White men and women in Indian-produced imagery, no doubt preferring that Indians remain the observed and consumed rather than the observer or consumer. Thus, Tahoma's relatively frequent choice of non-Indian individuals in his paintings, as well as his refusal to exclusively paint emasculated subject matter, can also be read as resistance.

Alongside his turn toward hyper-masculine subject matter, Tahoma may have also been responding to efforts to racialize, feminize, and infantilize him through the complicated ways in which he interacted with White women. Certainly, it is by no means insignificant or coincidental that White women such as Dorothy Dunn and Margretta Dietrich dominated the sphere of Indian art and, through this and other venues, attempted to insert themselves intimately in Indian lives. Moreover, Harrison Begay mentioned in an interview that affluent female tourists from the East Coast often asserted themselves sexually upon meeting Native American men, perhaps looking for the same sort of empowerment that controlling Indian lives through "activism" or cultural appropriation could incur.<sup>70</sup> While Begay seems to have taken this in stride, Tahoma often felt particularly shunned or heartbroken upon realizing that these encounters were not the precursor to true romance and in no way indicated equal social standing.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, Tahoma sometimes developed serious, albeit unsuccessful relationships with White women, including one with a high-school senior from a well-to-do family, Jean Wallace. But while Wallace's parents considered themselves connoisseurs and patrons of Indian art, even going so far as to invite

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<sup>70</sup> Havens and Badertscher, *Quincy Tahoma*, 162.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

Tahoma into their home, they nevertheless forbid their daughter from engaging in an interracial dalliance.<sup>72</sup>

Tahoma sometimes undertook the role of political as well as social commentator. During the 1944 presidential election a local newspaper published Tahoma's satirical cartoon, "Bogged Down in Midstream," depicting Uncle Sam wading through a river and wrestling a triumphant "Dewey" elephant as the bespectacled and panicked "FDR" donkey drowns in the water. The caption reads:

Quincy Tahoma, a Navajo Indian whose drawings have been admired in galleries throughout the nation, was moved by the present campaign to symbolize with sketching pencil and paper his conception of the plight of Uncle Sam. The elephant with his raised eyebrow has the same arrogance that Tahoma gives his famous buffalos. The artist, who cannot vote because he is an Indian, said his people of the Navajo reservation hoped for a change to relieve them of confining regulations, restricted freedom and the "hundreds of government men who ride around the reservation."<sup>73</sup>

Not only does Tahoma's depiction drive home the animosity the Navajo community felt toward the Roosevelt administration and John Collier's stewardship of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, but it also highlights the liminal role of Native Americans in contemporary politics. Although federal legislation in 1924 bestowed citizenship on Native Americans en masse, New Mexico did not enfranchise its Native population until 1962—the last state to do so. Tahoma also subtly pointed out this disparity in his painting of a returning Native American soldier. In this picture, a U.S. veteran returns home to his family on the Navajo reservation. While his family displays the same kind of emotion one would expect in any, say, Norman Rockwell depiction of an American

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>73</sup> Quincy Tahoma, "Bogged Down in Midstream," 1944, Santa Fe Indian Club World War II Scrapbook, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM.

hero's homecoming, Tahoma's imagery proves edgier in light of the disenfranchisement of the Navajo family. Furthermore, Tahoma may well have surmised that Native Americans in general and Navajos in particular enlisted in proportional numbers that far exceeded any other ethnic or racial group; he certainly knew that virtually every one of his classmates at the SFIS had volunteered to serve.<sup>74</sup>

Yet throughout his career and regardless of any ill feelings he may have had for his rocky early childhood on the reservation, Tahoma clearly held his Diné culture close to his heart. Like all of the Navajo artists of the period, Tahoma retained ties to the traditional lifestyles of the People while straddling the cultural divide inherent within the Santa Fe art sphere; indeed, all of the artists included within this study maintained profound ties to Indian spaces outside of Santa Fe and the White world. Despite his traumatic early childhood, Dinétah continued to function as an imagined sanctuary and cultural anchor for Tahoma, as it did for his compatriot, Begay. Harrison Begay remained a close friend until Tahoma's death in 1956; in fact, Begay stood as one of Tahoma's few confidantes. Biographers Charnell Havens and Vera Marie Badertscher maintain that Tahoma was able to compartmentalize, bisecting his Navajo family—which he routinely claimed did not exist—and his Santa Fe life. He spoke English almost without an accent, in spite of his having failed the fourth grade because of poor language skills, and moved easily throughout the urban art circles. In fact, Tahoma often relied upon a sizeable array of friends and supporters, both Native and non-Native. During times of financial and personal duress, friends such as photographer T. Harmon Parkhurst, Santa Fe restaurateur Epifano

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<sup>74</sup> In fact, Native Americans did enlist for service during World War II in percentages greater than any other minority group. For more on this, see Donald L. Fixico, *Termination and Relocation: Federal Indian Policy, 1945–1960* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986). In addition, there is a plethora of scholarship on the Navajo Code Talkers, a group of Navajo servicemen who immensely aided the war effort through their radio communication, in Navajo, of top-secret information. For an overview see, for example, the website [navajocodetalkers.org](http://navajocodetalkers.org), which contains recorded oral history interviews with several of the soldiers.

Montoya, and trader Jimmy Silva stepped forward offering support, art supplies, and housing—often for nothing other than, evidently, altruistic reasons or out of genuine fondness for the artist.<sup>75</sup> Concurrently, Tahoma lived a secretive life centered on the remnants of his Navajo family, one which he kept distinct from his non-Indian Santa Fe friends and acquaintances. Havens and Badertscher, for example, found evidence that, as an adult, Tahoma made contact with his birth mother and visited her on the reservation on at least one occasion. Moreover, according to Begay, Tahoma never failed to carry a small pouch of corn pollen, sacred within Navajo culture, and occasionally slipped secretly back to the reservation to visit his sister.<sup>76</sup>

Even during those periods when he painted pictures bristling with irony, bitterness, or violence, Tahoma continued to produce images of heartrending tenderness, depicting Navajo families and children, flora and fauna. It is tempting to ascribe too much import to this imagery, because ultimately Tahoma painted for a living and thus undoubtedly chose much of his subject matter based on buyer popularity. Nevertheless, like his friend Begay, Tahoma surely desired to disseminate positive imagery of his Diné culture. Moreover, Tahoma's later works, so popular due to their alignment with the Noble Savage trope, outsold the quieter domestic scenes he continued to paint. Tahoma understood the marketability of his work; he replicated almost identically many of his best sellers over and over—nearly all of these were images of hunts, animal attacks, a sort of “End of the Trail” representation, and masculine stallions—but he tended to paint singular scenes of domesticity.<sup>77</sup>

Perhaps Tahoma's most profound legacy, though, is the enormous and often overlooked influence he had upon other Native American painters. In her book *Visions and Voices*, editor

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<sup>75</sup> Havens and Badertscher, *Quincy Tahoma*, 110.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 90, 24–25.

<sup>77</sup> I am grateful to Charnell Havens and Vera Marie Badertscher who pointed out the similarity between these two paintings in their book, *Quincy Tahoma: The Life and Legacy of a Navajo Artist*.

Lydia Wyckoff maintained that Tahoma's style "strongly influenced" next generation Comanche artist Rance Hood, and throughout the book, other interviewed painters such as contemporaries Charlie Lee (Diné), Rafael Medina (Zia), and Al Momaday (Kiowa) mentioned Tahoma as an inspiration.<sup>78</sup> Writing in 1986, John Anson Warner asserted that Tahoma's distinctive composition of the buffalo hunt influenced "generations of later artists," until it was "finally reduce[d] to a stereotype."<sup>79</sup> Moreover, Studio classmate Narciso Abeyta often mentioned Tahoma fondly in his later correspondence, while both Harrison Begay and Pop Chalee maintained close friendships with Tahoma until his death.

Pop Chalee perhaps summed up Tahoma's life and legacy best when she asserted that Tahoma may have been "the best of all the Indian artists," and added, "Oh, poor Quincy. He was such a sweet man, but he suffered so much."<sup>80</sup> In many ways Tahoma's life proves the exemplar by which we can gauge the flagitious ramifications of, not only Indian boarding school assimilation or the rigid parameters of Studio art instruction, but also the suffocating popular discourse that relegated Native artists to liminality as it strove to infantilize and other them with gender-coded, racializing language. Tahoma, like the other first-generation fine artists discussed here, was forced to play the incompatible roles of passive reservation Indian and urban artisan in order to succeed as a professional painter. Tahoma's life quickly spiraled out of control when he proved unable or unwilling to conform to White notions of "fairytale" Indianness. While producing paintings to assuage the non-Indian public's hunger for Native imagery paid his bills and undoubtedly brought him some creative satisfaction, Tahoma, unlike White artists of the

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<sup>78</sup> Lydia L. Wyckoff, ed., *Visions and Voices: Native American Painting from the Philbrook Museum of Art* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 30, 168, 180.

<sup>79</sup> Anson, "Individual in Native American Art," 194.

<sup>80</sup> Cesa, *World of Flower Blue*, 141.

period, was compelled by the mainstream to play the primitive in order to do so, even as he lived his life among non-Indians. Refusing to conform to the public's expectations of his art, Tahoma pushed the bounds of acceptability by painting scenes that barely masked his contempt and rage; ironically, the power of discourse handily contained these pictures within the well-worn intellectual framework of Indian romance, whimsicality, or tragedy. Yet, in Tahoma's work we also see not only his awareness of hegemonic efforts to pigeonhole and control him, but also a means by which he resisted these attempts. In his paintings, Tahoma "talked back" in ways—however ultimately quixotic—that circumvented the popular discourse that situated Indian artists into racialized, infantilized, and gendered taxonomies.

## **Chapter 5: The Silent Stories of Navajo Women Painters Sybil Yazzie, Ruth Watchman, and Mary Ellen**

Along with the cohort of talented Diné male painters who trained at the Dunn Studio there existed a group of gifted women artists as well. Yet, while the young men who emerged from the Studio sometimes enjoyed at least a modicum of success—or, as in the case of Nailor, Tahoma, and Begay—were even afforded a living off of their skills, their Navajo female classmates did not achieve the same level of celebrity or prominence. This occurred in spite of Dunn's clear championing of the girls in her class. While at the SFIS, Dunn's students Sybil Yazzie, Ruth Watchman, and Mary Ellen proved equally talented as their male counterparts, but they each fell into obscurity after leaving school.<sup>1</sup> The reasons for this vary, but revolve around the early twentieth-century's lack of gender parity, especially within the realm of fine art; this impacted artists of every ethnicity along with Native women. Moreover, popular discourse tended to categorize Indian arts and crafts differently from easel painting; thus, Navajo women were thought of as weavers (and Indian women in general were assigned the discursive and actual roles of weavers and potters), and therefore crafters, instead of as artists. Even within the Diné culture obstacles existed that foreclosed professional careers to women; although Navajo ideology assumed gender equality, specified gender roles continued to play an important part in societal expectations.

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<sup>1</sup> By combining a discussion of these three Navajo women into one chapter rather than devote single chapters to each, as I did the male artists included in this study, I by no means wish to reinforce their subjugated status. Indeed, my point here is to reinforce my assertion that while the Native artists' voices are often difficult to reconstruct, Native women's stories prove even more elusive.

Sybil Lansing Yazzie, perhaps the best known of the Navajo women painters from the Dunn Studio, showed great promise early on as an artist and as a student.<sup>2</sup> After graduating from the SFIS, however, Yazzie spent most of her adult life living in her birthplace of Chinle, Arizona, raising her children and running her family's convenience store rather than pursuing a professional painting career. Although well-respected in Chinle as a businessperson and as an upstanding member of the community, records indicate that Yazzie nevertheless continued to aspire to broaden her education throughout her life. Born sometime around 1917 to Tachini Yazzie, who listed "farm and sheep" as his profession, and Ethanabah Yazzie, Sybil joined nine siblings in the family's four-room home.<sup>3</sup> At around the age of seven or eight, Yazzie's parents enrolled her in first grade at the Indian Service-run Chin Lee Boarding School, and after attending first through fifth grades there, Yazzie transferred to the SFIS where she received the remainder of her primary-school education, graduating with a high school degree in 1937.

From a review of Yazzie's SFIS records, it appears that she blossomed during this period of her life. Report cards show an unvarying string of A's for art and drama classes, and she was a "good member" of the Dramatic Club.<sup>4</sup> Yazzie apparently enjoyed all of the creative arts; alongside art and drama Yazzie also loved music and listed that subject uppermost as one of her "special aptitudes."<sup>5</sup> Handwritten remarks indicate that she was "an excellent student" and the

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<sup>2</sup> Sybil Lansing Yazzie was also known as Sybil Tachimi Yazzie on some SFIS records. After her marriage sometime between 1937 and 1951, Yazzie assumed the surname "Baldwin." Sybil Yazzie, Student Case File, Santa Fe Indian School Records, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Denver Federal Records Center, Broomfield, Colorado.

<sup>3</sup> Again, like the other artists included within this study, Yazzie had only a general idea of the Western year of her birth. School records list 1916 and 1917; Yazzie claimed 1918. Sybil Yazzie, Student Case File, Santa Fe Indian School Records, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Denver Federal Records Center, Broomfield, Colorado. Incidentally, Kee Yazzie, Sybil's younger brother, also attended Studio classes and became a close friend of artist Quincy Tahoma.

<sup>4</sup> Sybil Yazzie, Student Case File, Santa Fe Indian School Records, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Denver Federal Records Center, Broomfield, Colorado.

