

A VOICE IN THE SILENCE: CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY  
THROUGH THE VISUAL ARTS

By

Brieahn DeMeo

Submitted to the

Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences

of American University

in Partial Fulfillment of

the Requirements for the Degree


of Master of Arts

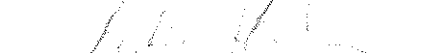
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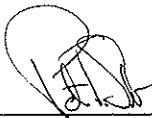
Arts Management

Chair:

  
Armonia Varela

  
Michael Wilkerson

  
Sherburne Laughlin



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Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences

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ABSTRACT

The visual arts can be utilized as a mode of non-verbal discourse within marginalized societies. The process of creating a work of art affords an individual the opportunity to re-imagine their own self and realize challenges that may arise in maintaining this identity. In situations where verbal communication is either ignored or non-existent the visual arts offer a medium through which to express disparities and inequities faced by a marginalized population. Three case studies examine the different ways in which the visual arts can manifest themselves and promote a stronger sense of self for the individual and community and foster a dialogue with a larger audience.

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## CHAPTER 1

### A VOICE IN THE SILENCE

“What I do attempt, is to create images that will cause the observer to look upon reality in a more contemplative way.”  
Antoni Tàpie

Since the beginning of human consciousness there have been artistic and symbolic representations of the social realities we experience. The *Hall of Bulls* in the caves of Lascaux, France depict symbolic worldviews of some of the earliest human beings (Lewis-Williams 2002). The significance of these cave paintings lie in their ability to represent societal conceptions of reality. The depictions provide us with a window into the reality of another culture in another time and place. The paintings on the walls evoke an emotional connection between the viewer and the artist who created them. Although we have little knowledge of the artist, we are able to achieve an understanding of the significant aspects of their culture through these symbolic representations of the world. What we see are nothing more than the image of a horse, a hand, and a bull. What we realize is that they are not just horses and hands and bulls, they represent the beliefs and realities of this society.

Art is not easily defined and there is not one single characteristic that identifies it. Art is personal and emotional and is therefore difficult to describe. Traditionally it encompasses a wide range of disciplines including dance, theater, music, and visual art.

For the purposes of this paper I will focus on the visual arts and define them as any object or image that's significance moves beyond the ordinary and into that of the extraordinary<sup>1</sup>. The images convey meanings beyond their overt interpretations and you begin to understand the artist's worldview through these visual representations.

Art functions as a non-verbal communicator, visually representing the realities of the world in which we live. Social realities are subjective realities, and represent the interpretations of the artist. No two people will see the world quite the same, creating a visual portrayal of what life means to the artist permits the viewer to experience this alternative reality. When encountering cross-cultural interactions it is often difficult for either party to understand what the other is trying to say or within what context their beliefs and values exist. Art and artistic expression have a unique way of helping us to understand one another more fully by tapping into the emotional aspect of human existence; we feel what the artist is feeling through their artwork. The arts evoke emotions within people and cultivate spheres of understanding.

The use of art as a mode of discourse becomes increasingly useful within marginalized communities. In environments where verbal communication is limited or non-existent, art provides an outlet for self-expression and voice. Establishing a symbolic representation of the disparities and injustices that communities experience produces a creative sphere in which to express feelings about a social situation. It facilitates indirect and symbolic communication which is verbally silent yet visibly loud (Huss 2007a, 983). A once silent population now has a medium through which to explain and express the

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<sup>1</sup> This definition of the visual arts is one crafted by the author. While it may represent an acknowledged notion of what the visual arts are it does not present an established definition.

realities that they face in their daily lives. Art can be utilized as a powerful tool for social change urging the dominant power to recognize the existing inequities.

The arts are deeply rooted within the cultural context from which they are derived. The cultural elements of the arts are intrinsic to the understanding of art itself. Images portrayed in art pieces are often rooted in symbolic systems of meaning that are learned and understood through ones cultural upbringing. Symbols become a vehicle for cultural understanding and orientation within social systems, and operate to sort out experience and place it within a cultural category. This then allows the artist to better understand his or her own societal beliefs. A cultural identity is represented through the visual context that is created by the artist. The artist begins to gain a better understanding of the systems within which they reside and may bring these revelations to the community as a new way of viewing a shared cultural identity. With a reinvigorated sense of shared existence communities are better equipped to face challenges that may arise. Images evoke an emotional connection throughout the community and foster new modes of self-expression for its members.

Language legitimizes cultural institutions by creating meaning (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 33) and allows us to communicate our social realities verbally. Beliefs, values and behaviors are understood because words are associated with culturally significant concepts. Identity is acknowledged and maintained through the use of language. In environments where this discourse is controlled art becomes the language through which social realities can be communicated and allows the artist to bring attention to any inequities that exist within society



The emotive qualities of the arts create an environment through which unfamiliar realities may be understood. The arts “speak” to audiences in a way that is unique and allows for the reception of ideas more effectively. As a form of non-verbal discourse the arts have the potential to communicate disparities felt by marginalized communities and empower them to hold authority over their lives.

### Three Case Studies

Three cases studies are presented in the following chapters, each representing communities that have become displaced from their homelands and/or pushed to the margins of society. Each has found themselves in the midst of cultural hybridization, forced to renegotiate their own identities within the context of new societies. The case studies can be viewed as building on each other, or as representing the steps a community may follow in order to explore their own sense of cultural identity and develop a dialogue addressing the issues that may arise within these communities as a result. Beginning first with the individual artist developing a stronger sense of identity in relation to the challenges they are faced with (Bedouin Women in Israel), continuing on to the communities shared sense of understanding and realization that together they are better able to combat challenges they may be faced with (Cuban exiles in Miami, Florida), and finishing with the museums potential role in developing a space for these conversations to take shape and for dialogue to be held between the marginalized community and the greater population (Native Peoples and the National Museum of the American Indian).

