LAGUNA SPIRIT & IDENTITY:

STORIES OF CIRCULATION AND SURVIVANCE IN THE ART OF LAGUNA PUEBLO

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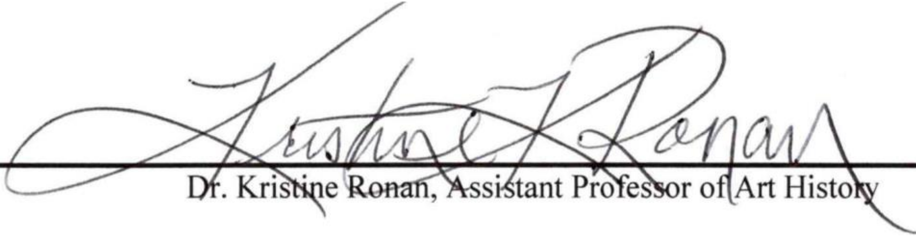

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Identity is no museum piece, sitting stock still in a display case, but the endlessly astonishing synthesis of the contradictions of everyday life. -Eduardo Galeano[1]

Introduction

Tribal members of the Laguna Pueblo share an enduring legend concerning the origin of their community. It is a story of homecoming, of migrants who find their sacred and rightful place in the cosmos. This legend, central to the Pueblo's worldview, gives its members a sense of place, purpose, and identity inseparably bound to a precise location in the universe: Laguna Pueblo. This deeply held legend of origin gives a sense of belonging to all the members of Laguna, its people, ancestors, and objects. Because the land of Laguna is the locus of the culture's spiritual identity, the Pueblo maintains a close-knit local community. Migration, circulation, or displacement of people and objects would seem to distance this connection with localized spiritual and ancestral forces. However, no matter how far from home someone or something may travel, each is fundamentally bound to the Laguna homeland.[2] This Laguna identity is inseparable and continually manifests and evolves through the lives of its objects.

Within Laguna's mother church, *Mission San José de Laguna,* bright images of pottery vessels adorn the altar cloth at the heart of the sanctuary [fig. 1]. The presence of pottery vessels is similar to the visual references to Laguna ancestors throughout the church. Both symbolically merge Laguna material culture with ancestry, identity, and spirituality. This series of vessels

[1] Eduardo Galeano, "Celebrations of Contradictions/2," in *The Book of Embraces* (New York: Norton, 1991), 125.
[2] Andrea Grugel, "Culture, Religion and Economy in the American Southwest: Zuni Pueblo and Laguna Pueblo," *GeoJournal* 77, no. 6 (2012): 789–799.

perhaps reminds the community that its objects, like its people, also contain an intrinsic cultural and spiritual identity, even if forged in the pottery ovens at Laguna.

Elsewhere, however, distance complicates the identity of Laguna pottery. Within the glass vitrines and storage vaults of art, anthropology, and natural history museums throughout the United States, Laguna pottery sits displaced from its home. In such settings, viewers typically evaluate and assign meaning according to the vessel's accompanying didactic label, which may briefly or in generalized terms comment on its culture, its aesthetic beauty, or even its value to the Western cultural economy. To the museum-going public, such Laguna pottery is no longer a symbolic or spiritual vessel. To the Laguna people, however, these works are remembered as if they were members of the community or ancestors far from home.

At the Laguna Church site, pottery appears again, but this time in a form which complicates the identity of pottery both at home and far away. Only a few yards distant from the church entrance, the priests' office doubles as an informal welcome center for visitors and tourists. Inside, local artists offer miniature-scale painted pottery vessels, ornaments, and souvenirs for sale. These objects are created locally and often purchased by tourists as if the spirit of Laguna were a commodity for collection and display. These pieces were intended to leave home and circulate an idea of the Laguna Pueblo for the public's admiration and imagination. To the buyer, this pottery is not spiritual, but memorable. To the Laguna people, this pottery is cultural but also commercial. Identity is carefully and beautifully constructed and is also purposefully distorted.

As a catalyst for agency through the expression of Indigenous identity, Anishinaabe scholar Grace Dillon's seminal theories of *Indigenous Futurisms* offers a channel through which to understand the construction of identity from the authority of Laguna creatives. Indigenous

Futurisms, “the visualization and creation of possible futures for Indigenous people,” can inform an approach to view Laguna objects through a Native worldview by seeing beyond the commercial ideologies that hold Laguna objects captive, both in museums and in art historical literature.[3] What sets Indigenous Futurisms apart is its application to a Native understanding of time in which futures are, and have always been, connected to the present and past.[4] I use Futurisms as a way to revise our historical approach to better align with Indigenous realities.[5]

By retelling the story of the Laguna Pueblo through its artwork and exploring its history over time from a postcolonial perspective, this project considers Laguna artmaking as an act of agency and survivance. I argue that the spirituality of the Laguna people is manifest in their art on multiple levels. This spirituality can be seen within the art and architecture of the very mission intended to convert them but also in the many Laguna objects that have been displaced from Laguna via their acquisition by museums and collectors. While some forms of Laguna art have evolved under new cultural and economic systems created by a tourist economy, these still reveal an inherent spirituality. The life stories of Laguna pottery reveal new ways in which cultural identity can expand, diminish, persevere, and transform. As I show in this thesis, pottery, like people, can call Laguna home. Laguna artists today, as well as others who embrace the ideas of Indigenous Futurisms, interact with the pottery of their ancestors, and through contemporary

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[3] *Indigenous Futurisms* introduced by Grace Dillon is a broad concept encompassing visual arts, film, music, and literature. It also draws inspiration from *Afrofuturism,* which interweaves traditional knowledge with futuristic themes of expression. While the original concept of Futurisms is a vast catalyst for change, this thesis will address its application to the realm of Indigenous visual arts as a *movement* with specific aims to create futures by reclaiming spaces of cultural representation in the art world. See Patsy Phillips, “Forward,” in *Indigenous Futurisms: Transcending Past/Present/Future*, ed. IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, et al. (Santa Fe: IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, 2020). 9.
[4] According to Phillips, “Many Native American cultures look seven generations back and seven generations ahead when making important decisions that affect current and future tribal members.” Ibid.
[5] Grace L. Dillon, “Imagining Indigenous Futurisms.” In *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction,* ed. Grace L. Dillon, 1–12. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012.

interventions the agency of past lives is made present in a plurality of artistic forms and expressions.

Survivance, a term coined by Gerald Vizenor (Anishinaabe), deliberately recalls the convergence of both survival and resistance as "an active sense of presence," a reconciliation of past and present struggle as determined continuance.[6] Whether *contemporary* or *ancient*, the labels of each generation of Laguna art fade away as spirit reconvenes with spirit and *Laguna identity*, in all of its countless and indefinable configurations, transcends past, present, and future temporalities.

Respecting the Power and Privacy of Sacred Tribal Knowledge

A study of cultural identity through the lens of Laguna objects must first establish necessary limitations of public knowledge regarding Laguna history, especially where that history intertwines with sacred epistemologies and spiritual identities. Laguna Pueblo operates on the principle that sacred tribal knowledge must be restricted to tribal members in order to retain its power—a belief shared across Pueblo nations. As Sascha Scott writes, "traditional Pueblo thought holds that knowledge is powerful because it is rooted in cosmology and supernatural forces; certain knowledge must be carefully guarded….Western attitudes toward knowledge, which generally hold that more knowledge is better…place a premium on the unimpeded access to knowledge."[7]

[6] Gerald Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 15.
[7] Sascha Scott, "Awa Tsireh and the Art of Subtle Resistance," *The Art Bulletin* 95 no. 4 (2013): 600. Scott also outlines a number of sources vital to the understanding of Indigenous knowledge systems and discerning the limitations of Western education. These include Vine Deloria Jr., "Philosophy and the Tribal Peoples," 3–11, Brian Yazzie Burkhart, "What Coyote and Thaïes Can Teach Us: An Outline of American Indian Epistemology," 15–26, V. F. Cordova, "Approaches to Native American Philosophy,"

How can historians decode silences in the historical record without betraying their secrets? Or how can one condemn neglectful histories while respecting necessary boundaries? My goal as an art historian has been to offer a platform and a voice to untold or underprivileged narratives, but this process forces me to question the reasons why stories do and do not circulate. As a non-Native scholar, I inherently operate outside of the boundaries of Laguna cultural knowledge. As such, this thesis functions to draw awareness, understanding, and respect to the necessity of keeping sacred tribal knowledge private. This scholarship cannot, and does not, presume to act as a revelation of sacred tribal knowledge or experience. Rather, my account functions as a decolonizing critique and an institutional self-reflection for a public audience to demonstrate ways in which art history can respectfully and responsibly amend the gaps in our own colonial narrative while offering a mobilizing platform for Laguna voices.[8] The interviews interspersed throughout this research acknowledge Laguna sovereignty and rely on the authority of each member's perspective and power over my narrative. While no public art historical account will ever be adequate to define Laguna identity from a cultural perspective, this thesis will address how Laguna identity has been distorted through the gaze of the outsider and the art historian.

A Laguna Art History

Art history's relationship to the Pueblos of New Mexico is infamously canonized in a lecture by Aby Warburg, the nineteenth-century German philosopher regarded as one of the

27–33, and John DuFour, "Ethics and Understanding," 34–41, in *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays*, ed. Anne Waters (Maiden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2004).

[8] Catherine Grant and Dorothy Price recently published a series of interviews to foster an academic dialogue on the current state of the art historical discipline and potential ways that art historians can decolonize the field from the inside out. See Catherine Grant and Dorothy Price, "Decolonizing Art History," *Art History* 43 no. 1 (February 2020): 9–66.

discipline's most influential founding fathers.[9] From 1895–96, Warburg visited the Southwest for the first and only time, but it was not until 1923 that he used his encounter with Puebloan visual culture as a definitive case study for his lecture on the evolution of cultural symbols: *Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North America.*[10] Warburg described the material culture and ceremonies he observed in the Southwest as evidence of "Hispano Indian layers," recognizing the cultural hybridity of a place intrinsically altered by Spanish cultural and religious conquest.[11] Yet Warburg's case for Pueblo cultural symbolism does not indicate from whence this cultural mixing comes, nor the political implications of his own outside narrative.

Warburg was captivated by the suggestion of cultural and religious hybridity within the Catholic mission churches of the Southwest. He was particularly drawn to the church of *San José de Laguna* which features a Baroque-style altar and images of Catholic saints surrounded by colorful vegetal forms and murals of traditional Puebloan symbols. As discussed in the following chapter, this convergence of religious symbolism within the church seems to at once honor the spirits of both ancestors and Creator within a Euro-Christian institution. Warburg described these examples of Native and Mestizo artistic agency as evidence of the invariable presence of "pagan cosmological symbols."[12]

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[9] Contemporary historians frequently condemn Warburg's writing for its damaging effects on Puebloan communities which misrepresented them to the world and furthered the idea that Native America offered a primitive gateway to ancient cosmologies that were quickly deteriorating with modern civilization. See Estevan Rael-Gálvez, "Coyote Convergence: Introduction through Interrogation," in *Converging Streams: Art of the Hispanic and Native American Southwest,* ed. William Wroth and Robin F. Gavin (Santa Fe: Museum of Spanish Colonial Art, 2010), 19.
[10] Michael P. Steinberg, "Aby Warburg's Kreuzlingen Lecture: A Reading," in *Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North America*, ed. Aby M. Warburg and Michael P. Steinberg (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 64–65.
[11] Excerpt from Aby Warburg's travel diaries in New Mexico. See Serge Gruzinski, *The Mestizo Mind: The Intellectual Dynamics of Colonization and Globalization* (New York; London: Routledge, 2002), 2.
[12] E. Boyd, *Popular Arts of Spanish New Mexico* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1974), 125.

Although Warburg is credited with widening the art historical discipline to include a more global and transcultural approach, even today, many art historians preserve Warburg's idea of Native culture as a static icon and Native American art objects as pure and unchanging artifacts of cultural and spiritual identity. In so doing, they fail to acknowledge the complex histories of conquest and convergence. Warburg's narrative, however flawed, offers a channel through which we may address how past transgressions continue to haunt the present.[13] Reorienting Warburg's narrative of "pagan symbols" and breaking down the theoretical constructions of cultural hybridity and authenticity may allow us to challenge the colonial condition that still haunts the discipline today.

As art historians begin to discard the traditional idolization of authenticity and learn to recognize the commercialization of Native culture today, the discipline requires a critical consideration of the literature informing our judgements. Most early art historical accounts of Pueblo pottery rely on iconography and connoisseurship.[14] Perhaps appealing most to collectors, this scholarship invokes a tone of appraisal and places value on the formal qualities of pottery vessels. More recent scholarship incorporates pottery traditions into broader discussions of Pueblo cultural expression. I believe the most successful of these provide insights from multidimensional cultural, social, and historical perspectives: *Converging Streams: Art of the Hispanic and Native American Southwest* (2010), *The Arts of the Missions of Northern New Spain, 1600–1821* (2009) and *Transforming Images: New Mexican Santos In-Between Worlds*

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[13] Scott, 614.

[14] While these sources are highly focused on formal analysis and connoisseurship, they remain influential to my study as they set the tone of interest in the collecting niche of traditional Pueblo pottery by the end of the twentieth century. See Ruth L. Bunzel, *The Pueblo Potter: A Study of Creative Imagination in Primitive Art* (New York: Dover, 1972). See also Jonathan Batkin, *Pottery of the Pueblos of New Mexico 1700–1940* (Colorado Springs: Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, 1987) and Don Dedera, *Artistry in Clay: Contemporary Pottery of the Southwest* (Flagstaff: Northland Press, 1985).

(2006) each provide an array of scholarly approaches informing a study of Laguna artforms.[15] Additionally, Ruth Phillips and Christopher Steiner's scholarship on the Native American souvenir unpacks the art market's subservience to authenticity in the commodification of Native cultures, providing a critical foundation to the understanding of Laguna objects in the twentieth-century art market.[16]

Recognizing that formal and iconographic methods of Western art history alone are insufficient to address an intricate cultural study of Laguna artistic agency across time, this project implements a cross-disciplinary approach. I rely upon the intersections of history, theology, anthropology, literary arts, and museum studies to provide a deeper contextualization of an object-based Laguna art history. As I seek to provide a more equitable narrative, I must credit the pioneering scholarship of Jemez historian Joe Sando, who composed a detailed account of the events of the Great Pueblo Revolt from the perspective of Puebloan communities.[17] More recent efforts by Laguna and other Native scholars seek to reclaim artistic and academic spaces as platforms for Indigenous agency alone—agency which, by its celebration of cultural transformation and hybridity, renounces and invalidates Warburg's problematic claims of a pure, authentic, and unchanging Native identity. Contemporary artists today who embrace the ideas of Indigenous Futurisms operate within a worldview that recognizes the cyclical intersectionality

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[15] William Wroth and Robin Farwell Gavin, eds., *Converging Streams: Art of the Hispanic and Native American Southwest* (Santa Fe: Museum of Spanish Colonial Art, 2010). Clara Bargellini and Michael Komanecky, eds., *The Arts of the Missions of Northern New Spain, 1600–1821* (Mexico City: Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso, 2009). Claire J. Farago and Donna Pierce, eds., *Transforming Images: New Mexican Santos In-Between Worlds* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006).
[16] See Ruth B. Phillips, *Trading Identities: The Souvenir in Native North American Art from the Northeast, 1700–1900* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1998) and Ruth B. Phillips and Christopher B. Steiner, *Unpacking Culture Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).
[17] Joe S. Sando. *Pueblo Nations: Eight Centuries of Pueblo Indian History* (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 1998).

of time—that all past, present, and future realities are eternally interconnected. Their understanding of *future as history,* will inform the long historical approach of this thesis.

Because Laguna is the only Pueblo to emerge after Spanish colonization in the aftermath of the Great Pueblo Revolt—a rebellion which in 1680 successfully expelled the Spaniards and the Catholic Church from Pueblo lands—the concept of identity manifested in the creation of its objects is complex, confronting issues of religious hybridity. As such, it requires the consultation of theological texts addressing the "terribly ironic" phenomenon of Native Christianity, which is deeply rooted in a history of religious conquest and acculturation.[18] There is an abundance of research and writing on Native Christianity authored by non-Native scholars; most of these address the seminal studies of George Tinker, an Osage scholar specializing in Native liberation theology.[19] I rely on the foundations laid by Tinker who contended that the transformations of religious hybridity post-conquest offer a mode of survivance and spiritual liberation. Building on Tinker's ideas, I see Native Christianity at Laguna as a hybrid spiritual practice of colonial resistance.

At the heart of Laguna cultural identity, Native Christianity informs the exercise of Puebloan religious freedoms within the very church structure originally intended for conversion. The hybridity that encompasses Native Christianity is also manifest within the production of

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[18] Jace Weaver addresses the "terrible irony" of being both Native and Christian because Christianity is a considered a borrowed religion of a foreign invader. Spanish colonizers saw the necessity of religious conversion as justification for the conquest of the New World. However, the modern acceptance of Christianity alongside Native spirituality complicates the act of free will, as many Laguna communities accept Christianity as a central component of Native spiritual identity. Indeed, to many Native theologians, Christianity is just another form of their own original religion. See Jace Weaver, "From I-Hermeneutics to We-Hermeneutics: Native Americans and the Post-Colonial" in *Native American Religious Identity: Unforgotten Gods,* ed. Jace Weaver (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998), 3.
[19] Clara Sue Kidwell, Homer Noley, and George E. Tinker, *A Native American Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001). See also George Tinker, *American Indian Liberation: A Theology of Sovereignty* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008).

many Laguna objects in the past and present. It inspires an artistic activism that reclaims cultural identity within the very markets used to commodify them.

To say that the Laguna community only accepted Christianity because it was forced upon them is to deny them the agency to choose.[20] Likewise, to say that contemporary Laguna artists *only* create art because they depend upon the market to survive an impoverished state rooted in colonial histories and governments also denies them agency. As the following chapters will attest, the art market today is a space that has been, in many ways, reclaimed for a unique form of Native American agency and power subversion. Defending this claim, I hope that this scholarship can demonstrate how art history and museums can reconcile the biases and silences of history and return Indigenous authority by reuniting cultural objects with the voices of their community.