<sup>5</sup> Sybil Yazzie, "Personnel Card, United Pueblos Agency," Student Case File, Santa Fe Indian School Records, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Denver Federal Records Center, Broomfield, Colorado.

limited correspondence in her school files show that she grew quite close to at least one of her instructors there, a Mrs. Brannon, with whom she remained in touch even after graduation.

A letter Yazzie mailed to Brannon shortly after leaving the SFIS reveals Yazzie's sense of loss and loneliness; it also denotes her desire to continue her education. In beautiful, even penmanship, the former student wrote, "Thinking of not returning back to Santa Fe seems rather sad and lonely. But I guess if graduating means part—we have to. It certainly is hard for us to forget the kind faithful teachers and friends whom we meet and has helped us gladly through our work." Yazzie continued her letter by requesting information regarding a two-year post-graduate teacher training course. She further mentioned that she might also be interested in post-graduate art instruction with "Miss Dunn, but I'm not sure of that."<sup>6</sup> School records stand silent as to the reason or reasons why, but it is clear that Yazzie never reenrolled at the SFIS. In 1951, the now-married Sybil Yazzie Baldwin again wrote to the school requesting her transcripts as she was considering attending Arizona State College (now Northern Arizona University), and in 1969 Yazzie wrote once more to the SFIS, this time asking that her transcripts be sent to the newly opened Navajo Community College.<sup>7</sup> It is unclear whether or not Yazzie ever earned her degree, but records from the Arizona State College prove her tenacity; she was enrolled in classes during the summers of 1951 and 1968, and again in the spring of 1970, the spring semester the following year, and then the entire school year of 1971–1972.<sup>8</sup>

It is, perhaps, understandable that Yazzie waxed nostalgic for the SFIS and periodically attempted to return to the academic sphere. Her time spent at the SFIS must have been quite

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<sup>6</sup> Letter from Sybil Yazzie, Chin Lee, Arizona, to Mrs. Brannon, July 2, 1937, Student Case File, Santa Fe Indian School Records, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Denver Federal Records Center, Broomfield, Colorado.

<sup>7</sup> Sybil Yazzie, Student Case File, Santa Fe Indian School Records, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Denver Federal Records Center, Broomfield, Colorado. Now Northern Arizona University, in 1951 Arizona State College, located in Flagstaff, was a small teachers college.

<sup>8</sup> Brandi Eddings, e-mail message to author, February 3, 2016.

rewarding and exciting. Dunn thought very highly of Yazzie as an artist and included her work in many of her student art shows, including a 1934 exhibit at the Museum of New Mexico. In her review of the exhibition, Olive Rush wrote that “The Navajo girls are showing their mettle, Sybil Yazzie with sensitive charming watercolors of Navajo women on horseback and of women carding and spinning wool.”<sup>9</sup> At the following year’s museum show, Yazzie again earned praise; reviewer Frederic Douglas remarked that she was one of the exhibit’s “outstanding painters” and went on to say, “Feasting at Yeibeichai, by Sybil Yazzie is an excellent example of the modern trend toward genre subjects.”<sup>10</sup> Olive Rush returned to write the review for the fifth annual student art show at the museum and said of Yazzie, “Color dances and exalts. . . in “Gift Giving” by Sibyl [sic] Yazzie of Rough Rock who has developed a miniature style of great beauty.”<sup>11</sup> In her book, Dunn remembered Yazzie as a painter who “excelled in miniature,” as “scores of horses and human figures filled her paintings so rich in color and imaginative in statement.” Dunn continued, “Her broadly inclusive ceremonials would shine in the dark or sparkle in the sunlight; she had a gift for selecting the right color hues and values for chosen occasions. Within the larger patterns, her tiny motifs of necklaces, bracelets, belts, hatbands, harnesses, fringes, and like adornments studded each scene with meticulously wrought decoration.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Olive Rush, as quoted in Dunn, *American Indian Painting*, 276.

<sup>10</sup> Frederic H. Douglas, as quoted in Dunn, *American Indian Painting*, 280.

<sup>11</sup> Olive Rush, as quoted in Dunn, *American Indian Painting*, 312. It is unclear why Rush listed Yazzie as hailing from Rough Rock, a community that lies around twenty-five miles from Chinle. Yazzie invariably listed Chinle (or “Chin Lee”) as her place of birth and residence. However, the vastness of the Navajo lands and the scattering of the homesteads do not preclude the possibility that Yazzie’s family home was nearer to Rough Rock than Chinle proper.

<sup>12</sup> Dunn, *American Indian Painting*, 301.

Indeed, many of the extant images created by Yazzie display both wistfulness and great love for her Diné culture and homelands. While the male artists, even Begay who so assiduously painted depictions of Navajo women and sheep, frequently painted with one eye toward self-expression and the other toward commercial success, Yazzie's paintings appear almost vulnerable in their straightforward representation of Yazzie's memories of her Navajo upbringing and heritage—especially poignant in light of her future tenuous position as a relatively educated Diné woman readjusting to life on the reservation. This makes them no less sophisticated or, quite simply, beautiful, but it does beg the question: did Yazzie understand that a career as a professional artist was out of reach for her? Did she, then, paint simply to bring to life those most treasured images of her Navajo culture? If such is the case, then one could argue that Yazzie's painting, in contrast to that of her male classmates, was the most "authentic" and the least influenced by the White market.

Like Yazzie, SFIS Studio classmate Ruth Watchman also enjoyed her sojourn at the Indian school. In fact, a telling letter written in 1937 seems to indicate that she, even more than Yazzie, felt out of place and at a loss upon her return home from school. After arriving that morning, Watchman penned this agitated four-page letter to the SFIS superintendent Chester Faris requesting an immediate return to the school and writing that she wished to leave because, "those peoples that around my home are sure lier [sic] and tell tailer. They been telling lies on me ever since June." Watchman continued, "I sure don't like it Mr. Faris. I don't have good time either. I really want to go back to my favorite school Santa Fe, please let me know if you want

for me to go back over there.” Watchman concluded her missive by writing, “All my home people sure can talk about school girls. They sure are against me.”<sup>13</sup>

Although more is at play here, it is certainly the case that Watchman came to the SFIS from severely straitened and possibly unhappy circumstances. On her enrollment application for the SFIS, a school official wrote “very limited” on the line indicating family financial resources. Born circa 1917 to Peter and Zonnie Lee, Watchman had already attended a succession of schools before enrolling in the SFIS in 1931. After completing first through third grade at the Fort Defiance Indian School, Watchman’s parents transferred her to the Charles H. Burke Indian School at Fort Wingate, New Mexico, for fifth grade, and then relocated her once again to the Fort Defiance School for sixth grade. It seems the young Watchman battled the scourge of the early twentieth-century Navajo Reservation, trachoma, during that period and her contagion often made her unwelcome around other students. Indeed, at her induction into the SFIS, she continued to struggle with the eye disease—a disease that, according to the World Health Organization functions as a by-product of poverty and occurs when “people live in overcrowded conditions with limited access to water and health care.”<sup>14</sup>

In spite of her early challenges, while at the SFIS Watchman revealed both a sense of humor and rare artistic talent. On a “psychological examination” administered upon the occasion of Watchman’s 1935 graduation (apparently standard school practice), question four of the “complete the sentence with the missing word” section asked for a six-letter word to finish this phrase: “One who lives alone in a desert or some other solitary place is called a \_\_\_\_\_.”

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<sup>13</sup> Letter from Ruth Watchman, Fort Defiance, AZ, to Chester E. Faris, July 28, 1934, Ruth Watchman, Students’ School Folders, Santa Fe Indian School Records, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Denver Federal Records Center, Broomfield, Colorado.

<sup>14</sup> Ruth Watchman, Students’ School Folders, Santa Fe Indian School Records, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Denver Federal Records Center, Broomfield, Colorado; “Water Sanitation and Health: Water-Related Diseases,” *World Health Organization*, 2016, accessed February 3, 2016. [www.who.int/water\\_sanitation\\_health/diseases/trachoma/en/](http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/diseases/trachoma/en/).

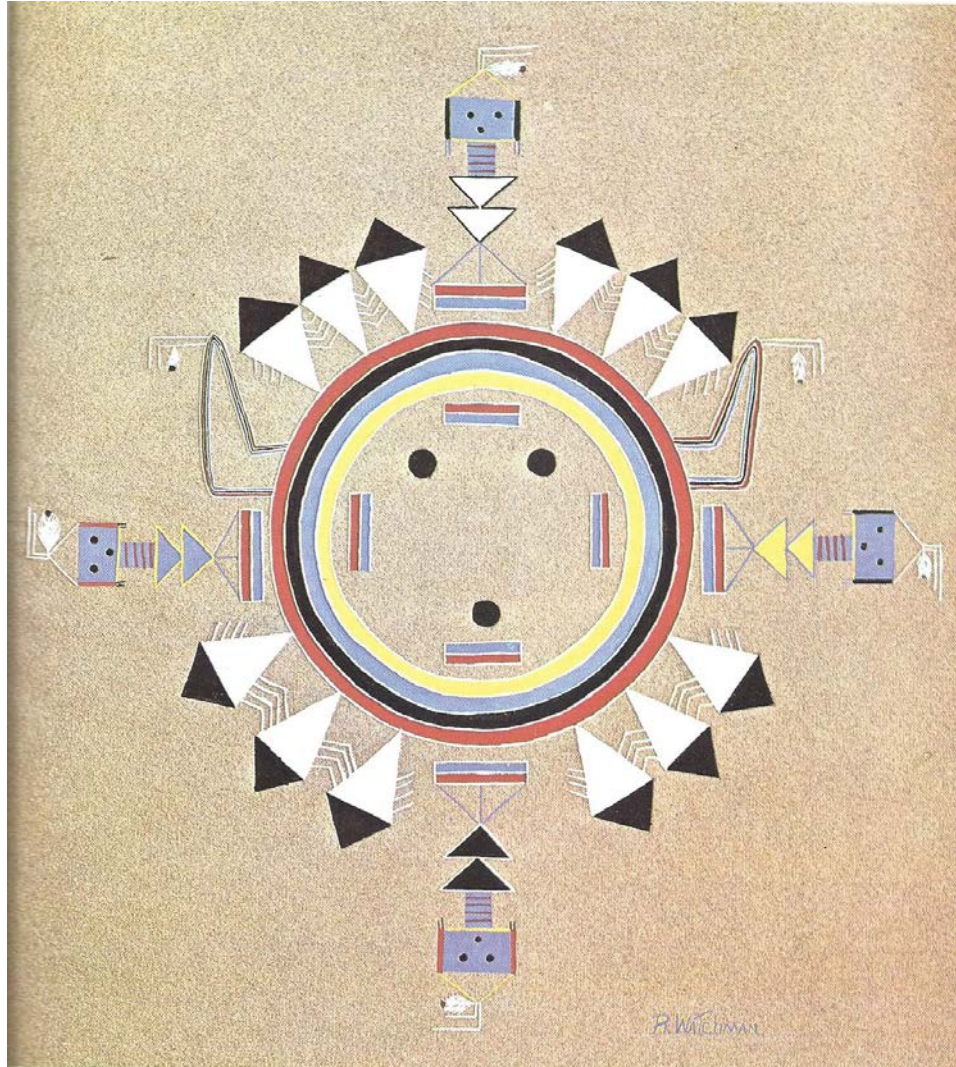
Watchman, undoubtedly with a smile upon her face, wrote “Navajo” rather than the expected “hermit.”<sup>15</sup> In her final year at the SFIS, Watchman enrolled in Dunn’s Studio art class, earning an A, and her talent impressed Dunn even during the limited time that they interacted. Gleaning her inspiration from Navajo sand paintings, Watchman often translated traditional Diné designs into paint. Dunn wrote of Watchman that she was a “research technician in design.” Unlike her fellow Navajo classmates, “She seemed to care little for painting the pictorial aspects of Navajo life but set for herself the task of studying the patterns of the sandpaintings and of creating a technique whereby characteristic elements of these fleeting designs might be permanently captured.” Dunn concluded by stating that Watchman “worked with plaster and sand and true earth pigments until she admirably achieved her purpose. Her paintings were miniature sandpaintings, authentic in design, color, and texture.”<sup>16</sup> After her 1935 graduation, Watchman fell out of the SFIS Studio and Santa Fe modern Indian art world; no mention is made of her in any of the pertaining discourse following that time.

Few of Watchman’s paintings remain within public view, but from Dunn’s comment as well as the extant pictures, it seems that the young Diné woman chose interestingly different subject matter from that of her fellow Navajo painters. We may only speculate as to her reasons why, but perhaps, like Yazzie, Watchman understood that for her a career as a professional painter was unlikely, and it may also be the case that, judging from her irreverent sense of humor, Watchman understood that a woman depicting sand painting imagery would strike a chord amongst the conservative Diné community.

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<sup>15</sup> Ruth Watchman, Students’ School Folders, Santa Fe Indian School Records, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Denver Federal Records Center, Broomfield, Colorado.

<sup>16</sup> Dunn, *American Indian Painting*, 301.



**Figure 5.1: Cat. 53978/13. *Navajo Sun*, by Ruth Watchman, Navajo, ca. 1934. Dorothy Dunn Collection, Museum of Indian Arts & Culture, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe.**

And what of the final painter mentioned in this chapter's introduction: Mary Ellen? It hardly seems possible in light of the relatively scant information available on Yazzie and Watchman, but even less documentation exists regarding her, even in light of her important contribution as one of the first Navajo artists to paint Diné sacred ceremonies in watercolor.<sup>17</sup> Alongside her classmates, Mary Ellen exhibited widely, and her paintings reveal a sophistication

<sup>17</sup> Patricia Janis Broder, *Earth Songs, Moon Dreams: Paintings by American Indian Women* (New York: St. Martin's, 1999), 86.

that much other Studio output lacks. Dunn asserted that the artist “Chose for herself [a] difficult problem—that of painting, side by side in a single scene, the temporal personages of the Navajo world and the extremely conventionalized plants of the sandpaintings. By intensifying colors of the plants and rooting them to earth, while lowering the color values and immobilizing the action of the human figures, she approached compatibility in such diverse components.”<sup>18</sup> A 1950 article written by Anne Forbes for *El Palacio* describes Mary Ellen as an artist who “painted charming pictures while at school but now apparently has ceased painting.”<sup>19</sup> There is no record of her painting after 1950.