Case #1: The Bedouin women of Israel represent a marginalized community that has utilized modes of artistic expression to explore the sources of discontent and inequity

created by the shift from a nomadic to sedentary lifestyle. Through the use of art they have begun to create symbolic spaces that allow navigation through real life barriers and develop problem-solving skills to combat these barriers. It is through the artistic process and subsequent discussion of artistic product that these women are able to begin to think critically about their social realities.

Case #2: Cuban exiles in Miami demonstrate how the visual arts can be used as a catalyst for community development outside of a homeland. The art of Cuba, grounded in a rich and vibrant national identity, provided a source of continuity for exiles newly arrived in the United States. For this group of displaced peoples, the very essence of this artistic tradition allowed for the exploration of what it meant to be Cuban outside of Cuba. The importance of maintaining these traditions and supporting art as an essential component of Cuban identity eventually led to the formation of what is now Cuban Miami.

Case #3: Native Americans have been displaced from their homelands and pushed to the margins of society for generations. Their identities are complex, rooted in the traditional culture that pre-dates colonial settlement yet is very much a part of the contemporary culture of America. Native identities are constantly changing and balancing tradition with modernity. Hardly trapped in the past, as many communities are portrayed, Native peoples live multi-faceted and contemporary lives throughout the country. Contemporary Native art retains many of the traditional processes and themes used by past generations while incorporating the experiences of being Native in modern society. The National Museum of the American Indian provides a space within which these conversations may reach a greater audience. The museum fosters a dialogue

between Native and non-native peoples and offers an opportunity for voices that have been ignored for so long, to be heard in a new and creative context.

Each study exemplifies the way in which the arts aid in the construction of cultural identities that lend a voice to individuals and communities to express this sense of identity. Through self-expression audiences may begin to understand more fully the realities of marginalized communities. Dialogue is established and solutions may develop as a result of the sharing of these social realities.

## CHAPTER 2

### RE-IMAGINING IDENTITY: BEDOUIN WOMEN IN ISRAEL

The Bedouin present an example of the way in which individuals can use the arts to begin conversations within their own communities regarding disparities that may be felt. Traditionally a nomadic people, in recent years, the Bedouin have begun to adopt a sedentary lifestyle in Israel (Huss 2007b, 306). Literally translated as ‘desert dwellers’ their name has changed from defining a lifestyle to defining a cultural identity (Cole 2003, 237). The rise of political power within sedentary states, introduction of motorized vehicles, privatization of land ownership and monetarization have all contributed to the relocation of these nomadic peoples (Barfield 1993, 76). This migration has forced the Bedouin to abandon many of their established ways of life, to be replaced by that of a city resident. Bedouin identity has begun to shift and is being redefined as they become more and more immersed in settled communities (Wooten 1996).

Women of Bedouin tribes, relocated within Israeli communities and thrust into this new way of life, often find themselves isolated from the public sector. A collective community, the Bedouin are learning to live within an individualistic culture, faced with fundamental differences between nomadic and settled life (Huss 2007a, 961). Living within the context of a settled Israeli community has proven difficult for Bedouin women. Adaptation to new cultural norms can produce stressful environments for those experiencing them. An inability to express overwhelming feelings of discontent can lead

to a sense of isolation and defeat for women experiencing this transition (Weaver 2000, 180).

Self-expression through artistic mediums allows for a visual representation of one's perceived social reality. The roles of women within Bedouin society are structured based on institutional order; individuals become conditioned to remain within these structures and identity is based on the adherence to structure and acceptance of cultural norms. Cultural knowledge is learned in terms of what is relevant to the particular society and is reinforced through legitimization processes; traditional affirmation, explanatory themes, explicit theories, and through the symbolic universe<sup>2</sup> (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 70-80). All of these methods aid in understanding cultural constructions as well as maintaining their existence and relevance within society.

The inequities and injustices that face many communities throughout the world are the product of socially constructed institutions that have failed to incorporate all facets of society, or have simply chosen to negate certain aspects of them. Institutions are cultural constructions developed to order reality, through them individuals learn what is appropriate behavior and how to navigate through their world effectively. Institutions create the parameters within which communication functions, but it is individuals who utilize communicative devices to rethink cultural constructions. The knowledge that guides individual's conduct within a society is part of these institutions. With each culture we find varying institutions that direct and shape social interpretations of reality

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<sup>2</sup> Traditional affirmation-“this is the way things are done”; explanatory themes-relating sets of objective meanings; explicit theories- institution is legitimized in terms of a differentiated body of knowledge; significations that refer to realities other than those of everyday life. [Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York, New York: Anchor Books, 1967)].

and develop environments in which individual realities are constructed and maintained. It is the hidden cultural<sup>3</sup> that often governs the way in which we see the world and it is within these contexts that social realities are expressed (Weaver 2000, 72). An individual's behavior is the extension of the system within which he/she lives (Korac-Kakabadse 2001, 6). These extensions allow for the sharing of human talents and the transmission of cultural information (Hall 1989, 37).

When one's own institutions are contradicted a sense of dissonance arises within the individual or community (Weaver 2000, 73). From this emerges confusion and feelings of isolation develop. Individuals may develop anxiety over loss of signs and symbols when exposed to a new culture. These cues help to establish a known identity and when they suddenly appear altered or disappear altogether one may experience a crisis of identity (Weaver 2000, 177, 181). Common ways of viewing the world are challenged and reestablished within new contexts.

Some women of Bedouin communities have begun to utilize art as a way to expose the limitations that they experience in their daily lives, and the sense of isolation and dissonance from their known identity that they feel. Lack of mobility has been the primary obstacle in adjusting to sedentary life. Traditional Bedouin norms prevent women from participating in the public sector without the company of a male relative<sup>4</sup>. Economic conditions, however, have forced men to take jobs away from the home

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<sup>3</sup> Hidden culture refers to the cultural logic of a society. It is typically viewed as inherent to the social structure, and often is not consciously recognized by the people who prescribe to it.