Because art history—and as consequence, museums—in many ways still suffers from Warburg's harmful narrative, these institutions struggle particularly with efforts to label and categorize Native, Pueblo, and Laguna identities, which results in their tokenization. Acknowledging that cultural identity transcends definition within art historical discourse, this thesis undertakes the broadening and overturning of labels with an exploration of post-colonial hybridity and its manifestation throughout *Mission San José de Laguna,* Laguna pottery, and contemporary arts, stressing its centrality to the concept of cultural identity construction.

Chapter One outlines the historical context of colonial religious conflict from which Laguna Pueblo emerged in the late seventeenth century and will serve to situate the condition of religious hybridity from which contemporary Native Christianity at Laguna hinged, as evidenced by the constellation of religious imagery within the altar screen of *Mission San José.* Chapter

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[20] Samuel Y. Edgerton, *Theaters of Conversion: Religious Architecture and Indian Artisans in Colonial Mexico (*Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), 3.

Two demonstrates the commercialization of Native identities within the U.S. art market for Pueblo pottery as per the ideas set into motion by Warburg in 1896. However, by intercepting this historical account with the stories of two Laguna pottery ollas and their journeys into two very different U.S. museums, the objects will foreground our discussion and guide us through an understanding of hybridity as a powerful component of identity. Listening to the historic ollas as agents of memory and survivance will prepare us for the active performance of contemporary Laguna arts as set forth by the ideas of Indigenous Futurisms explained in Chapter Three. Through the intervention of contemporary artists, scholars, and activists, the modes of expression and resistance within *Mission San José* and the pottery ollas continually revive and transform; hybridity becomes the "active sense of presence" crucial to survivance and paves the way for future realities.[21] Coming full circle, our narrative will conclude where it began: with a critical reflection on museums that offers a process of decolonization which Indigenous Futurisms necessitates. This charge to museums will be guided by the voices of Laguna community members and Laguna objects as living entities of artistic activism.

[21] Vizenor, 15.

Every man is saved according to his own religion.
-Proverb banned by the Spanish Inquisition in the New World[22]

Chapter I: Rebellion & Rebirth: *Mission San José* and the Emergence of a Laguna Nation

Mission San José de Laguna greets visitors with distinct visual and architectural symbols of colonial Catholic presence. As the tallest structure in the Laguna Pueblo reservation today, its iconic, white-washed adobe architecture betrays its Franciscan origins from miles away [fig. 2].[23] Before entering, visitors must cross through a courtyard and cemetery where some of the first Laguna Puebloans are buried. While most of the graves are unmarked, the burial site surrounding the church shrouds it with an atmosphere of solemnity, silently reminding all who approach of the ancestors whose life journeys of rebellion and homecoming laid the foundations of the Laguna nation [fig. 3].

Approaching the church, large wooden doors carved with the Franciscan seal—the stigmatized hands of St. Francis and of Christ meeting at the cross—remind visitors of the early missionaries' religious objectives [fig. 4]. Contained within this orderly Franciscan structure, however, is a plethora of both Catholic and Pueblo religious symbolism.[24] The narrow church

[22] Robert C. Galgano, *Feast of Souls: Indians and Spaniards in the Seventeenth Century Missions of Florida and New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 11.
[23] Don Hanlon, "The Spanish Mission Church in Central New Mexico: A Study in Architectural Morphology," *Anthropologica* 34, no. 2 (1992): 206–207.
[24] Pueblo communities across New Mexico today share similar Catholic churches erected after the reconquest of Northern New Spain and the phenomenon of religious hybridity is not unique to Laguna. Neighboring examples include San Estévan del Rey Church of Acoma Pueblo and Our Lady of Guadalupe Church of Zuni Pueblo. Artist and scholar Alex Seowtewa continues this artistic tradition by creating religious imagery for the Zuni church as a tribute to both Pueblo and Christian beliefs. See Joel W. Martin, "Native and Christian," in *The Land Looks After Us: A History of Native American Religion* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 76. See also video interviews with Alex

sanctuary is arranged from entrance to altar with rows of church pews, its walls on either side adorned with wooden carved stations of the cross and a painted, mural-like series of traditional Laguna symbols [fig. 5]. Both the Christian and the Native American series adorning the walls serve to guide visitors visually through the church sanctuary and up to the altar where a colorful and ornately decorated altar screen stretches from floor to ceiling. The circa 1800 altar screen is comprised of a series of registers and compartments containing the Holy Trinity, Franciscan friars, Catholic saints, swirling floral motifs, and Pueblo ancestral spirits in the enigmatic form of watchful eyes [fig. 7].

The altar screen of *Mission San José* has long served as a site of debate for scholars. Its visual, cultural, and religious hybridity, once considered to be evidence of disappearance, may be reinterpreted as a monument to Laguna survivance. Warburg saw the hybridity of religious spaces in Pueblo communities as a threat to cultural purity. His ideas reinforced the growing twentieth-century belief in the "vanishing Native American." Warburg lamented what he believed to be an ancient Puebloan system of visual symbolism disappearing with American progress. In his eyes, hybridity and adaptation could not be a form of agency. For Warburg, the altar screen was proof that Laguna was trapped in a changing world and that it was destined for extinction.[25]

Nevertheless, the site continues to flourish today as an active church in the community, and visitors and tourists often interpret its cultural hybridity as a metaphor for religious harmony. While this interpretation may appear well-intentioned in its recognition of spiritual agency, it

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Seowtewa created for The Elders Project on Vimeo: Elders Project, "Zuni Painter Alex Seowtewa on Catholic and Traditional Religion," Vimeo Video, 3:02, August 2, 2012, https://vimeo.com/channels/372120/30027063.

[25]Aby M. Warburg, *Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North America,* ed. Michael P. Steinberg (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 50.

does not fully acknowledge Laguna's complex history of religious subjugation and rebellion. A myth of religious tolerance in the history of the Southwest must be corrected.[26] As art historian Claire Farago has argued, New Mexican Catholic imagery defies a single interpretation, since it emerged in tumultuous circumstances of political, ethnic, and cultural convergence.[27] The early history of Laguna must be analyzed carefully and thoroughly, as its origin story of resurgence during a period of colonial suppression has inspired artistic agency for generations.

Conquest and Conversion in Northern New Spain

The Spanish empire made its first foray into the Colorado Plateau region of North America in the 1500s in search of wealth. Impressed by the Aztec and Inca empires of the south, conquistadors pressed northwards in search of a new empire and, for some, in search of the elusive seven cities of gold still rumored to exist.[28] Spanish conquest was further motivated by the Roman Catholic Church and its urgent quest to convert the western hemisphere as quickly as possible to fulfil necessary requirements of the apocalypse and second coming of Christ, which many Catholic leaders believed to be imminent.[29] In 1598, Franciscan friars, led by conquistador Juan de Oñate, first ventured into northern territory beyond the line of Spanish settlement and

[26] Vine Deloria Jr. and James Treat, *For This Land: Writings on Religion in America* (Hoboken: Routledge, 2013), 56.
[27] Claire Farago, "The Semiotics of Images and Political Realities," in *Converging Streams: Art of the Hispanic and Native American Southwest,* eds. William Wroth and Robbin F. Gavin (Santa Fe: Museum of Spanish Colonial Art, 2010), 26.
[28] Spaniards were enticed by fables of seven cities to the north glowing with gold. Upon an expedition in 1540, explorer Francisco Vasquez de Coronado was angered to discover that these rumors referred to the seven villages of Zuni Pueblo, the adobe architecture of which gleamed with a sunlit golden glow. See Sam D. Gill, *Native American Religions: An Introduction* (Belmont: Thompson Wadsworth, 2005), 11. See also Galgano, 37.
[29] John L. Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 24–27.

into the land of the Acoma and Zuni Pueblo peoples. They established New Mexico as a remote missionary colony and the northernmost possession of the Spanish empire.[30]

The Franciscans' first settlement in Northern New Spain was far from peaceful. For most of the seventeenth century, missionaries took a forceful approach to conversion, attempting to civilize the people whom they disparagingly called *indios bárbaros,* or *chichimecas.* These were derogatory comparisons to the Aztec and Inca imperial leaders of the South with whom the Spanish were most familiar.[31] The Pueblos were commanded to "acknowledge the Church as the ruler and superior of the whole world," while their communities were organized into agricultural tributary systems under the Spanish crown.[32] In these systems, colonizers organized the Pueblo peoples according to a resettlement policy known as *congregacionés de indios*, or "congregations of Indians" which were villages modeled after Spanish towns.[33] While Spanish friars recorded that the Native Americans enthusiastically agreed to become Spanish subjects, the decree was accompanied by fear tactics and threats of violence, slavery, and murder.

By the late seventeenth century, the Catholic Church had an established history of dehumanizing Indigenous populations in Mexico and Peru. In Spain, church leaders held moral debates to determine if Indigenous Americans were in fact soul-bearing people and deserving of basic human rights.[34] If any community would not convert, the Church declared them unworthy

[30] David J Weber, "Arts and Architecture, Force and Fear: The Struggle for Sacred Space," in *The Arts of the Spanish Missions of Northern New Spain 1600–1821,* eds Clara Bargellini and Michael Komanecky (Mexico City: Mandato Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso, 2009), 4–6.
[31] Kevin S. Blake and Jeffrey S. Smith, "Pueblo Mission Churches as Symbols of Permanence and Identity," *Geographical Review* 90, no. 3 (07, 2000): 359–363.
[32] Blake, 363.
[33] Emilo Kourí, "The Practices of Communal Landholding: Indian Pueblo Property Relations in Colonial Mexico," in *Beyond Alterity: Destabilizing the Indigenous Other in Mexico*, eds Paula Caballero and Adriana Acevedo-Rodrigo (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2018), 31–34.
[34] Lewis Hanke, *All Mankind Is One: A Study of the Disputation between Bartolomé De Las Casas and Juan Ginés De Sepúlveda in 1550 on the Intellectual and Religious Capacity of the American Indians* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1994), 67.

of protection, granting the Spanish government permission to destroy, enslave, and exploit said community by any means necessary to secure resources for the Crown. Ultimately, Church councils ruled in favor of peaceful conversion practices. Yet in the remote reaches of Northern New Spain far from the administrative watch of Spanish viceroys, governance and conversion did not follow the letter of Spanish laws, and even converted Pueblo communities often suffered from violence and mistreatment by those in power. Soldiers in the northernmost territory often lacked formal military training and supervision and treated the Pueblo people with excessive cruelty.[35] However, the rural and isolated nature of northern settlements—and the strength of traditional Pueblo networks—became the communities' saving grace.

The Great Pueblo Revolt of 1680

New Mexican Spanish settlements during mid-1600s were fraught with discontent. Forced from their traditionally mobile lifestyles, the Pueblos were vulnerable to European diseases and Apache raids from the North. Several Pueblo rebellions broke out, and the Franciscans responded by punishing local Native leaders and destroying their religious objects.[36] Because population fluctuated drastically due to disease, hunger, raids, resettlements, and rebellions, the Spanish *congregacionés de indios* continually rearranged the social and political landscape in Northern New Spain. [37] Colonial Spanish maps of the northern territory, including one eighteenth-century example now in the Library of Congress, reveal the many settlements scattered along the upper Rio Grande and advertise Catholic intervention [fig. 8]. Sporadic

[35] Joe Sando, *Pueblo Nations: Eight Centuries of Pueblo Indian History* (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 1998), 75.
[36] William B Carter, *Indian Alliances and the Spanish in the Southwest, 750–1750* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 160–161.
[37] Kourí, 34.

revolts from Jemez, Zuni, and Acoma Pueblos shook Spanish settlements. Northern New Spain was rife with political and religious unrest, and the communities had reached a breaking point.

On the evening of August 10, 1680, warriors and religious leaders from forty-six Pueblo communities banded together in a great revolt, successfully expelling the Spaniards and Christianity from Native lands.[38] By 1680, the catastrophic effects of Spanish colonization had decimated Pueblo populations from approximately 80,000 to 17,000.[39] With so many lives lost, in the aftermath of rebellion survivors from Acoma, Santo Domingo, Cochiti, Cienguilla, and Zia Pueblos gathered to form a new community, *Kahwaikamen hanoh* in the Keresan language, known today as Laguna Pueblo.[40] In 2005, Jemez historian Joe Sando famously penned a new celebratory title for the Great Revolt, calling it "The First American Revolution."[41] It is commemorated by all Pueblo communities as the single successful expulsion of European settlement from North America. For the Laguna Pueblo, this day holds specifical significance because it marks the beginning of their origin story of homecoming.

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[38] Galgano, 37–45. See also Michael V. Wilcox, "Seek and Ye Shall Find," in *The Pueblo Revolt and the Mythology of Conquest: An Indigenous Archaeology of Contact* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009), 151–153.
[39] Edward P. Dozier, *The Pueblo Indians of North America* (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 1983), 56. For more information about the flux in Pueblo populations after 1680, see Paul Kraemer, "The Dynamic Ethnicity of the People of Spanish Colonial New Mexico in the Eighteenth Century," in *Transforming Images: New Mexican Santos In-Between Worlds,* ed. Claire Farago and Donna Pierce (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 81–100.
[40] Blake, 366.
For a detailed reference to the individual communities from which survivors converged at the time of Laguna's emergence, see Elsie Clews Parsons, *Pueblo Indian Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), 2:888.
[41] Joe S. Sando and Herman Agoyo, *Po'pay: Leader of the First American Revolution* (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 2005). In 1973, anthropologist Alfonso Ortiz commented, "This revolution [the Revolt of 1680] was fought for precisely the same reasons that the revolution of 1776 was fought—to regain freedom from tyranny, persecution and unjust taxation….It was a fight for freedom that has never been widely recognized as such, nor accorded the attention by historians that it might have had…but it is part and parcel of our common heritage as Americans and it must be made part of our common consciousness." See Alfonso Ortiz, quoted in Wilcox, 149.

The Great Revolt, however, was only the beginning of the story and what happened next fundamentally changed the Laguna cultural and religious landscape. Twelve years later, Diego de Vargas reclaimed Santa Fe for the Spanish empire and slowly began reinstating military dominance, including over Laguna Pueblo.[42] Painfully aware of their predecessors' failures and the disastrous results of their mistreatment of the Pueblo peoples, as missionaries gradually returned, they built new churches with greater religious tolerance and compromise, incorporating kiva and adobe traditions into church architecture. Historian David Weber notes that over time Pueblos "forced Spaniards to accommodate to their religion and culture, even as they accommodated to the ways of their Spanish neighbors."[43] While Mission San José de Laguna fosters narratives of peace and unity, it was built upon a foundation of conflict and death which remains visible within the church today through the recognition and reverence of ancestral spirits.

Because Laguna was a post-rebellion resettlement, its community was more politically autonomous than the area's original Spanish settlements. Laguna was self-governed, its lands communally owned and farmed. The Laguna mission, built in 1699 and dedicated to the cult of Saint Joseph, became a *cofradía*—an Indian confraternity.[44] Even after the fall of the Spanish American empire in 1821, the Laguna Pueblo remained a sovereign polity recognized by Mexico in 1821 and by the United States in 1863.[45] The colonial history of Laguna demonstrates remarkable resilience and flexibility during periods of turmoil, exploitation, and change. When

[42] Weber, 15–16.
[43] Ibid., 11, 19.
[44] Kourí, 39.
[45] Lee Marmon and Tom Corbett, *Laguna Pueblo: A Photographic History* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2015), 27–28.

those who had been forced into the *congregacionés* came home to Laguna, the land became a source of a new identity, spiritually and culturally autonomous.

Religious Transformation at Laguna: Hybridity as Resistance

There is no word for religion in Laguna Keresan.[46] The traditional beliefs, stories of emergence, and ways of knowing the world remain largely inaccessible to public scholars and as such, most anthropological and theological accounts barely scratch the surface of the culture's complex and deeply guarded spirituality.[47] While this scholarship cannot undertake a comprehensive overview of traditional Puebloan religions (for practical as well as privacy reasons), exploring some comparisons between Puebloan spirituality and Christianity will better contextualize the emergence and agency of Laguna spiritual hybridity.

The art world's consideration of hybridity as the absence or loss of authenticity resonates with religious debates over Native Christianities.[48] Several theologians, both Native and non-Native, consider Native Christianity to be inauthentic, arguing that two separate belief systems unavoidably lose some integral principles upon convergence. Early anthropologists, too,

[46] Sando, 30.
[47] Sam D. Gill simply summarizes Keresan Pueblo beliefs as a ceremonial system that emphasized a magical approach to "controlling weather, curing the ill, and maintaining good health, warfare, and controlling game animals and fowl." See Sam D. Gill, "Tradition and Change in Native American Religions," in *Native American Religions: An Introduction* (Belmont: Thompson Wadsworth, 2005), 106. Elsie Clews Parsons, learning directly from Laguna tribal elders, also published broad summaries of Laguna ceremonial traditions from the perspective of an outside scholar. See Elsie Clews Parsons, *Notes on Ceremonialism at Laguna* (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1920).
[48] Philips and Steiner consider how Native arts, commercialized for tourist markets and isolated from the cultural identities of creators were redefined under broad or multi-cultural categories and were plagued by disputations of authenticity. See Ruth B. Phillips and Christopher B. Steiner, "Collecting Culture and Cultures of Collecting," in *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds,* ed. Ruth B. Phillips and Christopher B. Steiner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 256–297.

considered religious hybridity to be the result of a “tragic acculturation.”[49] Yet scholars of Native Liberation Theology aim to correct this misjudgment. For George Tinker, Osage theologian and ordained Lutheran minister, finding common ground between Pueblo beliefs and Christianity does not constitute an abandonment of tradition but accepts Christianity as a foreign variation of Native beliefs. Tinker writes that so many principles of Christianity already existed within Native worldviews and that “we could even go so far as to insist that we already knew the gospel!”[50]

To understand the autonomous choice of the Pueblo peoples to accept a foreign faith that had, in the past, been abused by the Spanish to subjugate, enslave, and oppress requires a critical revisitation of the variant of Christianity that was seventeenth-century colonial Catholicism. If we recognize that Christianity itself has evolved throughout the ages into various strands of *Christianities*, we come to understand that the problem does not necessarily lie with Christianity, itself, but with its wrongful manipulation to service the political aims of the Spanish conquest. The Pueblo revolt, I would argue, can be considered a successful *revolution,* to use Dr. Joe Sando’s label, because even while the Spanish and the Franciscans returned twelve years later, the Great Revolt stopped the forceful and oppressive Catholic conversion strategy for Pueblo peoples in its tracks and allowed for a peaceful reentry of Christianity on Pueblo terms. When Christianity returned to the members of the new Laguna Pueblo at the end of the seventeenth century, it was not the same Christianity that had been inflicted upon Pueblo nations prior to 1680. The Pueblo people had fought and died for the right of free will and could now consider, accept, or reject the deeper theologies upon which European Christianity was based *on their own*

[49] James Treat, *Native and Christian: Indigenous Voices on Religious Identity in the United States and Canada* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2012), 6–9.
[50] George Tinker, “Jesus, Corn Mother, and Conquest: Christology and Colonialism,” in *Native American Religious Identity: Unforgotten Gods* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998), 135.

terms. Thus, it was not solely the Spanish who had initiated the change of Pueblo religion; the Pueblo peoples themselves had effectively transformed Catholicism. As religious studies scholar Joel Martin wrote, "converting to Christianity, they made Christianity their own."[51]

Once Pueblo peoples had stopped the oppressive conversion tactics of the Spanish, they could consider Christianity for its validity in respect to traditional beliefs. While some would choose not to accept it, others would find that at its core, Christianity offered an account of God which in many ways mirrored Pueblo beliefs of the Creator and a worldview which "did not discriminate on the basis of status, gender, culture, or race."[52] Some theologians believe Native Christianity to be a syncretic third category, a new and distinct religion. Yet, I believe that this view potentially minimizes Pueblo authority: syncretism at Laguna occurs only in spaces and in times of the community's choosing. Perhaps a more inclusive summary of religion at Laguna Pueblo would state that while all Catholic presence at Laguna is syncretic, Catholic syncretism does not constitute all Laguna *spirituality*. Rather, Laguna Pueblo authorizes syncretism and hybridity as a strategy for continuance.