Indeed, there is also no record of Mary Ellen as a student at the SFIS. It seems likely that she painted under an assumed name, perhaps because she feared censure from her fellow Diné for depicting ceremonial themes. Although the Navajo culture tended toward tolerance regarding the sharing of traditional legendry and ceremony, especially when compared to some of the Pueblo groups, the consensus nevertheless frowned upon a general dissemination of many of the Navajos’ most sacred rites. Yet, from the extant corpus of work Mary Ellen produced, little would appear to violate those unwritten laws of secrecy. It is not outside of the realm of possibility, however, that different standards applied to male and female Navajo artists, both inside and outside Dinétah.

Navajo women were not alone in facing gender discrimination within the wider art community. Women artists of every ethnicity, including White women, struggled to achieve legitimacy during the first half of the twentieth century. This was true within the Indian Service, as well; while women such as Dunn and her colleague, arts and crafts instructor Mabel Morrow,

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<sup>18</sup> Dunn, *American Indian Painting*, 301.

<sup>19</sup> Anne Forbes, “A Survey of Current Indian Pueblo Painting,” *El Palacio* 57, no. 8 (August 1950), 249.

consciously included and encouraged their female students, more powerful individuals within the institution often stymied their efforts. Kenneth Chapman, for example, although having championed Dunn and her mission to teach fine art at the SFIS, nevertheless regarded women illustrators and teachers as subpar. Writing in his capacity as “Special Consultant” to the Indian Arts and Crafts Board, Chapman mentioned to Director of Education Willard Beatty regarding the illustrations for an Indian School primer: “It is quite natural that a woman should have given the commission to some of the girls. Having worked alongside women illustrators in Montgomery Ward’s and other catalog jobs over 40 years ago, I came early to the conclusion,



**Figure 5.2: Cat. 54003/13. *Navajo Women with Corn*, by Mary Ellen, Navajo, 1941. Margretta S. Dietrich Collection, Museum of Indian Arts & Culture, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe.**

strengthened as I size up their work in the perspective of these many years, that it is a mistake to require anything factual of them, outside of their own interests. Most women illustrators, as you

know, dress their men in comic misfit clothes and show only the vaguest knowledge or interest in things structural or mechanical.”<sup>20</sup>

Within the fine art world, women encountered similar biases, and by the 1950s, the art world essentially barricaded itself from all artists save White males. Witness the efforts, for example, of Meret Oppenheim who during the 1920s achieved fleeting fame after exhibiting her creation, “Fur-covered Cup, Saucer, and Spoon” yet never managed to ascend to the levels of her surrealist cadre, which included Man Ray (for whom she posed) and her lover Max Ernst. Or, we might consider the Mexican painter Frida Kahlo as she attempted during the 1930s to establish a life and career for herself both in New York and Mexico that was separate from her husband, muralist and painter Diego Rivera. As a final example, we could look at the uneven relationship during the 1940s and 1950s between artist Lee Krasner and her tortured, alcoholic husband Jackson Pollock—while Pollock achieved fame, Krasner gamely held down the fort and quietly continued to paint throughout her long life. In an interview, Krasner recalled, “I happened to be Mrs. Jackson Pollock and that’s a mouthful. . . I was a woman, Jewish, a widow, a damn good painter, thank you, and a little too independent.”<sup>21</sup> Indeed, post-World War II United States proved even less accommodating to women artists than before as the male-dominated genre of abstract expressionism took hold. Art historian Erika Doss contended that the climate shunned the “abstract aesthetics of many postwar women artists, including sculptors Louise Nevelson and Louise Bourgeois, and painters Elaine de Kooning, Grace Hartigan, Joan Mitchell, [and] Helen Frankenthaler” along with Krasner, because “Standard postwar accounts of Abstract Expressionism cast it as an art of violence and virility, its practitioners as heroic men of

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<sup>20</sup> Letter from Kenneth M. Chapman, Santa Fe, NM, to Willard W. Beatty, transcript in the hand of Kenneth Chapman, Kenneth M. Chapman Collection, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM.

<sup>21</sup> Jessica Shaffer, “Lee Krasner,” *The Art Story*, 2016, accessed February 3, 2016.  
<http://www.theartstory.org/artist-krasner-lee.htm>.

action.”<sup>22</sup> Again, Krasner poignantly summed up the hostile climate women artists encountered by stating simply, “I didn’t fit in.”<sup>23</sup>

Unquestionably, the postwar fine art sphere, now centered in New York, overwhelmingly employed a masculinist discourse that often pushed women and minorities of both sexes to the sidelines or, especially in the case of women, objectified them as deconstructed subject matter. A look at Willem de Kooning’s *Woman and Bicycle*, painted in 1952 and 1953, depicts a horrific and monstrous abstracted woman, whose most recognizable features are her tremendously large breasts (centered in the composition) and her oversized eyes and lips. De Kooning referred to this figure as his “idolized” woman, and critics such as Thomas B. Hess agreed. Hess maintained that “*Woman* and the pictures related to it should be fixed to the sides of trucks, or used as highway signs, like those more-than-beautiful girls with their eternal smiles who do not tempt, but simply point to a few words or a gadget. . . . The smile is not fearful, aggressive, particularly significant, or even expressive of what the smiler feels. It is the detached, semi-human way to meet the world, and because of this detachment it has a touching irony and humanity.” Hess concluded by comparing de Kooning’s objectified, de-anthropomorphized woman to “the Greek Kouros and the medieval Virgin.”<sup>24</sup>

Of course, Indian artists had already experienced many decades of gendered discourse that worked to feminize them and infantilize them, but the newly muscular United States, now in a position of global political and cultural primacy, translated its pugnacity into forms compatible

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<sup>22</sup> Erika Doss, *Twentieth-Century American Art* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2002), 135. In her book Doss provides a much more thorough and trenchant analysis of the sexism inherent within this movement and time period.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Patricia Hills, *Modern Art in the USA: Issues and Controversies of the Twentieth Century* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001), 156.

with all cultural production.<sup>25</sup> Ironically, abstract expressionists such as Pollock, Adolph Gottlieb, and Barnett Newman often compared their work to Indigenous production, seeking to align themselves to primitivism they perceived as “pure” and the antithesis to bourgeois kitsch.<sup>26</sup> For example, Pollock compared his drip-style technique, for which he staged his canvases on the floor, to “the method of the Indian sand painters of the West,” and Newman equated his search for the “pure idea” to Kwakiutl artists’ paintings that represented a “ritualistic will towards metaphysical understanding.”<sup>27</sup> Yet while these men sought to distance themselves from the banality of realism and envisioned their work as a response to postwar mediocrity, they nevertheless functioned as a tightly restricted boys’ club that disdained both women and minority artist members.

To be sure, postwar United States witnessed a world in flux, especially for women and minorities. While this was an era of explosive economic growth and many within the White middle class saw their incomes rise by as much as 70 percent, it was also a time when women were slotted into confining societal roles that allowed little individual freedom of expression. Indeed, as suburbs gobbled up the countryside, relocated housewives often found themselves with less leisure time, little family support, and fewer resources than ever before. Furthermore, racism continued to play a central role in 1940s and 1950s America as African Americans remained relegated to now-declining urban areas and Termination and Indian Relocation plans attempted to end the reservation system once and for all through a renewed push for assimilation.

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<sup>25</sup> See chapter four of this study for more on the gendered discourse that surrounded Native American art and artists.

<sup>26</sup> Hills, *Modern Art in the USA*, 172. This was also nothing particularly new. White artists had been appropriating Indian art and imagery for over half a century already. Take, for example, the subject matter of the Taos Society of Artists, Southwest visitor Robert Henri, early twentieth-century modernists such as Andrew Dasburg, and New Mexico transplant John Sloan—all of whom felt perfectly justified in painting Indians and including traditional Native imagery in their pictures. (Indians painting White people, however, was a different matter altogether. The relatively few examples that exist caused considerable discomfort amongst the non-Indian population. See, for example, Gerald Naylor’s painting of White tourists, discussed in chapter three of this study.)

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 170, 172–73.

Thus, Navajo artists who were both female and non-White encountered an inordinate amount of obstacles, especially when attempting to cut through both mainstream and Diné societal barriers.

Part of the issue for Navajo women artists revolved around the taxonomy that organized arts and crafts and fine art into separate and hierarchical categories. Paralleling and complimenting the persistent gendering and racializing of Native art and artists was the notion that men created fine art and women produced crafts. Thus, while the affluent White hegemony had an extensive and comfortable history purchasing rugs and blankets woven by Diné women, this did not translate into a commensurate market for female-produced easel art. The converse of this ideology may be seen in the relatively low demand for weavings originating from the Hopi community, where the weavers traditionally were, and remain, men. Furthermore, discourse foreclosed individuality to artisans or crafters. Leah Dilworth asserted that “the myth of the artisan” demands that he or she not be “an artist in the romantic tradition; he is not an excessively individualistic genius but acts and exists within circumscribed social structures that limit his creativity.” Moreover, the crafter or artisan “produces objects of utility that meet societal demands, rather than things that please only his imagination.”<sup>28</sup>

Along with mainstream society’s and the fine art world’s prevailing sexism, as well as discursive barriers that saw Native women as crafters rather than artists, female Navajo painters had to contend with a traditional culture that, while positioning both men and women on equal social standing, nevertheless generally slotted them into rigid gender roles that allowed little space for a woman striving to live her life outside Diné expectations. An examination of Navajo conceptions of personhood and gender help us to understand the difficulties Yazzie, Watchman,

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<sup>28</sup> Leah Dilworth, *Imagining Indians in the Southwest: Persistent Visions of a Primitive Past* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 146.

and Mary Ellen may have encountered as they attempted to create identities for themselves as artists.

Certainly, equality and, in some sense, fluidity run like threads throughout every aspect of Diné culture and philosophy; their conceptions of personhood and gender reflect this.<sup>29</sup> The Navajo creation story reveals a sense of gender parity and flexibility, too; many variations exist, but all essentially agree on the roles assigned to men and women. After progression through a series of underworlds, the *Diyin Dine'é*, or Navajo holy people, created First Man and First Woman in Dinétah, a region bound by the four sacred mountains, two of which are male and two female. Over time, First Woman and First Man's progeny populated the earth, and initially all was well.<sup>30</sup> The men and women worked together to perpetuate their comfortable farming and hunting subsistence; women farmed and men hunted. Soon, however, a quarrel occurred between First Man and First Woman over the importance of their respective sex's societal contributions, this argument overturned their previously harmonious state and precipitated a physical separation of the sexes. The men gathered up their possessions and moved across a large river opposite the women. This segregation lasted for a considerable period of time, and both men and women suffered, although the men fared better, as they had brought *Nádleehé*, a male-bodied woman, with them to perform women's duties.<sup>31</sup> *Nádleehé* cooked for them and instructed the men on how to farm, but the men became increasingly lonely, as did the women. Eventually, both parties agreed to a truce whereby women retained dominance in the domestic sphere and the men's bailiwick consisted of the hunt and the ceremonial realm.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Carolyn Epple, "Coming to Terms with Navajo 'nádleehí': A Critique of 'berdache,' 'Gay,' 'Alternate Gender,' and 'Two-Spirit'" *American Ethnologist* 25, no. 2 (May 1998): 268.

<sup>30</sup> Gilpin, *Enduring Navajo*, 4–6.

<sup>31</sup> Maureen Trudelle Schwarz, *Blood and Voice: Navajo Women Ceremonial Practitioners* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003), 20–21.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

This origin story reveals a number of points about gender in Navajo culture; namely, it illustrates their inherent equality. In Navajo eyes, coexistence incorporating mutual respect is mandatory for survival. Indeed, it is worth mentioning that the men and women of their creation story negotiated their roles; neither men alone nor gods assigned them. Anthropologist Maureen Trudelle Schwarz summed up: “The hardships and failures of life during the separation ultimately proved that neither sex can exist without the other, and this reunion symbolizes the complementary roles of men and women.”<sup>33</sup> It also highlights the Diné worldview based on harmony, balance, and duality; in all things, every living and non-living entity, there exists a balance between male and female. When unsettled, this imbalance creates disharmony and strife.<sup>34</sup> Many of the paintings produced by the Navajo artists from the Studio illustrate this fluidity; women appear as primary actors, but there is also a sense of androgyny inherent in the characters. The Navajo figures depicted often display interchangeable features and in general the artists did not clearly delineate gendered bodies. Gerald Nailor’s 1942 painting of six men dancing provides a telling example of this tendency. Although Nailor painted with remarkable detail, differentiating each dancer’s tunic and head sash, he chose a homologous and gender-neutral template for their faces and bodies. These men might just as easily pass for women wearing traditional men’s clothing.

Interestingly, hermaphrodites, or *nádleehe*, figure prominently in Navajo legend as well, offering further evidence of the significance of gender balance in this culture. Individuals with such an overt blending of male and female characteristics garner respect rather than ridicule, and for the Navajo all humans are composed of an intermingling of the feminine and the masculine.<sup>35</sup> *Nádleehe* is impossible to translate, as “hermaphrodite” fails to encompass the nuances of the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Seymour, *When the Rainbow Touches Down*, 65, 73.

