WHAT IS 'HURON ART'?: NATIVE AMERICAN ART AND THE NEW ART HISTORY

RUTH B. PHILLIPS,
Department of Art History,
Carleton University,
Ottawa, Ontario,
Canada.

ABSTRACT/RESUME

The "new art history" rejects two major assumptions of contemporary art history, a concept of linear evolution culminating with western European art, and the equation of artistic with cultural style. The author reviews Native art history practices in terms of the new art history, using several contemporary pieces as examples. She also examines past art history concepts in terms of Huron art.

La "nouvelle histoire d'art" rejette deux suppositions majeures de l'histoire d'art contemporaine, un concept de l'évolution linéaire se terminant par l'art de l'Europe occidentale, et l'assimilation du style artistique au style culturel. L'auteur étudie les pratiques autochtones de l'histoire d'art dans des termes de la nouvelle histoire d'art, en se servant, à titre d'exemple, de plusieurs modèles contemporains. Elle examine aussi les concepts passés de l'histoire d'art dans des termes de l'art Huron.

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Introduction

A fundamental rethinking of the assumptions of art history in recent years has had little effect so far on the study of small scale societies.[1] Although these explorations have been carried out primarily with reference to European art, many of the new ideas have profound implications for work in non-western art. Indeed, work by students of Native arts on cross-cultural aesthetics and interpretation has anticipated some of the critiques of the 'new art history.' In other ways, however, the marginal position of historians of 'primitive' or 'third-world' art has isolated these scholars from the formal methodological debates being carried on in the mainstream of the discipline.[2]

This essay will review the basic elements and methods of the new art history with specific reference to Native American art.[3] The history of Huron art will be used to illustrate overall tendencies in the field. Such a review reveals that some recent innovations, such as broadly contextualized studies of art, or the democratization of genres, are already integral to the practices of historians of Native American art. Other new approaches, however, offer more rigorous ways to conceptualize scholarly habits already in place, or urge an expansion of the scope of research. The new art history, together with parallel developments within anthropology, thus offers the kind of re-positioning and broader intellectual framework called for by several scholars in recent years (Klein, 1989).

There is another reason for attending to the state of Native American art studies at the present time. In recent years, some Native scholars have critiqued many art history practices; moreover, many Native people have taken political action aimed at changing the way Native arts and cultures are represented in museums and university curricula.[4] These latter often sound very similar to the academic critiques. Alfred Young Man's recent call for home-grown art history, to cite just one example, parallels James Clifford's advocacy of a 'multivocal' ethnography. "Art history in Canada and the U.S.A. has a long way to go before it meets [the] ideal," Young Man writes adding:

> We are on our way. Let our national institutions of art history and culture reflect the real North America, finally. Why must we live in a derivative culture imported from Europe? Why can't we accept our own? (1988:5).

The similarity of the critiques of Native people and academics stems from their common goal of dismantling an intellectual apparatus belonging to the past age of European cultural and political hegemony, a process of the decolonization of knowledge. Insights produced by different schools of discourse analysis, about the ways in which language and narrative conven-

tions limit our ability to tell the stories of other times and other cultures,have now been accepted by many art historians, but textual and museological practices have not yet accommodated the new theories. The new orientation of art history is a hopeful development; it will help scholars to confront not only intellectual challenges, but also the ethical dilemmas that currently face both the academic and museum communities.

The Critique of the Old Art History

New art history is, in the first place, a movement that reacts strongly against the German Idealist traditions which provided the foundations of the discipline in the nineteenth century.5 It rejects two basic Hegelian assumptions about the nature of human cultural development and the nature of art. The first of these is the notion of a universal history of art evolving in a linear progressive fashion and culminating in the art of Western Europe.6 The second equates artistic with cultural style. According to this idea the work of art, created by an artist genius, is a distillation of the cultural achievement of the age in which it was produced, permitting a reconstruction of cultural history on the basis of a sequence of great objects alone.

New art history also developed out of a conviction that the old art history had bankrupted itself because the tools it had developed in order to fill in the details of the grand historical design - stylistic analysis and iconography - had become ends in themselves. Studies of style and meaning seemed increasingly isolated and narrow in scope as the historical inventory of works in the Great Tradition neared completion.