<sup>4</sup> Men within a family are seen as protectors of the female relatives (Huss 2007a).

leaving many women alone<sup>5</sup>, yet they must continue to adhere to the traditional rules of movement and socialization (Huss 2007b, 307). In the past women's communities were independent spheres of discourse; women were able to meet and socialize freely. A woman's ability to move between various networks of information afforded her an invisible power within the community (Barfield 1993, 76). This power no longer exists as many women are confined to their homes, unable to journey outside of the private sector.

Modernization and Islam seeks to place the women firmly in a household setting, which denies them the social freedom that they once experienced (Abu-Lughod 1998). These women begin to feel isolated but are unable to express their unhappiness effectively. Vocalization of discontent is not seen as acceptable within Bedouin culture. Art becomes an effective tool for self-expression in this situation. It allows the individual to visually represent the disparities and limitations that they experience.

A study conducted by Ephrat Huss, an art therapist, illustrates the effectiveness of using art to navigate through this crisis of identity. Bedouin women were given the opportunity to visually represent their experiences of sedentary life through self-created art<sup>6</sup>. In an attempt to combat oppression caused by poverty, culture, gender, and influence of dominant culture, social workers bring women together in hopes of building a stronger sense of community. This study demonstrates art's ability to facilitate self-expression where verbal communication is not possible. The women used blank sheets of

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<sup>5</sup> High poverty within these communities has resulted in the inability for extended family to protect in the same capacity as they would previously. These family members are no longer available for chaperoning women around the cities (Huss 2007a).

<sup>6</sup> The women in this study were brought together through the welfare department. Impoverished women often become the responsibility of the welfare department. Social workers create social programs in hopes of easing the transition of these women into Israeli society (Huss 2007a).

paper as a symbolic “space” for self-expression, communication, and problem solving. The artistic process allowed the women to imagine resistance against the dominant cultural norms that deny them mobility. They were able to examine the realities that they experienced and “dream” of what the alternatives might be (Huss 2007b, 316).

Common themes begin to appear amongst the works created by these women. The study separates these themes into categories for further analysis; category one and two presenting the lack and pain that women experience and the third and fourth category utilizing physical symbols of struggle and integrative solutions to their struggle (Huss 2007a, 964) . Symbolic patterning, and repetition of imagery throughout, establishes a shared language amongst the women. While there is some difference in definition and use of certain symbols—for one woman the image of a house signified basic protection, occupying a space in which she can move and affording her a mobility she currently lacks, while in another example the house motif illustrates the constraining aspect of a home (Illustration 1), the inability to leave and venture out into the public world (Huss 2007a)—a common understanding of the message that is being communicated is present. The art created may not be considered fine art, what is important is not the quality but what the art does. By drawing their feelings and experiences these women begin to better understand what those feelings are.





Illustration 1. Image of woman in house (Huss 2007a)

The interpretation of images, while rooted in the subjective reality of the artist, allows each woman to “experience” what the symbols mean to her in relation to what it means to an outside audience. A house may be viewed generally as a modernity, independence and status, but in actuality it represents the cultural limitations felt by an individual (Huss 2007a, 966). Other motifs include car imagery; representing the real and physical outside, of which women cannot easily move through. The symbolic representations of these social realities combine both traditional and western elements.

Nature motifs, traditional to Arab art, are used throughout the artworks, but are utilized in more western ways (Huss 2007a, 972). We recognize a transition of identity from past to present that it is wrought with feelings of loneliness and confusion presented through the imagery. It is important to note that these women view the pain they experience as defined by external factors, it is not a result of their internal weaknesses' (Huss 2007a, 973).

The female body is considered a site of strength, and is drawn as struggling against the hardships that they face, this idea is demonstrated through physical representations of struggle. A single figure climbing a hill illustrates the inner strength paired with a continued sense of isolation. The feelings of loneliness and isolation persist even with the representation of female strength. These women continue to struggle against this new life and the many limitations that it has presented (Huss 2007a, 977). Through the process of creating art these women begin to develop a multi-faceted narrative that allows for the imagining of new solutions to their situations (Huss 2007a, 966).

The integration of solutions and group narratives in regards to these images is important for the experiences of the Bedouin women. While they work independently on their art they will discuss the meanings behind the pieces within a larger group setting. This generates an environment of group empathy and allows the conceptualization of each woman's struggle to be seen as a group effort. The dialogue that is generated from these discussions further develops the problem-solving skills, and potential implementation for real change within one's life (Huss 2007a, 980). The female artists create symbolic space within which they may move, something that is not so easily done

in their daily lives (Huss 2007a, 971). They create spatial ways of knowing, creating an identity based on the spaces within which they are located. Through a realization of this identity, one hopes that what follows is a sense of empowerment within these women. The knowledge that they can change their situation and that they are not alone in their struggle to overcome the barriers that they come up against.

The Bedouin are just one example of how the arts can facilitate self-expression and develop a sense of empowerment among marginalized communities. Through the visual representation of social realities, we can begin to understand the context in which these communities function. We recognize the disparities created by unbalanced power systems and the way in which cultural institutions can exclude a community from participating in that society.

Art facilitates the creation of voice for those who have yet to discover an effective way of expressing the inequities within their society. Through artistic interpretations marginalized peoples are able to present to a larger audience the struggles that face them. Where verbal communication is ineffective, the arts provide a unique opportunity to develop conversation and invoke social change. The arts establish agency within communities where alternative modes are not effective. Art produces a voice, a vehicle for self-expression that embodies the cultural and societal realities that individuals and communities experience.

### CHAPTER 3

#### MAINTAINING IDENTITY: CUBAN EXILES IN MIAMI, FLORIDA

The very essence of Cuban art is its exploration of national identity, of creating and challenging what it means to be Cuban. As an exiled community begins to establish themselves in a new environment a sense of lost identity may arise. Retaining elements of one's own culture becomes crucial in navigating through this period of adjustment. For Cuban exiles, relocated to Miami, Florida, the artistic traditions and connections that were established in Cuba became the connecting element for establishing a new community away from their homeland. Artists such as Baruj Salinas, Humberto Calzada, Maria Brito, used the skills they developed as working artists in Cuba to communicate experiences of displacement.