<sup>35</sup> Schwarz, “Snakes in the Ladies’ Room,” 613.

term, as do the words “gay” and “berdache.” Instead, Carolyn Epple argued that, unique to the Navajo outlook, there is a sense of the fluidity of the term. She asserted that the Diné worldview “seems to place more emphasis on situation-based definitions than on fixed categories.”<sup>36</sup> This concept of a dually-gendered nature, though altered as Navajos have become more entrenched in mainstream culture, still resonates today. Perhaps more importantly, however, Navajo creation myths specifically gender labor and put women at the center of animal husbandry and the home. At the conclusion of the mythic separation of the sexes, both men and women agreed to their assigned roles, and as women maintained control over the domestic arena, the care of sheep and goats thus became their province while men became the soldiers, healers, and artists.

Thus, as the Diné labored to maintain their culture and traditions even as a considerable measure of their autonomy slipped away in the face of increasing governmental intervention through, first, the herd reductions and soil conservation plans of the 1930s and 1940s and then the 1950s push toward assimilation, it is not surprising that women—always the mainstay of the Navajo community—bore the brunt of censure for moving outside societal norms. For Sybil Yazzie, this translated into difficulties pursuing her education while the family business and the rearing of her children demanded her attention. For Mary Ellen, this may have meant that she painted under an assumed name, and ceased painting entirely upon leaving school, in order to depict the Diné ceremonial themes of her choice. In Ruth Watchman’s case, her decision to recreate Navajo sand paintings flew in the face of societal taboos that sometimes forbid, or at the very least, frowned upon women performing these rites. Although women, of course, frequently observed rituals that centered on sand painting, their participation tended to be limited to

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<sup>36</sup> Epple, “Coming to Terms with Navajo ‘Nádleehí,’” 268.

observation alone. Indeed, within the Navajo community female *hataalii* are rare and were even more uncommon, accordingly to White anthropologists, during the early twentieth century.<sup>37</sup>

While few avenues existed for Navajo women to pursue fine art careers, it is nevertheless the case that involvement in Indian lives and Indian fine art provided a means of empowerment for many White women, especially during the early decades of the twentieth century. Margaret Jacobs cogently argued that the upheavals of this period caused many affluent, educated White women to question their societal roles and to imagine themselves as active participants in both the public and the private spheres. She further maintained that championing the Indigenous populations, especially in the American Southwest, provided an arena by which these women could both reinvent themselves and “reenvision womanhood.” Jacobs stated, “To the white women who journeyed, sojourned, or settled in New Mexico after World War I, the region represented a refuge from modernity, gender restrictions, sexual conventions, and racial prejudice.”<sup>38</sup> However, as Jacobs pointed out, upon arrival in this perceived utopia, many of these women, through their efforts, indelibly inscribed change upon the surrounding Navajo and Pueblo communities even as white antimodernists such as Dunn and Dietrich strove through political and social means to preserve Native cultures. This impacted Native women, perhaps even more than men, as non-Indian educators imposed their unquestioned notions of gender upon Indian women while, conflictingly, White women projected their desires for political and social autonomy on to the Native female population. At the same time, another wrinkle caused by antimodernists who strove to perpetuate the “primitivism” of both Indian art and Indians further

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<sup>37</sup> For more on this, see Schwarz, *Blood and Voice*.

<sup>38</sup> Margaret D. Jacobs, *Gendered Encounters: Feminism and Pueblo Cultures 1879–1934* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 22. For more on this correlation of White female empowerment via involvement in Native American lives and the appropriation of Native American culture, see Molly H. Mullin, *Culture in the Marketplace: Gender, Art, and Value in the American Southwest* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

complicated the roles of Native women; as Indian schools disseminated information that subjugated women's traditional roles and educated White women imparted their own views of female empowerment, antimodernist art buyers and critics demanded that Native artists continue to produce work that conformed to their need for primitivism as a counter to modernity. In 1924, for instance, socialite, reformer, and art buyer Amelia White, wrote urging the organizer of the Gallup Inter-Tribal Ceremonial to "confine it to primitive Indians. The so-called educated ones . . . get to be rather tiresome."<sup>39</sup> Jacobs succinctly summed up the dilemma of Native women during this period when she wrote that the White female elite allowed them "two stark choices"—to either "become just like us or stay just the way you are (or, more accurately, the way we imagine you to be)."<sup>40</sup>

Thus, we can see that for Navajo women such as Yazzie, Watchman, and Mary Ellen, opportunities for professional careers as painters were virtually non-existent. Even for those very few Pueblo Indian women who were able to break, at least marginally, through the barriers precluding entry into the realm of fine art, life was not easy. Pablita Velarde (or Tsa Tsa, Santa Clara Pueblo), perhaps the most successful Indian woman painter of that generation, struggled to gain legitimacy and throughout her long career faced both tribal censure and, although her paintings now sell for many thousands of dollars, public indifference as she attempted to sell her pictures to tourists for a few dollars each. Pop Chalee (or Merina Lujan, Taos Pueblo), although credited with inspiring Walt Disney to create his Bambi character after a visit to her Santa Fe Studio, eventually saw her art become synonymous with the degradation of the Studio method. Indeed, detractors in the 1960s and 1970s often referred to Studio art as "Bambi art"—pointing

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>40</sup> Jacobs, *Gendered Encounters*, 184.

indirectly as Pop Chalee's work as all that was most objectionable about the genre.<sup>41</sup> It was not due to a lack of talent that left artists such as Yazzie, Watchman, and Mary Ellen out of that cohort of Navajo painters who succeeded post-Studio. Nor was it due to neglect on the part of Dunn, who strove for inclusivity on behalf of her female students. Ultimately, it was the combined forces of a male-dominated art world and two strongly gendered cultures that shut doors for these women, even while it sometimes opened doors for their White counterparts, each of whom eventually returned to lives in Dinétah that more easily fit into the expectations of both White and Native societies.

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<sup>41</sup> Joseph Traugott, "Native American Artists and the Postmodern Cultural Divide," *Art Journal* 51, no. 3 (Autumn 1992), 36.

## Chapter 6: The Changing Style of Narciso Abeyta



**Figure 6.1: Narciso Abeyta, c. 1935, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM.**

Unlike his classmates Nailor, Begay, and Tahoma, the enormously talented Narciso Platero Abeyta (Ha-So-De or Ha-So-Deh, meaning “Fiercely Ascending”) left correspondence behind that not only marks Abeyta as erudite and articulate, but aids in our understanding of him and the challenges he faced. Because he led a relatively long life and reentered the public consciousness during the twilight of his career, Abeyta and his work provide us with rare insight

into the evolution of the Studio style, as well as a glimpse at the long-term ramifications of the restrictive yet opportune environment in which all of these artists began their careers.

Like Tahoma, Abeyta entered the SFIS as a young boy fresh off the reservation, but in spite of the fact that he was born in a one-room hogan and the youngest of five siblings, Abeyta's family was unusual in its early and advantageous interaction with the White world. Indeed, although Abeyta lost his father at a young age, leaving his uneducated, widowed mother to care for the relatively large family, Abeyta's oldest brother George attended the University of New Mexico for two years and worked as a construction foreman. In some sense this difference is one that colored Narciso's life throughout and continued as he successfully straddled both worlds, Navajo and White.

Abeyta was born in Cañoncito, New Mexico, circa 1918, and began his boarding school education at the tender age of either four or seven.<sup>1</sup> In 1935, he began studying under Dunn at the Studio while also learning silversmithing techniques at the SFIS. Abeyta excelled at school, lettering on the SFIS boxing team and participating in the glee club; overall he earned good grades, especially and not surprisingly in art and "silvercraft," and his report card displayed such comments as "serious student." While completing a year of post-graduate studies in studio painting and silversmithing, Abeyta received the coveted Faris Award in both subjects.<sup>2</sup> At Dunn's encouragement, Abeyta launched his career as a professional artist during his first year of attendance by illustrating Hoffman Birney's children's book, *Ay-Chee, Son of the Desert*. Other opportunities and accolades followed as he exhibited his work in numerous national and

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<sup>1</sup> While most of the sources, in particular the secondary sources, I looked at marked his birth year as 1918, on a brief exhibition biography written in 1951 Abeyta himself scratched out the year "1918" and handwrote "1921." It is possible that, like the other artists discussed here, he was unsure of his actual date of birth. Likewise, on Abeyta's school records three dates of birth are listed: 1914 (crossed out), 1921 (crossed out), and 1918.

<sup>2</sup> Narciso Abeyta, Record of Pupil in School, Student Case Files, Santa Fe Indian School, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Denver Federal Records Center, Broomfield, Colorado.

international exhibitions. That same year, Dunn, working alongside French artist Paul Coze, included his work among the one hundred watercolors exhibited at the Trocadero Institute of Ethnology in Paris.<sup>3</sup> When Dunn exited the SFIS two years later, Abeyta assisted her successor, Gerónima Cruz Montoya, instructing other art students at the Studio. Nineteen thirty-nine marked a banner year for Abeyta as he won an advertising poster contest for the Indian Court at the Federal Building installation of the Golden Gate International Exposition and was selected to demonstrate painting techniques at the Exposition's Treasure Island Fair.<sup>4</sup> In addition, he worked with several other renowned Native artists, including Harrison Begay, to produce murals for John Gaw Meem at the architect's newly constructed Maisel Trading Post in Albuquerque.<sup>5</sup> After his 1939 graduation from the Indian school, Abeyta attended a summer session of Somerset Art School in Pennsylvania and received a scholarship to study art at Stanford University beginning in fall 1941.<sup>6</sup>

But from this impressive and auspicious beginning, life took a turn for the worse as Abeyta encountered challenges outside of his control. Thinking he would avoid conscription and finish his military service before the onset of his Stanford education, Abeyta enlisted in the army. The United States' entry into World War II at the end of that year signaled four years of active duty instead and the resultant loss of his scholarship. Writing from the Pacific Front in 1943 to Margretta Dietrich in her role as de facto leader of the NMAIA Indian Club, Abeyta wistfully remembered happier times, "Often recall the last exhibit of Harrison [Begay], Quincy [Tahoma], and my paintings. The day we used clothespins?" and mentioned his dashed plans, "With a

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<sup>3</sup> Winona Garmhausen, *History of Indian Arts Education in Santa Fe* (Santa Fe, NM: Sunstone Press, 1988), 54.

<sup>4</sup> Narciso Abeyta, Biographical sketch, January 1951, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM.

<sup>5</sup> Dunn, *American Indian Painting*, 318–19.

<sup>6</sup> Snodgrass, *American Indian Painters*, 1.

scholarship at Stanford University in the fall of '41 things looked 'gay.' Until we thought it best to get a year of service in after conscription was passed. That was before war was declared. Well, this is where I'm finally at."<sup>7</sup> Abeyta's stoicism belied his intense and traumatic war experience, forecasted earlier by a Navajo *hatalii* during the Enemy Way ceremony he participated in shortly before reporting for duty.<sup>8</sup> Participation in both the invasions of Iwo Jima and Okinawa as a United States Army Ranger demolition instructor left the artist shell-shocked and largely unable to paint for many years afterward.<sup>9</sup>

Although the United States government never acknowledged its role in Abeyta's post-war emotional condition, he nevertheless attempted to pick up the pieces of his life upon his return to the States. Once back in New Mexico, he took advantage of the G.I. Bill to enroll in the University of New Mexico's art program and while there studied under transcendental abstractionist Raymond Jonson and fellow modernist Lez Haas. Before completing his undergraduate degree in 1952, he began courting Sylvia Ann Warder, a fellow student, Santa Fe socialite, and divorcee with three children.<sup>10</sup> Whether the Santa Fe elite approved of their interracial marriage a year later is difficult to determine; however, a letter written to Dunn from Dietrich in 1953 includes this somewhat salacious passage:

Had you heard that Narcisco [sic] Abeyta married Sylvia Ann Warder? (one of the Brownell-Howland adopted daughters) She married first Wm. Warder who was also a student at the univ— His mother was ½ Spanish & ½ Indian (don't know tribe) so the 3 Warder children are 1/8 Indian—Warder divorced her. Sylvia went back to the univ this summer to finish getting a degree—married Narcisco & they are supposed to be in Gallup now. . . . Sylvia is elfin like—a trial to her

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<sup>7</sup> Letter from Narciso Abeyta, January 17, 1943, and May 29, 1943, to Margretta Dietrich and the New Mexico Association on Indian Affairs, Santa Fe, NM., World War II Scrapbook, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM.

<sup>8</sup> Tony Abeyta, in discussion with the author, September 2015.

<sup>9</sup> David Carlson, "'Weekend Job' has made Painter Famous" June 8, 1984, *Gallup Daily Independent*; Snodgrass, *American Indian Painters*, 1.

<sup>10</sup> Brody, *Indian Painters*, 152; Carlson, "'Weekend Job'"; letter from Margretta Dietrich, Santa Fe, NM to Dorothy Dunn, March 2, 1953, transcript in the hand of Dorothy Dunn Kramer, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM.

mothers who have great satisfaction out of the other completely conventional daughter.<sup>11</sup>

A veneer of titillation and disapproval coats Dietrich's letter, indicating that those same Indian rights activists who pushed for legislative reforms and recognition of Indian art and culture nevertheless found White-Native pairings distasteful. In spite of the example Mabel Dodge Luhan set thirty years before by marrying Tony Lujan from the Taos Pueblo, an Indian man marrying a White woman, especially a socially-connected White woman, still resounded among the Santa Fe elites. Regardless of any undercurrents of disapproval, however, Narciso and Sylvia Abeyta enjoyed an enduring marriage, producing four more children to add to the three they began with.