One frequently cited comparison of Pueblo and Christian beliefs involves the Corn (Earth) Mother as a Christ-like deity. While stationed within Juan de Oñate's northern Spanish colony, Fray Juan Escolana enigmatically remarked in a 1601 letter to the viceroy that "here corn is God."[53] Over three hundred years later, anthropologist Elsie Clews Parsons described a deity of Laguna called *Iyatik,* embodied by a ceremonial ear of corn.[54] The two disparate accounts reflect how easily outside observers were impressed by the Puebloan sacrality of corn as a

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[51] Joel W. Martin, "Native and Christian," in *The Land Looks After Us: A History of Native American Religion* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 66.
[52] Ibid., 65–73.
[53] Rael-Gálvez, 20.
[54] Parsons (1920), 96–98.

sacrificial, life-sustaining product of the earth. While Parsons only begins to hint at its deeper cosmology in connection to Laguna ceremonies, contemporary theologians situate the Corn Mother deity within the context of Native Christianity.

According to one version of the story, Corn Mother, or *Iyatik* in Keresan, sacrificed her body by transforming into an abundance of maize to save the Pueblo people during a great famine.[55] The Mother's salvific sacrifice in death and resurrection as corn is continuous—she lives as a product of the earth to sustain all life. In turn, all life returns to her through the earth in death, completing the reciprocal cycle. Thus, veneration of corn honors more than the Mother, it also honors ancestors past who have returned to the earth. Similarly, the artistic act of creation is also imbued with spiritual meaning: the act of creating pottery from the clay of the earth reenacts the divine cycle of life by the Creator and the resurrection of Corn Mother.[56] Native theologians recognize the Keresan reverence of Corn Mother as a Christ-like figure: "Both recount a salvific moment in the community's past, yet both continue to function to bring some element of 'salvation' and wholeness to the peoples who honor the stories today."[57]

Iyatik is also present within Mission San José via the spiritual veneration of maize. Throughout the mural-like paintings of Laguna symbols lining the church walls, representations

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[55] For more detailed descriptions of the Corn Mother's origin story shared by Native communities across North America, see Dave Aftandilian, "Corn Mother in North America: Life-Bringer and Culture-Bearer," in *Goddesses in World Cultures, Vol. 3: Australia and the Americas,* ed. Patricia Monaghan (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2011): 135–148.

[56] Clara Sue Kidwell, Homer Noley, and George E. Tinker. *A Native American Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001), 33–37. See also Joseph Epes Brown, "There Is No Word for Art: The Creative Process," in *Teaching Spirits: Understanding Native American Religious Traditions* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[57] Ibid., 80. Because *Iyatik* is regarded as the mother of all life, she is also frequently compared to the Christian conception of the Virgin Mary as both a physically and spiritually nurturing deity. Anthropologist Peter Whiteley writes of the Hopi Pueblo that "two perfect ears of corn are given to a newborn child as its "mothers"; when a person dies, ears of blue maize similarly accompany him on his journey beyond life. Maize seeds, ears, tassels, milk, pollen, and meal all serve as sacramental elements in differing contexts." See Peter M. Whiteley, "The Southwest," in *Native American Religions: North America,* ed. Lawrence E. Sullivan (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 56.

of small birds appear to perch atop the painted motifs, each accompanied by a tassel of corn or a small vessel [fig. 6.a and 6.b]. According to Father Chris Kerstiens (Order of Friars Minor), the birds represent the souls of those buried within church grounds while the corn tassels emphasize the reverence of maize; during particular times of liturgy within the Laguna church, maize replaces Catholic holy water.[58] The symbolic consumption of the Corn Mother's sacrificial body conveyed by Pueblo spiritual narratives also correlates to the Catholic eucharist and the value of transubstantiation (the ceremonial consumption of wine and bread turned into the blood and body of Christ during communion). Theologian George Tinker and historians Homer Noley (Choctaw) and Clara Sue Kidwell (Choctaw and White Earth Chippewa) contextualize this within a Native worldview:

> When we eat, we understand that we are benefitting from the lives that have gone before us, that all our human ancestors have also returned to the earth and have become part of what nourishes us today. Thus, one can never eat without remembering the gift of the Mother, of all our relatives in this world, and of all those who have gone before us.[59]

By incorporating maize into the church imagery and liturgy, Mission San José becomes a site of spiritual convergence where at certain times both Christ and Corn Mother seamlessly merge and support the veneration of Laguna ancestors.

At Laguna, religious hybridity is not a tragic defense mechanism, but a choice. While Native forms of Christianity persist in some areas within the Laguna church and village, other areas remain governed solely by traditional beliefs. During certain times throughout the year, even Mission San José transforms into a center for Laguna ceremonies and celebrations.[60] Here, Christianity does not compromise tradition. Each is given appropriate time and place;

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[58] Father Chris Kerstiens, in a conversation with author during a visit to the Laguna church, November 9, 2019.
[59] Kidwell, Noley, and Tinker, 82.
[60] Gill, 105–106.

furthermore, the community chooses the times and locations of hybridity and syncretism as an artful strategy for survivance while traditional beliefs continue, carefully guarded.

Laguna Agency within the Altar Screen of *Mission San José*

The altar screen of Mission San José de Laguna, created at the turn of the nineteenth century, stands at a liminal space in time [fig. 7]. Scholars have attributed the altar screen to the hand of a local artist anonymously known as The Laguna *Santero*—a title given to self-taught itinerant painters of religious scenes throughout the Northern region. While the identity of this artist is still debated, The Laguna Santero was likely one of many itinerant artists working within the New Mexico religious scene.[61] Created during a period of political change between the dissolution of the Spanish empire and the integration of U.S. federal Indian territories in the Southwest, the altar screen stands as a tribute to the perseverance of Laguna culture and spirituality and as a symbol of triumph over a literal battleground of religious identity.

The remaining Franciscan institutions in the Southwest continued their missions of Christianization after Spanish political occupation, but their practices often operated on teaching strategies less dependent upon forceful assimilation and more accepting of similarities and freedoms between religions.[62] Franciscan correspondences in the late eighteenth century note the continuance of Christianity in Puebloan communities but only as a formality. Fray Francisco Atansio Dominguez wrote in 1776: "Their repugnance and resistance to most Christian acts is

[61] Boyd, 155–169, 327–335. Paula Korngay summarized the debates in the 1980s surrounding the Laguna Santero's identity. While once attributed to a Mestizo artist named Pedro Antonio Fresquís, a wood-dating method (dendrochronology) has more recently compelled scholars to wonder if The Laguna Santero *predates* the activity of Fresquís, and that perhaps this artist inspired Fresquís and others to follow a similar style. See Paula B. Korngay, "The Altar Screens of an Anonymous Artist in Northern New Spain: The Laguna Santero," *Journal of the Southwest* 38, no. 1 (1996): 63–64.
[62] Kourí, 39.

evident, for they perform their duties pertaining to the Church under compulsion, and there are usually many omissions."[63] Even Warburg noticed during his visit in 1896 that Catholic religious leaders in the Pueblos "who understood not a word of the Indian language, had to employ an interpreter who translated the mass sentence by sentence and may well have said whatever he pleased."[64] In effect, Christian colonization never completely overtook Laguna. Christianity quietly continues only as it serves alongside traditional ways of knowing, even within the very church structure originally intended for conversion over three centuries ago.

If Clare Farago's speculation about the inscrutability of hybrid religious imagery in the Southwest holds true, it would be in the sense that the Laguna altar screen was built upon such complex layers of history and disparate systems of visual knowledge that it inspires so many interpretations.[65] One of the altar screen's current roles as a tourist attraction exemplifies this condition. In its contemporary setting, the church avoids historical accounts of colonial conquest in favor of an idealized narrative which more closely aligns with its evolved identity as both a Catholic Church and Pueblo cultural symbol. During my visit to the mission in November of 2019, Father Chris shared a Native American proverb which the altar screen's contrasting stripes are believed to symbolize: "The Laguna Church," he said, "is like a horse-drawn wagon; though it is led by both a red and a white horse, it takes us where we wish to go."[66] Using the

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[63] Eleanor B. Adams and Fray Angelico Chavez, eds. and trans., *The Missions of New Mexico, 1776. A Description by Fray Francisco Atansio Dominguez with Other Contemporary Documents* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1956), 254–256.
Sam D. Gill also writes, "Catholic missions apparently had very little effect on the Pueblo religious beliefs and practices, apart from forcing into secrecy performance of the native tradition and forcing the tacit public performance of Christian acts." See Gill, 108.
[64] Warburg, 14.
[65] Farago asks, "How can we interpret the visual traces of intersubjective religious experience under such culturally complex conditions? And who are 'we' to do the interpreting?" See Clare Farago, "The Semiotics of Images and Political Realities," in *Transforming Images: New Mexican Santos In-Between Worlds,* ed. Claire Farago and Donna Pierce (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 26.
[66] Father Chris Kerstiens, in a conversation with author, November 9, 2019.

intertwining colors of the altar screen as a metaphor for Christianity and traditional Pueblo spirituality, Father Chris's proverb speaks to the two different cultures and religions coexisting in harmony within the mission's sacred space. Art historian Maya Stanfield-Mazzi has suggested that as the colonial period came to an end, many churches in Latin America reimagined new narratives for themselves by removing connotations of colonial conquest.[67] By distancing themselves from a colonial narrative, Catholic churches asserted their authority in the New World as religious rather than political. In this way, churches could continue to thrive post-independence even as they transformed to accommodate Pueblo spirituality.

At first glance, the Laguna altar screen's intertwining Catholic and Pueblo symbols appear to reinforce visions of religious harmony. However, given the histories of Pueblo rebellion, the altar screen also speaks to a deeper history and identity of a people that transcends its colonial moment and, perhaps, the origins of Laguna itself. Beyond the portraits of the Trinity and Saints encased in swirling florals and symbols of both biblical and Laguna accounts of creation, additional symbolic imagery emerges that is almost invisible to anyone not specifically looking for it and which perhaps speaks directly to Laguna audiences. Though rather inconspicuous at first glance, groups of three triangular shapes on either side of the base bring another powerful spiritual presence to the church [fig. 9.a and 9.b]. Within each triangle, a face, tranquil and expressionless, looks out towards the congregation. The faces, almost hidden within the natural and geometric forms, represent the ancestral spirits of the Laguna community.[68]

Once recognized, other faces emerge from the surrounding artworks. To the proper right of the altar screen, over the confessional door, the face of another ancestral spirit looks down

[67] Maya Stanfield-Mazzi, "From Baroque Triumphalism to Neoclassical Renunciation: Altarpieces of the Cathedral of Cuzco in the Era of Independence," in *Buen Gusto and Classicism in the Visual Cultures of Latin America, 1780–1910,* ed. Paul B. Niell (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013), 250.
[68] Father Chris Kerstiens, in a conversation with author, November 9, 2019.

through floral designs, as if watching and listening to the confessions below. Not only are the spirits present within the floral and triangular motifs surrounding the altar, but they also live within it. The groupings of three spirits in triangular forms offer a distinct visual correlation to the three triangular halos framing the heads of the Holy Trinity in the upper register of the altar screen, perhaps intending to suggest parallels between the Christian God and the Laguna Spirits. Nearly unnoticeable, within the cloak of God in the center of the Trinity, subtle outlines reveal a face staring out at us [fig. 10]. Both at the heart of the altar and at the heart of God, perhaps the face indicates to a Native audience that both religions serve the same spirit: Heavenly Father, Creator, Earth Mother, and Ancestral Spirit, all merge as one within the Laguna church.[69]

Visual imagery in a Native worldview is more than symbolic. The images of ancestral spirits, saints, and trinity do not merely represent images of their prototypes, but though their representation, the sprits of each are *made present* within the church space.[70] Thus, the imagery within Mission San José offers a literal convocation of ancestral lives with the divine and with the living. At the time of the altar screen's creation at the turn of the nineteenth century, the additional faces concealed within the larger composition served as subtle acts of resistance to the Christian faith—additional connotations either unnoticed or dismissed by church leadership. The church itself is situated on a burial site. Perhaps also the faces remind the community not only of

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[69] Ramón A. Gutiérrez also notes how iconographical motifs in Pueblo churches could serve as artful translations of traditional beliefs for Pueblo audiences by reinforcing the presence of ancestral spirits: "Throughout the seventeenth century, the Franciscans tried to conflate God and the Christian saints with the Pueblo katsina in liturgy and iconography. In Pueblo myth and artistic motifs, fog, snow, dew, clouds, and mist were all natural manifestations of the katsina, the Rain-Spirits or ancestor dead." The Laguna altar screen is situated underneath a canopy depicting a rainbow and, on either side, the sun, moon, and swirling, cloud-like motifs, offering more possible ancestral references. See Ramón A. Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico, 1500–1846* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 162.

[70] As Joseph Epes Brown writes "…Native American cultures believe the form *is* an actual materialization of the powers, beings, or ideologies represented." See Joseph Epes Brown, "There Is No Word for Art: The Creative Process," in *Teaching Spirits: Understanding Native American Religious Traditions* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

the Laguna ancestors they manifest, but those of surrounding Pueblo peoples who gave their lives in rebellion to lay the foundations of a new community of survivors and rebels that day in 1680. Perhaps they look back to a time before rebellion.

It is unlikely that many non-Native visitors fully realize the events of suppression and revolt that underly the altar screen's creation. Its messages of religious hybridity conveyed by the combination of Christian figures and Puebloan motifs is startling and visually arresting. Warburg's captivation and disheartenment at the sight of Native Christian hybridity in 1896 would foreshadow the desires of a twentieth century art market determined to collect Native culture. In the two centuries following the altar screen's creation, Laguna traditions would be censured, exploited, and commercialized in a desperate pursuit of artistic and cultural purity that did not exist—or only existed, at least, in the imaginations of white collectors. However, as is revealed in the following chapter, Laguna artists pushed back against commercial misappropriation by asserting agency over the market for Laguna pottery and began practicing survivance through artistic creation by subverting and dismantling Warburgian notions of authenticity.

Hybridity at Laguna did not begin and end with Spanish conquest or Catholic conversion. Neither is it limited to what theology terms *religion*, Christian, syncretic, or otherwise. The survivors, or rather the *victors* of the Great Revolt in 1680 from Acoma, Santo Domingo, Cochiti, Cienguilla, and Zia chose to unite under their own terms not only for the sake of survival, but for revival and rebirth. Laguna identity is defined by their union and its multiplicity of expressions across time honor their sacrifice.

In the photo archives,
I found a black and white picture—
Great Grandfather, Henry Acoya—
At the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History.

I couldn't wait to tell
Grandma Linda that I had found
Her father's picture in Washington D.C.,
But the excitement made me forget that she was gone too.
-Max Early[71]

Chapter II: Vehicles of Clay: Stories of Laguna Identity in the Museum World

When survivors of the Great Pueblo Revolt came home to Laguna after 1680, the land became a source of a new identity that was spiritually and culturally autonomous. This identity inspired and embodied the production of Laguna pottery. Throughout the past century, the identities embedded in these objects of Laguna artistry and activism evolved even as they were transformed by commercial transactions in the art market. The objects began new chapters in their lives as they circulated the nation at the hands of collectors and tourists.

Although Laguna withstood the Spanish empire's harsh religious conquest, after its integration into the United States federal reservation system in the nineteenth century, the New Mexico Pueblo community continued to face transformative assimilation policies. This had a dramatic effect on Laguna art production. In 1881, the Albuquerque Indian School [fig. 11] was founded with a mission to "lift the Indian from barbarism to civilization" and "transform the savage to a citizen."[72] From its inception up until the turn of the twentieth century, the

[71] Max Early, Simon J. Ortiz, and Marla Allison, *Ears of Corn: Listen* (Denver: Taos Press, 2014), 17.
[72] Marinella Lentis, "The Administration Has No Sympathy with Perpetuation of Any Except the Most Substantial of Indian Handicraft: Art Education at the Albuquerque Indian School," in *Colonized Through*

Albuquerque Indian School operated on a strict policy to "civilize" Native Americans through cultural assimilation which discouraged any form of traditional art production.[73] Despite this educational mandate, however, with the completion of the Southern Pacific Railroad in 1880, the people of Laguna began to create pottery independently for sale to travelers and tourists against the school's regulations [figs. 12 and 13]. Benjamin Thomas, the superintendent of the Pueblo Agency, wrote in a letter, "the present effect upon the Pueblo Indians of railroads…is bad. Railroad stations have great attraction for the Indians, and many are there learning to loaf and sell trinkets instead of giving attention to their farms and domestic duties."[74] As the outside world tried once again to infiltrate, control, and commodify the Laguna Pueblo world, the people of Laguna pushed back with consistent and deliberate efforts to create and sell pottery.