Cuban art is a product of both time and circumstance. Developed in an era of political and social upheaval the paintings of early Cuban artists reflect a national inclination for change, both thematically and stylistically (Gómez Sicre 1987). Each generation of Cuban painters grew from this inventive adaptation to artistic traditions. *La Vanguardia*, considered to be the forefathers of Cuban art, were classically trained abroad as Renaissance and Baroque artists. What distinguishes Cuban visual art from other traditions, and allows it to be utilized by a transnational people<sup>7</sup>, is its exploration and

exemplification of national identity (Gracia, Bosch, and Alvarez-Borland 2008, 2). A small island in the Caribbean, Cuba maintains a long history of political, economic and social unrest, which generations of artists have sought to explore and express through a variety of mediums, most often through that of visual art<sup>8</sup>.

*La Vanguardia* engaged in discovering and defining national identity for themselves as well as their country (Martinez 1994, 2). They created the foundations through which future generations would examine their identities within non-Cuban contexts. Exiles that relocated to the United States during the 1960's were forced to negotiate a balance between maintaining their national identity and incorporating a new American self. Although there are many circumstances under which Cubans left their home country, the result of this displacement has been the creation of an artistic mode of discourse through which these individuals critically explore and express the experience of exile.

*La Vanguardia* represented a collection of artists who were known and recognized throughout Cuba, creating an independent artistic movement, taking what they had learned through their studies abroad and establishing a unique form of art. A product of the environment in which they lived, "their art grew out of the turmoil of a country in the midst of reconstruction" (Martinez 1994, 2). The works of this generation sought to create symbolic representations of Cuba, to identify what it meant to be Cuban and the many aspects of this national identity. By constructing a visual narrative they could bring the awareness and cohesion of a national cultural identity into the public realm of reality (Martinez 1994, 41). Trained in European traditions, Cuban artists took the styles learned abroad and molded and adapted them to create an artistic codex that

would come to define Cuban art. Having studied their craft in Europe<sup>9</sup>, these artists were able to view the country through the eyes of a foreigner as well as a native.

A belief developed that a strong national culture would result in the self-determination of the country and its people (Martinez 1994, 37). Out of this the concept of *cubanidad* was born, defined as a “representation of the soul, a complexity of sentiments, ideas, and attitudes” (Martinez 1994, 38). *La Vanguardia*, used their art as a tool for the development of cultural identity and the advancement of Cuban society. Understanding the importance of creating comprehensively communicative subjects allowed for the production of internationally translatable works of art.

*La Vanguardia* laid the foundation for future generations of Cuban artists, creating a visual vocabulary from which artists drew their education and inspiration. The *Vanguardia* painters sought to capture the life of Cuba, focusing on the countryside and the peasants’ exploitation, struggle and survival (Martinez 1994, 51). Artists Eduardo Abela (Illustration 2) recast traditional themes in an expressionistic manner, depicting everyday scenes of Cuban life, building a rich and full narrative of Cuban life. Antonio Gattorno criticized the social conditions present in Cuba at the time while paying homage toward their natural way of life (Illustration 3). Each artist contributed to the expression of a multi-faceted national identity and vision of Cuba. They codified the essence of Cuban culture, and established an artistic tradition that became as much a part of national identity as that which their paintings sought to explore.



Illustration 2. *Peasants* Eduardo Abela (Abela 1938)





Illustration 3. *Do You Want More Coffee, Don Nicolas?* Antonio Gattorno (Gattorno 1936)

As Fidel Castro came to power in 1959, the social and political unrest of the country began to increase. As Cuba's political climate began to change, fearing for the safety of themselves and their families<sup>10</sup> many people were forced to leave their homes. By 1960 25,000 Cubans had fled to the United States, leaving most of their possessions behind. In an attempt to prevent mass migration, Castro created many obstacles for those attempting to leave the country, allowing only one suitcase and a maximum of \$100 per person. Arriving with next to nothing, the exiles were now presented with the task of



rebuilding the lives they had left in Cuba (Bosch 2004, 23). The first generation of Cuban artists to leave Cuba were *La Vieja Guardia* (The Old Guard). These individuals were born in Cuba; here they developed their artistic skills as well as their national identities. They represent the first wave of Cuban artists forced to confront the realities of displacement, creating art in response to being Cuban outside of Cuba. The continuation of artistic traditions allowed those displaced individuals to retain an important part of their culture.

The first wave of immigrants to relocate in Miami were composed primarily of teachers, journalists and doctors, along with art dealers and collectors who were familiar with the artists of *La Vieja Guardia* (Bosch 2004, 23). In an attempt to maintain a connection with their heritage, exiles began investing in the artwork of their community (Bosch 2004, 36). Having established themselves as professional artists, *La Vieja Guardia* presented a tangible link to Cuba for the community that was developing in Miami. As an individual is exposed to a new culture they are subject to “culture shock” and that as a result experience three stages of distress; loss of familiar cues, breakdown of interpersonal communication, and a crisis of identity (Weaver 2000, 178). In order to counter these reactions it is necessary to remain connected to one’s own culture in some way. As Cuban’s developed an art market in Miami they were alternately reconstructing and maintaining their cultural identities. Art became the way in which relocated Cuban individuals could remember and retain, to a certain extent, the lives they had lived in Cuba.

In the homes of Miami Cubans an art market began to grow, informal gatherings were held with artist and non-artist alike in attendance. These “Friday” events, as they

were called, not only created a venue for artists to meet with fellow Cubans in Miami, but also allowed the community to create a space to discuss art, culture, music, literature, religion and spirituality, all-important aspects to Cuban society. The community was able to reclaim the pieces of culture that had been left behind. Through ties of friendship, family and shared interests these artists retained their Cuban identities as they began their new lives in Miami (Bosch 2004, 43).

