

TACOMA ART MUSEUM

CONTEMPORARY CONNECTIONS



Native American Artists at Tacoma Art Museum

Teacher Guide

CONTEMPORARY CONNECTIONS

Introduction

Artworks made by Native American artists, inspired by Native cultures, and portraying Native individuals appear throughout Tacoma Art Museum's collections and exhibitions. These objects affirm the continued presence and influence of Indigenous peoples in our communities and in mainstream culture. These contemporary artworks highlight the innovation of Native peoples in the present. There are also artworks created by non-Natives that can help us facilitate important dialogues on stereotypes and misrepresentations.

Native Art Past and Present

There are currently 567 federally recognized Native American tribes. Each tribe is unique with its own language, stories, belief systems, art, and cultural identity. Although art forms and styles vary from region to region and tribe to tribe, historically many Native peoples integrated design into daily life. Beauty was incorporated in utensils, tools, clothing, shelter, religious objects, and everything in between. Art served not only an aesthetic purpose, but was simultaneously spiritual and utilitarian. Native peoples mastered varying combinations of abstraction and figuration. Natural materials from the environment were used as well as foreign materials traded from far away tribes and eventually settlers from across the ocean. Today Native artists continue to adapt, utilizing contemporary resources, as they reflect on their personal experience and Native identity.

The Pacific Northwest region has a large population of Native peoples with rich contemporary arts and cultures. Washington is home to 29 local tribes. Major cities, like most urban centers, also host individuals from a wide diversity of varying tribes representing cultures from the Plains, Southwest, Woodlands, Northeast, Great Lakes, and other regions.

Native Artists at TAM

Tacoma Art Museum has a growing collection of artworks created by Native American artists from diverse tribal affiliations, and there are always some on display at any given time. The museum's Chief Curator, Rock Hushka, notes:

"It is critically important that everyone sees themselves in our galleries. As such, we have included works from our Native American art collection in every thematic exhibition of our permanent collection since I've become Chief Curator, including works in the Haub Collection. We have also made a concerted effort to acquire works by Native American artists. We know that we need to begin to build expertise across a much broader range of time and culture than our initial collecting goals. We are eager to do this well and begin partnerships that will benefit more than just TAM."

This curriculum guide will explore three contemporary works in our collection created by Native American artists: *Welcome Figure* by Shaun Peterson, also known as Qwalsius, (Puyallup); *Blanket Stories: Transportation Object, Generous Ones, Trek* by Marie Watt (Seneca); and *Buffalo at Sunset* by John Nieto (Apache). These artists build on cultural traditions to create artworks that speak to the present.

ARTWORKS ON VIEW AT TACOMA ART MUSEUM

Created or Inspired by Native Peoples

Outdoor Sculpture

Welcome Figure—Qwalius-Shaun Peterson (Puyallup)*

Blanket Stories: Transportation Object, Generous Ones, Trek—Marie Watt (Seneca)*

Marie Helmer Lobby and The Kreielsheimer Foundation Alcove

Transference—Preston Singletary (Tlingit)*

Brick Mountain—Joe Feddersen (Colville)*

TINNA—Preston Singletary (Tlingit)*

She Who Watches—Lillian Pitt (Wasco, Yakama, and Warm Springs)*

Welcome Figure Maquette—Qwalsius-Shaun Peterson (Puyallup)*

Blanket Stories: Cradle (Blue)—Marie Watt (Seneca)*

Grey Jaguar—Paul Marioni

Bagman Blues—Paul Marioni

Dale Chihuly at TAM

Glass from the *Navajo Blanket Series* and *Basket Series*

Art of the American West: The Haub Family Collection

Sante Fe Indian Market—Doug Hyde (Nez Perce, Assiniboine, and Chippewa)*

Crow War Shield—Kevin Red Star (Crow)*

Buffalo at Sunset—John Nieto (Apache)*

Buffalo Horse Medicine—Kevin Red Star (Crow)*

Coyote—John Nieto (Apache)*

Portrait of Star Road—Catherine Critcher

Will Rogers on Horseback—Sally James Farnham

Taos Woman—Kenneth M. Adams

The Meeting of Tecumseh and William Henry Harrison at Vincennes—Julius Stearns

Maungwudaus—Paul Kane

Northwest in the West: Exploring Our Roots (exhibition open through fall 2015)