Despite Laguna artists going against federal assimilation policies and detracting time from what were considered "civilizing" activities—farming for men and household chores for women—federal agents were never able to stop Laguna's pottery production. The pottery vessels were handmade products of artistic, economic, and political agency. Their production and sale secured an independent source of revenue while simultaneously expressing cultural identity to an outside audience. As Laguna pottery vessels dispersed through their sale transaction and entered new markets and collections, these objects began to take on many new challenges of displacement. More than products of cultural capital, the materiality of the vessels in circulation carried with them the spirit and resilience of their community. As Native studies scholar Sherry Racette writes, "objects…embody their maker's knowledge and times of their creation. The imprints of skilled fingers are everywhere: tiny stitches laid in regular rhythm.

Art: American Indian Schools and Art Education, 1889–1915 (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), 121–124.

[73] Ibid., 139.

[74] Ibid.

Delicate materials pushed to their physical limits…Their forms and materials are narrative accounts of struggle, innovation and continuity."[75]

As an aesthetic desire for Pueblo pottery developed in the United States, art markets moved these vessels further and further from home. One of these vessels now lives within the Smithsonian's collection of anthropology, as a part of the National Museum of the American Indian and an early product of pottery circulation that now indexes the Laguna culture within a vast national collection [fig. 14]. Another more contemporary vessel lives within the Denver Art Museum [fig.15]. Assigned to the name and identity of its creator, Gladys Paquin, this vessel embodies contemporary Laguna identity while catering to an aesthetic appreciation of Laguna pottery by the art world. In Laguna today, artists continue to create pottery both as an expression of cultural identity and for independent sale to tourists and collectors. Contemporary artist and poet Max Early furthers the art of pottery and poetry in response to language revival efforts for Laguna Keresan. Contemporary painter Marla Allison brings Laguna identity to global recognition in the contemporary art world with paintings featured in collections and exhibitions in England, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. By the agency of their creators, the following objects transcend temporal and geographic boundaries. They bear testimony to the resilient and continuously transforming nature of Laguna cultural identity.

As artwork continues to leave Laguna and to circulate the world through markets and collections, how is a shared cultural identity preserved and misplaced under new titles such as "anthropological artifact" and "fine art"? How do each of these products of Laguna identity offer the stories of their homeland when their own object histories have brought them so far from

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[75] Sherry Farrell Racette, "Encoded Knowledge: Memory and Objects in Contemporary Native American Art," in *Manifestations: New Native Art Criticism* (Santa Fe: IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, 2011), 41.

home? As the nature of Laguna art and agency has evolved, the objects take on the spirits of their community and carve a space for future Laguna voices.

The NMAI Olla: Laguna in the Smithsonian

Jar/Olla, circa 1900 [fig. 14], rests somewhere within one of the Smithsonian's vast offsite storage facilities in Suitland, Maryland. At the time of this writing, the vessel is only immediately accessible to the public through the National Museum of the American Indian's online collections database in which a brief tombstone of information offers the viewer a vague idea of the object's origins. Perhaps most detailed is the appearance of the object itself. Juxtaposing orange, white, and black colors, distinctive geometric and curvilinear motifs, and alternating solid and line-filled shapes accentuate every figure within the *Olla's* formal design. Decorating the vessel's stout and round body, two birds perch upon delicate vegetal strands surrounded by meandering triangular patterns and scalloped botanical forms.[76]

No public information at present discloses the object's provenance or explains the complex cultural exchanges it traversed along its passageway from Laguna to the Smithsonian. This is to be expected. Based on its estimated time of creation, the *Olla* likely entered the markets through an exchange along the Southern Pacific Railway, or through one of the local curio shops. An exact dating or attribution of the vessel is nearly impossible, since at that time potters from Laguna, Acoma, and Zuni Pueblos gathered together at railway stations to sell their pottery to tourists. During the purchase transaction, cultural affiliation was often lost, as this would likely have been a hasty acquisition by a collector or tourist from an unknown Pueblo man

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[76] See pages 39–41 for a more detailed discussion of the spiritual significance of the circa 1900 Olla's symbolism.

or woman. Additionally, the fully documented provenance of an object bought and sold on the tourist market in early twentieth-century New Mexico is extremely rare.

The ambiguity of the Smithsonian's *Olla* leaves many questions unanswered, particularly regarding its final destination in a national and encyclopedic museum collection. While uncovering the precise journey of this particular *Olla* is beyond the scope of this project at present, a broader exploration of collecting trends in the early twentieth century as well as a discussion of interpretation issues in the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian may help piece together some hidden chapters in the story of the *Olla's* journey.

Into the 1900s, the Albuquerque Indian School softened a few of its policies on art production and began to sanction pottery production, basket-weaving, and beadwork alongside domestic workshops for boys and girls, such as embroidery and woodworking. Even when the school relaxed some of its policies, pottery production was only allowed after it had been considered domesticated and re-taught to children by Anglo teachers.[77] Some of these pottery examples were exhibited at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis. There, products of Native American students throughout the U.S. were exhibited under the label of "fine Indian handicraft" produced under the civilizing leadership of the Indian Arts Education initiatives. This kind of production and exhibition supported a typology of Native American art production that was profitable to white collectors, while crafting the notion of a vanishing ancient practice.[78] This systematic re-teaching credited non-Native instructors with the agency of design while stripping

[77] Many schools relied on non-Native supervisors to teach and authorize Native craft. One prominent example is the story of Josephine Foard, a woman who moved to Laguna from the east coast in 1899 to "show Pueblo women how to improve their pottery" and promote the touristic commercial interest in Laguna. See Dwight P. Lanmon, *Josephine Foard and the Glazed Pottery of Laguna Pueblo* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007), 1–9.
[78] Emily Burns, "(Im)Mobilities," in *Transnational Frontiers: The American West in France* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2018), 109.

the pottery of its Laguna identity. Thus, originality was temporarily lost in the demand and display of objects under U.S. political expansionist agendas.[79] Still, to the disapproval of the school, Laguna members continued to sell pottery along the railroad tracks. The NMAI *Olla* is likely a product of the Laguna people acting in direct opposition to U.S. assimilation policy by creating and selling pottery to tourists along the railways, its creation an act of subtle resistance and an assertion of strength in identity.

Another possible route within the *Olla's* circulation may be uncovered within the institutional history of the National Museum of the American Indian. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the museum world experienced the same sense of urgency that fueled the exhibition of Native handicraft at World's Fairs and the collection of pottery by tourists. In a modernizing era of expansion and industry, U.S. institutions placed a narrative of extinction upon its Native cultures, intensifying the museum collecting craze for a culture it believed was disappearing. In 1901, wealthy American oil tycoon George Gustav Heye funded an initiative to excavate and acquire a massive collection of Native American artifacts—a collection which eventually became the foundation of the NMAI.[80] Heye's collection of Native American objects has since been condemned for its unethical removal and illicit excavation of sacred materials. Today, the NMAI *Olla* is one of hundreds of thousands of Native American objects in the

[79] Lentis, 140–141.

[80] When the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) was established in 1989 from the foundation of Heye's collections, it was condemned as a commercial ploy still aiming to serve tourists rather than honoring the resilience of the communities it represented. The NMAI is still haunted by its tribute to Heye, even as more recent curators have sought to contextualize galleries by acknowledging its institutional history and its founder's illicit acquisitions. See Scott Manning Stevens, "The National Museum of the American Indian and the Politics of Display," in *American Indians and Popular Culture: Literature, Arts, and Resistance,* ed. Elizabeth DeLaney Hoffman (Santa Barbara, Denver, Oxford: Praeger, 2012), 351–363.

Smithsonian with questionable collection histories, perhaps having been acquired under Heye's initiatives.

Although the NMAI strives to act on the forefront of restitution efforts through the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), its good intentions cannot cancel out the fact that the majority of its collection was likely unethically acquired. This questionable acquisition history means that to many Native communities the museum wrongfully holds cultural and spiritual members captive.[81] The Laguna vessel lives as an active extension of the lives of those who designed and created it, of the spirits from whom its clay was resurrected from the earth. Even while NMAI wishes to correct the mistreatment of Native American collections by museums and to set a standard for the ethical treatment of collections in the U.S., the museum cannot escape the unsettled political condition of the collection it curates. The museum's contested authority adds another complex dimension to the *Olla's* uncertain history. Can any one institution or person claim ownership to an object of another's cultural identity? Whether the *Olla* was purchased along the railway at Laguna and circulated through the market or whether it was purchased and acquired at a curio shop or through another of Heye's initiatives remains unclear. Regardless, the *Olla's* journey has placed it at the center of a provocative national conversation that also destabilizes the authority and legitimacy of the Smithsonian's claims of ownership.

While the Smithsonian NMAI was built upon the controversial collecting practices of Heye, the current museum has more recently taken steps to return authority to its represented communities under the leadership of a Native director, governing board of trustees, and

[81] "Objects are alive and must be handled with respect." See Racette, 41. See also Nancy B. Rosoff, "Integrating Native Views into Museum Procedures: Hope and Practice at the National Museum of the American Indian," in *Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge Reader,* ed. Laura Peers and Alison Brown (London: Routledge, 2003), 72.

curatorial staff members who regularly consult with tribal elders for guidance in the development of didactic texts and object display procedures.[82] The NMAI remains at the center of a critical debate over the ownership and repatriation of cultural objects, however, its ongoing and Native-centered shift in governance may result in the restitution of Laguna agency to the NMAI *Olla*, allowing the vessel to escape from the conceptual confines of its museum identity and to reconvene with its continually evolving Laguna identity.[83]

Gladys Paquin: Laguna in the Fine Art Museum

Gladys Paquin's *Jar* (1994) lives at the Denver Art Museum [fig. 15]. Its broad shape, red base, and white background mimics the structure of the NMAI *Olla.* However, simple and repetitive motifs encircle the jar, giving its designs a rhythmic balance. Alternating black organic and red geometric forms repeat in a smooth and orderly sequence.

It wasn't until the mid-1930s that the Albuquerque Indian School officially recognized the personal creation and sale of pottery at Laguna under the tutelage of Native teachers, reasoning that it would benefit the economic stability of the Pueblo communities. Under the new policies, students could freely create pottery with personal and cultural expressions of form.[84] During the next several decades the circulation of Pueblo pottery in the art market exploded.

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[82] For a review of the NMAI upon its opening in 2005 as a tribute to the survivance of Native North American communities, see Amanda J. Cobb, "The National Museum of the American Indian: Sharing the Gift," *American Indian Quarterly* 29, no. (2005): 361–83. Additionally, for a description of the "community curation" strategy enlisted by former NMAI Director, Kevin Gover (Pawnee), see Robin Pogrebin, "For American Indians, a Chance to Tell Their Own Story," New York Times, March 12, 2008, https://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/12/arts/artsspecial/12indian.html.

[83] The museum's public statement of institutional values shares that "the NMAI has been steadfastly committed to bringing Native voices to what the museum writes and presents…. The NMAI is also dedicated to acting as a resource for the hemisphere's Native communities and to serving the greater public as an honest and thoughtful conduit to Native cultures—present and past—in all their richness, depth, and diversity." See The National Museum of the American Indian, "About the Museum," Smithsonian Institution, accessed April 4, 2021, https://americanindian.si.edu/about. See also

[84] Lentis, 154.

Numerous outlets of production and sale emerged throughout the Southwest. In addition to the popular railway stop sales previously discussed, hotel shops, curio shops, galleries, and private Native American arts vendors sprang up throughout New Mexico, allowing the potters of Laguna to more freely participate in the local economy. As the markets for Pueblo pottery expanded, Laguna artists developed a characteristic style by implementing a distinct variation of white-slip polychrome in their pottery compositions and encasing those designs with broad bands of red. These formal distinctions would serve to differentiate Laguna pottery from the similar styles of neighboring Pueblos—such as Acoma or Zuni, which were commonly misattributed—and allow collectors to recognize and associate the vessels with Laguna identity.[85]

By the mid-twentieth century, Laguna pottery production slowed and it nearly stopped circulating in the markets for a couple of reasons. The rise of mass production in the curio trade drew some customers away from original Pueblo creators while at the same time manufactured vessels began to enter Pueblo homes and to replace some of the utilitarian functions of traditional pottery.[86] However, in the 1970s and 1980s, three women, Evelyn and Lee Ann Cheromiah and Gladys Paquin (1936–2021) [fig. 16], began to create pottery with a mission to revive the traditions and designs of Laguna ancestors. The women recreated traditional olla pots with characteristic Laguna motifs but adapted their designs to reflect a more minimalist aesthetic reflective of contemporary art practices.

Referring to herself as a "contemporary traditionalist," Paquin created pottery with rhythmic, spacious, and balanced designs, intending to reflect the spirit of the older Laguna pots,

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[85] Stephen Trimble, *Talking with Clay: Art of Pueblo Pottery in the 21st Century* (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2007), 96. See also Rick Dillingham, *Acoma and Laguna Pottery* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1992), 26–39.
[86] Lanmon, 8, 57.

rather than duplicate them.[87] In a 1988 interview, Paquin explained that "she enjoyed the traditional designs and used them as a way of establishing a different look for her pots."[88] While her work draws inspiration from ancestral Laguna vessels, Paquin's creations are unique because she would pause throughout the design process to reinvent traditional designs with her own improvisations: "When I can relax and enjoy making them [the pots], I can wait for a design to come to mind. I sometimes do little bits of designs and wait for separate inspirations."[89] Paquin inspired a new generation of pottery at Laguna, with artists such as Max Early and Thomas Natseway now following in her footsteps and running successful pottery workshops.[90] Unlike the NMAI *Olla,* Paquin's *Jar* was never intended to serve a functional purpose. While the contemporary jar does not function as a container or transportation device, collector Lee Cohen argues that it is a container for something invisible and that it has transported Laguna identity into new contemporary contexts.[91]

Paquin's *Jar* is a collector's item, a work of art, admired behind glass but never touched. Although the *Jar* is physically inaccessible and geographically distanced from its home, it pays homage to the culture of its maker and its ancestors from afar. The jar's journey from home to gallery and to art museum was purposeful, and although its public non-Native audiences may not fully comprehend its cultural or spiritual significance, they will perhaps hear its declaration: Laguna is neither extinct nor vanishing and its vibrant community continues an ancient *and* modern practice. Contemporary Laguna artists, while producing and selling works to circulate in

[87] Trimble, 96–99.
[88] Interview paraphrased in Dillingham, 174.
[89] Glady's Paquin, in an interview with Rick Dillingham. See Dillingham, 88.
[90] Aurelio Sanchez, "Colossal pottery, Entrepreneur has high hopes for gigantic, Pueblo-style pots," *Albuquerque Journal* (Albuquerque, NM), February 21, 2004.
[91] Lee Cohen, *Art of Clay: Timeless Pottery of the Southwest* (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 1993), 11–23.

the fine art market, do more than continue and sustain an ancient tradition. Their pottery challenges the historic political and commercial motivations that had originally perpetuated the circulation of the pottery of their ancestors. Paquin's "contemporary traditional" *Jar* is an agent of change within the Denver Art Museum, a testimony to the permanence and endurance of Laguna identity after centuries of attempted exploitation and assimilation. Laguna artists continue to assert contemporary agency by sharing the artistic and spiritual identity of their culture with the world through the intentional circulation of their pottery while maintaining a spiritual practice at home.

Even with such honorable objectives, the identity and narrative of Laguna pottery in the art museum faces inevitable challenges and distortions. The art museum, while offering a space of representation for Native arts, can also obscure cultural context with its potent atmosphere of aesthetic contemplation. The jar may experience, in the words of Svetlana Alpers, the "museum effect" in which an emphasis on formal beauty risks obscuring the object's cultural and historical context.[92] However, contemporary Native American art on display in the art museum offers a powerful act of *reappropriation*—here defined as the hopeful reclaiming of culture by its own members through public celebration—thereby displaying culture in a way that purposefully distorts how its audience has historically misperceived it.[93] Gladys Paquin's *Jar* preserves her legacy as an artist devoted to the continuance of tradition while also participating in a larger contemporary dialogue about Native American inclusion and individuality in the art museum. As the Denver Art Museum stated in 2008, "we must acknowledge and celebrate the complexities of

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[92] Svetlana Alpers, "The Museum as a Way of Seeing," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display,* eds. Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 25–26.
[93] Paul Manoguerra, "Leap of Faith: Contemporary American Indian Art and American Visual Culture," in *American Indians and Popular Culture: Literature, Arts, and Resistance,* ed. Elizabeth DeLaney Hoffman (Santa Barbara, Denver, Oxford: Praeger, 2012), 189–206.

cross-cultural exchange, because the Taos School, the Hudson River School, and the Santa Fe Studio of artists did not develop in isolation."[94] Issues of misrepresentation and unethical ownership still persist in the museum world. However, Native American artists such as Paquin confront them with contemporary visibility and conversation.

The Spiritual Agency of Laguna Pottery

To many tourists, collectors, and museum-goers, pottery is purely decorative, even evocative of a Southwestern "aesthetic." Yet, to the members of the vessel's community, the visual language of pottery design is a rich corpus of cultural knowledge. Every design, every image, every precise and mathematical configuration of symbol, color, and line across the vessel's three dimensional composition recalls a name, a memory, and a story.[95] Each serves a purpose, not only in communicating its story visually, but in making physically present that which the vessel represents. In practical use, the NMAI *Olla,* carried on the head as is pictured in Figure 13, provided an intimate relationship not just with the object itself, but with that which it *made present.* The *Olla's* traditional use as a container for water, while utilitarian, further animates the vessel. In 1886, anthropologist Frank Cushing wrote of the life force imbued into pottery by its use: "Water contains the source of continued life. The vessel holds the water; the source of life *accompanies* the water, hence its dwelling place is in the vessel with the water."[96]

[94] Nancy J. Bloomberg, "Introduction: Advancing the Dialogue," in *[Re]inventing the Wheel: Advancing the Dialogue on Contemporary Native American Indian Art,* ed. Nancy J. Bloomberg (Denver: Denver Art Museum, 2008), 13–25.
[95] Bunzel, 69–70.
[96] Frank Cushing, quoted in Dillingham, 9.