The Old Art History and Native Art Studies

Native American art first became attached to the margins of the history of Western art as a result of a series of intermittent 'adoptions' of forms of 'primitive' art into the mainstream. Isolated, decontextualized object types were sporadically enfolded into the universal history of art as Western artists noticed their coincidental resemblances to the particular stylistic exploration of that year's avant garde. This erratic attention fragmented traditions of Native art-making and prohibited all but superficial formal appreciations. Such appropriations simply reflected - and validated - the universalist and imperialist pretensions of Western art history as cultural history.7 In James Clifford's terms, the old art history has been narrated as an 'allegory' of Western imperialism and colonialism (1986).8

As a sub-field of art history, Native American art is a recent limb on the family tree of art historical studies, branching off from the main trunk of the Western tradition and left to repeat the same basic pattern of growth. In Na-

tive American art, as in other non-Western traditions, serious problems have emerged from the attempt to apply methodologies originally developed to analyze objects in the Great Tradition, a body of art produced by patriarchal, class-structured, literate European societies. The tensions between traditional art history practice and the field of Native American art were succinctly reviewed by Joan Vastokas several years ago (1986-87).9 She concentrated on the procedural difficulties that interfere with creating for Native art the same kinds of understandings of stylistic development over time and the interpretation of meaning that have been achieved for the historical forms of Western art. Though her position is basically optimistic, she identified the enormous difficulties of carrying out the basic tasks of art history.

Vastokas' discussion highlights the fact that historians of Native American art, unlike historians of the western Great Tradition, have not yet completed the inventory. They have not been able either to establish complete and accurate chronological sequences, or to identify many individual artists. In the area of stylistic analysis Native American art gained its Wolfflin only in 1965, with Bill Holm's classic analysis of the rules of form in Northwest coast art. Such studies are still lacking for most other traditions of Native American art. Indeed these unsolved mysteries - the lure of important unfinished work of identification and discovery - undoubtedly attract many of the scholars currently working in the field. Twenty years ago, theses in mainstream art often seemed to require searching out a minor Old Master who had not yet been 'done'.

That having been said, however, the insights of new art history (and 'post-modern' anthropology) forcefully alert us to the dangers inherent in attempting stylistic identification or iconographic analysis in Native American art. in Native American art, as in mainstream Western art, the labours of historical verification or connoisseurship - tasks ancillary to the larger questions we ask - can also easily become ends in themselves.

But students of Native American art face additional problems. First, the very nature of the material record that has come down to us has been grossly distorted by the perceptions and prejudices of its Western collectors; the values which determined what was to be preserved were not generated by the producing cultures. Second, the methodology of art history, which separates stylistic and iconographic studies, may well be inappropriate to the arts of non-Western, small scale societies. Visual artistic expression in such cultures assumes burdens of meaning not required of art in societies possessing written language. As a result these art forms may not be capable of satisfactory analysis by means of a model which detaches style from content. Vastokas is correct in pointing out that a great deal of useful work remains to be done in archives, libraries and museum collections, but often

insuperable barriers that exist for historians of Native American art must be more clearly acknowledged.

Some of the general points that have been made thus far can be illustrated by the early history of Huron art. The Huron are probably better described in the documents of the seventeenth century than any other Woodlands nation, and they have, in addition, recently been the subject of exhaustive ethnohistorical research (Trigger, 1976). Despite all this it is nearly impossible to identify enough documented Huron objects to permit the art historian to distinguish Huron style, examine chronological change, or analyse a Huron visual symbolic system.

That these tasks are unfinished is due to in large part to the radical dislocations which occurred for the Huron as a result of European contact, dislocations experienced in one way or another by all Native groups. The Huron confederacy was defeated in 1648, and survivors were either adopted into the victorious Iroquoian nations, or eventually resettled in widely separate locations, from the village of Lorrette outside of Quebec City, to the central Great Lakes, to Oklahoma. The largest trove of 17th century Huron objects is probably in the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, but it is unlikely that we will ever be able to pick them out from among other objects collected in New France. The French Revolution caused the loss of whatever documentation there once was (Fardoulis-Vitart, 1979). Even if we had this documentation, it would probably not do us much good, for the seventeenth-century French were great adherents of the fictional concept "Indian,"and were cognitively unconcerned with more refined ethnic definitions, at least for material objects.

As a stylistic category, furthermore, "Huron" may be either too broad or too narrow. Perhaps we should consider the member groups of the pre-1648 confederacy separately. Or, given active trade, exchange, intermarriage, and adoption, an ethnically pure art style may not have been an important reality in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Today non-Native scholars are often irritated when Native people 'appropriate' objects from the 'wrong' nation as their own ancestral art. 10 Perhaps seventeenth-century realities were closer to those of our own day than we have been willing to admit.

Once in a while a tag survives on an object, as in a false-embroidered bag from the Sloane Collection in the British Museum (with no guarantees, of course, of its accuracy). This piece has been constantly regarded as one of the few 'fixed points' of Huron art of the early contact-period, and it is only recently been suggested that this and other similar objects may in fact constitute early examples of acculturation. For without European steel needles

the dense, rich patterning that is their glory would probably not have been possible (Feest, 1984).