While the themes and styles of *La Vieja Guardia* reflect those linked with the experiences of exile, they remained within the visual vocabulary established by *La Vanguardia*. Having developed their identities fully within Cuban societal contexts, their connection to the homeland was much stronger than that of the younger generations (Bosch, 2004, p. 159). Artist Baruj Salinas, the youngest member of *La Vanguardia*, found himself traveling to the United States with *La Vieja Guardia*. A unique position that ensured the transmission of both old and new sensibilities within a growing contemporary Cuban tradition.

Abstract artist Baruj Salinas began painting as a child, often depicting Cuban landscapes, a common motif among *La Vanguardia* (Gracia, Bosch, and Alvarez-Borland 2008, 7). Many of his earlier works were left behind in Cuba or lost, not only was Salinas faced with reestablishing his cultural identity in a new place, he was met with the task of replacing the art of his past. Salinas finds abstraction an internal process; his work is informed not only by his Cuban heritage but also of his being Jewish and American. *Through the Ring* (Illustration 4) is just one example of Baruj Salinas' work.



Illustration 4. *Through the Ring*, Baruj Salinas. (Salinas 1982)

Humberto Calzada, an engineer by trade, picked up painting at the age of 75 following his immigration to the United States. His pieces depict architecture and landscape only, rendering an idealized Cuba that records an engaged yet objective analysis of the island's history through its buildings (Gracia, Bosch, and Alvarez-Borland 2008, 20). His work is strongly rooted in Cuba; the architecture is distinctly Cuban and addresses the internal struggle with exile. Calzada never reconciled the idea of not being Cuban, never felt the desire to integrate completely into American culture, his art maintains his Cuban identity away from his homeland. A sense of loneliness and sadness emanates throughout his work, the absence of figural elements further demonstrates the sense of isolation felt by the artist.



Illustration 5. *Light of the West*, Humberto Calzada (Calzada 1982)

*La Vieja Guardia* provided a base upon which younger artists and later arrivals would create their own artistic modes of expression, working within the mainstream modernist traditions that defined Cuban art (Bosch 2004, 157). Arriving in conjunction with this first wave of immigrants were the “Peter Pan Children,” 14,000 adolescents who were born in Cuba but whose families sent them to the United States alone. While most parents intended to reunite with their children, governmental restrictions prevented many from leaving Cuba for years. During this time the children who arrived in the U.S. were placed in camps, where they experienced abuse, neglect, and general isolation (Bosch 2004, 24). *La Vieja Guardia* arrived in Miami with a much more constructed form of national identity than the artists that few from this generation of Cuban immigrants. The works produced by this younger generation express the loss, suffering, and alienation they felt as they began their new lives in the United States.

The “Peter Pan” artists were faced with the challenge of negotiating a dual identity. They are considered to be the one-and-a-half generation, having been born in Cuba but raised in the United States (Gracia, Bosch, and Alvarez-Borland 2008, 3). Their identities were partially formed in Cuba, but as they were ripped from their cultural context during adolescence, acculturation into American society became a major component of their development. For this generation of artists the ability to define themselves becomes a central theme within their art (Gracia, Bosch, and Alvarez-Borland 2008, 6). The art produced is reflective of the memories that they retain from Cuban life along with their experiences as exiles in the US. For them, exile represents the “rupture and trauma present as cultural continuity and self-definition is disrupted” (Bosch 2004, 64). Those living on “the hyphen” of a Cuban-American existence were forced to

navigate between what it means to be Cuban and what it means to be American (Gracia, Bosch, and Alvarez-Borland 2008, 4). This dichotomy of identity produces emotionally charged works representing the difficulty in coming to terms with this split sense of self.

The final wave of immigrants to reach the Florida shores, referred to as *Marielitos*, were primarily political prisoners, criminals, mental inmates and Cuba's poor and unemployed. Arriving on makeshift boats launched from the Cuban harbor these individuals represented the lower classes of society. It is important to note that, although not artists themselves, this final migration resulted in the formation of a microcosm of Cuban society in Miami, Florida. Typically, transnational communities consist of homogenous populations, communities forced to leave their nations due to religious, political or economic persecution. In the case of the Cuban exile movement, all elements of society were now represented in the U.S. "This provided the artists with a climate of cultural continuity, an environment through which they could retain and renew their Cuban identity along with the acquisition of an American self" (Bosch 2004, 28). Against a new American landscape, these artists could renegotiate their national and cultural identities in a way that many displaced populations cannot.

The tradition of Cuban art was established within a climate of change that allowed for the formation of a movement devoted to identifying and maintaining a national identity by visually representing, challenging, and transforming what it meant to be Cuban. *La Vanguardia* created a unique medium through which exiled Cubans could explore their identities through traditional practices, thus maintaining cultural continuity within a new nation. In the case of Cuban exiles, the art itself is the unifying element in forming identity outside of the homeland. The art of Cuba establishes a national identity

that transcends the island borders. It is through the art, the visual representations of self, that a national identity was created, developed and maintained in the hearts and minds of the people of Cuba.

## CHAPTER 4

### NATIVE PEOPLES AND THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN

Museums, as a whole, are beginning to be viewed as potential sites for dialogue where traditionally marginalized people may enter into the public sphere. The creation of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) illustrates a recent shift from museums as object-oriented repositories to sites of subjectivity and participation through a discourse of empowerment for communities being represented (Brady 2008, 763, 767). The NMAI legitimizes native voices and in the process lends itself the same legitimacy through the authenticated voice (Brady 2008, 768). The museum challenges the stereotypical representations of native people that have been produced in the past (Lemontree 2006, 60).