The birds of the NMAI *Olla* offer a recognizable motif shared across pottery from both Laguna and Acoma Pueblo.[97] Scholar and ceramicist Rick Dillingham traces bird imagery in Laguna and Acoma pottery back to the mid-nineteenth century and poses a fascinating theory about the birds' origins which, if true, becomes paramount to the spiritual charge of both the vessel at NMAI and Paquin's vessel at the Denver Art Museum.

Dillingham makes a connection between the birds adorning the pottery and the birds adorning the walls of seventeenth-century Pueblo churches.[98] Returning to the iconography of the birds perched throughout the murals of Mission San José, we must recall the emblems of pottery and corn accompanying them [figs. 6.a and 6.b]. If the emblems signify the presence of Earth Mother and ancestors within the church, perhaps then the material pottery vessels echoing these Laguna emblems also evoke the spirits of those represented within the church. When understood within the context of Pueblo spirituality, the birds act as "messengers," as anthropologist Hamilton Tyler recorded, "between men and gods, or stand as signals between man and man."[99] Perhaps the birds of the NMAI vessel and the meandering vegetal forms of both vessels then serve as vehicles for Laguna agency and as powerful visual reminders of identity even as they circulate the nation and transform over time. Hybridity, as a strategy of survivance, extends beyond Mission San José and into the evolving forms of Laguna pottery as mediums of cultural expression. The NMAI and Paquin ollas, as living members of the Laguna community, perhaps wait patiently in their isolated museum cases to receive those who remember, who recognize, and who share the same agency. Within each unique vessel, the lives

[97] So much so that in 1896 Warburg began to reference them in his notes as "bird hieroglyphs." See Warburg, 7.
[98] Dillingham, 99–100.
[99] Hamilton A. Tyler, *Pueblo Birds and Myths* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979), xii.

of generations past are reborn through the clay by the hands of the artist. By the ingenuity of design, the story and identity of each evolves as they interact with the lives of those who came before and follow after.

Max Early & Marla Allison: Contemporary Laguna and Global Exhibition

Today, Laguna artists and scholars complete groundbreaking work that brings global recognition to Laguna culture and identity and participates in conversations of contemporary Indigenous identity in light of a rapidly changing social world in the twenty-first century. Like Paquin, contemporary artist Max Early (b. 1963) [fig. 17] seeks to revive the pottery traditions of his Laguna ancestors, but in a way that also revives stories of Laguna history and language for the next generations. As both a poet and a pottery artist, Early's writings and creations frequently highlight Keresan words and phrases in tribute to the lives and stories of his elders, reintroducing the language to younger audiences through poetry and sometimes even inscribing them into the pottery ollas of his own hand. For Early, poetry and pottery simultaneously breathe life into one another as contemporary vehicles for cultural revival and language retention.

Through the art of poetry, Early describes how the process of pottery making at Laguna is imbued by the philosophies of cultural memory—it may be spiritual, historical, or personal, depending on the artist's relationship with Laguna traditions and lifeways. He describes moments of this process in the poem, "Stairs of Reviving Pottery." The original arrangement of Early's poem, as seen in Figure 18, takes the shape of a staircase and encourages the reader to ascend from below.

> My last creation nestles in the clay water
> Slowly dissolving away, my flaw melting
> Pool of muddy forgiveness urges me on
> By releasing old thoughts, I stir the bowl

Of preceding notions as water vaporizes
Leaving the gelatinous clay ready to mix
Hands sticky, goo slides between fingers
Knead and pound all pockets of air away
I'll start over again, same coveted shape
Or form, *Straniyasheh Mitsi*[100] will decide
Rolling hand-coils of clay in four circles
Revived passion, slicking walls together
Now dry and cure, sanding you smooth
Burnished body of brush-stroked clouds
Go face the fire, ringing the pitch desired
Shroat-wehmeh[101] masterpiece of endeavor[102]

For Early, the artist's relationship with earthly materials fosters a reverence for Mother Earth and through Her, the ancestral Puebloans. As Early notes, "The relationship of harmony and balance in the knowledge of kindred spirits helps to bring forth the being representing the pottery vessel as a living entity. This is thereby establishing strength, durability, elasticity, continuance, and connection with the ancient ones."[103] Pottery production, traditionally a woman's craft, reenacts an ancient testimony to the authority of matrilineal social relationships in Laguna ancestry. While the practice was censored during periods of colonial suppression, as discussed above, it has resurged in recent years and its current flourishing practice by both male and female artists draws a new tribute to the mothers of Laguna's history.[104] As Early describes, the process of contemporary pottery creation fulfills a deeper relationship with past and future as both a symbolic and literal tribute to earth, to Laguna mothers, and to Mother Earth. Sourcing clay from Laguna land, the pottery symbolically reenacts the process of creation by Earth Mother and—in a perhaps more literal sense for the Laguna community—resurrects the spirits of both

[100] *Straniyasheh Mitsi* (Laguna Keresan): "Our Mother Clay." See Max Early, *Ears of Corn: Listen: Poems* (Denver: Three: A Taos Press, 2014), 84.
[101] *Shroat-wehmeh* (Laguna Keresan): "Never mind, let it go." See Early, 84.
[102] See Figure 18 for original prose arrangement. Early, 84.
[103] Early, xv.
[104] Ibid., xv–xvi.

Earth and ancestral mothers through the clay's transformation from flesh of the earth into precious object. The object, then, in ceremonial or practical use, continues its symbiotic relationship with Laguna earth and the community

For many Pueblo potters, every step in the creative process is a sacred and spiritual experience. The clay of the earth holds a life force of its own; the artist may pray, sing, or speak with the clay throughout its transformation.[105] Early urges the importance of thanking Earth Mother for her gift even before the clay is lifted from the Laguna earth: "if only one has said their prayer correctly, then Mother Clay will be willing to depart with the potter."[106] The development of pottery design is a communal effort on the part of artist, Earth Mother, and ancestral spirits of the earth who impart their visions and dreams onto the artist as they are reborn through the clay.

Pottery and poetry provide just one example of the intersectionality of medium and memory in tribute to a transforming Laguna identity. Within the painted world of contemporary artist Marla Allison (b. 1980), *Mission San José de Laguna* reappears once more [figs. 19 and 20]. In *Sacred Heart Mission* (2013), shades of blue, grey, and white cast an atmosphere of solemnity across the historic Catholic structure. A permanent member of the Laguna landscape, the church has transformed into a symbol of Laguna cultural identity as well as religion. Allison shares that during feast days at Laguna, the church transforms as the centerpiece for celebrations of cultural and religious freedoms:

> Traditions become intermixed so the priest is there along with the village leaders and the traditional leaders and singers. All the community participates and adds to the celebration. It's an event that not only pays homage to the saints that the

[105] *Hopi: Songs of the Fourth World*, directed by Pat Ferrero (San Francisco: Ferrero Films, 1985).
[106] Trimble, 10.

> priests of the past have brought in, but it also embraces Laguna traditions and history. It embraces the two as a mother and a father who are both equal.[107]

The painted surface of Allison's canvas reveals the church through a variegated color block composition. The individual blocks merge upon sight to reveal the church as a structure shaped through many colorful lenses, perhaps shrouded by a veil of memory. It appears temporally suspended as a timeless object viewed through contemporary eyes. Allison continually reimagines contemporary Laguna life for her community, and her painted compositions have also garnered international interest with exhibitions and artist residencies in both England and Saudi Arabia.[108]

> My main focus is Laguna since I was raised there, but I integrate pottery design and different elements of traditions into my work where it brings it into a contemporary light. And I realize it's rare—it's a rare thing to be able to represent a small tribe and to be able to represent it all around the world. I would say it's slightly exotic…. That's the hardest part—sharing an education of my background, but also sharing the fact that there are hundreds of tribes still continuing and still producing artwork with the influence of tradition, but also the influence of the modern world.[109]

Just as Paquin and Early revive material traditions of Laguna artistry into their works, Marla Allison often includes elements of traditional pottery designs and Laguna water signs into her scenes [fig. 19] and in so doing, brings the past into conversation with the present. Her painted scenes sometimes share stories recalling both personal memories and shared experiences of Laguna heritage.

While Laguna's religious hybridity has become customary today, this condition does not always manifest harmoniously in modern life. Scenes such as *Personal Faith* (2008) [fig. 21]

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[107] Marla Allison, in discussion with author, December 2020. See full interview transcription in Appendix.
[108] Marla Allison, "A Brief Biography," https://marlaallison.com/biography/.
[109] Marla Allison, in discussion with author, December 2020. See full interview transcription in Appendix.

offer a chaotic glimpse into the mixed emotions of an identity caught between the traditions of two religions—for Allison, the ancestral Laguna and the Christian-Catholic belief systems. Within this scene, the figure of a priest reaches down with one hand to grasp the face of a figure below and with the other hand to offer him "FAITH." The priest's body is tall and dominating and would be intimidating were it not for a colorful vision of many faces overpowering his image. Their presence goes unnoticed by the priest, but for the viewer, they stand as an unwavering reminder of lives past. To the left, another ambiguous figure stands to face us. Hand outstretched, this figure seems to alternatively offer a "PERSONAL" vision—the many faces of a subjective cultural or ancestral memory. The faces surround us as witnesses to a site of active conversion, but they also appear to look past it and outwards toward us. The outstretched hand and the crowd of expectant faces offers the viewer another personal choice of faith. Allison explains:

> It represents the person that's caught in between—being raised by both of these big entities and, in a way, my own personal questioning of identity…. At Laguna, church and traditions are side by side. I mean, the building in which they practice the deeply traditional works is literally next door to the church. They are symbiotic now, in a way. They both feed off of each other because the religion itself is really giving praise to the higher power and the various symbols that they have mixed together becomes the same understanding.[110]

Paquin, Early, and Allison, like many contemporary Indigenous artists today, recognize the sacrality of cultural revival through artistic practice, which can only maintain its potency with resilient ties to the land and community of its people. The commercial consumption of the U.S. markets which today dictate much of what outsiders know of Pueblo artistic traditions, can operate adversely to the objects' purpose, as Early wrote, "as a living entity."[111] For artists to engage their practice with the outside world, they must manage a precarious catch-22.

[110] Allison, in discussion with author, December 2020. See full interview transcription in Appendix.
[111] Early, xv.

Participation in popular, touristic, commercial, and fine arts becomes necessary for global recognition and representation in the twenty-first century. Contemporary Laguna artists, then, often find themselves performing a careful balancing act which requires revealing and concealing different reflections of Laguna identity for both public international and private local audiences. Laguna artists become guardians and mediators of cultural, and sometimes spiritual, memory which is protected and sustained for the continuance of Laguna lifeways but also delicately translated for public visibility and understanding.

Pueblo houses often have their doors and their window dressings painted in a blue kind of turquoise color, which is part of almost a superstition or tradition to ward off evil spirits. So, there's that slight bit of connection to tradition but still adapted into modern life and then moved into contemporary artwork. Those kinds of influences are important to me and shown in some of my work as well; using the turquoise color to keep that box [of tradition] safe while also being able to share it. There's so much more on the inside of the box, but also there's the question of looking outside—the morphing and the evolution of culture and influence into what will be going out into the outside world. It has slight references to the traditions and superstitions that I was raised with, all while still embracing that whole outside world of influence…It just becomes more and more indicative of how art and identity can [evolve]. I do like the fact that I am Laguna and that I can say, "yeah, I'm a rare person in this world—but so is everybody."

[Laguna people] have an identity that is age old but is always changing becoming a part of something else. -Marla Allison[112]

[112] Marla Allison, in discussion with author, December 2020. See full interview transcription in Appendix.

But as long as you remember what you have seen, then nothing is gone. As long as you remember, it is part of this story we have together.
-Leslie Marmon Silko, from *Ceremony*[113]

Chapter III: The Past Is Prologue: Laguna Futurisms

Within both museum and academic spaces, the concept of Laguna identity can be difficult, if not impossible, to articulate. Both museums and academia, as historically white institutions, sometimes self-sabotage in their efforts of inclusion by demarcating Indigenous collections, galleries, or in some cases even staff and faculty members, as token expressions or members of an "othered" experience. [114] Such scenarios occur more frequently than institutions wish to admit, but it is necessary to draw attention to misperception, and often diminishment, of cultural identity in these public spaces of representation. Often when Native artists seek to express identity to a public audience, tribal affiliation and individualism can sometimes become eclipsed by the looming, generalized title of *Native*, as if it were a stamp of authenticity to define a singular and marginalized American experience. Dr. Lee Francis IV, Laguna scholar, comic artist, bookstore owner, and CEO of Native Realities Publishing also recounts the challenges of representing Native identities for public audiences through mediums of contemporary art and popular media:

> One of the things that I recognized early on as I attended conferences and comic cons or sci-fi cons was that often I was the only Native person in attendance, and my friends shared similar experiences. So, in these events we became siloed into

[113] Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 231.
[114] For an in-depth study of racialized and ethnic tokenization in academic environments (especially the arts and humanities), see Yolanda Flores Niemann, "The Making of a Token: A Case Study of Stereotype Threat, Stigma, Racism, and Tokenism in Academe," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 20, no. 1 (1999) as well as Roderick A. Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things: The University and Its Pedagogies of Minority Difference* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

> being the symbol of Native experience. Giving everyone your entire background and experience eventually gets exhausting. And I've talked with many of my colleagues and scholars of color about how this can be very exhausting. When we are in that space as the person of color, everybody looks to us as representatives of our culture.[115]

In public environments, tribal identities risk becoming tokenized as objects of public curiosity and historical nostalgia. In academic institutions, Indigenous members and creatives frequently carry the responsibility of reflecting the nonexistent "universal Indigenous experience," a social role that becomes a heavy burden and also risks minimizing the diverse cacophony of voices from thousands of cultures across the nation and the globe.

The museum realm especially suffers from this condition. Didactic labels persist which omit specific cultural identities or categorize and describe objects and artists as *Native only*, rather than include them within the sphere of American Art or more comprehensive schools of thought to which they also belong. Curators, as mediators between the lives of objects and the public, should strive to responsibly articulate identity without tokenizing or alienating Native forms of expression within the art world. Marla Allison relates:

> To adapt and to be able to share my work with the public definitely made me think deeper about how I share myself. And, you know, I never really wanted to be a *per se* Laguna artist, or *just* identified as Native American because I am full American. I want my work to be seen as American art but, with all the standards and with all the categorization, people want to pigeonhole each artist into exactly what they want them to be.[116]

An intellectual movement of *Indigenous Futurisms*—a title coined by Anishinaabe scholar Grace Dillon—has steadily grown across literary and visual artistic disciplines.[117] The Indigenous creatives engaging with Futurisms challenge the expectant tropes of the Native

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[115] Lee Francis IV, in discussion with author, January 2021. See full interview transcription in Appendix.
[116] Marla Allison, in discussion with author, December 2020. See full interview transcription in Appendix.
[117] Grace L. Dillon, "Imagining Indigenous Futurisms," in *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction*, ed. Grace L. Dillon (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012).

American voice in modern society by rejecting the overworked academic themes of post-colonial reflection and victimization and foregrounding instead the rich and unique experiences of Native communities across the boundaries of time. Laguna takes part in the ideas promoted by Futurisms, one of many tribal affiliations across the continent reclaiming their Native voice in popular media.

"Returning to Ourselves" through the Spirals of Time

Indigenous Futurisms emerged as a strand of science fiction literature authored by those who did not wish their generalized Native identity to define their writing. Originally a platform of literary activism, Futurisms challenged the stagnant tropes of historical persecution and ancient existence associated with Native American identity in popular media. The nineteenth- and twentieth-century belief in the ancient and vanishing Indian as seen in the writings of Warburg continues today when the perspectives of Natives as individuals, as Laguna, as Americans, and as citizens of the world become diminished simply by the fulfilment of a social interest to include a blanket Indigenous experience. As authors of pure science-fiction without the pretense of a socially constructed identity projected onto them, Dillon explains that the possibilities for Native writers are boundless. By extension, this freedom of thought and creativity could surmount societal constraints and develop a narrative and reality defined by multiple Indigenous perspectives.[118]

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[118] Dillon, 1–5. The eruption of Indigenous-authored science-fiction Dillon recognizes coincides with a larger renaissance of speculative story-telling authored by people of color. Futurisms as a *literary* concept takes part in a more comprehensive strategy to reimagine the world through the eyes of those whose vision has long been repressed. LeVar Burton writes, "these stories are delivered by vibrant, authentic voices bursting to weigh in on the human condition and our journey of human evolution." See Nisi Shawl, ed., *New Suns: Original Speculative Fiction by People of Color* (Oxford: Solaris, 2019), 10.

Dr. Lee Francis describes how Indigenous Futurisms pivots on Native perspectives of time and space and thus reorganizes the human relationship with the past:

> If you look at Indigenous epistemology, philosophy, ontology—all of our big buzzwords from the academic side—what becomes necessary to understand is that Indigenous frames of time are cyclical, they're not linear. We've always understood that—this idea that time cycles on itself. I don't think of it as two-dimensional. I actually think of it as a three-dimensional spiral…its shape depends on how you move. Your perspective of it changes depending on where you are within it. So, if I take this three-dimensional figure that is a spiral—potentially an infinite spiral—and I turn and look at it this way, it looks like a circle. If I turn another way, it looks like a spiral. And so, when all of these little interconnected points turn like this, it gives me a direction, it gives me a form…. So, when we talk about bringing the past with us, it's not necessarily about the past, but about the intersections of our temporality as Indigenous humans. When I'm on the spiral, I can look back and see all of those previous points of intersection and I can see all of the points in the future.[119]

The historical record, with its inherent biases, reflects a Western and linear perspective of time as a progressive sequence of civilization.[120] This becomes evidenced, too, by Catholicism's interest in Native America in the seventeenth century. The religious motivations that fueled the conquest and conversion of the New World by Franciscan missionaries were inspired by a Euro-Christian concept of the linear urgency of time and the impending apocalyptic end of the world. However, such urgency cannot exist in Native theologies which foster the natural and constantly recurring cycles of the earth—within which human life fulfills a relationship of reciprocity with the earth.[121] In Native worldviews, history becomes reevaluated not as a linear sequence of moments past, but as stories that continually grow, reappear, and touch contemporary and future lives in countless and incalculable ways. The past is not over, finite, dead. All of time is

[119] Lee Francis IV, in discussion with author, January 2021. See full interview transcription in Appendix.
[120] Joseph E. Brown, "Changeless at the Heart of Change," in *Teaching Spirits: Understanding Native American Religious Traditions* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 9–12.
[121] Clara Sue Kidwell, Homer Noley, and George E. Tinker, *A Native American Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), 13–15.

connected and speaks to a thousand moments past and a thousand yet to come. As Dillon describes, time itself becomes a slipstream of past, present, and future realities "that flow together like currents in a navigable stream."[122] This relationship with time asserts the relevance of past, present, and future forms of expression as they intersect across the temporal spiral and become a slipstream of potential realities. As stories and identities reconnect, the lives of objects continue.