The frustrations experienced by contemporary scholars in the face of this situation result from the fact that until very recently they have not been asking their own questions of the objects, but rather the questions originally posed by the cultural-evolutionist founders of material culture studies. The type of classification that still dominates the field is that of a nineteenth-century butterfly collector. Indeed, both Alfred Haddon and Giovanni Morelli, two of the most important early promoters of these methods of stylistic identification and connoisseurship for anthropology and art history respectively, were initially trained as naturalists (Ginzberg, 1980). For all these reasons trying to identify early contact period object sequences for the Huron and many other Native American groups is like attempting to discern details in a photograph that was taken from an arbitrary vantage point, out of focus, and then had acid spilled over it.

Native Art History: Iconography vs Representation

In the area of iconographic study, too, the inventory of Native American art is far from complete. Here the difficulties of applying classic Panofskian text-based methods are even more daunting. There are so many problems with the textual sources available to us in studying Native American historic art that they call into question the whole iconographic enterprise. We are faced with the double bind of extreme scarcity and the severe limitations of the texts we do have. Nearly all were recorded by non-Natives, and then edited, censored and transmuted by the authors' own forms of discourse.

Most seriously of all, the majority of the canonical texts to which modern scholars continually return in order to perform their art historical labours of explication and exegesis - from Boas, to Mooney, to Speck - froze oral traditions at one moment in their long history of development and change. This moment was usually one of the extreme cultural crisis occurring a century or more after the multi-pronged colonial attack on Native societies began. The dangers of trying to fix meaning based upon so incomplete a textual record have not been recognized often enough.

The models of old art history, then, often direct us either to ask the wrong questions, or to ask questions that cannot be answered with the methods we have thus far employed. Profiting from the insights of post-structuralist literary theory, new art historians such as Alpers have demonstrated that the Panofskian method of correlating visual images with written texts is not appropriate for every nexus of art and culture (1983: xvii-xxvii). What was valid for her discussion of 17th century Dutch painting is even truer for cross cultural work on non-European artistic traditions. 11

Plate 1: *Joe Jacobs, "The Story of Heno"*

Plate 2: *Joe Jacobs, "The Story of Heno"*

The inappropriateness of strict text-based iconological analysis even in contemporary art is illustrated by the sculpture of the Iroquois artist Joe Jacobs (Plates 1 and 2). Most of Jacobs' sculptures narrate myths by means of a sequence of pictorial vignettes and symbolic elements based upon the transcriptions of oral traditions published by western scholars. Yet attempts to correlate Jacobs' complex narrative structures with any particular published version of a myth are useless. The sculptor combines elements from many different published versions with inventions and reinterpretations derived from his personal experience in the late twentieth century. His work thus takes up an organic oral tradition that has been frozen in the texts of linguists and anthropologists and carries it forward in time (Phillips, 1988).

Theory and Methods of the New Art History

The critique of the old discipline has grown up over the past two decades around the margins of the old art history and in its negative spaces. It was provoked not so much by a misapplication of the techniques of historical verification and stylistic description but by art history's inability to speak adequately about the visual productions of people who were not upper class, not men, and not white. According to one recent assessment, new art history is not a "unified trend" but rather developed under "the impact of feminist, marxist, structuralist, psychoanalytic and social-political ideas on a discipline notorious for its conservative taste in art and its orthodoxy in research" (Rees and Borzello, 1986:2).

What, then, do new art historians have in common? And what, specifically, do their models have to offer historians of Native American art? There is a consensus on a number of issues. First, new art history replaces the notion of a universal 'history of art' with a number of discrete but overlapping 'histories of art' - the art of women, of different social classes, of different ethnic groups. Second, as a consequence new art history also seeks new, non-hierarchial redefinition of the term 'art' to include many forms of visual representation formerly excluded from the canon and relegated to the categories of craft, folk, and popular art.[12] These revisions point to a discipline potentially far better able to describe non-Western art traditions.

The methodology of the new art history features two important approaches. First, it is interdisciplinary, involving a much expanded intellectual and social contextualization of the objects it studies, and second, it breaks down the walls separating the discourse of historical, modern, and contemporary art. Let us examine these points one at a time. The new art history's emphasis on interdisciplinary work is particularly friendly to Native American art, for it recognizes the way in which the two disciplines most concerned, anthropology and art history, have been moving closer to each

other. The discourses of 'post-modern anthropology' and new art history are complementary and interpenetrating. Anthropology has become historicized through an insistence upon the historical specificity of its practices over time. At the same time, art history has been anthropologized through its recognition that the study of earlier periods in Western history is a cross-cultured enterprise requiring the application of concepts developed within anthropology.