Plateau Geometric #81—Joe Feddersen (Colville)*

Anthony Thosh Collins—Matika Wilbur (Tulalip/Swinomish)*

Talon and Sky Duncan—Matika Wilbur (Tulalip/Swinomish)*

Tlingit Basket—Preston Singletary (Tlingit)*

Oxblood Soft Cylinder with Payne's Gray Drawing—Dale Chihuly

Queen and Maple Leaf Copper—John Livingston (adopted Kwakwaka'wakw)

Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Library

Orca—Marvin Oliver (Quinault/Isleta-Pueblo)* ON THE THIRD FLOOR

* Native American artists

Prompts

Prompts and art vocabulary used to discuss art generally can be used to discuss art made by Native Americans as well. If visitors would like to facilitate deeper discussions about cultural identity, some of the prompts below may prove helpful starting points.

General prompts

- What do you think is happening in this piece?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- What more can we find by looking at all the details?
- What colors, textures, lines, materials, etc, do you see?
- What is the artist communicating and why?
- Why do you think the artwork was made?

For tours of Western American art

- Who defines the American West?
- Who is the West? Who is the West today?

Addressing Representation

- What story is the artist telling? What if anything is missing from that story?
- What seems real and what seems imagined in this artwork?
- What do you feel when you see this image, and why?
- How have non-Native artists represented Native American cultures? How have Native American artists represented their own cultures? What are the differences?
- What representations of Native Americans did you experience?
- Why was the artist interested in this subject matter?
- In what ways do these images shape our understanding of Native Americans?
- What other representations of Native Americans do you see outside the museum?

Contemporary Connections

- What material is this artist using? Why do you think they choose that material?
- Do we see these materials/patterns/forms in historical Native American art? Why or why not?
- How does this artwork relate to other artworks around it? How does it relate to artworks created by Native or non-Native artists?
- What is the artist communicating about themselves?
- Is the artist saying anything about their community?

MARIE WATT

Biography

Born in 1967, Watt grew up in Redmond, Washington. She describes herself as, “part cowboy and part Indian,” explaining that her mother is from the Seneca Nation in upstate New York, and her German and Scottish father came from a family of ranchers in Wyoming. Watt graduated from Willamette University in 1990, received a degree in Museum Studies at Santa Fe’s Institute of American Indian Arts in 1992, and earned a Master of Fine Arts in painting and printmaking from Yale University in 1996. Her work is simultaneously grounded in Native American history, 20th-century modernist abstraction, and communal practices like American quilting circles.

Artwork Description

Marie Watt’s small resin sculpture *Blanket Stories: Cradle (blue)* illustrates the artist’s mix of contemporary and historical inspirations from across cultures. In this work, miniature stacks of blankets curve and loop together. Watt is interested in “the humble yet significant role blankets play in our lives, in Native American communities, and in the settling of the West.” The sculpture is light blue and transparent, alluding to sky and water. With the title, *Cradle*, Watt reminds viewers, “we are received in blankets, and we leave in blankets”, as newborn babies are swaddled, and the dead are shrouded. The theme of beginnings and endings is also present in the circular form of the sculpture which references the circle of life, and a mobius strip (a never ending one sided shape), as well as a folded infinity symbol.

Blanket Stories: Cradle (blue) also partially inspired Watt’s new monumental bronze artwork outside Tacoma Art Museum titled *Blanket Stories: Transportation Objects, Generous Ones, Trek*. The large sculpture features two crossing blue arches cast from stacked blankets. Watt encourages viewers to imagine that the arches might complete an O shape, similar to her smaller resin sculpture, if you could follow them through the walls of the museum. The X shape created by the crossing arches also has many possible meanings: a signed term of endearment, a signature on a treaty, a marker of place. All the blankets used to create the artwork were contributed by Tacoma community members along with their stories which can be found online.