The National Museum of the American Indian works in consultation, collaboration, and cooperation with native people as an important site for power and knowledge formation (Brady 2008, 764). The goals of the museum are to protect and foster the cultures of the Northern Hemisphere by “reaffirming traditions and beliefs, encouraging contemporary artistic expression, and empowering the Indian voice. It provides a physical space in which the dialogue that the arts create can reach an audience on a grander scale. Dedicated to the preservation, study, and exhibition of the life, languages, literature, history, and arts of Native Americans, and built on the foundation



that the knowledge of Native experience can be communicated through the visual and material culture created by Native people, the museum provides a place for artist's work to reach a national and international audience. The museum has a responsibility to bring the work of Native artists into the public sphere to initiate a dialogue between artist and audience. The Native voice, in this country has a long history of being pushed to the margins of society.

Native American identity resides on the ultimate hyphen. Descending from the oldest people's of this country they're identity is built on being of Native origin as well as being American. Their universe exists both in a time before the United States and within contemporary American culture. The lives of Native American people's in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are complex, multifaceted and ever evolving. Individuals are constantly negotiating this dual identity and seeking balance within their lives. Native artists re-imagine indigenous spaces through the process of creating art works that address what it means to be both Native and American. Their art becomes an integral part of the process of reclaiming a unique sense of self within themselves and the community (Ash-Milby 2010). Native Americans are seen as experts of their culture, creating an environment in which the native voice becomes the central source for the legitimization of cultural resources housed within the museum (Brady 2008, 768).

### Preservation of Material Culture

More so than any other Museum within the U.S., The National Museum of the American Indian is influenced and affected by Native American governmental policies. A more detailed listing of important legislation can be found in Appendix A. Indigenous

artifact collecting has a long history within academic institutions. The Smithsonian has long been the home of many native cultural resources; recent legislation has redefined the museums role in dealing with these resources. The Native American Graves and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) has changed the way in which Native material culture is handled and the ways in which the U.S. government and tribal governments interact with each other by acknowledging a government-to-government relationship. The law requires native groups to be notified and consulted regarding disposition of human remains and cultural items obtained on federal and tribal lands. It lays down guidelines for repatriation of items as well as sets up a review board for tribal claims to items inventoried by museums (25 U.S.C NAGPRA, 1990).

The Native American Graves and Repatriation Act came out of a 1987 public reporting initiative held at the Smithsonian Institution that found 43% of human remains within its collection were of Native American origin (Rose, Green, and Green 1996, 89). This report led to Senate Bill 187 that prompted a discussion for Native American representatives, museums, and the scientific community. Issues that were addressed involved the appropriate treatment and disposition of human remains and cultural objects. What resulted from these discussions was The National Museum of the American Indian Act that eventually led to the creation of The National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) as well as The Native American Graves and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA).

NAGPRA was established in 1990 and served to address the issue of Native American cultural resource ownership and the appropriate handling of native human remains. NAGPRA requires universities, museums, and federal agencies to inventory their archaeological collections in order to prepare them for repatriation (Rose, Green,

and Green 1996, 81). The National Graves and Repatriation Act propelled archeological and museum professionals into a national inventory process which has eliminated gaps in research as well as created a more comprehensive analysis of artifacts and skeletal remains (Rose, Green, and Green 1996, 99).

The implementation of NAGPRA within the museum setting has opened the door for a very interesting and innovative way of looking at how we study and exhibit material culture. In the past, museums have looked to anthropologists and scientists as sole experts of native culture. The National Museum of the American Indian validates the legitimacy of both scientific and native discourses and allows them to be viewed on equal ground. The participation of Native Americans in the design and content of research can eliminate the conflicts that arise between scientists and native peoples (Rose, Green, and Green 1996, 88). The National Museum of the American Indian has pioneered the field of indigenous institutions, maintaining a running native narrative throughout the exhibitions.

Consultation regulations and increased collaboration have “drawn the academic, federal, state, and indigenous nation representatives together” (Fine-Dare 2005, 182). This in turn has provided a space for native discourses to be recognized as an integral part of the research process. The National Museum of the American Indian provides a platform for communicative efforts between the academic sphere and the native community; the curatorial authority is shared between native members and museum staff. This practice offers a model for which institutions around the nation may look upon in the future.

The Native American Graves and Repatriation Act has allowed discussions to move beyond the purely academic sphere and for native groups to make demands beyond

the scope of current laws (Fine-Dare 2005, 182). Through consultations museums and anthropologists can gain a better understanding of what pieces of NAGPRA can be effectively implemented within communities. Institutions such as The National Museum of the American Indian find themselves at the forefront of native advocacy (Fine-Dare 2005, 186). The museum has the opportunity to join native groups in their quest to gain continued visibility in terms of governmental agency. By including Native Americans in the discussion and disposition of cultural resources we can move towards legislation that better fits into the framework of both National and tribal definitions of heritage and ownership.

The repatriation of native cultural resources provides a source of visibility and vocality within the academic sphere. Native groups are given the authority to direct how items are to be protected within the parameters of NAGPRA (Wright 2004, 136). This gives Native Americans power and control over any cultural resource within the museum system and excavation sites. The voice of native people becomes the primary evaluator for cultural resources. The process of repatriation provides Native Americans further control over cultural resources. The major motivation behind NAGPRA was the return of human remains and sacred objects to the native peoples of America. This has led native groups to reflect upon their cultural past and traditions. These reflections into cultural identity can lead to the continuation of traditions as well as the potential for native peoples and museums to create new ways of communicating these practices.

As native groups determine how cultural resources fit into the parameters of the law they are afforded the opportunity to evaluate the cultural traditions that define community and heritage. This reflection of the past brings native groups closer to their

cultural customs, which in turn, leads to a better understanding of one's identity. Creating a closer relationship with their ancestry can lead to a greater sense of empowerment for native peoples. Bringing back cultural traditions that may have long ago been abandoned can revitalize community solidarity bringing with them a greater sense of oneness within groups (Tweedie 2002, 8).