The broader contextualization of new art history, too, requires an interdisciplinary method that goes beyond the old art history's combination of such humanistic studies as literature, philosophy, or history. New art history requires its practitioners to look as well at the economic and social conditions that surround artistic production. Examples include Clark's allocation of large chunks of his book on Impressionist painting to Haussmann's urban renewal of Paris, Parisian prostitutes, and cafe night-life (1984), and Alpers' discussion of mapmakers and lens grinders in her book on 17th century Dutch art (1983).

One important consequence of the new art historians' insistence on the meticulous description of social context is that studies of broader historical development will be impractical for some time to come and, indeed, perhaps even impossible. When we admit the representational complexity of each work of art, and the manifold areas that need to be investigated to understand it historically, it becomes exceedingly difficult to describe sweeping development over long periods of time (Belting, 1987:28). Thus there is a shift of emphasis away from the old diachronic focus of the history of art toward the understanding of the process of artistic representation at specific moments in past time.

Acculturation, Native Art, and the New Art History

Not all of these calls for reform in art historical practices resonate to the same degree with the realities of research of Native American art history. According to the new art historians, scholars of Native American art have been doing some things correctly for a long time. The new art historians' attack on the hierarchy of genres and media, for example, confirms a practice which students of Native American art have long adopted. It has been largely under the impact of studies in African, Oceanic, and other non-Western art traditions, as well as the art of women, that new art historians have called for the redefinitions.

Students of non-Western art have also long understood the necessity of interdisciplinary work that locates art within broad contexts of social and economic use. The models of new art history indicate ways to broaden those contexts still further so that Native American art forms are not examined

within hermetically closed aesthetic sequences of Native objects, but against the cross-cultural background of Native/non-Native economic, social, and political relations. In its desire to demystify the work of art, new art history has replaced it with a concept of 'visual representation' that participates in the larger category of 'social production' (Wolff, 1984).

This borrowing from Marxist theory has, potentially, particular value for the troubled area of "accultured art", a term that itself encodes the hegemonic pretensions of the old art history. At present approaches to the study of commercial, or tourist, art are inadequate to the task, despite the fact that these objects comprise the bulk of what Native Americans have made In the centuries since contact. Tourist art finds a minimal place in the current history of Native art largely because this history is still dominated by a paradigmatic matrix of male artistry, ethnic purity, and stylistic evolution. Furthermore, the market-driven production of Native American artists has not been regarded as serious art because of a paradoxical romanticism that has pervaded the study of all aspects of Native American culture. The same art historians who are accustomed to studing the responsiveness of Western artists to the demands of buyers and patrons, have assumed the 'pure' and 'true' art of non-Western cultures has been free of such modifying influences, orientated toward indigenous spiritual and ritual contexts. The important area of Native American "accultured art" - including commercial production - badly needs the broader intercultural, economic and political contextualization projected by many new art historians.

A later chapter in the historiography of Huron art can be used as a further illustration. In 1908 Frank Speck visited the Huron community of Ancienne Lorette outside Quebec City to investigate its material culture traditions. Speck virtually ignored the commercial art forms which had dominated Huron artistic production for the previous hundred years as well as their importance in the economic life of the community. He chose, rather, to commission models of bow drills and obsolete (or indeed reinvented) styles of birch bark containers that he regarded as somehow traditional to the Huron.[13] His main interest was establishing the putative origin of the floral motifs embroidered on the tourist art, to investigate whether they were indigenous or borrowed, and to trace their evolution to their current naturalistic style. Speck's questions and hypotheses form a small chapter in the discourse of the origins of art that dominated nineteenth and early twentieth-century studies of "primitive" art, and formed, in turn, an appendix to art history's larger discourse on the universal progressive evolution of art and culture.

In 1984 a Huron historian, Marguerite Vincent Tehariolina, published a book on Huron history and culture profusely illustrated by artifacts and

depictions. Included are photographs of several formal addresses written in flowing scrlpt on sheets of birchbark and ornamented with embroidered floral designs in moosehair. These are dated from the period of Speck's visit until the 1960's. The scrolls were made for presentation to official representatives of foreign governments and to commemorate coronations and landmarks in the reigns of British monarchs (1984: 328-339). These scrolls are apparently undocumented in the literature published by non-Natives; they were not collected by museums. 14 Yet as signifying objects their importance seems today to be as great, or greater, than the embroidery samples collected by Speck. Although stylistically the scrolls are highly acculturated forms, as ceremonial objects they have continued to serve the same functions of condolence and communal address as the wampum belts (themselves earlier acculturated forms) which Speck and others assiduously collected for museums.