Futurisms also promotes a method of decolonization which Dillon describes as "returning to ourselves."[123] It offers the ability to overcome emotional and psychological colonial traumas carried for generations by promoting moments of temporal intersection. It proposes a future created by reconnecting with precolonial memories and lives and thus a means by which to liberate the imagination from the restraints of colonial traumas that continue to haunt the historical narrative. For example, in *Shadow Country,* Laguna poet Paula Gunn Allen speaks of an experience of dislocation, both cultural and geographical, which stems from colonization. The condition of hybridity affects more than just art, but art becomes the extension of a personal and cultural condition shared by many Laguna members. In Allen's poem, the "shadows" of sacred cultural knowledge refer to the hope of revitalizing past knowledge for future generations and the courage necessary to do so:

> We shall go home again,
> back to our own time and earth.
> and know again the changelessness,
> the silence, the
> strong
> sure steps of home.[124]

[122] Dillon, 3.
[123] Ibid., 10.
[124] Paula Gunn Allen, *Shadow Country* (Los Angeles: American Indian Studies Center, University of California, 1982), 22–23.

The experience of alienation and hybridity, perhaps an inherent symptom of colonialism in the Southwest, has evolved through the agency of artists and poets as hopeful expressions of identity. It asserts the power of an identity formed by a plurality of voices and cultural experiences. It is both inward and outward knowledge, a command of multiple perspectives.

For public audiences, the utopian/dystopian fantasy realm of science fiction offers an escapist, at times metaphorical, alternative reality. Yet for many Native communities, a futuristic mode of expression and its popular themes of alienation and temporal subversion represent quite literal interventions upon reality.[125] The prevalence of this reality among the experiences of the Laguna people and surrounding Pueblo communities of the Southwest proves especially compelling, as the object histories outlined thus far bear testimony.

"Slipstreams": Imagining Native Arts across Temporal Dimensions

Fantastical, futuristic, and science-fiction related themes began to emerge as recognizable modes of Native artistic expression by the 1980s, during a moment when some of the most popular sci-fi franchises of all time—*Star Wars* and *Star Trek*—had captivated universal audiences in the previous decades. Curator and art historian Manuela Well-Off-Man explains that these beloved icons of science-fiction resonated particularly well with Indigenous communities who not only recognized in them the themes defining Native existence in the modern world, such as exploration, colonization, alienation, resistance, and survival across contested frontiers, but also perceived the multiverse as a platform from which to share ancient Indigenous ontologies and ways of knowing from a strictly Indigenous point of view. Well-Off-

[125] Manuela Well-Off-Man, "Indigenous Futurisms: Transcending Past/Present/Future," in *Indigenous Futurisms: Transcending Past/Present/Future,* ed. IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts (Santa Fe: Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, 2020), 14–16.

Man writes, "while Yoda and the Rebel Alliance represent resistance to the Empire (or U.S. Government), Darth Vader and his stormtroopers symbolize oppression and erasure."[126]

Selected for the 2020 exhibition, *Indigenous Futurisms: Transcending Past/Present/Future* by the Institute of American Indian Arts Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, artist Bryon Archuleta (Ohkay Owingeh/Santa Clara Pueblo) offers an innovative portrait of Princess Leia [fig. 22].[127] Drawing attention to the appropriation of Hopi hairstyles by *Star Wars* writer and producer George Lucas, Archuleta responds with artful acts of subversion, returning the iconic princess to the context of Hopi culture from which Lucas drew inspiration without attribution. The Archuleta painting emphasizes the power of a Hopi woman over the *Star Wars* visual narrative in popular media, likening traditional Hopi garments to Leia's flowing, royal robes. She stands in an authoritative posture, one hand on hip, the other grasping her laser rifle, commanding the galactic space surrounding her. In this context, the Hopi Pueblo hairstyle also becomes a link to the intersection of pasts and futures and a visual demonstration of Puebloan perceptions of time. Subversion of these mainstream epics offers an opportunity not only to preserve ancient knowledge systems for new generations, but to do so in a way that could fundamentally alter the way non-Indigenous audiences perceive Native identities and better relate to the world around them.[128]

Native comic artists today have become some of the most influential activists expanding the literary ideas of Futurisms to the realm of visual arts and mainstream media. Gord Hill's (Kwakwaka'wakw nation) *The 500 Years of Resistance*, first published in 2010, chronicles pivotal moments of colonial transgressions throughout the history of the Indigenous Americas

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[126] Ibid., 15.
[127] IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, et al, *Indigenous Futurisms: Transcending Past/Present/Future* (Santa Fe: IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, 2020), 67, 71.
[128] Well-Off-Man, 13.

within the format of a conventional graphic novel [fig. 23].[129] Hill arranges the events of the 1680 Pueblo Revolt into a strategic sequence of provocative images and text, carefully selecting scenes from the events of the revolt to propel messages of revolution and triumph over injustice. Scenes recount the Spanish Church's accusations of witchcraft and the subsequent punishments of slavery, imprisonment, and execution inflicted upon Pueblo peoples for continuing their cultural and religious practices. Within the first few scenes pictured in Figure 23, Hill points to the leadership of Po'pay, the Tewa Pueblo leader who organized the rebellion. The final scene offers a glimpse of the aftermath: homes burning and Spaniards fleeing the targets of Pueblo spears and arrows.

As an iconic medium of creative storytelling the graphic novel appeals, historically, to younger generations, but it also draws upon deeper pictorial traditions in the history of Indigenous America such as the Lakota Winter Count and Maya and Aztec codices.[130] Thus, it becomes a way to reconnect past and future realities through a shared medium of graphic storytelling. In this case, the comic's visual tools of expression accentuate the artist's poignant message of survival to illicit more urgent attention to the recurrence of injustices in our present. Shock-value amplifies Hill's message, accompanying the knowledge that its story is not fictional. Comic arts as a medium of contemporary Indigenous cultural expression urge audiences to consider not only what challenges Native societies have overcome, but how those moments strengthen and define futures as they become reality. Gord Hill joins a host of

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[129] Gord Hill, *The 500 Years of Resistance Comic Book,* 2nd ed. (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2021), 42–43.

[130] Kyle Bladow shares the politics surrounding Native comic arts and how it has transformed as an effective platform for confronting mainstream stereotypes. He also argues that the graphic novel expounds upon a long history of Native pictorial writing systems and storytelling traditions including Maya and Aztec codices. See Kyle Bladow, "Framing Storytelling: Indigenous Graphic Narratives," *Journal of Popular Culture* 52 (2019): 35–52.

Indigenous artists whose work has erupted in the comic arts scene within the last several years creating platforms for sharing contemporary Native worldviews through the graphic novel.[131] Dr. Francis shares the importance of Native representation within comic arts and across all realms of popular media:

> Teaching Native kids to recognize [Native] history is challenging when it's dismissed as something that happened in our past. For kids, so much learning is accomplished through popular culture: it's not only comic books, but it's superheroes, popular media, games, video games, TV. This is how we understand and relate to the world….While Native people are a micro group within the United States as a percentage of the populace, they have had a huge impact on the way that we have conceptualized American mythologies and American identities…. Native writers are filling a gap in American literature.[132]

Innovative Pueblo artists have begun to transition into futuristic methods of storytelling as time travel, alternate realities, and multiverse-based science fiction plots provide a diverse array of narratives by which to engage with and reimagine Indigenous worldviews. Cochiti Pueblo artist Virgil Ortiz develops installations of pottery, statuary, and costume to portray actors in a futuristic rendition of the Great Pueblo Revolt [fig. 24]. Created in preparation for a screenplay titled *Revolt 1680/2180,* Ortiz's characters travel across time and space to deliver aid to Pueblo ancestors in the expulsion of the Spanish occupation. The revolt transcends temporal boundaries and occurs simultaneously across multiple dimensions.[133] In Ortiz's Pueblo space odyssey, the Great Revolt occurs in both 2180 and 1680 when future Puebloans, whom he calls "Aeronauts," bridge the temporal divide by coming to their ancestors' defense. In so doing,

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[131] A few of these important, trailblazing publications created by Indigenous artists and authors include: *Deer Woman: An Anthology* (2017), *Moonshot: The Indigenous Comics Collection* Vols. 1–3 (2020), *Sovereign Traces* Vols. 1 & 2 (2019), *Trickster: Native American Tales, A Graphic Collection* (2020), and *Sixkiller* (2018). See also Red Planet Books and Comics as a resource for Native-authored publications: https://redplanetbooksncomics.com/.

[132] Lee Francis IV, in discussion with author, January 2021. See full interview transcription in Appendix.

[133] IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, et al, *Indigenous Futurisms: Transcending Past/Present/Future* (Santa Fe: IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, 2020), 99–103.

Ortiz's characters not only assure their peoples' survival in the seventeenth century, but their continuance five hundred years later, securing the spirit of revolution and the identities of their ancestors into the future. Narratives of Ortiz's characters come alive within the artful composition of his photographs. In Figure 24, a Puebloan warrior of the future recognizes a reflection of their image within a vessel before them. Pottery, an iconic medium of cultural expression, is one of few tangible remnants of seventeenth-century Pueblo life and memory. The two characters turn towards one another and suggest the imprint of future lives upon those of the past, just as ancestral lives define the future—a reciprocal relationship across time and space. Ortiz also explains that the Aeronauts serve a larger purpose: "they are protectors: cultivating, reviving, preserving, and educating mankind about Pueblo people and our history."[134] Ortiz's artistic storytelling calls attention to a futuristic resurgence of the Pueblo Revolt by merging Pueblo histories and imagined futures. "I think [Ortiz's] work is incredible because it shows that the revolt didn't end," Dr. Francis explains. "The rebellion never ends because the spirit of rebellion *is always with us*. We're fighting for equality, we're fighting for rights, we're fighting for these spaces of representation."[135]

Manipulation of time through slipstream narratives, to use the term of Dillon, not only allows for imagined futures but also becomes a way to reclaim the past. It creates a universe where Pueblo communities are no longer confined by the definitions of outsiders but have the abilities to envision their own narratives, which, in itself, constitutes actions of survivance according to Gerald Vizenor, who sees survivance as "an active repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry."[136] It often deploys narrative strategies of satirical humor, hopeful

[134] Virgil Ortiz, "The Future is History," Virgil Ortiz Creations, accessed January 19, 2021, https://www.virgilortiz.com/future-is-history.
[135] Lee Francis IV, in discussion with author, January 2021. See full interview transcription in Appendix.
[136] Vizenor, 15.

determination, trickery and subversion, all seen in Ortiz's work. Ortiz's *Revolt 1680/2180* provides a lens through which to understand a Puebloan account of the Great Revolt. By referencing time travel to draw connections between moments past and future, the work exercises an innovative form of visual sovereignty. Ortiz urges that the First American Revolution "is not just a story of persecution and revolt, but also a story of resilience—one that seems to be more critical than ever in today's political and cultural climate."[137]

Moving across histories past and histories to come and recognizing them as moments of interconnection offers an effective paradigm to reshape our understanding of history not as linear, progressive, and terminal, but as cyclical, symbiotic, and timeless. Within the slipstreams outlined here, Laguna identity continues, but it also expands and transforms through the shared experiences and events of ancestral and neighboring Pueblo communities, such as Hopi's confrontation of *Star Wars,* and the ancestral Tewa, Acoma, and Zuni participants in the Great Revolt. Futurisms demonstrates that it is possible to understand Laguna identity as a hybrid category in constant flux and as a simultaneously individual *and* collective experience by relying on the authority of Indigenous communities and creatives to shield, share, and compose those experiences on their own terms. It will require the work of Laguna scholars to align their position within the concepts of Futurisms—I cannot presume to do that here. However, as the final chapter will explain, as museums shift to better represent the communities they serve, Futurisms can inform a strategy by which to hold them accountable.

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[137] Virgil Ortiz, quoted in *Indigenous Futurisms: Transcending Past/Present/Future* (Santa Fe: IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, 2020), 99. Ortiz shares Dr. Joe Sando's description of the Great Revolt as "the first American revolution." See Virgil Ortiz, "Welcome to the Revolution," Virgil Ortiz Creations, accessed April 10, 2021, https://www.virgilortiz.com/welcome-to-the-revolution#:~:text=Welcome%20to%20the%20Revolution&text=Pueblo%20artist%20Virgil%20Ortiz's%20time,taboo%2C%20subjects%20with%20his%20pottery.

Through political, military, and psychic resistance, Indigenous Americans have persevered as sovereign people in the face of devastating change. Indigenous nations now dictate the terms of their engagement with contemporary America. -Will Wilson (Diné)[138]

Conclusion: Decolonizing and Indigenizing the Future of Art History

Discussions of decolonization have prompted museums to rethink the ways they function to interpret objects and histories on behalf of Native communities. Nancy Marie Mithlo (Chiricahua Apache) wrote for *Manifestations* that "it is easier to ignore the colonial trauma of our histories than to work to increase one's knowledge of Indigenous realities."[139] Likewise, it is easier to point at the flaws and failures that compromise the institution in which one exists than it is to initiate change. Without the support *and* activism of the non-Native scholars who at present dominate the art historical discipline, then they will simply continue as the sole beneficiaries of an exclusive organization. Change cannot be initiated by one person alone. It will require the collective efforts of non-Indigenous working alongside Indigenous scholars and leaders to realize these transformations. It will require moving outside the comfort and safety of presupposed knowledge, and it can only occur if we look to ourselves to initiate the changes we wish to happen.

The following account from an interview with Dr. Lee Francis shares the necessity of museums to address colonial histories, to be transparent about their collecting methods, and to

[138] Will Wilson, "Preface: Some Practical Reflections," in *Manifestations: New Native Art Criticism* (Santa Fe: IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, 2011), 17.
[139] Nancy Marie Mithlo, "The First Wave…This Time Around," in *Manifestations: New Native Art Criticism* (Santa Fe: IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, 2011), 24.

allow the authority of cultural communities to dictate the stewardship, interpretation, and visibility of materials:

> Decolonization is a way of reassessing several things: acknowledging that museum or institutional or spaces have always been built upon colonial platforms. If you look at anything around critical race theory or Indigenous crit, there is the assumption that it's omnipresent, and it's never going away. So, you have to ask how do people of color operate within those spaces? There are first steps—and I tend to be a little bit more optimistic here. Decolonization basically draws awareness to the fact that these organizations have been involved in a method, a means, and a mode of colonizing—for example, museums have taken objects and artifacts to take care of them *for* Native peoples. That is a patriarchal colonial stance, right? It comes from a fundamental belief that Native peoples and Indigenous peoples cannot take care of our own things. It's almost like we're children—it is infantilizing Native and Indigenous people. Even though when museums return them, the objects may be buried in the sand and [the museum] will never see them again. It is a Western and white fantasy that basically disassociates modern humanity with ancient humanity so modern humanity cannot exist as Indigenous….[Decolonization] is the way in which Institutions evaluate and take accountability for colonial practices that have been embedded in the walls and the DNA of the Institution, itself. Only with this reckoning can we begin to move forward in our conversation. Its disrupting the majority of colonial assumptions that have been the foundations of Institutions, especially museums.[140]

In addition to repatriation efforts, several museums have embraced programs of collaboration which allows the authority of cultural communities to dictate the stewardship, interpretation, and visibility of their materials. The Indian Arts Research Center at the School for Advanced Research in Santa Fe has developed guidelines for museums to follow, helping to initiate institutional changes with Indigenous communities at the helm.[141] The School for Advanced Research also organizes an artist-in-residency program, allowing contemporary Native artists to engage with its historical collections. Marla Allison shares her experience:

> They have a huge collection of Acoma and Laguna pottery. I was able, for three months, to handle and touch them. They only let the artists handle them because they want the artists' hands to feel what the previous artists had made, even if it's

[140] Lee Francis IV, in discussion with author, January 2021. See full interview transcription in Appendix.
[141] School for Advanced Research, "Guidelines for Collaboration: Guidelines for Museums," SAR, accessed February 11, 2021, https://guidelinesforcollaboration.info/guidelines-for-museums/.

> hundreds of years old or from the days of when they started making pottery to sell to the tourists. Those objects I was able to feel and think, wow, how many people are lucky enough to hold the pottery that their great, great grandmother might have made or seen? To follow down the line of matrilineal descent and reconnect with those past lives.[142]

The acknowledgement of Laguna materials in museum collections not as ancient and lifeless objects to accession, but as living agents of cultural memory, provides a necessary first step for museum professionals to serve as stewards of Native histories and futures. Francis explains:

> This pottery tells a bigger story. It needs to be held and delicately cared for, but it also needs to be spoken to. It needs to be honored. This vessel was important to someone. Your obligation or the next person's obligation to decolonizing the museum means that you respect and reflect upon these things not just as something you're cataloging or showcasing to others, but as something you hold just as dear and sacred as the people one thousand years ago did because it somehow came into your care. For whatever reason, the Creator put it into your care. You need to give your love to it. You need to put your heart in it. And you pass along its story to others.[143]

To change the museum institution's relationship to collections of Native materials, non-Native historians, curators, and collections professionals must consider their own relationship to the collection and prioritize the object's original and active relationship with its community. Reunited with cultural memory, museum objects may transform as an "active testimony to a living moment through the mediation of someone who did not observe and analyze, but who

[142] Marla Allison, in discussion with author, December 2020. See full interview transcription in Appendix.
[143] Lee Francis IV, in discussion with author, January 2021. See full interview transcription in Appendix.

lived for the object and for whom the object lived."[144] Museums should thereby seek to uplift Native voices as the authors of their own histories, honoring the objects as living entities. [145]

Listening to Laguna and Indigenous voices becomes necessary in order to foster a more accurate historical narrative, but it is also necessary so that the plethora of voices and cultures represented by museum collections and art history seminars can do more than merely resist the biases of the past. Now, perhaps more than ever before, historians have sought to understand how our pasts shape our futures so that we can understand and navigate the chaos of our present. In the past year alone, Laguna and the entirety of Indian Country has experienced both devastating loss and resounding triumph. Throughout the year 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic decimated Native communities at disproportionately high rates.[146] The loss of so many tribal elders—who also often serve as keepers of Native languages and precious cultural knowledge—has shattered the spirits of tribal communities throughout America. In the midst of this immense grief, the past year has also seen the confirmation of Laguna congresswoman Deb Haaland as the first Native American Cabinet secretary and head of the Department of the Interior. Haaland

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[144] Anne Vitart-Fardoulis, curator at the Musée de l'Homme, compares the encounter of a museum object to a reunion with a lost family member when a garment is returned to the grandson of a performer in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, a poignant testimony to the reclamation of memory and identity. Quoted in James Clifford, "On Collecting Art and Culture," in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 246.