Warder's marriage to Abeyta, rather than elevating him to her Santa Fe social circles, however, served to demote her standing. Once popular in the local paper's society columns, mention of Sylvia Abeyta seldom appeared after this snippet ran in the October 1953 *Santa Fe New Mexican* announcing the birth of her and Narciso's first child together:

Pablita, the wee Indian maiden, granddaughter of Eleanor Brownell and Alice Howland, recently copped a blue ribbon at the Indian Fair held at Shiprock for being one of the prettiest and quietest little Indian babies laced on a cradle board. . . . Mrs. Abeyta is the former Sylvia Ann Shipley Warder. . . . Abeyta is an accomplished Navaho [sic] artist . . . . It was he who fashioned the Indian cradle board for wee Pablita.<sup>12</sup>

Quite obviously, the writer of this brief paragraph heavily stressed the "Indianness" of Abeyta's new family. The cool reaction to Sylvia and Narciso's marriage may have entered into the Abeytas' decision shortly afterward to relocate to Gallup where Narciso accepted a position as a

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<sup>11</sup> Letter from Margretta Dietrich, Santa Fe, NM, to Dorothy Dunn, March 2, 1953, transcript in the hand of Dorothy Dunn Kramer, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM; Eleanor Brownell and Alice Howland, prominent Santa Fe socialites, adopted two daughters, one of them Sylvia Ann Shipley. Lorraine Carr Huddleston, "It Happened in Old Santa Fe," *Santa Fe New Mexican*, 26 October 1953, p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> Lorraine Carr Huddleston, "It Happened in Old Santa Fe," *Santa Fe New Mexican*, 26 October 1953, p. 10.

Navajo translator and vocational counselor with the New Mexico Employment Security Division, a job he held, but largely despised, for over thirty years.<sup>13</sup> Although Abeyta attempted to revive his fledgling painting career in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, his war trauma prevented him from accomplishing anything, by his own admission, worthy of note during that period. Instead, Abeyta continued his education, working toward a master's degree in psychology, and pursued his interest in amateur boxing, sparring with his former SFIS classmate, Allan Houser, and earning a spot in the semi-finals of the 1953 Golden Gloves competition.<sup>14</sup> In a 1984 interview, Abeyta remarked, "I tried painting, but it was nothing like the pre-war production that I did. I couldn't make a straight line very much." He continued, commenting on the reception of the work he did manage to produce, "There was a period there when they took my paintings and dumped them somewhere—didn't even put them up. It was very discouraging."<sup>15</sup> Indeed, popular discourse during the period immediately following the war largely ignores Abeyta, with the exception of a brief aside in a 1950 *El Palacio* article stating that he "did some interesting work before he went to the University of New Mexico."<sup>16</sup> His son Tony Abeyta, a highly successful artist in his own right and an avid collector of his father's work, recalled a phone call he received from the owner of a picture his father supposedly produced in 1944. Although Tony was initially skeptical because, to his knowledge, his father had been completely unable to paint during that time, upon inspection Tony realized that Narciso had indeed created the work. Yet, the painting shook Abeyta's son because of its poignant

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<sup>13</sup> Tony Abeyta, in discussion with the author, September 2015; Carlson, "'Weekend Job.'"

<sup>14</sup> Tony Abeyta, in discussion with the author, September 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Carlson, "'Weekend Job.'"

<sup>16</sup> Ann Forbes, "A Survey of Current Indian Pueblo Painting," *El Palacio* 57 (August 1950): 249.

“awkwardness.” Tony elaborated further, seeing in the shaky “child-like” lines his father’s tentativeness and emotional frailty.<sup>17</sup>

By the late 1950s, however, Abeyta had once again found his muse and, although logistically restricted to painting solely on the weekends, began creating pictures reminiscent of his earlier work, yet in many ways different. In her 1956 article for *Arizona Highways*, Linzee King Davis lauded Abeyta’s return to the art world, “although for a long period he dropped out of public view,” and wrote, “His work, like Tsihnaahjinnie’s and Nailor’s, is so stylized, and so far removed from traditional Anglo art forms of the past as to be sometimes termed modernistic, but in reality this type of painting is largely the result of the Indian’s directness, simplicity, and originality of approach expressing itself.” She added, “Ha So De paints boldly and quickly on very large sheets of paper with none of the delicate finesse of brushwork of Harrison Begay or Nailor. His chief preoccupation is with design and pattern and the depiction of force and action.”<sup>18</sup> But her short exegesis, determined to situate Abeyta’s recent production within the well-established modern traditional genre, neglects to mention the significantly divergent imagery he had begun creating. His new work was darker, more dramatic, and more sophisticated in both composition and palette, and as the scale of his work grew, his subject matter grew more complex. Beginning with landscapes, the artist gradually began incorporating figures mined from Navajo mythology, often representing the darker aspects such as those associated with witchcraft and violence.

In a series most representative of his recovery, one painting, *Changeable Werewolf*, displays the loose, exuberant style Abeyta is known for, but appears bigger, bolder, and much

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<sup>17</sup> Tony Abeyta, in discussion with the author, September 2015.

<sup>18</sup> King Davis, “Modern Navajo Watercolor Painting,” 29; Andrew Van Tsihnaahjinnie (1916–2000) was a classmate of Abeyta’s at the SFIS Studio. Dunn referred to him in her book as unequaled amongst the Studio painters, and in her correspondence she sometimes mentioned that Tsihnaahjinnie’s techniques influenced Abeyta.

more ominous. In this picture of a werewolf, “perhaps among the first ever portrayed in Indian artwork,” even the background vaguely menaces with its dark, somber tones and the gnarled flora’s sharp and zigzagged lines.<sup>19</sup> Rather than the stylized birds seen so often in other Studio works, here Abeyta’s seem to be fleeing in terror from this ominous tableau of witchcraft. Although we cannot clearly discern the man within the disturbing wolf costume, one subtle glimpse of his leg beneath the lacings lets us know he is there, and this increases our discomfort. This scene, like all of Abeyta’s chosen themes, presents traditional Navajo imagery, but the painting depicts a very dark, violent tableau of a “skinwalker” attacking a woman on horseback.

In spite of its technical and visual magnificence, Abeyta’s “Skinwalker” series caused consternation within the Navajo community for its portrayal of this powerful, yet taboo subject. Although the artist remarked in a contemporaneous interview, “I’ve been concentrating most recently on Navajo mythology painting. I refrained from doing that kind of work earlier because the culture refrained from having some of those published,” Abeyta’s interviewer maintained that “his purpose in painting the mythology symbols was to preserve his tribe’s culture.”<sup>20</sup> But perhaps the true *raison d’être* for this and the other skinwalker paintings was as a sort of catharsis for his war trauma. Indeed, they serve as reflections of the artist’s own life experiences. Abeyta described the scene of *Changeable Werewolf* for an exhibition catalogue as one where a “woman rode into an area where she should not have been. In stepping outside the accepted boundaries, she encountered a man laced in a skin who attacked her.”<sup>21</sup> Relating the image even more closely to his own life, Abeyta remarked that mythological skinwalkers “try to make

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<sup>19</sup> John Neary, *Translating Navajo Worlds: The Art of Narciso (Ha-So-De) and Tony Abeyta* (Santa Fe, N.M.: Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian, 1994), 6.

<sup>20</sup> Beth Rosebrough, “Gallup Artist Mentioned.”

<sup>21</sup> Neary, *Translating Navajo Worlds*, 3.

people sick and things like that, because of envy. When I went to war, that was what most of my life's existence was: bad spirits.”<sup>22</sup>

Compare this painting with one from Abeyta's pre-war production, and it becomes clear that his style underwent a significant change. In this earlier picture, composed of a pastel color scheme and static composition, the figures smile happily at the viewer; and while this painting still displays Abeyta's unique use of line and mastery of color, the mood differs enormously. Of course, it is worth mentioning that Abeyta painted this work while still a very young man and a student at the Santa Fe Indian School. Reflecting both Studio mandates and Navajo cultural icons, the painting depicts the quintessential Navajo themes of women and sheep. The catalogue produced for a 1994 joint exhibition of Narciso and Tony Abeyta's work explains the imagery of *Newborn Lambs*: “This depiction of shepherders conveys a strong sense of the Navajo matriarch, the strength of the Mother and her nurturing of the young. Sheep are the essential livelihood of many Navajo families . . . Protecting and caring for them is seen as more than just a responsibility, it is a way of life.”<sup>23</sup> While Abeyta's style, even during his Studio days, could never be confused with anyone else's, *Newborn Lambs* conforms wholeheartedly to the early expectations of modern traditional Indian painting.

The bucolic and benign imagery offered here, startlingly different from Abeyta's later work, proves especially interesting as an exemplar of the evolution of Native American easel art from the Dunn Studio parameters to the explosion of individualism that took place within the genre beginning in the late 1960s. Dunn herself scoffed at speculation that Abeyta's post-war production may provide the transitional link between the two movements. In a response to an

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<sup>22</sup> Gussie Fauntleroy, “Two Generations of Navajo Painters Show Their Work: Young Artists Honor Tradition,” *Santa Fe New Mexican*, 21 January 1994.

<sup>23</sup> Neary, *Translating Navajo Worlds*, 1.

essay written by J.J. Brody sometime after the mid-1960s, Dunn scornfully maintained that Brody's description of Abeyta as the "most independent" of the Studio's Diné painters "is supposition and fantasy. . . . His genre was often more sociological than 'romantic.'" Answering Brody's assertion that Abeyta displayed an "unwillingness to conform to a stylistic mold," Dunn disdainfully wrote:

This idea in all its implications does disservice to Abeyta whose concentration on his own painting disregards styles of others, even though his initial works showed his admiration for the young [Andrew] Tsihnaahjinnie's painting, a fine influence and innovatingly [sic] incorporated, but in the matter of drawing only. The statement re Abeyta's "forecasting" is silly among the many useless and tiresome forecasts for the "direction of Indian painting." (Too many such pronouncements conditioned by the customs of the mainstream culture intrude upon and distort the truth which a study such as this should be upholding.)<sup>24</sup>

Given Dunn's attachment to the Studio style that she helped to develop, as well as her animosity toward the IAIA and its group of emerging and innovative Native artists, it is not surprising that she found Brody's statements untenable.

Yet Dunn, in spite of considerable ambivalence, had to acknowledge that Indian fine art, even that produced by her former students, teetered on the brink of change. In a 1952 letter to Dietrich, Dunn wrote enthusiastically of a visit she had paid to both Abeyta and another Studio alumnus, Joe Herrera, while they were studying at the University of New Mexico; after lauding Herrera's experimental work in particular, Dunn averred: "He has been giving some very intelligent thought to his painting for some time; I have talked with him every time I have been at the U.—he and Narcisco [sic]. . . . I wrote Joe a long letter of encouragement after I saw some things he had being doing with Jonson. . . . He was going back to old symbols, yet he had learned

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<sup>24</sup> Dorothy Dunn, "Notes on a Study by J.J. Brody: Modern Indian Painting and the Collections of the Museum of Northern Arizona," unpublished document, undated, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM.

something from Jonson about color application and had fused the old and the new in a remarkable way.”<sup>25</sup> She might have said the same about Abeyta’s work; and, in fact, in her book Dunn later asserted that the “University of New Mexico through its art department has widened the horizons of several Indian painters without causing them to diminish their own art resources. Among these [is] Ha-So-De.”<sup>26</sup> Certainly his training at the University of New Mexico influenced Abeyta tremendously. In a letter he wrote to Dunn applying for painting supplies granted to Indian artists by art patron Mary Benjamin Rogers, he mentioned that his professors “like the dynamic individual style in which I paint . . . although the technique contains the suggestion of depth instead of the flat surface technique of Indian paintings. With the advice of instructors, I’ve been trying to ‘branch out’ from the foundation which has been established.”<sup>27</sup>

It is this post-World War II university instruction that sets Abeyta apart from most of his Studio contemporaries. Indeed, like the vast majority of that first generation of Studio-trained artists, none of the other painters discussed within this study received additional training after the war. Art educator Winona Garmhausen contended that it was the rare Studio student who continued his or her training in the arts: “Those who did go on for further training usually returned to their home areas or to the SFIS to teach”; thus, “few truly outgrew or surpassed the tenets of their earlier Studio training, and many would gradually drift into other fields.”<sup>28</sup>

Tony Abeyta believes that his father’s university experience and training under Raymond Jonson profoundly changed and liberated his father’s artistic style, freeing him from

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<sup>25</sup> Letter from Dorothy Dunn, Berkeley, Calif., to Margretta Dietrich, Santa Fe, N.M., August 25, 1952, transcript in the hand of Dorothy Dunn Kramer, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM.

<sup>26</sup> Dunn, *American Indian Painting*, 329.

<sup>27</sup> Letter from Narciso Abeyta, Albuquerque, NM, to Dorothy Dunn, May 10, 1952, transcript in the hand of Dorothy Dunn Kramer, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM.

<sup>28</sup> Garmhausen, *History of Indian Arts Education*, 58.

the detail that the Studio's ethnologically based method demanded.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, through his instruction at the University of New Mexico's art department, Jonson provides a direct link between Abeyta's evolving style and early twentieth-century New York's avant-garde. While W. Jackson Rushing, in his book *Native American Art and the New York Avant-Garde*, connects New York modernists and the White Santa Fe and Taos painters through their concurrent mining of Native American imagery for authenticity, inspiration, and source material, he explores no similar ties between these mainstream painters and the Native American artists with whom they interacted. Certainly, however, Jonson, as a member of that group of New York modernists whose relocation to New Mexico during the first decades of the twentieth century occurred as these non-Indian artists sought to wrest cultural capital away from Europe's dominance through the mimesis of what they believed to be unique American primitivism, in essence served as both teacher and student to his Native students.