Why did Speck not describe or collect the bark scrolls? These objects testify to a conceptual rather than a stylistic continuity, but the style/culture paradigm of art during that period sought similarities of outer forms in constructing its histories. A bark scroll written in cursive arabic script looked too different from a belt of shell wampum beads worked in geometric motifs to belong to the same category. In order to demonstrate broad laws of human historical cultural development, Speck found it necessary to reject the contemporary in favour of the archaic.

New Art History and Periodization

The "otherness" of the Huron was, then, for Speck, not only ethnic but also temporal. He sought visual correlates to this otherness which frequently blinded him to contemporary reality. This failing, typical of Speck's whole generation, leads directly to the second major methodological revision which new art history has made in older practices, its rejection of art history's conventional periodization into the historic, the modern, and the contemporary. The past strict separation of work in these three areas has resulted, writes Belting, in the development of

> different traditions of evaluation and narration, traditions which are fundamentally incompatible. The pre-modern tradition, isolated by the wall of modernism, became either obsolete or sacrosanct, while modern art itself seemed only to consist of denials of tradition, to such extent that its response to tradition, where this did occur, was no longer even perceptible (1987:36).

Although Belting is describing the discourse of Euro-American art history, his remarks point equally to the inability of historically oriented scholars of

Native American art to incorporate contemporary developments into their formulations. It is, again, insights coming out of discourse analysis which have broken this deadlock. If all discourses are subjective, including those of the academic disciplines, the self-consciously subjective assessments of critics and creative artists can be admitted to a common conversation about art. "Today," as Belting says, "the artist joins the historian in rethinking the function of art and challenging its traditional claim to aesthetic autonomy" (1987:xi).

This point is particularly critical for the art of groups which have been regarded as "other" and it has been made repeatedly by feminists and by Native artists. At the last Canadian National Native Indian Artists' Symposium, for example, Rick Hill spoke eloquently from an artists' point of view: "So it was like the whole world came crumbling down because, everything I've ever heard at conferences is that we have to make a distinction between Traditional art and contemporary art, that Modernism somehow removes you from that essential Spirit. What those Traditional Elders who gathered at that time and saw Contemporary Modernist work said was: "You guys are doing a good job. Keep doing it. Keep telling the people what you feel" (Young Man 1988:58).

The question of periodization in art history is also directly related to Native criticisms of the continued use of the ethnographic present in the representation of Native art and culture. One of the most revealing - and damning - features of the representational practices of Native American art history is that its standard periodization contains no modern era at all. Surveys normally go from the prehistoric, to the historic, and then directly to the contemporary. It is as though Native American artists, in keeping with predictions of their imminent disappearance, had been rendered invisible through much of the twentieth century. It is only recently that serious attention has begun to be paid to the "reservation" period which can fill in the presently-existing gap, often by Native scholars (McMaster, 1989).

We are currently in the middle of a period of historicism in contemporary art, both Native and non-Native. And because the history of Native art has so often fallen between the cracks of the old art-historical edifice, the work of contemporary Native artists is particularly concerned with the issue of cross-cultural appropriation of artistic styles. By laying claim to the styles of twentieth-century modernism and post-modernism, Native artists assert their existence in the twentleth-century world together with their right to reappropriate past Western images of themselves.

One example can stand for many, the Huron artist Pierre Sioui's "Genocide I" of 1986 (Plate 3). This work represents Huret's seventeenth-century engraving showing the martyrdom of Jesuit Fathers - missionaries

Plate 3: *Pierre Sioui, "Genocide I"*

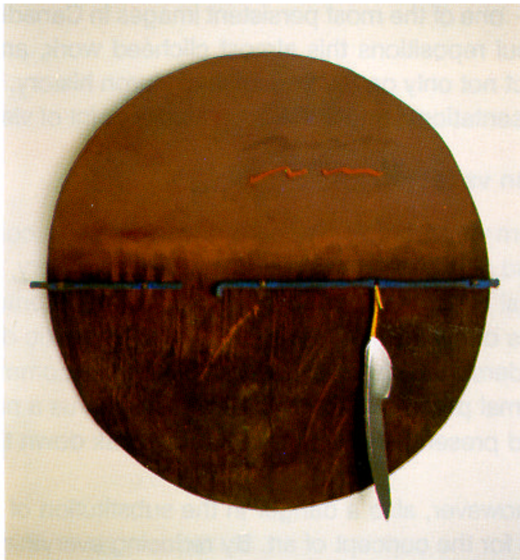

Plate 4: *Robert Houle, "Warrior Shield for the Lubicon"*

century forebears promoted art as the quintessential human expression, twentieth century discourse analysts have exalted, in an equally arbitrary fashion, language and written texts. As art historians we must ask ourselves whether we still believe that there are things which can be expressed visually but cannot be perfectly translated into words. We must also decide whether we are still willing to distinguish for special consideration particularly "good" objects which have the capacity to express complete worlds of meaning. There is a real choice to be made here. If we cannot answer in the affirmative it is hard to defend the continuation of a discipline of art history which isolates a category of particularly "art-ful" visual representations as its primary data. Although a charge of essentialism is often brought against those who defend the aesthetic as a category of cross-cultural classification, this tag exaggerates the actual position taken by most historians of Native American art. It has generally been accepted since the days of Boas that it is skill and intelligence which define the parameters of art rather than genius or divine inspiration (Maurer, 1986).