For the *Makah* of Washington State the practice of whaling has been re-introduced into the lives of the people. Anchored in the spiritual life-ways and structures of tribal society this traditional practice has reconstituted cultural continuity within the population. Hunting practices are directly tied to notions of ownership, social hierarchy, status, and sacred objects as well as other material culture (Tweedie 2002, 6). In developing a greater understanding for these traditions the *Makah* are able to put forth NAGPRA claims that are grounded in more apparent cultural conventions. Increased focus on native cultural rights has brought about a heightened interest in tribal histories within communities as well as the intensification of traditional artistic expressions and practices. The repatriation of material culture leads to the re-introduction of visual images, oral histories, songs and melodies important to communities.

Reflection can lead to challenging the definitions and boundaries of NAGPRA (Tweedie 2002, 100). The language of the law creates confusion and conflict between native groups and government officials at times. The present-tense construction of NAGPRA, as well as the applicability to traditional customs, illuminates the inconsistencies between U.S. and native definitions of cultural affiliation and ownership (Mussleman 2005, 711). These inconsistencies can lead native groups to develop alternative methods for protecting cultural resources and traditions. In attempts to take

advantage of NAGPRA regulations and protect cultural resources from looters, the *Makah* tribe orchestrated excavations on their lands, recovering upwards of 55,000 items. They then set about building a museum and cultural center in which to house these items, allowing the care of these items to remain within Native hands (Tweedie 2002, 5).

Reflecting on the traditions of society provides native groups the ability to remain in control of their cultural identities, empowering them to continue to explore and recount their stories. Reaching back into the past and re-discovering cultural patterns that may have been lost to the community allows members to maintain a greater sense of cultural identity, which in turn amplifies their voices within institutional settings.

### Establishing Identity

Traditional Native arts are in a constant state of change, incorporating new elements and in so doing providing an ideal platform upon which to investigate the Native identity that is rooted in tradition yet influenced by contemporary culture. Through the presentation of contemporary Native art the museum seeks to inform audiences that Native identity is very much a part of the American landscape. Exhibitions introduce the lively and diverse realities of contemporary Native Americans in urban, suburban and rural settings. Through the exhibition of works created by Native artists, the audience is able to glimpse into the lives of Native peoples not only in the past tense but most importantly in the present. There remains, today, steadfast stereotypes regarding the lifeways and realities of Native Americans in today's society.

Sepia toned images of stoic individuals in feather headdresses holding rifles continue to be seen as present day interpretations of Native people in America. The

reality is that many Native Americans live in urban or suburban settings, and those who remain on reservations are living with many of the same struggles that face non-native Americans in contemporary society. The lives of Native peoples are not as foreign as some might imagine them to be. Yet Native identity remains a novelty throughout the United States and the Americas. The National Museum of the American Indian seeks to alter these stereotypes and provide an accurate and honest portrayal of Native life before and after European settlement. The NMAI is committed to illuminating the full range of Native life in the contemporary world (West 2005b, 7).

The museum presents many shows throughout the year, exploring both the past and present lives of Native peoples throughout America. Contemporary Native art continues to retain elements of tradition. *Born of Clay Ceramics*, an exhibition presented in 2005, illustrated the close connection artists have to their Native roots. The show included ancient artifacts from Native groups across the Americas alongside contemporary pottery and clay pieces. Clay art is created through the same processes that have been passed down through generations. Artists synthesize the past and present through continuity of materials and techniques (West 2005a, 6). Clay pieces from the past are living entities, gifts from the Creator, made from the same living clay with which the first people were formed (ibid, 6). By its very nature, the art of clay making is an extension of Native identity.

Pottery is, perhaps, one of the most recognized Native art forms. Ceramics have not only been a source of cultural tradition throughout generations, but have also been utilized as trade items which became sources of income for Native people in the Southwest United States (Bernstein 2005, 41). For Pueblo people pottery serves as a

primary means through which to convey to themselves and the outside world their identity, origin, and consciousness, allowing the artist to feel the connection with his/her past. Pueblo pottery has survived because people continue to find meaning in it. Native art is composed of internal and external features (Bernstein 2005, 41). The internal features illuminate values and understandings that continue to inform native identity, the artist makes sense of their world through the process of creation and the viewer gains a deeper understanding of contemporary Native realities. The creation of ceramics is an ongoing process that demonstrates an innovative, decorative and technical excellence that remains an essential part of maintaining the communities collective sense of self (Bernstein 2005, 42).

To be Native American presents a unique angle to identity formation and maintenance issues. Unlike many immigrants who come to the United States and begin the journey of re-imagining the self through the lens of contemporary American society, Native peoples must negotiate an American identity from two perspectives, that of being Native American and of being American. Native communities have lived multi-faceted lives, in a multitude of environments, and have become a crucial part of urban/contemporary collage (West 2005b, 7) .

*New Tribe New York*, an exhibition held by NMAI in 2005, illustrates how Native identities continue to change. The exhibition featured New York based artists, Mario Martinez, Alan Michelson and Lorenzo Clayton, who have maintained their sense of tribal and cultural identity while drawing inspiration from modern urban culture (McMaster 2005, 20). These artists move freely between tradition and contemporaneity, native and non-native, rural and urban spaces (Haworth 2005, 10). Each artist draws



from their own cultural background and hopes to bring broader public recognition to Native artists in New York.

New York City holds the highest concentration of Native peoples in the United States, yet amidst increasing internationalization of Native and contemporary art these artists retain elements of their cultural identity that can found within their art. Each artist explores what it means to be Native in an urban environment and the new urban tribe that has developed. As these artists establish lives in New York their cultural heritage remains an important component of their identity.