Jonson himself vacillated throughout his life between acknowledging the enormous influence Indian imagery had on his art and denying its importance. Like others of his larger cohort, including Georgia O'Keeffe, Marsden Hartley, John Sloan, and Andrew Dasburg, Jonson joined the intellectual exodus to the "big sweep" of the Southwest," which was "the greatest space a white person could sense—as certainly the redman knows how huge it is—having made his world out of it—his entire cosmos."<sup>30</sup> After his 1924 arrival, Jonson "knew immediately that the combined effect of landscape forms and 'Indian atmosphere' would stimulate his painting."<sup>31</sup> Yet, later in his life he averred that Indian art had had no significant influence on his early work, and in an explication of a series of paintings he titled *Pictographical Compositions*, he insisted

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<sup>29</sup> Tony Abeyta, in discussion with the author, September 2015.

<sup>30</sup> Marsden Hartley as quoted in Erika Doss, *Twentieth-Century American Art* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2002), 86.

<sup>31</sup> Rushing, *Native American Art and the New York Avant-Garde*, 80.

that although they were painted “in a spirit of sympathy with primitive Indian designs,” he did not copy Native imagery, but rather “internalized” it, creating “Jonson pictographs, not Indian” ones.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, Abeyta’s fellow student and Native American modernist, Joe Herrera, maintained that Jonson regularly incorporated designs from the Indian pottery, baskets, and textiles collected throughout the years by his wife, Vera.<sup>33</sup>

While it is critical to acknowledge the likely influence of Jonson’s Native students, and Indian imagery and art more generally, upon his art, we should not underestimate Jonson’s reciprocal impact on both his Native students and Southwest modernism. Working under the auspices of Edgar Lee Hewett, director of the New Mexico Museum of Fine Art, Jonson curated regular exhibits of local abstract artists in the museum’s new modern wing, and in 1938 he co-founded, along with fellow painter Emil Bisttram, the area’s Transcendental Painting group, a collective of artists who, as their manifesto claimed, sought to “carry painting beyond the appearance of the physical world.”<sup>34</sup> At the close of World War II, Jonson relocated south to Albuquerque where he opened his eponymous gallery, the state’s sole broker of modern and abstract art, and began his two-decade long career teaching at the University of New Mexico where he mentored any number of young artists, including abstract expressionist Richard Diebenkorn, as well as Abeyta and Herrera.

This period after World War II proved critical for Native Americans in general and Native artists in particular. The return of the extraordinarily high percentage of Indians who enlisted and fought in the war changed the persistent isolation of Native communities

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 84–85.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>34</sup> “History: Modernism in New Mexico Art,” New Mexico Art Tells New Mexico History, New Mexico Museum of Fine Art, 2010, <http://online.nmartmuseum.org/nmhistory/art-architecture/modernism-in-new-mexico/history-modernism-in-new-mexico.html>; Manifesto of the Transcendental Painting Group, 1938, as quoted in Doss, *Twentieth-Century American Art*, 89.

significantly more than years of boarding schools and other government assimilation attempts. Exposure of greater numbers of Indians to the wider world created a sense of frustration with oppression at home and the limitations of reservation life, and many returning servicemen, such as Abeyta, relocated to urban areas in search of better opportunities through either the G.I. Bill or expanded employment prospects. It is again worth noting, however, that Abeyta's home state—indeed, home to the nation's largest Indian reservation—denied voting rights to its Indian citizens. New Mexico did not enfranchise Native voters until 1962, the last state to do so. Furthermore, the federal government drastically cut funding, both during and after the war, for social service programs, including many within the Indian Service. In response, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Commissioner John Collier resigned in 1945, thus opening the door for many politicians, particularly western legislators, who sought to turn back the liberal reforms made during the New Deal era.

Commensurate with the United States' entry into a post-war phase was the nation's economic explosion and its newly powerful position within global politics; this directly impacted the arts, both Native and mainstream. Art historians have sometimes decried the Dunn influence, claiming that her instruction, which demanded forced and artificial representations of Indian life, resulted in a lack of innovation that caused Native American painting to stagnate by the late 1940s. Perhaps it is more correct to credit the transformed social climate of the post-war era for a resulting lack of interest in American Indian art. As the Cold War monopolized the nation's thoughts, and with New York clearly in a position of global art ascendancy, public sentiment turned again toward Indian assimilation rather than cultural plurality. The intelligentsia no longer felt the need to search for American cultural authenticity, and aggressive conservatism ousted 1930s liberalism. Indeed, as McCarthyism took hold during the early 1950s the American public

saw Indian reservations in a communistic light that conflicted with the general consensus ethos of the day, and federal Indian policy began centering on the twin projects of Termination and relocation. Collectors no longer viewed Indian art as a source of valuable ethnological data, the answer to modernity, a foil for the reflection of European American identity, or an authentically American answer to European art world dominance; instead they trivialized it as a quaint hearkening to a distant and foreign past. Indeed, articles written during the 1950s provide evidence of this transformation when compared to 1930s art criticism. Dunn's legacy began to falter as well, and the Indian artists who continued to paint in the Studio style saw a corresponding change in the way in which art buyers and critics received their production. It was not until the Civil Rights Movement turbulence of the 1960s and the simultaneous rise in minority status that Indian art experienced resurgence in a newly socially conscious form.

Undoubtedly, by the 1950s both the SFIS and the Studio style began to stagnate. New Mexico's Pueblo communities, swept along in the post-war rush toward mid-twentieth-century modernity, began sending their youth to mainstream junior and high schools, and by the mid-1950s, "the SFIS was little more than a dumping ground for 'trouble' and 'problem' students from many reservations [although primarily Navajo]; in the vernacular of the times, 'juvenile delinquents.'"<sup>35</sup> Gerónima Cruz Montoya, Dunn's hand-picked successor, gamely attempted to keep the old flames alive and continued to teach her mentor's pedagogy throughout the 1940s and 1950s. In fact, Cruz Montoya remained in regular contact with Dunn throughout the decades, requesting advice and passing along information about her old classmates. Yet by 1954, Cruz Montoya sadly reported that only a few students bothered to enroll in Studio art classes; both

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<sup>35</sup> Garmhausen, *History of Indian Arts Education*, 59.

interest and funding had severely decreased.<sup>36</sup> Dunn tried rather desperately to encourage Cruz Montoya, while continuing to advocate for her preferred imagery, “Tell the painters to work for ‘happy things,’ to get as much joy and gaiety in paintings as possible—burlesque, games, mudhead pranks, gay birds and other animals.”<sup>37</sup> Clearly, Dunn seemed unable to perceive how her insistence on unchanging, uncomplicated subject matter doomed her students’ work to irrelevancy.

Dunn refused to accept that the central paradox of the Studio style, an uneasy mix of self-conscious contemporaneity and quiescent traditionalism, was becoming increasingly outdated as young Indian artists sought to document the fast-changing world around them. Instead, she cast about for individuals to blame, including the loyal Cruz Montoya, stating in a chronology of Native American art she penned in 1971 that, “Po-Tsunu [Cruz Montoya], herself a fine painter but inexperienced in guidance principles, faithfully maintained the Studio with no critical aid and nothing but obstruction from official channels.”<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, she claimed that the declining interest in and support for modern traditional Native art was due to no fault of the artists themselves, but was rather the result of a lack of “help from exhibition critiques or the schools,” and elaborated, “Artists were disorganized from the mid-forties on, [and] also [they] were increasingly at a loss to abide by the bizarre classifications and restrictions governing entry to the shows.”<sup>39</sup> Yet she never gave up hope for a rebirth of modern traditional Native American art nor doubted its validity. In 1960 she wrote these sad words in a letter to the director of the Museum of New Mexico, “At present, even though much Indian painting is so-so or bad, and

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<sup>36</sup> Jill Melick and Jeanne Shutes, *The Worlds of P’otsúnú: Geronimo Cruz Montoya of San Juan Pueblo* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 114.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 115–16.

<sup>38</sup> Dorothy Dunn, “A Documented Chronology of Modern American Indian Painting of the Southwest,” 1971, unpublished, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

usually with reason, I cannot recognize that it is through. Perhaps this is because I have seen American cultures that are at heart still more Neolithic than “civilized” and have been convinced they are still more potentially productive of art distinctively native among our country’s largely assimilated arts.” She admitted, “I realize of course Indian art is changing. It is degenerating.”<sup>40</sup> Later, she began to place most, if not all, of the blame for the denigration of the Studio style squarely upon the ascension of the IAIA and her old nemesis, Lloyd Kiva New.

Abeyta, as an evolving artist, weathered the sea change, albeit perhaps not without bearing the continuing stigma of his Studio instruction. Although his son Tony insists that his father never spoke an unkind word about Dunn—indeed, that Abeyta Sr. credited her with providing him with the opportunity to express himself as an artist—as her star descended and the new lights of the IAIA, painters such as Fritz Scholder and T.C. Cannon, ascended, the Studio painters fell by and large into obscurity. Abeyta, with his unique style, however, continued to quietly paint on the weekends. And he sold his work. While Abeyta never achieved extraordinary success as an artist during his lifetime, as his son Tony so descriptively put it, “Because my dad would sell his paintings, sometimes for a few thousand dollars, we ate steak.”<sup>41</sup>

Near the end of his career, Abeyta described his work as “two-dimensional” with “lots of line movement and rhythm,” and asserted that he was able to maintain his own style in spite of Dunn’s influence, while admitting that his Navajo traditions provided the foundation for his art.<sup>42</sup> In an interview conducted in 1993, Abeyta further elaborated on his training under Dunn:

One of the things that I liked in class was music—like the sound—like the rhythm. [For me, painting] sort of had the same effect, and I already had it within my makeup, that ability or potential to want to put in on paper. There was a lot of

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<sup>40</sup> Letter from Dorothy Dunn, Los Altos, CA, to Frederick Black, March 20, 1960, transcript in the hand of Dorothy Dunn Kramer, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM, underlining in original.

<sup>41</sup> Tony Abeyta, in discussion with the author, September 2015.

<sup>42</sup> Beth Rosebrough, “Gallup Artist Mentioned,” *Gallup Independent*, 1980.

movement . . . in rabbit chasing, deer chasing, antelope [running]. . . . A lot of rhythm, so I put it on paper. . . . Some of that was Dorothy Dunn's teaching. She said the eye has a tendency to follow the lines, and she said we put movement into painting. . . . And design was the other thing she stressed. And then we put on the design like Navajo rainbow, male or female.<sup>43</sup>

He also considered his use of color to be his strongest attribute.<sup>44</sup> His son confirms his father's remarkable and intuitive sense of color, claiming that this artistic gift was the strongest one handed down to him.<sup>45</sup> In her book, Dunn wrote of Abeyta that he "developed a markedly individual style . . . . His paintings of hunt and home scenes were broad in brushwork and flowing in line, at times appearing almost nonchalant. He was never concerned with small detail but only with the sweep and dash of movement in wild, free scenes."<sup>46</sup> She continued with, "One of the most gifted of Navajo artists, Ha-So-De has the capacity to yet return as one of the strongest leaders in contemporary Indian art."<sup>47</sup>

Dunn's prediction may yet prove omniscient. By the mid-1990s Abeyta finally received the critical recognition denied to him for so long. A 1994 exhibition at Santa Fe's Wheelwright Museum, held four years before his death, paired a retrospective of Abeyta's work with that of his son Tony. The exhibit received substantial local publicity and enjoyed outstanding success.<sup>48</sup> Of the seven artists examined in this study, time has been kindest to Abeyta if availability of artwork on the market is the determining factor. Although the fame his White contemporaries such as Jackson Pollock or Willem de Kooning enjoyed eluded him to the end, Abeyta's rarely offered paintings nevertheless increasingly attract discerning buyers and remain as lovely and meaningful today as they did during the decades in which he painted them.

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<sup>43</sup> Wycoff, *Visions and Voices*, 30, 61.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Tony Abeyta, in discussion with the author, September 2015.

<sup>46</sup> Dunn, *American Indian Painting*, 302.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 349.

<sup>48</sup> Neary, *Translating Navajo Worlds*; Fauntleroy, "Two Generations of Navajo Painters," *Santa Fe New Mexican*, January 21, 1994.

## Conclusion

The late 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s were a time of flux for Native American fine art, as well as for modern traditional Indian artists and their White supporters. A look at Dunn's professional trajectory reveals the undulations the genre endured throughout the middle decades of the twentieth century. When Dunn arrived in New Mexico in the 1920s, she joined a burgeoning cadre of East Coast and Midwestern expatriates searching the American Southwest for an authenticity that responded to both European cultural hegemony and United States industrialization and modernity. Upon encountering Indian-produced art, the Anglo intelligentsia felt it had found something of profound value. White cultural nationalists saw the Indigenous art emerging from New Mexico as iconic of a national identity that originated in the uniquely American Southwest.<sup>1</sup> The desire to establish a purely American, "primitive" art style, however, waned as the United States matured as a world powerhouse in the 1950s. While Dunn's reputation as an educator and Indian art expert remained intact, the overall usefulness of her students' work for nationalizing purposes began to wither. Later, during the socially divisive 1960s and 1970s, Dunn's star plummeted to depths surpassing the still relatively low valuation of her Indian students' works. Although a few of her former pupils were able to break out of the confines of the Studio style during this period, the vast majority of SFIS-trained artists continued to feel the increasingly moribund constrictions of Dunn's vision. The reinvigorated conservatism of the 1980s and early 1990s witnessed a new assessment of both Dunn and the modern traditional genre she shaped and nurtured. While the work of her students has yet to fully regain the luster it held during the early twentieth century, art critics and historians now tend to

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<sup>1</sup> Corn, *Great American Thing*, 4, 253.

acknowledge, albeit with a certain wryness, Dunn's monumental contribution to American Indian art. Indeed, Dunn's influence, while undeniable, remains problematic.