The contemporary Ojibwa artist Carl Beam has made this distinction most forcefully:

> Let's dispel one thing first of all. There could be the concept of Native Artists burning Sweet Grass in the middle of the bush murmuring incantations about a Vision that is going to appear in the work...Then there's the other one of somebody going to art school, learning about their own culture, about world cultures. If there's any Gift involved it is the Gift of intelligence and creativity. That's the Gift. The Gift is not mysterious. The Gift is actually free and accessible to anybody in the world. It's a Gift that is given freely by a human being who is concerned about these issues (Young Man, 1988:75-76).

Beam's remarks alert us to a further implication of the substitution of the concept of "representation" for the concept of "art". In its extreme form the promotion of 'representation' ignores the aesthetic dimension; it flattens or even cancels the uniqueness of particularly successful visual expressions. All visual images become equally translatable into social documents, useful as sources of information about cultural process. What is, in fact, frequently at issue in the current debates among art historians and anthropologists and Natives and non-Natives is not the criteria for the evaluation of quality per se, but their importance relative to the non-iconographic meanings attached to objects. Conflicts arise over decisions taken by art historians and curators to privilege aesthetic quality over other factors. When Native consultants or curators are involved, decisions are

Plate 5: *Bob Boyer, "Sun Dance Shield"*

Plate 6: *Ron Noganosh. “Shield for a Modern Warrior or Concession to Beads and Feathers in Indian Art”*

Figure 1: Gregoire Huret, "Jesuits Martyred by the Iroquois Indians"

to the Huron - one of the most persistent images in Canadian art history[15] (Figure 1). Sioui repositions this almost clichéed work, and compels the viewer to reflect not only on the tragedies of Huron history, but also on the Western representational tradition from a Native point of view.

Representation vs Art

The concern with representational modes dominates contemporary art, both Native and non-Native, just as, in the new art history, a concern with representational codes has replaced, at least for the moment, a notion of "art".[16] A focus on representation rather than on stylistic development al-lows us to understand works of art as solutions to common conceptual rather than formal problems (Belting, 1987). It offers us a non-stylistic way to link past and present, and it has helped to break down the hierarchy of genres.

There is, however, also a danger in the substitution of the concept of representation for the concept of art. By reducing everything to a text, the notion of representation risks privileging the verbal to the same degree that we are said to have previously privileged the visual. Whereas our nineteenth

often made to include or omit objects on the basis of other criteria, such as historical, political,or sacred significations. 17

Three Shields

It will perhaps be more persuasive to defend both the validity of art as a category, and the need to join the discourses of Native and non-Native, of past and present, of artist and academic advocated by the new art history by looking, in conclusion, at three last images. All three are shields made by contemporary Canadian Indian artists, and all could be seen hanging in Ottawa art galleries in June of 1989. The earliest, dated 1980, is by Bob Boyer, entitled "Sun Dance Shield" (Plate 5). Fully modernist, it conceives of space In the manner of Matisse and echoes the abstract compositions of Kandinsky. Equally it is filled with a joyous explosion of colour and fringed with bright ribbons which convey the celebratory atmosphere and movement of Plains Indian summer ceremonials. It vibrates with the positive energy of the revival and revitalization of Indian ritual in the 1980s.

Ron Nogonosh's shield, made in 1984-85, is entitled "Shield for a Modern Warrior: Concession to Beads and Feathers In Indian Art" (Plate 6). This shield was a response to the artist's study of historic Plains Indian art and conveys a darker message than Boyer's painting. It incorporates hide, beads, and feathers but takes its basic structure from an old hub cap and crushed beer cans. This work participates in a tradition of Dadaist irony and surrealist juxtapositions as much as it resonates with the nineteenth century Indian media and forms it incorporates. It makes wry acknowledgement of the participation of Indians in their own stereotypes while starkly confronting us with the tragic realities of alcoholism and technological dependency and waste.