QWALSIOUS - SHAUN PETERSON

Biography

Shaun Peterson, or Qwalsius, is a pivotal figure in the revitalization of Coast Salish art. Born in 1975, he is a member of the Puyallup Tribe and was raised in Tacoma. His work has traveled internationally. Peterson combines his deep knowledge of historical coastal art traditions with contemporary tools and innovative methods. "I create for today," he says, "honoring my ancestors by creating in the present." He works with wood, glass, metal, and digital media. Peterson is active in the local art community and currently serves on Tacoma Art Museum's Collections Committee.

Artwork Description

On September 18, 2010, the City of Tacoma dedicated the monumental *Welcome Figure* in Tollefson Plaza. Shaun Peterson carved this figure based on traditional Coast Salish sculptures that were erected near the shoreline to announce that all visitors to the area were welcome. Historically, the site of present-day Tollefson Plaza was once the location of an important medicine house and is near *spuy'elepebS*, a major village of the Puyallup Tribe. Peterson's sculpture serves to connect the Puyallup Tribe with the City of Tacoma. Tacoma Art Museum contributed to the completion of this sculpture beginning in 2003 with the exhibition *Carving a Legacy: Innovation in Coast Salish Art*. Peterson and his mentor Greg Colfax, a nationally renowned Makah carver, were invited to work on the sculpture in the museum's galleries. The female figure stands 24 feet tall, more than twice the size of traditional Welcome Figures, and was carved from laminated red cedar with an internal steel support that is the first of its kind.

The small macquette, or model, Shaun Peterson made before creating this Welcome Figure resides in the museum's lobby.



JOHN NIETO

Biography

Apache and Latino painter John Nieto connects imagery related to Native American lifeways with modern art influences. Nieto was born in 1936 and grew up near an Apache reservation in New Mexico. In 1959 he graduated with a degree in fine art from the Southern Methodist University in Dallas. After travelling to Paris in the 60s, he became fascinated with Fauvism (a movement in painting characterized by vivid colors, free treatment of form, and a resulting vibrant and decorative effect) and painters like Henri Matisse and André Derain. He began to use the bold bright color and modern forms he saw there in his own work depicting Southwestern cultures. His paintings have been shown internationally and are frequently visitor favorites at Tacoma Art Museum.

Artwork Description

Western American art is full of images of bison herds, buffalo skulls, and sunsets, often alluding to the imminent extinction of the buffalo along with the Native peoples that relied on the animal for food. John Nieto, with his Apache descendancy, reverses that symbolism in his painting *Buffalo at Sunset*. In neon color, Nieto's buffalo could not look more full of life. The blues and lavenders behind the animal could be referencing the flat planes of color in modern abstraction, or even a simplified landscape. The patchwork of color on the buffalo itself might be read as a quilt, an aerial map, or a collage, and calls to mind many other types of patterns. Buffalo have indeed survived into the present and now have growing populations, just as Native peoples survived and thrive today. Nieto explains, "People look back at the Native American era as a movie, a black and white movie, and I try with my color to bring it to life." Nieto makes clear, through this painting and his practice as an artist, that Native American communities not only maintain their traditions but also continue to innovate in the contemporary world.



RESOURCES

Videos and Media

1491s

Sketch comedy group
<http://1491s.com/>

Honor the Treaties

Free posters and materials
<http://www.honorthetreaties.org/>

Longhouse Media and Native Lens

Seattle non-profit that creates films on Native issues and with Native youth
<http://www.longhousemedia.org/>

MTV Rebel Music: Native America

Free music videos, documentary, and music streaming
<http://www.rebelmusic.com/#!/music/rebel-music/episode/native-america>
<http://www.rebelmusic.com/#!/music/rebel-music/episode/native-america/lightbox/lessonplan/native-america>

Never Alone

Video game
<http://neveralonegame.com/>

Osiyo: Voices of the Cherokee People

TV show created by the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma
<http://osiyo.tv/>