Especially during the 1970s, but even up through today, art historians frequently denigrate the Dunn influence, asserting that her instruction demanding strict adherence to White-constructed style parameters resulted in the eventual and inevitable stagnation of modern traditional Native American painting, but an examination of the larger historical narrative reveals the underpinnings for the resultant post-World War II lack of interest in Native American fine art. As an economic boom, the Cold War, and a newly invigorated wave of conservatism gripped the nation, and with New York now clearly ensconced as the western world's art capital, public sentiment turned again toward Indian assimilation and away from cultural plurality. No longer did art patrons and scientists see Indian easel art as a source of valuable ethnological data and the key to Indian cultural preservation, as an avenue for authenticity and the antithesis of modernity, or as a uniquely American response to European cultural dominance. Rather, Native American artists working in the Studio style saw their work become increasingly irrelevant, as reflected in the discourse. For example, Linzee King Davis's 1956 *Arizona Highways* article "Modern Navajo Water Color Painting" discusses the Navajo artists as charming throwbacks to an earlier and simpler time, while La Farge and Olive Rush sought during the 1930s to position Indian art as the uniquely American answer to Europe's cultural hegemony.

Furthermore, post-World War II Indian artists, like artists of every ethnicity, saw the world differently because the world had, indeed, changed. Modern Indian art was changing, too, in spite of the efforts of individuals like Dunn and La Farge to encapsulate it in amber. Yet, the evolution of Indian art made everyone in its sphere uncomfortable because no one really knew how to define it any longer. Did it only need to be produced by an actual Native American in

order to be considered Indian art, or did the genre require that the subject matter and style conform to traditional expectations? Tellingly, when the brilliant painter Oscar Howe, a Yanktonai Dakota Sioux Indian and former Dunn student, submitted his modernist picture *Umine Wacipe: War and Peace Dance* to the 1958 prestigious annual Philbrook Indian art show, the museum's curator of Indian art, Jeanne Snodgrass—herself a Cherokee Indian—rejected Howe's work because it was not “Indian” enough. Howe fired back with this blistering reply, summarizing the complicated and conflictive issues inherent within the rapidly changing field of Indian art:

Who ever said that my paintings are not in the traditional Indian style has poor knowledge of Indian art indeed. There is much more to Indian Art than pretty, stylized pictures. There was also power and strength and individualism (emotional and intellectual insight) in the old Indian paintings. Every bit in my paintings is a true, studied fact of Indian paintings. Are we to be held back forever with one phase of Indian painting, with no right for individualism, dictated to as the Indian has always been, put on reservations and treated like a child, and only the White Man knows what is best for him? Now, even in Art, ‘You little child do what we think is best for you, nothing different.’ Well, I am not going to stand for it. Indian Art can compete with any Art in the world, but not as a suppressed Art.<sup>2</sup>

While the art world embraced Euro-American New Mexican modernists, the public view of Indigenous art in the Studio style had indeed taken a noticeable downturn by the late 1940s, and this continued into the following decade. The influx of European artists and intellectuals fleeing fascism or communism into American urban centers and America's new role as world unassailable arbiter of style, the United States began to imagine itself in that role; and as America experienced global cultural and political hegemony, its fascination with the cultures of the internally colonized dissipated.<sup>3</sup> White Americans no longer required Indigenous peoples to

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<sup>2</sup> Letter from Oscar Howe to the Philbrook Indian Art Annuals Jurors, 1958, “Creating the Other: Challenged in Native American Art: Oscar Howe and the Philbrook Museum of Art, 1958,” from “Out of Many: Religious Pluralism in America,” Newberry Library, accessed February 1, 2016, <http://publications.newberry.org/outofmany/exhibits/show/creating-the-other/oscar-howe-and-the-philbrook-m>.

<sup>3</sup> Said makes this point viz. British control over Egypt in *Orientalism*, 34.

provide them with an authentic American experience; their own perceived exceptionalism buoyed them and provided vindication for the nation's rawness and lack of European history and sophistication. In addition, the Cold War ethos demanded political and cultural consensus. Any individual or group outside the Anglo Saxon norm, including Native Americans, appeared suspect and potentially "red." Indeed, the "socialistic" communities fortified by the reservation system helped to inform the federal Indian policy of termination, which gained its maximum momentum in the mid-1950s and sought to permanently eradicate reservations and federal support through relocation and assimilation.<sup>4</sup>

Regardless of the specific cultural or political underpinnings, art critics, as pundits for the fine art world more generally, began to display a marked coldness toward Studio art by the late 1940s. Indeed, an interesting letter exists written by the legendary photographer, Ansel Adams. In 1947, he wrote to the Willard Beatty in his role as director of education for the BIA, "Passing through the Navajo Reservation. . . I had the pleasure of seeing some of the paintings of Beatin Yazz [sic]. He is a young Navajo of considerable talent and great promise. I was impressed with the naïve and personal quality of most of his work, and was also depressed with that particular phase of his work which reflected the instruction he received in art at the Santa Fe Indian School." Adams further clarified, "This art instruction seemed to emphasize a conventional approach to "Indian" style and to impose a sterile quality upon an otherwise free and natural spirit."<sup>5</sup> Art historian Joseph Traugott provided further evidence of this pendulum swing away from Studio art, writing that by the 1950s, "detractors colloquially described the Studio formula

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<sup>4</sup> Daniel M. Cobb, *Native Activism in Cold War America: The Struggle for Sovereignty* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2008), 12.

<sup>5</sup> Letter from Ansel Adams, en route, AZ, to Willard Beatty, June 15, 1947, Records of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Denver Federal Records Center, Broomfield, Colorado. Beatin Yazz, also known as Jimmy Toddy or "Little No Shirt," was born 1928 and thus represents the second generation of Studio painters. Although he began painting very early and displayed considerable talent as a small boy, he later trained at the Studio under Gerónima Cruz Montoya, where he began painting in the Studio tradition of flat planes of color and two-dimensional perspective.

as ‘Bambi art’ because it had become stereotypical and lacked individuality.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Dorothy Dunn herself may have contributed to this; at the very least she noted the trend in an article she wrote for *El Palacio* when she claimed, “the florescence of Indian painting, which occurred in the twenties and thirties and began to fade in the forties, seems to be nearing an end.”<sup>7</sup> However, it must be noted that Dunn’s motivation in this article was to argue for the continued patronage of truly “authentic” Indian work and to exhort the public to “regard it as an integral part of the world’s art, not merely as a curiosity.”<sup>8</sup>

In spite of Dunn’s justified worry that Indian art no longer held its former cachet, for the most part her reputation as an Indian educator remained in good standing through the 1950s even as her former students’ professional reputations and marketability plummeted. A 1956 *Arizona Highways* article on modern Navajo painting, although replete with trivializing and infantilizing language referencing the Diné painters, mentions Dunn as having provided “wise guidance” as an instructor at the SFIS, who after recognizing her students’ abilities, “let it alone to develop its own individuality.”<sup>9</sup> This widely held acknowledgement regarding Dunn’s legacy was soon to change, however, and coincided with the 1962 closing of the SFIS Studio and the simultaneous opening of Santa Fe’s Institute of American Indian Arts. By the 1970s, Dunn’s legacy began to falter as well, and the Indian artists trained in her Studio saw a commensurate change in the way in which art buyers and critics perceived their art, although throughout their careers these Native artists continually faced paternalism, infantilization, and feminization. It was not until the Civil Rights Movement turbulence of the 1960s and 1970s and the simultaneous rise in minority

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<sup>6</sup> Joseph Traugott, “Native American Artists and the Postmodern Divide,” *Art Journal* 51, no. 3 (Autumn 1992), 36.

<sup>7</sup> Dorothy Dunn, “Indian Painting can Progress,” *El Palacio* 57 (April 1950), 99.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>9</sup> Linzee W. King Davis, “Modern Navajo Water Color Painting,” *Arizona Highways* 32, no.7 (July 1956), 12.

consciousness that Indian art experienced resurgence, albeit in a newly socially conscious and individualistic form that purposefully removed itself from the earlier Studio style.

The IAIA employed a completely new philosophy and attempted to distance itself from criticisms of internal colonialism or Indian Bureau heavy-handedness. Joy Gritton suggested in her article, “Cross-Cultural Education vs. Modernist Imperialism,” that in its infancy, between 1962 and 1968, the IAIA struggled to disengage itself from rigid Studio parameters and establish its own discrete identity, one that adapted “traditional [Native American] heritage into forms palatable to modernism.”<sup>10</sup> An article written in 1962 by Oliver La Farge for the *Santa Fe New Mexican* illustrates what must have been a common point of dissension in the Santa Fe art community at this time. He argued against condemnation of Dunn and the SFIS Studio method—an argument implicitly for the orientalist/imperialist tradition—by stating, “The ease with which we forget our past and replace the true traditions with myths continues to surprise me. A highly false mythology has grown up about the art school movement at the Santa Fe Indian School in the 1930’s [sic] and has spread widely.” He continued with, “Out . . . of the dedication of Miss Dorothy Dunn . . . came the establishment of an art school under Miss Dunn, at the Indian School,” and defensively added, “None of the people then concerned with the promotion of Indian arts and crafts believed in telling Indians what to do. They all saw that, if anything was to come of it, the Indians must move into new developments of their own.”<sup>11</sup>

The IAIA’s first art director, Lloyd Kiva New, a Cherokee Indian from Oklahoma, took an approach that diverged significantly from Dunn’s orientalism, encouraging students to explore

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<sup>10</sup> Joy Gritton, “Cross-Cultural Education vs. Modernist Imperialism: The Institute of American Indian Arts,” *Art Journal* 51, no. 3 (Autumn 1992), 28.

<sup>11</sup> Oliver LaFarge, “False Mythology on Indian Art Blasted; Truth Cited,” *Santa Fe New Mexican*, June 24, 1962. Anthropologist and writer LaFarge, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Laughing Boy* (1930), was a longstanding resident of Santa Fe as well as the president of the Association on American Indian Affairs during the 1950s. Cobb, *Native Activism*, 14.

their own individuality rather than any one style. In many ways echoing Dunn's stated aims regarding Indian art, though, New asserted in his philosophy that he strove to "Orient these Indian youngsters with pride through knowledge of their own cultural history, having them identify with their particular artistic heritage and to understand it better by having a knowledge of world art. . . . If a youngster is a product of a living tribal culture, and he identifies with that culture, then I would expect his art to be less creative and more within the style of that group. With the purely creative-minded Indian youngster, I would hope for reflections of his heritage." And, like the White elite cadre of early twentieth-century Santa Fe, New worried that, "My fear is we may unduly hasten assimilation in artistic expression by subtle means at our command, and in doing so jeopardize the hopes implied by this project that there is a contribution to be made by Indians to the general cultural stream." Yet New differed from Dunn in his tolerance for Indian students who wished to experiment with varying styles; regarding Native students without any particular sense of tribal culture, he further elaborated, "If no reflections were there, then I would help him find his creative strengths as an artist with reference to this background, Indian or not."<sup>12</sup> Thus, New focused on the artist as a self-determinant individual rather than on himself as the arbiter of Indigenous authenticity. Essentially, New summed up the key difference in philosophy between the SFIS Studio and the IAIA when he wrote, "It is generally assumed that the future of Indian art lies in an ability to evolve, adjust, and adapt to the demands of the present, and not upon the ability to remanipulate [sic] the past. Art is a manifestation of the times; and this is no less so with Indian art."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Lloyd H. New, "Report on a Proposed Philosophical Approach to the Art Education Program of the Institute of American Indian Arts, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Santa Fe, New Mexico," Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology Archives, Santa Fe, NM, underlining in original.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

After years of decline at the SFIS and the Studio, the BIA's decision to build a new Indian arts school in Santa Fe, along with New's warm reception within the community, rankled Dunn as well as the neighboring Pueblos, albeit for different reasons. Indeed, Dunn's animosity seethes forth from her papers; she held on to IAIA correspondence and newspaper clippings for years, writing cramped and bitter notes in the margins. New's and Dunn's paths had crossed once before, many years previously during the 1930s when Dunn met with New while he was still an art education student at the University of New Mexico interested in a future teaching Indian art. The chair of the Art Institute of Chicago, Dunn's and New's alma mater, had requested that she meet with him in order to help him "understand the job that is before him."<sup>14</sup> Dunn remembered New as "morose and aloof" when she tried to offer guidance and credited that meeting as the basis for what she believed to be his later vendetta against her. She contended that while she herself had never "one iota of hatred for him," she nevertheless despaired upon her realization that New was "as lost in the world as Quincy Tohoma had been."<sup>15</sup> Remarkably, however, once ensconced in his role as IAIA art director New included Dunn in his professional correspondence, never failing to invite her to student art show openings or regaling her with the latest school newsletters. In fact, his widow, Aysen New, claimed that her husband never held any reciprocating hostility toward Dunn, in spite of his beliefs regarding the stagnation of Studio instruction.<sup>16</sup> Dunn's own initial ambivalence regarding New is apparent from a letter she wrote to Dietrich in 1960 when he was still employed as the art instructor at the Phoenix Indian School: "Well . . . [ellipses in original] although I am willing to be shown, I have my fingers crossed on

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<sup>14</sup> Letter from Gertrude M. Hadley, Chicago, IL, to Dorothy Dunn, Santa Fe, NM, July 14, 1937. Transcript in the hand of Dorothy Dunn, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology Archives, Santa Fe, NM.