[145] Raney Bench, "Building Partnerships and Authority Sharing," in *Interpreting Native American History and Culture at Museums and Historic Sites* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), 36. Amy Lonetree's book is another vital resource with case studies of decolonization and collaboration strategies in museums. See Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

[146] APM Research Lab shared with the Guardian in February: "…one in every 475 Native Americans has died from Covid since the start of the pandemic, compared to one in every 825 white Americans and one in every 645 Black Americans." See Nina Lakhani, "Exclusive: Indigenous Americans dying from Covid at twice the rate of white Americans," *The Guardian*, February 4, 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/feb/04/native-americans-coronavirus-covid-death-rate.

announced: "Growing up in my mother's Pueblo household made me fierce. I'll be fierce for all of us, our planet, and all of our protected land."[147]

At this pivotal moment in history, it is more urgent than ever that museums act quickly to preserve, to protect, and to uplift Native and Laguna cultural authority. In light of this urgency, in February of 2021, the Doris Duke Foundation awarded over $1.6 million in grant funds to digitally repatriate 6,500 Indigenous oral histories spread out across the collections of seven U.S. universities. Under the direction of the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums, the funds will allow for the digitization and organization of all histories into a web portal, making them accessible to their respective communities. ATALM will also support the appointment of community curation teams who will authorize private or public accessibility and provide cultural context to accompany the collections.[148] One can only hope that this initiative will spread and prompt institutional changes in support of Indigenous communities now fighting for survival by reuniting them with collections as hopeful voices of cultural memory, spirit, and identity.

In theory, Indigenous Futurisms represents a strategic continuation of the artful agency practiced by Laguna artists for generations. The story of Catholic conversion and Great Revolt relayed by the history of *Mission San José* is challenged by the spectacular array of Laguna imagery within the church and its altar screen, claiming the religious site for the history of a people that transcends colonialism. Its hybrid imagery has evolved through the ages into a

[147] Statement from Rep. Dep Haaland (Laguna) via social media after she was nominated to serve as the first Native American Cabinet secretary and head of the Department of Interior, December 17, 2020, https://twitter.com/DebHaalandNM/status/1339722046373130241.
[148] Livia Gershon, "$1.6 Million Grant Will Support Digitization of Native American Oral Histories," Smithsonian Magazine, February 11, 2021, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/big-indigenous-oral-history-project-going-digital-180976988/?fbclid=IwAR2E_bk94bkydpOLP5dMU5w77cykbiBUgkspz1272-CSog8LR9OURpLB1dQ.

symbol of enduring identity. Although created for a colonial Christian institution, its visual testimony and expanding center for cultural celebration and storytelling shatters the limitations of the colonial condition from which it emerged. As a symbol of enduring Laguna identity today, its Spanish American roots and Catholic imagery represent only one historical moment in the story of a people that extends into infinite horizons. Its story continues, as do the stories of Laguna art and material culture removed and placed into public circulation by U.S. collectors and cultural institutions. Their futures depend upon our ability to facilitate and to return them to the authority of cultural knowledge and memory so that each object may continue to merge futures with the stories of the Laguna creators and ancestors who shaped and inspired them. The faces of the spirits in *Mission San José* perhaps see more than the congregation before them or the history behind them. Perhaps they look forward towards a future beyond them.

In the past, the U.S. government denied Indigenous futures by actively targeting Native youth for assimilation through boarding school systems. Even in such acts of erasure, this colonial government recognized the powers of younger generations to continue the spirits of rebellion and continue to grow resilient cultural identities.[149] Laguna artists and activists promote innovative avenues of learning and cultural expression for younger generations so that they may continue to stand as resilient forces of continuity and change within the institutions their ancestors fought to overcome. As contemporary Laguna artists and activists such as Max Early, Marla Allison, and Lee Francis IV continue to pave a path for future generations and assure a place for future Laguna voices, it remains the duty of historical disciplines and institutions to

[149] The Legacy of Hope Foundation offers a digital intervention upon archival memory for Indigenous communities to recover the histories of members removed and transformed by boarding schools in Canada, an exemplary model for U.S. institutions to follow. See *Where Are the Children? Healing the Legacy of the Residential Boarding Schools:* https://legacyofhope.ca/wherearethechildren/.

ensure that our collective memory honors their stories and opens a dialogue to understand how the past shapes the present and future.

Dillon's effort to recognize Native science-fiction writers extends across all artistic disciplines. A critique of the present conditions tokenizing Indigenous creatives should provoke conversations of amendment among scholars of all backgrounds. After confronting the commercial and stereotypical gatekeeping of Laguna creations in U.S. markets and collections, it is time we respond to Futurisms as a call to action. Futurism arts offers an intellectual foment seeking to recognize contemporary Native creators and activists across all realms of expression, including those who would not fit an historical expectation of the "traditional Indian." Futurisms transforms public awareness of what Native—what Laguna—identity is and what it can be. Aligning the art historical discipline with Futurisms may allow us to rise above the now perhaps outdated *pre-colonial* and *post-colonial* narratives in art history and transform our methods of study so that we might define individual cultures not only by their relationship to a moment of European contact and colonization, but by such equally vibrant pasts and futures surpassing this moment.

How can we not consider *destinies* in the same way we consider *pasts*? Indigenous Futurisms frees Native identities from the social and cultural constructs of the tokenized Other. It is not the narrative that anyone expects. It challenges what we think we know. It is in Futurisms that this written account finds meaning. Rather than a strictly post-colonial survey of Laguna art making throughout a linear four-hundred-year timeline, the past chapters of this thesis—discussing centuries of Laguna identity, survivance, and transformation—dedicate themselves as a prologue for a future that continually manifests, reimagines, and reconvenes with the past. This

sets the stage for a reality existing in both memory and imagination, and one that is continuously coming true.

My past is a knapsack. I always carry it with me….And if you think about it, a deeper way of looking at it is through the traditional stories which you see in pottery….I like to tell stories of history, but I also like to make sure that they're tied to the present. And then they tell of a future. If you look at any of the comics that I've created, they tell about the great before time, they tell about the now time, and then they project away to what I say is a bright and beautiful future, because I want it to be understood that Indigenous peoples are still going to be around. We made it through this, and we're going to make it through the future.
-Dr. Lee Francis IV[150]

[150] Lee Francis IV, in discussion with author, January 2021. See full interview transcription in Appendix.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1

Mission San José de Laguna (interior)
Laguna, New Mexico

Figure 2

View of Laguna Pueblo from a distance
Photograph by Ken Lund, 2010
Source: Flickr (https://flic.kr/p/93h8DN)

Figure 3

Mission San José de Laguna
1699
Photographed with permission by Sarah Webb, November 2019

Figure 4

Seal of the Franciscan Order
Mission San José de Laguna
Photographed with permission by Sarah Webb, November 2019

Figure 5

Mission San José de Laguna (interior)
Postcard image
Photograph by Lee Marmon

Figure 6.a and 6.b

Details from interior wall mural
Mission San José de Laguna
Wagner photographic collection, New Mexico State Records Center and Archives

Figure 7

Altar screen
Attributed to The Laguna Santero
c. 1800
Carved and painted wood
Postcard image
Photograph by Lee Marmon
Mission San José de Laguna

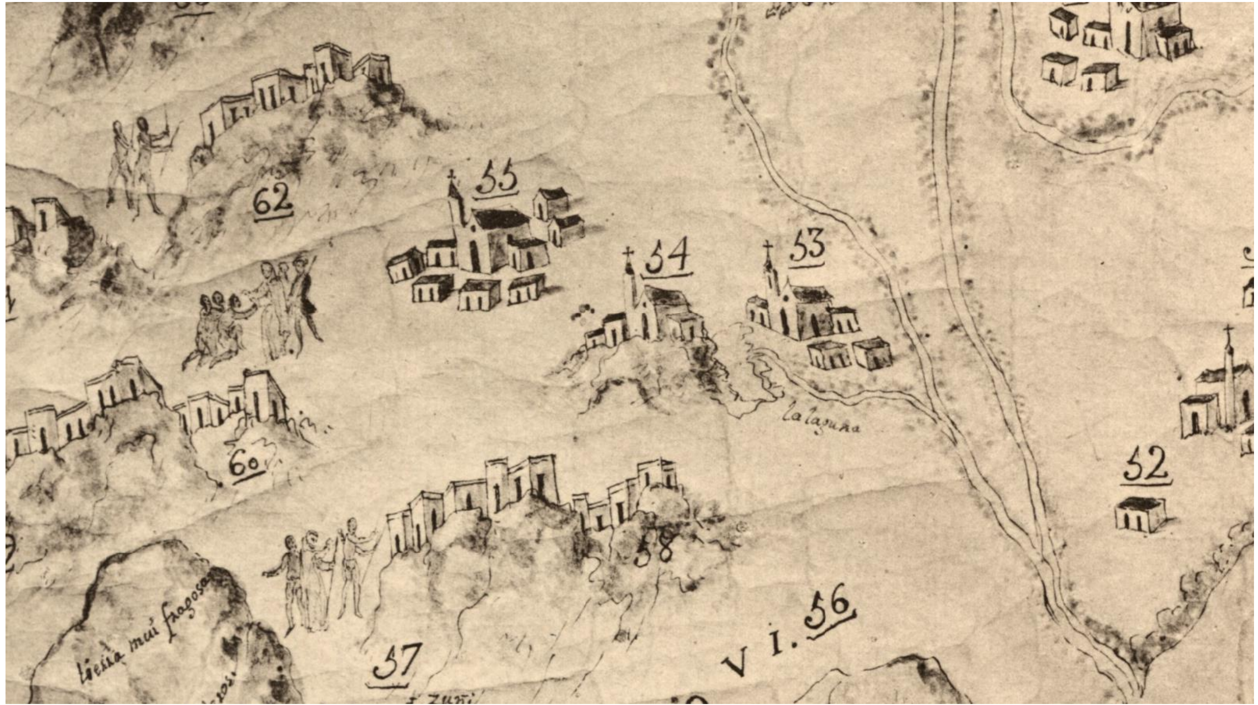

Figure 8

Detail of map depicting Spanish Missions in Northern New Spain
Early 18th Century
Library of Congress

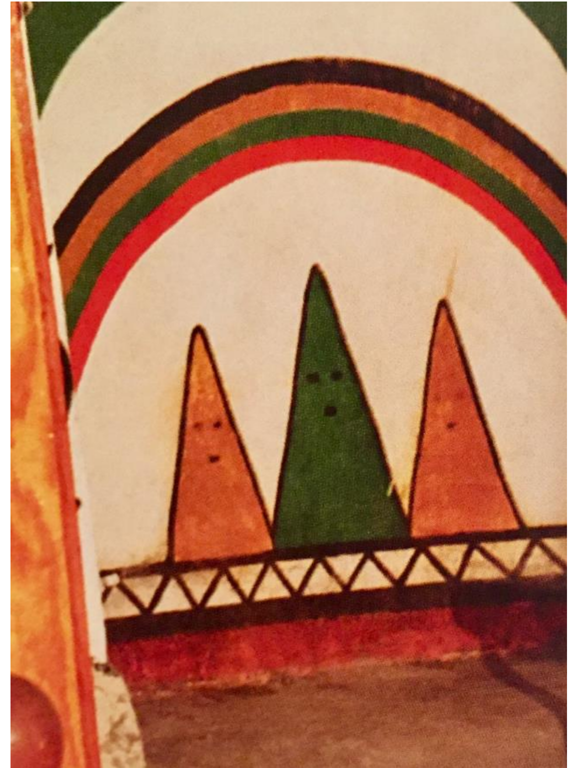

Figure 9.a and 9.b

Altar screen (detail of ancestral spirits)
c. 1800
Carved and painted wood
Poster image, photographed by Lee Marmon
Mission San José de Laguna

Figure 10
Altar screen (detail of the Holy Trinity)
c. 1800
Carved and painted wood
Poster image, photographed by Lee Marmon
Mission San José de Laguna

Figure 11

Unknown photographer from the Bureau of Indian Affairs
Albuquerque Indian School
1885
Photograph
National Archives at Denver

Figure 12

Laguna women selling pottery through the passenger car windows at the Laguna station
c. 1890
Photo by Gus Weiss

Figure 13

Laguna women selling pottery at the railroad station, c. 1898.
The Autry Museum of the American West, Los Angeles
Negative number 20269

Figure 14

Jar/Olla
c. 1900
Laguna Pueblo
29 x 33 cm
National Museum of the American Indian
Washington D.C.

Figure 15

Gladys Paquin
Jar
1994
Laguna Pueblo
11 x 28 cm
Denver Art Museum

Figure 16

Gladys Paquin
2017
Photograph by Andrea Fisher Fine Pottery
Source: andreafisherpottery.com

Figure 17

Max Early
2014
Photograph by Marla Allison

STAIRS OF REVIVING POTTERY

—please climb up the stairs of this poem—

Shroat-wehmeh masterpiece of endeavor

Go face the fire, ringing the pitch desired

Burnished body of brush-stroked clouds

Now dry and cure, sanding you smooth

Revived passion, slicking walls together

Rolling hand-coils of clay in four circles

Or form, *Straniyasheh Mitsi*, will decide

I'll start over again, same coveted shape

Knead and pound all pockets of air away

Hands sticky, goo slides between fingers

Leaving the gelatinous clay ready to mix

Of preceding notions as water vaporizes

By releasing old thoughts, I stir the bowl

Pool of muddy forgiveness urges me on

Slowly dissolving away, my flaw melting

My last creation nestles in the clay water

Figure 18

Max Early
"Stairs of Reviving Pottery"
From *Ears of Corn: Listen: Poems*
2014

Figure 19

Marla Allison in the vaults of the Indian Arts Research Center with her painting, *Path of Life* (2010)
School for Advanced Research, Santa Fe

Figure 20

Marla Allison
Sacred Heart Mission
2013
Acrylic on canvas
36 x 48 inches

Figure 21

Marla Allison
Personal Faith
2008
Acrylic on canvas
48 x 36 inches

Figure 22

Bryon Archuleta (Ohkay Owingeh/Santa Clara Pueblo)
Star Rez: Hopi Maiden with Laser Rifle
2011
Acrylic on Masonite
14 ¾ x 24 ½ inches

Figure 23

Gord Hill (Kwakwaka'wakw nation)
"1680 Pueblo Revolt" from *The 500 Years of Resistance*
2010

Figure 24

Virgil Ortiz (Cochiti Pueblo)
Photograph of “Aeronaut” character beside pottery vessel
from series, *Revolt 1680/2180*
2018

APPENDIX

December 15, 2020
Interview with Marla Allison

Webb: Why did you choose to become an artist? What was your path to get here like?

Allison: I think artwork chose me. I was lucky to have some kind of talent as a child and as I continued, it was always the dream to be an artist in some way, some form. I didn't know exactly how to start. As I went to school, I excelled in every art class. I actually really loved music as well but, as things happen, I found I was better at artwork than music. So, I went to school and found a way to actually start getting into art shows and started getting recognition and then things fell into place. As I continued on, I realized how rare it is to be a Laguna artist. I was raised in Laguna, but I'm also half white (Anglo) and part Hopi Pueblo and Jemez Pueblo. So, kind of a mix of New Mexico and Arizona tribes.

My main focus is Laguna since I was raised there, but I integrate pottery design and different elements of traditions into my work where it brings it into a contemporary light. And I realize it's rare—it's a rare thing to be able to represent a small tribe and to be able to represent it all around the world. I would say it's slightly exotic because, you know, if someone from the Middle East were to come here, they would be an exotic here. And so, when I visit [the Middle East] they're like, "oh I you're one of the First People—we thought you didn't exist!" That's the hardest part—sharing an education of my background, but also sharing the fact that there are hundreds of tribes still continuing and still producing artwork with the influence of tradition, but also the influence of the modern world. My path has been guided, in some way, to be who I am and to share where I've come from. The fact that it's taken me around the world a few times is fortunate. As lucky as it is to be an artist, so is the journey to continue wherever it leads.

Webb: Yes. And I think that leads into other issues about sharing identity with public audiences. Do you view it as important to identify yourself as a Laguna artist to the public? What do you wish the public to understand when they look at your artwork?

Allison: That's a good question. I trouble over this quite often. When I was doing my first big show at the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona—in 2006 I think—I realized I was surrounded by a lot of Native American artists, but also very powerful artists. To make a show of myself through my work, I was still questioning what kind of artwork to create in order to best represent myself. I did one painting that had the whole influence of Native religion versus Christianity and I put that into a painting that was based off of a Nine Inch Nails song, *Personal Jesus*—which of course is a modern influence as well—and it shows the times that I grew up in.

The main thing I realized is that, with traditions, you can't share everything being Pueblo. It's just not a public thing. So, to adapt and to be able to share my work with the public definitely made me think deeper about how I share myself. And, you know, I never really wanted to be a *per se* Laguna artist, or *just* identified as Native American because I am full American. I want my work to be seen as American art but, with all the standards and with all the categorization, people want to pigeonhole each artist into exactly what they need to be, when artwork is so everywhere and everything and has multiple influences.