Houle's shield, entitled "Warrior Shield for the Lubicon" made in 1989, is the most recent (Plate 4). It is made from the top of an oil drum in reference to the bitter struggle of the Lubicon Cree whose title to hereditary lands is threatened by illegal oil and gas development. The patina already developed on the metal surface by acid rain has been reworked by the artist to produce an elusive image of the land. Houle's reappropriation of the oil drum from a garbage heap and his enhancement of it refer, as do Nogonosh's reappropriations, to Native people's practice of reusing and transforming the discards of white society. The image of an eagle feather hanging from the shield's edge contains a further reference to the spiritual meanings of historic shields, but by using a photograph rather than a real feather Houle avoids transgressing the boundary that separates the sacred from secular. Houle's shield speaks both of threat and of beauty. It confronts contemporary political issues through a complex language of styles, genres, and

media. Through his haunting evocation of illusionistic Western landscape painting and his use of the traditional shield form, the artist announces himself the postmodern inheritor of multiple and distinct artistic traditions.

Taken together these three shields contain a whole history of art. They summarize the major inventions of modern art and make statements about the historical relations of Aboriginal people to the wider culture. The totality of the complex resonances of their materials and forms is ultimately impossible to translate into words, but the works nevertheless yield fresh insights into the history both of Native art and modern art. Such insights complement the studies of art historians and anthropologists, they do not replace them. Scholars study the cultures of other people in the first place to understand their own cultures, and the tools of western scholarship are a birthright to be valued and shared. New art history challenges us to acknowledge Native scholars and artists as participants in the project - to create what Griselda Pollock has called a "conversational community." If we find a way to do this we will have responded to the critical ethical and intellectual challenges which face us today. And we will have begun to ask our own questions of the history of art rather than those which seemed urgent to past eras.

NOTES

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented as the keynote address of the biennial meeting of the Native American Art Studies Association in Vancouver, British Columbia in August 1989.

2. Essays by Drewal, Blier, and others in the special issue of the Art Journal devoted to "Object and Intellect: Interpretations of Meaning in African Art." The authors examine African art studies within some of the current methodological debates of art history through rigorous analyses of individual art traditions (Drewal, 1988; Blier, 1988).

3. Within the discipline of art history, Native American art has been marginal even in comparison to the arts of Africa or Oceania. The neglect of this area is remarkable, especially within North America where Native American traditions have a much greater resonance than the more exotic tribal arts to which so much more attention has been paid. Some reasons have to do with market forces, for there is a much smaller supply of historic Native American art than of African or Oceanic art. There is an extensive literature which examines more profound reasons having to do with the ambiguous place of Native Americans within

mainstream North American culture, including the classic studies of Fiedler (1969) and Stedman (1982).

4. Some recent Canadian events include the Lubicon boycott of the 1988 Calgary Winter Olympics exhibition "The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples"; the Assembly of First Nations/Canadian Museums Association national conference held to initiate dialogue on problems ranging from repatriation to interpretation (Carleton University, Ottawa, November 1988); and the Woodlands Indian Cultural Centre's October 1988 conference on stereotyping, "Fluffs and Feathers." In both the United States and Canada a number of innovative exhibitions have taken place involving Native Americans in the process of self-representation to an unprecedented degree. An outstanding recent example is the Burke Museum's Washington state centennial exhibition "A Time of Gathering" in 1989. Still other exhibitions are in the planning stages at institutions such as the American Museum of Natural History and the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology. See also the discussion by Clifford et. al. (1989:152-153) of the process of Native/museum collaboration in developing an exhibition.

5. The following discussion is largely summarized from Belting (1987), an essay which is particularly valuable both because of its rigorous examination of the philosophical basis of the old art history and because its discussion of the new art history is relatively free from specific ideological bias. Other assessments directed at more specific issues in new art historical methodology can be found in the introductory chapters of Clark, 1984; Alpers,1983; Pollock, 1988; and the essays included in the anthology of Rees and Borzello, 1987.

6. Grabar comments that scholars of non-Western art active in the 1950s and 1960s "trained in Western art...more or less accepted as a truth that the linear progression of Italian art from the fourteenth to the seventeenth [centuries] was paradigmatic of all artistic developments..." He also notes, however, that many came to see that the acceptance of this Western-derived paradigm was the result of the historical circumstances of the development of the discipline rather than the operation of universal laws (1982:282).

7. The tacking on of token objects of tribal art to the universal history of art has continued in most introductory textbooks used in university his-

tory of art surveys. Such inclusions reveal little that is meaningful in the histories of Native art traditions.

8. Iconologists have also taken a sporadic interest in Native American art. When the founder of this branch of art history, Aby Warburg, made his one trip to America in 1908, it was to visit the American Southwest in order to pursue his obsessive interest in magic and the forces of the irrational among the Pueblo Indians. Like the stylistic appropriations of twentieth-century Euro-American art, this type of investigation was guided by a need to validate perceptions about the European tradition (Gombrich, 1986).