PBS Videos

Videos and resources
<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/films/native-american/>
<http://www.pbs.org/gunsgermsteel/>
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/weshallremain/>
<http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/>

For Educators

Heard Museum

Teacher resources on American Indian art and history in the Southwest
<http://heard.org/education/teacherresources/>

PBS Vision Maker Media

Free videos and learning media for educators
<http://visionmakermedia.org/educators>

Since Time Immemorial

Curriculum on tribal sovereignty in Washington State
<http://www.indian-ed.org/>

Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian

FAQs, online exhibitions, and teacher resources
<http://www.nmai.si.edu/explore/foreducatorsstudents/>
<http://www.nmai.si.edu/explore/foreducatorsstudents/classroomlessons/>
<http://www.nmai.si.edu/listening/>

<http://nmai.si.edu/explore/forfamilies/resources/>

Tacoma Art Museum

Cast of Characters Curriculum Guide

Curriculum exploring representations in western American art

<http://www.tacomaartmuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Cast-of-Characters-Curriculum.pdf>

Contemporary Native Voices

Interviews on western American art and TAM's new collection

<http://www.tacomaartmuseum.org/voices/>

Marie Watt's Blanket Stories: Transportation Object, Generous Ones, Trek

An outdoor sculpture for the Haub Family Galleries

<http://mkwatt.generalist.nu/>

Blogs

(Art)ifacts

Blog of local artist Fox Anthony Spears (Karuk)

<https://foxanthony.wordpress.com/>

Contemporary North American Indigenous Artists

Interviews with contemporary Native artists, curators, and professionals

<http://contemporarynativeartists.tumblr.com>

Native Appropriations

Dr. Adrienne Keene (Cherokee) explores misrepresentations

<http://nativeappropriations.com/>

Beyond Buckskin

Dr. Jessica R. Metcalfe (Turtle Mountain Chippewa) on contemporary Native fashion design

<http://www.beyondbuckskin.com/>

Idle No More

Environmental and social activism in Native communities

<http://www.idlenomore.ca/>

Matika Wilbur's Project 562

Matika Wilbur (Swinomish and Tulalip) on photography and contemporary issues

<http://www.matikawilbur.com/blog>

Qwalsius Blog

Shaun Peterson (Puyallup) on artwork and social issues

<http://www.qwalsius.com/>

Books

1491 and 1493

Charles C. Mann (2005-2011)

A revisionist history of events before and after Columbus in two volumes

Do All Indians Live in Tipis?

Questions and Answers from the NMAI (2007)

An introduction to Native issues

Everything You Wanted to Know About Indians But Were Afraid to Ask
Anton Treuer (2012)
An introduction to Native issues

In the Spirit of the Ancestors: Contemporary Northwest Coast Art at the Burke Museum
Wright and Bunn-Marcuse as editors (2013)
The first in the new Bill Holm Center Publication Series on Native Art of the Pacific Northwest

Native Seattle
Coll Thrush 2007
A look at Native American involvement in the history of Seattle

Native Universe: Voices of Indian America
NMAI (revised edition 2008)
Essays about historical and contemporary culture

Rez Life: An Indian's Journey Through Reservation Life
David Treuer (2012)
About the origins of Native rights and contemporary Native life

Tiller's Guide to Indian Country
Economic Profiles of American Indian Reservations
<http://tillersguide.com/>
available at many libraries

also see:

<http://nmai.si.edu/store/#books>
<http://www.seattleartmuseum.org/Documents/Indigenous%20Beauty%20Educator%20Resource%20List.pdf>

Local Resources

Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians
1827 Northeast 44th Avenue #130, Portland, OR 97213
<http://www.atntribes.org/>

Burke Museum
University of Washington museum with a Native American specialty
17 Ave Northeast and Northeast 45th Street, Seattle, WA 98105
<http://www.burkemuseum.org/ethnology/tribes>
<http://www.burkemuseum.org/ethnology>

Cherokee Community in Puget Sound
Cherokee Community of Puget Sound strengthens and sustains Cherokee ethnic identity and culture in Washington State.
Seattle and Tacoma
<http://cc-ps.org/main/>

Daybreak Star and the Sacred Circle Art Gallery
A facility that hosts pow wows, art markets, events and rotating art shows
<http://www.unitedindians.org/daybreak-star-center/>

Governor's Office of Indian Affairs
The main website lists State-Tribal news and resources, and the Tribal Directory lists contact information for all Washington State tribes as well as BIA offices, State Agency Tribal Liaisons, Tribal Colleges, Tribal Newspapers, Indian Organizations, etc.