<sup>15</sup> Dorothy Dunn, "Notes Pertinent to Untrue Statements Concerning Art Education at the Santa Fe Indian School," unpublished, May 14, 1963, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology Archives, Santa Fe, NM.

<sup>16</sup> Aysen New, in discussion with the author, June 2014.

Lloyd New Kiva [sic] . . . I would like to see a little bit of heart and perception . . . and certainly some genuine knowledge.”<sup>17</sup> Dunn also loathed the instruction the students received at the Institute, feeling that teachers such as painter Fritz Scholder and jewelry artist Charles Loloma unduly influenced their students and commandeered the spotlight away from aspiring artists.<sup>18</sup>

The surrounding Pueblo communities also felt threatened and insulted by the proposed art school. A press release penned by Martin Vigil, Chairman of the All-Pueblo Council, states unequivocally that “we do not need it and do not want it.” While offended because of the BIA’s lack of communication (“No effort was made to consult with the Indians when this new program was planned. If, after all these years, the Bureau’s Branch of Education did not know what was needed, we could have told them.”), the Pueblo people decried the sad state of their children’s education in general and requested instead a new vocational school to address the widespread unemployment on the reservations. Indeed, the consensus amongst the Pueblo communities was that the IAIA was a boondoggle that wasted budgeted funds for Indian education on a school for the “arts elite” that was both “unrealistic” and could not be justified “in view of what is needed.”<sup>19</sup> By contrast, the Navajo Nation lauded and tentatively supported the new institution, publicly wishing it “every success.”<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, the IAIA, under the guidance of Dr. George Boyce as superintendent and Lloyd New as art director, began offering classes in the fall of 1962 and in spite of any early bumps and obstacles, remains the premier Indian arts institute of the United States Southwest

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<sup>17</sup> Letter from Dorothy Dunn, Los Altos, CA, to Margretta Dietrich, Santa Fe, NM, March 7, 1960. Transcript in the hand of Dorothy Dunn, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology Archives, Santa Fe, NM, underlining in original.

<sup>18</sup> Dorothy Dunn, “A Documented Chronology of Modern American Indian Painting of the Southwest,” unpublished, 1971, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology Archives, Santa Fe, NM.

<sup>19</sup> Martin Vigil, Press Release, July 5, 1962, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology Archives, Santa Fe, NM.

<sup>20</sup> Winona Garmhausen, *History of Indian Arts Education in Santa Fe* (Santa Fe, NM: Sunstone Press, 1988), 71.

today. As it strove, sometimes harshly, toward a fresh mission and an identity separate from the SFIS, the IAIA and its staff sought to revitalize Native American art through a “wide-spread renaissance of interest in experimentation”—in direct opposition to the Studio’s practice of “ram[ming]” a student’s “culture down his own throat.”<sup>21</sup> The breaking away of the IAIA from the SFIS Studio foreshadowed Dunn’s own fall from grace as well as a significant shift in the Anglo-Indian orientalist discourse.

After the explosion of the social unrest of the late 1960s, including the 1969 Alcatraz occupation and the later exploits of the American Indian Movement, which demanded autonomy for formerly silenced or appropriated voices, the emergence of such Native American artists as Fritz Scholder, an instructor at the IAIA, and T.C. Cannon, Scholder’s student at the Institute, signaled increasing attacks on Dunn’s legacy. By the 1970s, both Dunn and the Studio style had been thoroughly denigrated within the fine art sphere, even as some of Dunn’s former students broke through the restrictions imposed, however benignly, by the Studio. Narciso Abeyta, along with Allan Houser, Oscar Howe, and Joe Herrera moved toward a more modernist, abstract style in the 1950s and 1960s; and although Herrera and Abeyta remained on good terms with their former teacher, Houser lambasted Dunn in an interview he did with journalist Jamake Highwater for the latter’s 1976 book, *Song from the Earth*.<sup>22</sup> Houser recalled that, “when I got to The Studio

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<sup>21</sup> “Introduction,” *The First Annual Invitational Exhibition of American Indian Paintings*, exhibit catalog (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of the Interior, 1961), 2, in Joy Gritton, “Cross-Cultural Education vs. Modernist Imperialism: The Institute of American Arts,” *Art Journal* 51, no. 3 (Autumn 1992), 29; Lloyd H. New, “Report on a Proposed Philosophical Approach to the Art Education Program of the Institute of American Indian Arts, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Santa Fe, New Mexico,” Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology Archives, Santa Fe, NM. It is important to note here that Gritton’s essay does not praise the IAIA for its new approach to education; indeed, her thesis contends that “while the school carefully constructed a public image of unfettered, culturally pluralistic arts training, the Institute’s curriculum and the reward system initiated through selective exhibitions, special events, and publications favored a Western, modern aesthetic dominated by individualism. Simultaneously, it encouraged and stressed commercial success in the non-Indian art market. Cultural pluralism thereby came to be defined as the adaptation and distillation of the students’ traditional heritage into forms palatable to modernism,” Gritton, “Cross-Cultural Education,” 28.

<sup>22</sup> Letter from Dorothy Dunn, Berkeley, CA, to Margretta Dietrich, August 25, 1952, transcript in the hand of Dorothy Dunn, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, Laboratory of Anthropology Archives, Santa Fe, NM.

it was the old Traditional style they wanted from you or none at all. Dorothy Dunn told me that if I was going to do things that are realistic, then you better go on out and take the next bus home.”<sup>23</sup> When Houser began experimenting while still at the Studio with landscapes, he remembered Dunn’s disapproval: “She told me she didn’t like my work anymore.”<sup>24</sup> Art historian J.J. Brody, in his 1971 publication *Indian Painters and White Patrons*, further discredited the Dunn method, assigning all recent innovation in Native art to the influence of modern Anglo painters, in direct contrast to Dorothy Adlow’s words published thirty years previously. Although Brody delicately avoided any personal denouncement of Dunn, he averred that, “few Indian artists trained before 1962 seemed capable of implementing intelligible formal changes,” and continued with, “Throughout, the pressures were against the development of personal or expressive painting, and efforts in that direction were consistently frustrated.”<sup>25</sup> In condemnation, he summarized, “Although [the SFIS] produced a large number of students, including some whose craftsmanship was impressive, neither it nor its students contributed to any significant formal invention.”<sup>26</sup>

Recent art historiography from the 1990s onward, in particular, takes a more informed, benevolent view of both Dunn and her protégées. Art historians, art collectors, and Native American artists alike are now far more likely to give Dunn her due as a pivotal, albeit not unproblematic, figure in the course of American Indian art. Art historian Bruce Bernstein maintained that “Dunn and her students . . . created a legacy of art and an approach to art

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<sup>23</sup> Jamake Highwater, *Song from the Earth* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1976), 149. It is worth noting that Houser gave this interview after his 1962 appointment as art instructor at the IAIA and, in keeping with the institution’s goal to distance itself from the Studio, it is likely that Houser also wished to personally distance himself from his earlier training. Indeed, his art production changed dramatically through the decades. Although he began his career working in the Studio style, by the 1950s, he was primarily working as a sculptor rather than as a painter, and his style evolved to abstract or semi-abstract modernism.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> J.J. Brody, *Indian Painters and White Patrons* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971), 175.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

education that contributed more to Indian painting in the modern era than any other force then or since.”<sup>27</sup> Gerónima Cruz Montoya, another student of Dunn’s who became a successful artist and teacher wrote many years after her education that Dunn “was a very compassionate person. She was a scholar, a dedicated teacher, and she respected our Indian way of life. She encouraged us to preserve our Indian art and culture.” Cruz Montoya went on to assert that, “We were encouraged to be proud of our heritage. Before this time we were made to feel ashamed of being Indian because of the earlier treatment at the school. Miss Dunn made us realize who we are and how we are as Indian people.”<sup>28</sup>

It is too complicated a matter to simply assign the role of villain or hero to Dunn. She displayed a singular passion in a 1935 article she wrote for *School Arts Magazine*, asserting that her “painting and design classes do not exist to teach . . . but to guide, encourage, discover, discern. They provide an opportunity for the Indian child to become conscious of and to gain a respect for his cultural birthright.”<sup>29</sup> Dunn’s students, with very few exceptions—Allan Houser most notably—overwhelmingly regarded her as a compassionate and effective teacher.<sup>30</sup> All of the male artists included in this study, Nailor, Begay, Abeyta, and Tahoma, at least publicly acknowledged their professional debt to her and spoke highly of her throughout their lifetimes. Indeed, Dunn spent her entire professional life promoting traditional Indian art, and without her efforts the possibility exists that the genre of Native American art would not endure today, for better or worse. Whether Dunn’s crusade to promote Indian art will prove positive or negative

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<sup>27</sup> Bernstein and Rushing, *Modern by Tradition*, 14.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>29</sup> Dunn, “Indian Children,” 426–27.

<sup>30</sup> For two examples representative of many more, see Pop Chalee’s recollections in Margaret Cesa, *The World of Flower Blue: Pop Chalee: An Artistic Biography* (Santa Fe, N.M.: Red Crane Books, 1997), 148; and Pablita Velarde’s interview in Tryntje Van Ness Seymour, *When the Rainbow Touches Down* (Phoenix: The Heard Museum, 1988), 164.

for Native American artists still remains to be seen. This, in turn, will decide the fate of Dorothy Dunn's future legacy.

The way history and the capricious art world decide the value of the art produced by Dunn's Navajo students remains in flux as well. While few art collectors, students, or academicians outside of the American Southwest remain particularly familiar with the work of those painters discussed in this study—indeed, in the vast array of American art history books in print today, few even mention in passing the modern traditional Indian art movement, let alone the individual artists whose work comprised this genre—artists such as Gerald Nailor, Harrison Begay, Quincy Tahoma, and Narciso Abeyta laid the groundwork for the vibrant community of Navajo painters that exists today. The tremendously exciting and well-lauded work produced by such painters as Emmi Whitehorse and Tony Abeyta continues to expand on the foundation put in place by their artistic antecedents. While the Diné Studio artists chafed under the restrictions imposed upon them by the White hegemony, which in its categorization of Indian artists and Indian art as innate and collectivist never allowed individual autonomy, today's Navajo painters enjoy unrestricted artistic freedom as individual artists with complete autonomy. Or do they? Tony Abeyta defines himself as a Navajo contemporary artist informed by his cultural birthright. But the prickly question remains, how does one achieve equal standing within the art world as an Indian artist? We do not single out artists as “White,” and even African American and Chicano artists are not necessarily expected to conform to some ethnic standard or expectations. But from its beginning, the White hegemony constructed and controlled Indian fine art, and these expectations continue to color the public's perception of the genre. Again, the question becomes: What defines Native American art? Furthermore, one may ask, “*Who* defines Native American art?” A conundrum exists. By labeling artists as “Indian” they are unavoidably and essentially

categorized into “otherness”; paradoxically, however, it is often the case that it is this very connection to their birthright and cultural legacy that informs their work. Spivak, commenting on Said’s work on orientalism, wrote that her primary interest lies in the “sustained and developing work on the *mechanics* of the constitution of the Other; we can use it to much greater analytic and interventionist advantage than invocations of the *authenticity* of the Other.”<sup>31</sup> This assertion is particularly pertinent in the area of American Indian art. Ultimately, it matters not whether the art produced by Dunn’s students is “authentic”; what retains relevance and what educators, art critics, and historians need to learn from this episode are the mechanics and cultural violence through which Dunn and the greater art-buying public imposed Indian cultural imagery upon Navajo, and other Native, painters, othering them and attempting to deny them cultural sovereignty, even as the Diné artists demanded that their voices be heard through the medium of their art. While I could have chosen to pair any one of the themes I discussed within this study—gender-coded discourse, resistance, cultural brokerage, sexism and gender roles, or the United States’ post-World War II climate—to each of the individual artists, I hoped to select those most pertinent to his or her life experience. Nevertheless, each of these artists encountered similar efforts to minimize and control them through the cultural violence endemic of the era. While these Diné painters each chose different paths as they fought to achieve cultural sovereignty and lives unhampered by hegemonic restrictions, their monumental struggles and achievements help us to understand the ramifications of myriad subtle, yet devastating internal colonializing projects and the ways in which they continue attempts to relegate subaltern people to marginalized positions within society.

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<sup>31</sup> Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” 294.

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## **Vita**

Pamela Kay Krch received her B.A. summa cum laude from Colorado Mesa University, Grand Junction, Colorado, in 2007. In 2010, she earned a master's degree in History and Public History from New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, New Mexico, graduating with highest honors.

During her tenure at New Mexico State University, Pamela Krch was awarded the Clarke-Kropp Award for outstanding graduate student. While earning her Ph.D. in History at the University of Texas at El Paso, Pamela Krch received a grant from the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies at Brigham Young University, as well as the W. Turrentine Jackson Scholarship and the Frances G. Harper Dissertation Research Award from the University of Texas at El Paso.

Pamela gleaned several semesters' experience working as, first, a graduate assistant at New Mexico State University, and then as an assistant instructor while at the University of Texas at El Paso. In addition, in Summer 2014 she was the instructor of record for post-1865 United States History at the University of Texas at El Paso.

In 2014, Pamela presented a paper titled "Gendered Views: The Art of Harrison Begay and Quincy Tahoma" at the Western History Association conference in Newport Beach, California.

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