Artist Mario Martinez develops a sense of place, context and cultural history within his work. He incorporates elements of Yaqui heritage, and his use of abstraction allows him to do this without betraying the sacredness of certain traditional image (McMaster 2005, 22). Historically the Yaqui held onto their culture, land and identity in spite of centuries of battle against the Spanish. Holding onto his identity is a cultural imperative that facilitates a deeper look into the realities of living a multi-cultural life. His art combines western modernism with Yaqui philosophy, the result of which is a non-traditional style that illustrates the duality of many Native identities (Figure X). Using abstraction the artist's pieces are emotionally charged and offer the audience the opportunity to connect with the artist in a thought-provoking way.



Illustration 6. *Yaqui World* Mario Martinez (Martinez 1992)

Alan Michelson, another artist featured in *New Tribe, New York* searches for the Native lives that have been hidden from our view (McMaster 2005). His art does not depict any Native peoples, seeking to uncover, identify, and interpret the Native reality missing from U.S. historical record and popular mind. Instead he presents the viewer with the conundrum of the “Absent Indian.” Through artful indirection the artist gives them presence in the consciousness of the viewer, the audience then becomes engaged in interpretation of the piece (McMaster 2005, 38). His work allows the audience to begin asking questions about whose history is being expressed. It challenges the ways in which Native histories have been portrayed, and allows the artist to explore his own feelings of lost identity. Michelson was adopted into a non-native family and did not discover his

heritage until he was an adult. Issues of hidden or lost identity inform his work as he explores what that means not only to Native peoples in general but also for himself. Adopting a spirit of inquiry and multiple perspectives Michelson's art illuminate histories that don't always conform to the myths that we have come to acknowledge as truth.

Art will always afford its creator an alternative way of communicating the realities that he or she experiences. For Native Americans this voice has been inhibited by the history of the past. Communities and individuals have the opportunity to take hold of their heritage and culture in ways that have been unavailable in the past. Through reflection of traditions a broader understanding of native ways of life can be revealed. The National Museum of the American Indian, as well as museums throughout the nation, can employ these insights to create exhibitions that focus on deeper understandings of cultural resources as well as the people to whom they belong.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

The process of creating art allows an individual to begin to analyze his or her own identity. In many cases this includes looking to the past in order to better navigate through the present and into the future. The artists must look within themselves and sift through the pieces that will lead to a greater sense of self-awareness. From this new sense of self the artist can then approach their community and offer a new perspective to any disparities or injustices that they encounter. As members, the individual artists have a close relationship with and the authority to speak for the community to which they belong. The conversation begins with the individual artist acknowledging and uncovering his or her own feelings about a situation. What makes art translatable is its universality. The emotional component allows the viewer to develop a connection with the piece.

The arts act as a form of communication that can be felt and understood across cultures and societies. Artists saturate their work with the realities that have created the world in which they live. The worldviews that each artist has been brought into inform the works created and allow the artist to more fully understand themselves. The artist may identify important struggles that they or their communities have faced in the process of creating their art and begin to develop new ways to approach these barriers. A sense of empowerment and agency is established and may facilitate change within the community.

For Bedouin women in Israel the art created by each individual became an effective tool for self-expression. The artistic process allowed the women to imagine

resistance against the dominant culture norm. The arts provided an accessible platform upon which to challenge these disparities and injustices experienced by the Bedouin in their new sedentary lifestyle. It created a voice for women who were unable to verbally convey their feelings because of cultural expectations. Subsequent conversations within female groups further developed problem-solving skills and the possibility of creating new solutions to these barriers. These ideas can then be taken back to the greater community and the potential for change becomes greater.

Cuban art has a long history of acting as an artistic mode of discourse through which to critically explore social realities of individuals, communities and nations. The history of Cuban art lies in its dedication to identifying a national identity and subsequently challenging and transforming that definition. The history of Cuban art positioned itself as an almost perfect medium through which exiled Cubans could rebuild their lives in the United States. The artistic canons that had created such an identifiable style of painting provided a recognizable piece of home that could then be incorporated into their new identities as Cuban American.

The National Museum of the American Indian presents the art of Native communities throughout the Americas, lending a voice to communities that have traditionally been ignored or neglected. The museum exemplifies how policy and support for the arts can support the conversation created by the artists through their artwork and foster a dialogue between audience and artist. The art created by contemporary artists paired with the images and objects of the past create a cohesive narrative that explores Native identity and how it is constructed in contemporary society. Drawing from the past

to inform the present, the art of Native people expresses the dynamic and complex realities of each artist.

The visual arts allow artists to explore their own social realities and the ways in which their identities are constructed. By looking at the visual arts as a catalyst for self-discovery we may begin to develop alternative lenses through which to investigate the use of arts within communities. By uncovering the social realities that one experiences a deeper understanding of circumstances may be acknowledged. The visual arts offer communities a medium through which to express the social realities that they experience. Lending a voice to marginalized peoples, the arts provide a platform upon which to challenge the disparities and injustices marginalized communities may face and empower them to face these challenges head on.

## APPENDIX A

### IMPORTANT NATIVE LEGISLATION

The American Antiquities Act of 1906 was the first in the US to recognize the harmful nature of amateur archaeology. The act authorized the President to declare public “historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures and other objects of historic or scientific interest” (16 USC 431-433). This also required permits for excavation sites with the stipulation that digs must be for the benefit of “reputable museums, universities, colleges or other recognized scientific or educational institutions (16 USC 431-433)”. While there are many holes in this piece of legislation it was the beginning of a national focus on antiquities and archaeological practices.

The Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 (ARPA) expanded the field of archaeology and preservation within a national context. While the American Antiquities Act focused primarily on the sites of historical importance, ARPA addressed the cultural resources that were obtained through excavations both legally as well as illegally. It established guidelines and definitions for removal of culturally significant items from federal and tribal lands (Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979). ARPA strengthened control over archaeological resources found at these sites (Wright, 2004, p. 133). Included in the legislation were notification requirements that mandated archaeologists to inform native tribes 30 days prior to excavation if results of dig had potential to be harmful to the site (Wright, 2004, p. 133). With this new focus on

archeological resources, the U.S. continued its legislative journey towards native cultural rights, and a new way of approaching museum practices.



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