<http://goia.wa.gov/>
<http://goia.wa.gov/Tribal-Directory/TribalDirectory.pdf>

The Longhouse

Evergreen State College's Native American program and facility
<http://evergreen.edu/longhouse/>
<http://www.evergreen.edu/longhouse/resources.htm>

Puyallup Tribe of Indians

Sharing the rich Puyallup culture with the Tacoma community
<http://www.puyalluptribe.com/>

Seattle Art Museum

Indigenous Beauty exhibition alongside a permanent collection of Northwest Native art
<http://www.seattleartmuseum.org/exhibitions/indigenous>
<http://www.seattleartmuseum.org/Documents/Indigenous%20Beauty%20Educator%20Resource%20List.pdf>

Washington State History Museum

Curriculum on local Native American history and the positive impact of tribes in the state
<http://www.washingtonhistory.org/education/curriculum/lessons/>
<http://www.washingtonindiangaming.org/images/content/wigaeconseptupt3.pdf>

weləbʔaltx^w – Intellectual House

University of Washington's new Longhouse hosting Native programming
<http://www.washington.edu/diversity/tribal-relations/intellectual-house/>

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the appropriate terminology for discussing Native people?

Indian? American Indian? Native American?

Each Native community and individual will likely have a personal preference regarding these terms. Whenever possible it is best to name a specific tribe or nation, and to use the term with which that community describes themselves (for example Inuit is now preferred over the misnomer Eskimo). Here in the Northwest, Native American is widely perceived to be the most politically correct.

Please use the term *regalia* when discussing ceremonial clothing, and avoid costume.

Tribe is an important legal and federal designation, but many tribes refer to themselves as *nations* to reflect their sovereignty and unique relationship with the U.S. government.

In the past, the word primitive was used to describe art made by Indigenous communities, but is not an appropriate or accurate descriptor. Native American art was never inferior to Western or mainstream art, and in fact inspired many important modern and contemporary artists including Jackson Pollock, Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, and Dale Chihuly among others.

How do I pronounce, spell, and appropriately use Native words?

It is great to use specific terminology from Native languages when applicable and when you can be sure of its accuracy (check the National Museum of the American Indian's website to see how they do this). For pronunciation, ask around or try to find a video from a reliable source online. Refer to individual tribal government's websites to see how they describe their culture, and their preferred spellings. If a Native person has an additional name it is important to acknowledge both names. For example, Shaun Peterson also carries the name Qwalsius.

Who is Native American?

The short answer is a Native American is a person who has Native ancestors and is recognized by his or her tribe or community. Each tribe determines their own enrollment criteria, which is typically based on a certain percentage of Indian blood (known as blood quantum) or otherwise proven lineage. There are hundreds of tribes, and many Native peoples are of mixed descent, all resulting in varying phenotypes and physical features across the Americas.

How many Native Americans are there in the U.S.?

There are approximately 5.2 million American Indians and Alaska Natives, making up about 2% of the country's population. At least 95% of Native people died during the first few hundred years of settlement from disease, which partially explains why our population is lower than that of immigrant ethnicities. There are now 567 federally recognized tribes and there are approximately 245 additional unrecognized tribes. These numbers refer to living cultures. Before contact with Europeans, there were likely thousands of distinct Indigenous communities across the continent.

What is a tribe?

An Indian tribe is an ethnologically similar group of Native people who also exist, in a legal and political sense, as a community. The U.S. federal government's recognition of particular groups of Native Americans as political entities, or tribes, was recognized by the Articles of Confederation in 1777, and has been enshrined in the Constitution since it was ratified in 1788.