9. At one point in her essay, Vastokas calls for a "new" Native art history. This should not be confused with the 'new art history' that is the subject of this essay, a phrase that refers to a specific revisionist program. The confusion also points to a continuing debate among art historians over whether these revisions will result in a renewal of the old discipline (such as Vastokas urges for Native American art studies) or a complete change of paradigm.

10. A recent example is the publication by the Huron historian Marguerite Vincent Tehariolina of Iroquois and Plains Indian artifacts in her book on Huron art and culture (1984). The phenomenon is even more notable in contemporary revivals of Native art, such as the mingling of Northwest coast traditions at 'Ksan in the 1970s. The pattern in such revivals has been toward a more "accurate" reference to strictly defined ethnic traditions as the revival matures, in all likelihood as the result of subtle suggestions from museum curators and others in whom the notion of coherence between style and ethnicity is deeply rooted (Macnair, Hoover, and Neary, 1984).

11. Problems in the application of Panofskian iconological methods to African art have been rigorously analysed by Blier, 1988. Although some of the problems for Native American art parallel those encountered in the study of other small-scale societies, there are also significant differences. These arise largely from the different potential of field investigation in various areas. It has been possible to study many African and Melanesian art traditions in the field because of the substantial continuities of historical with contemporary artistic practices. However, this has rarely been possible for historically known forms of Polynesian, Micronesian or Native American art. In these areas earlier

and far-more extensive colonization resulted in the extermination or severe modification of the cultural contest which produced the art forms under examination. As well, religious practices which survived were usually driven underground so far as to be beyond the gaze of the art historian or anthropologist. Revivals occurring today frequently involve the reinvention of ritual and art forms involving innovation and syncretism, further complicating attempts at the historical recontextualization of art forms. Thus the scholar Is far more reliant on ethnohistorical texts recorded by early travelers and ethnographers and must attend to the European cultural biases and textual conventions that inform these texts.

12. Both Zerner and Grabar regard these two tendencies as central in their contributions to the special issue of the Art Journal devoted to "The Crisis in the Discipline" (Zenner, 1982), one of the first mainstream American publications to attempt a formulation of the new critiques of the discipline. Grabar presents the notion of separate 'histories of art' in terms of a "centrifugal" model of disciplinary evolution which, in his concluding remarks, he sees as likely to "end up by becoming de facto the model of our time, because its objectives are clear, its techniques are known, and its institutional setting is nearly in place." Grabar also advocates replacing "the pernicious and elitist hierarchy of genres and of artistic traditions which still rules the world of art historians" (1982: 283).

13. Three such models, collected at Lorette in 1921, were acquired the following year by the American Museum of Natural History. They are a tobacco box (50.2/2054 A, B), a bow fire-drill (50.2/2055 A-D), and a model cradelboard (50.2/2056). All are constructed of wood and hide with no trade materials. They do not represent the actual material culture of the Lorette Huron in the period of Speck's visit.

14. I am grateful to Jonathan King for bringing to my attention an exception to this pattern, a birchbark scroll in the Museum of Mankind. It has no moosehair embroidery, but bears an ink inscription in French commemorating the visit of the Marquess of Lorne, Governor General of Canada, to Lorette in 1883 and was presented to him by the Huron chiefs (published in King 1982: 66; the inscription is not discernable in the photograph).

15. The engraving was used as an illustration to Francois Ducreux' seventeenth-century publication and has been widely reproduced and reworked by Canadian artists in the centuries since. The engraving is, of course, particularly iconic to those who, like Pierre Sioui, attended Catholic schools in Quebec.

16. Pollock has defined the new art historians' use of this term clearly: "representation stresses something refashioned, coded in rhetorical, textual or pictorial terms, quite distinct from its social existence" (1988: 6).

17. Jean-Hubert Martin, the curator of the most ambitious recent cross-cultural exhibition, "Magiciens de la Terre," has stated clearly that his most important criterion for selecting works from any world culture was the "strength" of the individual work, and that this quality has to be determined from the point of view of the Western receptor (Buchloh, 1989:158). In a commentary on this interview Clifford takes issue with this position, advocating the inclusion of different culturally-based curatorial viewpoints to multiply the meanings presented (1989:152).

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Plate 4: Robert Houle, "Warrior Shield for the Lubicon" 1989, mixed media of his work, oil, red oxide, ink on scrap metal with photograph, 79 cm (diameter), Private Collection, Ottawa.

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Plate 6: Ron Noganosh, "Shield for a Modern Warrior or Concession to Beads and Feathers in Indian Art" 1984-85, mixed media, Collection, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 152522.

Figure 1: Gregoire Huret, "Jesuits Martyred by the Iroquois Indians" 1664, engraving, National Archives of Canada, C41035.