What is the legal relationship between tribes and the U.S. government?

Tribes are sovereign nations meaning they interact with the United States on a government-to-government basis. Native nations have always been sovereign and their sovereignty is preserved through treaties and as part of the U.S. Constitution. However, tribal power has often been curtailed or ignored throughout American history.

What are reservations?

A reservation is an area of land “reserved” by the federal government through treaties as a permanent tribal homeland. However, more than 60% of Native people live away from reservations in urban or rural areas.

What is meant by Indian stereotype?

Inauthentic, unrealistic, and offensive images of Indians have been used to sell everything from butter to cars to sports teams. Despite efforts to correct or cease the use of stereotypes, distorted imagery and misinformation about Native peoples still abound. Many people hear the words Indian and picture a Hollywood version of Pocahontas, a leathered and feathered “brave” wielding a tomahawk, or an innocent “primitive” living in touch with nature. Native Americans are frequently spoken of in the past tense, yet in the U.S. today there are millions of Native people from hundreds of nations, all with rich and varied histories, languages, and contemporary cultures.

This document was based on the National Museum of the American Indian: Cultural Awareness Handbook

GLOSSARY

Contemporary: happening or beginning now or in recent times; marked by characteristics of the present period

Native American/American Indian: (a) some of the individual’s ancestors lived in what is now the United States before the first Europeans arrived, and (b) the individual is recognized as an Indian by his or her tribe or community

Regalia: special clothes and decorations for ceremonies and events

Reservation: A federal Indian reservation is an area of land reserved for a tribe or tribes under treaty or other agreement with the United States, executive order, or federal statute or administrative action as permanent tribal homelands, and where the federal government holds title to the land in trust on behalf of the tribe.

Sovereignty: Federally recognized tribes are recognized as possessing certain inherent rights of self-government (i.e., tribal sovereignty) and are entitled to receive certain federal benefits, services, and protections because of their special relationship with the United States.

Stereotype: an often unfair and untrue belief that many people have about all people or things with a particular characteristic

Tradition: the stories, beliefs, etc., that have been part of the culture of a group of people for a long time

Tribe: A federally recognized tribe is an American Indian or Alaska Native tribal entity that is recognized as having a government-to-government relationship with the United States, with the responsibilities, powers, limitations, and obligations attached to that designation, and is eligible for funding and services from the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

Speaking and Listening Standards

- Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on other's ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
- Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
- Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to take, purpose, and audience.

Language Standards

- Demonstrates command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
- Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs)

Arts

- 1.1 Understand arts concepts and vocabulary
- 2.1 Apply a creative process in the arts
- 2.3 Apply a responding process to an arts presentation
- 3.1 Use the arts to express and present ideas and feelings
- 3.2 Use the arts to communicate for a specific purpose
- 4.2 Demonstrate and analyze the connections between the arts and other content areas

Image Credits

1. John Nieto, *Coyote*, 2008. Oil on canvas, 16 x 20 inches. Tacoma Art Museum, Haub Family Collection, Promised gift of Erivan and Helga Haub.
2. Marie Watt, *Blanket Stories: Transportation Object, Generous Ones, Trek*, 2014. Bronze with patina. Tacoma Art Museum, Commissioned with funds from: Annette B. Weyerhaeuser, Citizens of Pierce County, and Cindy Rush Grady.
3. Marie Watt.
4. Shaun Peterson, *Welcome Figure*, 2010. Western Red Cedar, exterior latex paint, textured by a traditional adze method. 24' x 6' x 4'. Collaboration between City of Tacoma, Puyallup Tribe of Indians, and Tacoma Art Museum. City of Tacoma's Municipal Art Collection.
5. Shaun Peterson.
6. John Nieto, *Buffalo at Sunset*, 1996. Acrylic on canvas, 48 x 60 inches. Tacoma Art Museum, Promised gift of Erivan and Helga Haub.
7. John Nieto.

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