To take out the titles means to take out a certain person's identity, so I've had to embrace being Laguna and to try and work those things into my work. But, as I've been continuing on, it's become more streamlined or more slight for those who know Pueblo work or lifestyles. Like the painting behind me for example. This is part of a series called *Lost Inside.* I just started it this year with COVID-19 quarantining and everybody having to stay at home—which is normal for me as I'm pretty used to the isolation. Pueblo houses often have their doors and their window dressings painted in a blue kind of turquoise color, which is part of almost a superstition or tradition to ward off evil spirits. So, there's that slight bit of pagan connection or tradition but still adapted into modern life and then moved into contemporary artwork. Those kinds of influences are important to me and shown in some of my work as well; using the turquoise color to keep that box [of tradition] safe while also being able to share it. There's so much more on the inside of the box, but also there's the question of looking outside—the morphing and the evolution of culture and influence into what will be going out into the outside world. It has slight references to the traditions and superstitions that I was raised with, all while still embracing that whole outside world of influence. Which is inevitable. I mean, take the piece inspired by Nine Inch Nails which is so 90s, right? I mean, I'm dating myself for that comment. *laughter* But using the whole influence of life and music in general and of all these other things. It just becomes more and more indicative of how art and identity can [evolve]. I do like the fact that I am Laguna and that I can say, "yeah, I'm a rare person in this world—but so is everybody." Although it is a nicety that I can add [that identity] into paintings and description. I recently got a message from my friend in Slovenia, saying, "hey, we need, you know, people of ethnic backgrounds that are wanting to do an exhibition here," and then another friend in Budapest, who's currently writing a book that will feature my work on the cover and included and talked about. You know, they're loving the fact that [Laguna people] have an identity that is age old but is always changing becoming a part of something else. So, yes. I embrace both. I want to share that it is alright to identify with where you came from. Thankfully, my roots are very different and I want people to understand the beauty in that. It is fortunate to be who I am, and I want to encourage others also. Being an artist is being something more and sharing the places you have been with heart and feeling in the artwork. It is showing the rare view of what most think is normal while pulling out the beauty that open what the eyes can see. An artist is given a gift. It is our duty to share that and not waste it.

Webb: Do you have any specific works that you've been inspired by or works that you've created that celebrate Laguna identity? Can you share more about the work inspired by Nine Inch Nails?

Allison: Yes. My early influences are Mr. Lee Marmon with his photography and also Mr. Floyd Solomon, both from Laguna. Lee has photographed the elders in their regular clothing before westernization became the full influence of clothing and lifestyle. Floyd had learned an intense style of realism and made a mural drawing of a man turning into a deer dancer that still takes my breath away with the meaning of evolution changed through his eyes and art.

As I've grown up with their influence, I have created a mural at the St. Joseph's Mission School, an elementary school where I was able to go to along with all my siblings. I was asked to paint a large mural on their walls that is still there today. The other work to think of is on display at the Dancing Eagle Casino of an eagle dancer, a Pueblo girl, and a church sharing the walls with Lee's photography.

I could name plenty of others, but the main one to think of was my first early painting titled "Personal Faith." It's definitely showing a kind of priest-like influence but also of tradition and a subtle kind of religious mix. It represents the person that's caught in between—being raised by both of these big entities and, in a way, my own personal questioning of identity. I mean, I was raised Catholic and went to a private Catholic school throughout my youth and into sixth grade and then after that into a public middle school and high school. At this transition to public school, the change of more traditional Native beliefs became more clear and less Catholic influence was happening. That's when I began questioning all of these things that were always consistent before. It's like thinking, "oh, I don't have to go to church every day." You still have it to fall back on—you have all those prayers memorized in your head because you were graded on it. But you change and begin to realize your place in the rest of the world and what else is out there. I've come to realize that using those influences and moving back and forth between them is kind of just a part of life. As music became more accessible, modern influences, pop culture, learning of artwork around the world was shown, so my own imagination was changing and adapting.

Webb: That leads me to ask another question which I have run into many times throughout my research. I have come across a lot of scholarly interest in the lasting religious outcomes of Spanish colonization in the southwest. Even today, I think a lot of tourists and visitors who come to Laguna expect to see a kind of religious hybridity there. So, another question I have is if you've ever considered in your artistic practice if religion and the religious conflict of the past that is so deeply embedded in Laguna history—if that history of religious conflict has an impact on Laguna identity today? That's a big question, I know.

Allison: It is a big question. And it's very relevant today if you drive into the Pueblo. I know everything is closed right now because of COVID-19 restrictions. I can't even go there, myself, since I live in Santa Fe. At Laguna, church and traditions are side by side. I mean, the building in which they practice the deeply traditional works is literally next door to the church. They are symbiotic now, in a way. They both feed off of each other because the religion itself is really giving praise to the higher power and the various symbols that they have mixed together becomes the same understanding, although they are separate at times of celebration. There's traditional things that are done during certain times of the year like an equinox or when harvest or hunting time comes. These are different events that follow traditional religious ways. And then there are other times when each village church celebrates its own saint. I was raised in Mesita village. Their church is dedicated to St. Joseph and celebrates St. Joseph's day (August 15) which is also called a feast day. There are six villages of Laguna, and each village has their own particular feast day and celebration of the church and saint. These are kind of social dances mixed with both Laguna traditions and Christianic traditions…I think that's the proper description: Christianic. Traditions have become intermixed so the priest is there along with the village leaders and the traditional leaders and the singers. All the community participates and adds to the celebration. It's an event that not only pays homage to the saints that the priests of the past have brought in, but it also embraces Laguna traditions and history. It embraces the two as a mother and a father who are both equal.

Although there are definitely people who are anti-this or fully-that—fully traditional or who only want to celebrate the Native American way. But then there are others who go to church every Sunday, deliver the hosts, and do all this. But that's the human race, isn't it? I mean, they're

always choosing one or the other, full-on, or not. But for me, in general, I was definitely raised to embrace both sides. My grandfather was a singer and when he would sing, me and all my cousins and aunts and uncles would be there and participate in what events were happening. We weren't biased or hiding from any of it. We embraced it all. So, while I think colonization was inevitable, it was definitely something that made our people what they are now.

Webb: Yes. And this makes me realize that in many ways the contemporary Laguna community keeps in continual conversation with the past. Much of what I have been trying to get this thesis to do is to place these histories into context with the present. And in many ways the curriculum of art history resists this. Some of the next questions I have deal with issues of the art market and the ways in which the art world interprets Laguna art and identity. Are there ways that you feel your cultural identity is complicated or contested by the art market? What are some of the challenges you face?

Allison: That is also a good one. I've been raised to know that with the work I do, I don't show all the traditional things, which is good. It should be kept as its own, sacred, and beautiful as it is. So, to go around that, I try and share parts of my culture and cultural influence as a part of my vision, but I must also be very respectful as to what is seen by the public eye and what goes out from me towards the rest of the world in galleries and museums and such.

It's been it's been questionable. I mean, what we actually share, it's a strong thing. It's part of the spirit inside, right? It's like what I was raised with. I've come to understand a way of kind of coasting back and forth. I can share Pueblo houses and using these pottery designs to show my clan, my family, in a way, through these the pottery designs. Those are certain designs that certain families use. So, if you're of a certain clan or if you're raised around it, you stay with certain symbols and then you can make up symbols that go along with it. I am of a water clan, so I use water symbols throughout my work. And so, you know, you kind of have to know the backstory to know what those influences mean what and then interpret what's actually put onto canvas or paper.

There's also a contemporary edge that I have to be on to be a current artist. I have to balance on that razor's edge of doing something that I know not many other people are doing and that other people from other tribes are figuring out throughout this whole world. So, how do I stay on that edge while also embracing the constant adding of contemporary technology and while staying in my own weird little universe as an artist? And how do I make it different, but all while still merging all those traditional elements that have always been done? As far as I know, I think it's working. It's still hard, I think, for me, and for most potters as well. They have their traditional clay. For Max [Early], he does and he harvests the clay that he uses so he has his material ready. But he faces similar issues as an artist of what to do with that clay. He's also a poet. So, how does he add in his poetry but also keep the traditions that he was raised with to show that evolving identity as well? He's got a huge world that he's been building himself. As a painter, there's so much of the outside world that influences me, including European influences from throughout my studies of different museums. Even with so many contemporary influences, there's a desire to make it something different with who you are and I think that's the struggle. I'm trying to relate to the [contemporary art world] but also to keep true to myself.

Webb: I am also really interested how museums and art historians can take steps towards decolonizing the narratives surrounding collections. And it's been a big topic of conversation

recently in the art historical field. Have you ever given any thought to the implications of this term in the art world? What does this term mean for you?

Allison: I don't know if truly decolonizing is at all possible. It's already a part of history, you know. You can't take out the malfunction in the function. I mean, it's already been put into place. That that wrench has already been thrown in the gears of change so, really, how do you adapt to that slight bit of a misstep that is now becoming part of the consistent step or the heartbeat, or the drumbeat or whatever, you know? I mean, that sounds a little Native, but I think, truly you have to acknowledge all those influences and let them continue to grow. It's like adding a different petal to a rose. It just makes it even more alluring and exciting and so the influence is inevitable, but you must use it to continue on because otherwise it becomes one of those things I've seen in various other cultures where people dwell on it. They say things like, "we were raped and pillaged in our lands…" but that's not you. That's not my life. I wasn't raised in that world or journey. That was many lifetimes ago so really, it's not a part of my world anymore—right now is part of my world. I don't see it as a as a burden at all. It's just a part of history now.

Just to add a little more from the artist's perspective, the evolution of change is all what adds to the art. Generations have to acknowledge the history of the people otherwise it is not true. The works and some block prints that Mr. Floyd Solomon made in the past capture the story of the Spanish colonization through the hands of an artist raised with the stories of his elders and research of what happened. He showed me and others what it was like to live in those days through his art. They were sad times and disgusting things happened in the name of the church. This was his art, this was his gift, but it was also a burden. He was surely criticized at making it exist but in reality; he just envisioned it and put it out to the world. It was a hard truth and something people don't want to see, but it was actually beautifully made. I was supposed to be his apprentice years ago to learn realism and I was going to teach him how I figured out cubism, but we never had that time. He ended up passing away and left to the legends with the art he made. I feel he added a great part to the timeline of Native American Art and the evolution of change with the views through his art. History is harsh but it is life. hat's the mission of an artist, to capture the life and make it something beautiful.

Webb: How do you relate to Laguna objects in museums across the U.S.? Does this experience change depending upon the age of the object, or the circumstances surrounding its purchase or collection?

Allison: I've had to adapt. I used to be very angry and questioning, you know, how did they get this this piece. I realized that many cultures share a similar experience. All throughout the world, there's changes in language and there is loss. But when I think about people from across the world are seeing my art and seeing our culture in an established museum that's far away, it's really quite beautiful. I think to know that our culture is included and embraced in this setting can be very flattering.

I think I was growing into this understanding back when I was able to do a fellowship at the School for Advanced Research. They have a huge collection of Acoma and Laguna pottery. I was able, for three months, to handle and touch them. They only let the artists handle them because they want the artists' hands to feel what the previous artists had made, even if it's hundreds of years old or from the days of when they started making pottery to sell to the tourists.

Those objects I was able to feel and think, wow, how many people are lucky enough to hold the pottery that their great, great grandmother might have made or seen? To follow down the line of matrilineal descent and reconnect with those past lives. It is a rarity to be able to feel them but to be an artist and to see those beautiful paint strokes that were done with…God, what did they have? You know they didn't have fancy $14 paint brushes, like I do now! *laughter* Which was probably like gold compared to their chewed up Yucca stick that was cleaned off and straightened to create that perfect painting line. I think it's amazing, at least from what I've seen.

Thinking about it, I'm not sure which objects you mean. For the regular art of kachina dolls, baskets, pottery, or clothing I might feel it is alright. There are certain objects that should not be in museums and should be returned to the people of which it came. In 2017, I was able to view some collections in England and some of the objects were not meant to be there but somehow ended up in the collection. The good part was that the museum officials knew this and were making efforts to return them to the rightful owners, yet it was the leadership that had problems and thought that it was part of the type of inheritance to the country and not necessary to return. The struggles with museum collections have to be difficult but my gratitude goes out to those working there that acknowledge the importance and give efforts to do right with what is there.

It's mostly pottery of Laguna history that's put into museums. That's the iconic material that has been put out there. But now it's the photography of Lee Marmon who is (knock on wood) still with us and still influencing people with his famous photograph, *White Man's Moccasins.*

Webb: Yes! I remember reading about that one. I've been enjoying Marmon's incredible book of Laguna photographs.

Allison: Yes, I think he has three books total. There could be more…I try and collect his works as well. When I was first starting out, he gave me permission to actually paint his photographs exclusively and share it with them through a contemporary view. So, those who have seen or acquired my work, even La Fonda Hotel, have been like, oh my gosh, this is a Lee Marmon photograph! So, they go on to buy Lee Marmon's work as well. When they put it all together it just becomes a more comprehensive scene of his work, but also of Laguna. And through them Pueblo artists gain more and more recognition. Collaboration really changes things; it lets the work evolve and go into these museums where it embraces history but also puts the culture in a new light.

Webb: Another question that has come up for me in my writing is how often art historians find meaning in a finished work of art as an aesthetic object. But we don't always consider the process or the material experience that artists have with the object throughout the process of creation. So, another question I have is do you find meaning in the creative process as well as in the final product?

Allison: Certainly, yes. I know that with every art piece made, it's shared lifetime, it's shared breath. It's like the food that you take in. It's all that life energy that is making all this into the finished product.

January 14, 2021
Interview with Dr. Lee Francis IV

Webb: Why did you choose to become interested in comic arts and literature and how did you become to be the creator of the publishing company, Native Realities and Red Planet Books and Comics?

Francis: It's a good question and it goes way back. So, to be clear, within any type of research space, it's individualistic, right, I do not speak for all people. I am what we could call an off lander. I grew up on both coasts, my dad worked for the feds so I grew up in and outside of D.C. and I grew up on the west coast when he was teaching for universities. So, I'd get back here [to New Mexico] in the summer times and I'd get to visit my great grandma and my grandma when I'd come home, but it wasn't a place that I grew up with. So, the perspective that I'm giving is a perspective of a mixed suburban kid. My dad's side is it is Laguna from the village, Paguate, and my mom is Anglo from the great state of Missouri. I did my undergrad work at the University of Missouri, my masters work at the University of New Mexico, and my PhD work at Texas State. I think what drew me to comic arts goes back to when I was a kid. My dad was very much a follower of science fiction and fantasy. We had lots of science fiction and fantasy books and comic books in my household were never something looked down upon. If I was reading, my dad was happy. It didn't matter what I was reading. He just wanted me to read and it fostered a love of reading in me. So, I grew up with comics but I also grew up with these other great works of science fiction and literature while being in, what I will say, is a Laguna Indigenous household. It wasn't something we would talk about, but it was omnipresent, if that makes sense. When I was a kid—I remember as I look back through my auto ethnography—my parents sent me to school with a black armband on Columbus Day. This was in the 80s. I was already built to be an activist, you know, before everybody joined. I was like, man, all you bandwagon folks are jumping on now! I was like, "get off my lawn—I was doing this 20 years ago!" *laughter*

It was important to my folks. My dad and my mom very much recognized the historical inaccuracies and the issues in which we idealize and celebrate Western society, English society, and American society over the Indigenous contributions. I was the kid that went to school and while everybody was studying the eastern coast tribes, I was bringing up my Southwest Pueblo culture. That's how I grew up. Moving out of that space, that nerd side was really important to me. I did role playing games, I did Dungeons and Dragons, I found a comfort in that because I was able to actualize who I was and who I wanted to be. During that time growing up in elementary and middle school, I was a theater kid, which set me on a track to working in education. So, for a while I worked with Native schools trying to teach theater.

I've come to realize that my whole world has often been shaped around storytelling and teaching folks how to tell stories. I got my PhD in education. I worked with my own home community trying to get a school established and it didn't quite go through on the state side. And then I had the opportunity to continue to move forward and build comics so I started the publishing company, Native Realities, and moved into launching an Indigenous Comic Con and started Red Planet Books and Comics. My goal was really to create media for Native and Indigenous peoples, because we don't have a lot of representation in many visual mediums. We don't see ourselves in comic books. What we see is old historical representation. We don't see Native kids just being Native kids. I saw a lot of misrepresentations in popular and mass media. I faced that a lot when I was teaching not just with my kids at home, but when I taught in Texas as

well. I would teach kiddos and they'd be like, "we thought all the Indians were dead" or "oh, you're not *really* Indian; you don't look Indian." So, as an educator, I come in and say, "all right, that's not how all Indians look." Texas did a really good job of wiping out most of the traces of Native existence coming from the 1800s, all the way through. And since most of that Native identity was very—I like to use the term nomadic, but we'll say *migratory*—all of the Indigenous peoples that were a part of Texas lived in such an expansive area, they often didn't intertwine. When the Republic of Texas came in and asserted itself, Native folks ceased to exist in the terms of the collective of Texas. Teaching Native kids to recognize this history is challenging when it's dismissed as something that happened in our past. For kids, so much learning is accomplished through popular culture: it's not only comic books, but it's superheroes, popular media, games, video games, TV. This is how we understand and relate to the world. There is an incredible graphic novel by Nate Powell, who is the illustrator of the comic book, *March,* which is a graphic biography of John Lewis and it engages with the history and dress of white supremacy in America. It's an incredible reflection of past and present. And this is what we just saw a week ago! Some of those guys were wearing Punisher tee shirts or wearing paraphernalia that comes from comics. So, we can see the broader implications of popular culture happening now.

I got involved in comics because I can see what we'll call the micro-implications. While Native people are a micro group within the United States as a percentage of the populace, they have had a huge impact on the way that we have conceptualized American mythologies and American identities. I teach a whole course on this and I do a whole thing about Native representation in popular media. But that's why I got into comics. Really, one of my key experiences was when I got my undergrad, I started looking at Natives in theater and innovative forms of storytelling. Native writers are filling a gap in American literature.

Webb: Thank you! You also mentioned organizing the first Indigenous Comic Con. Could you talk maybe a little bit more about the inspiration behind that?

Francis: That's a good story and I like to tell it. There had been some conversations with myself and a couple of other Native comic creators. And one of the things that I recognized early on as I attended conferences and comic cons or sci-fi cons was that often I was the only Native person in attendance, and my friends shared similar experiences. So, in these events we became siloed into being the symbol of Native experience. Giving everyone your entire background and experience eventually gets exhausting. And I've talked with many of my colleagues and scholars of color about how this can be very exhausting. When we are in that space as the person of color, everybody looks to us as representatives of our culture. Now, I love being the center of attention, so I don't have a problem, speaking on that. But I know for a lot of my friends that can be very exhausting and it happens time and time again. So, I said, okay, why don't we create a space where we can all get together and just hang out and bring these shared experiences together. And I wanted to meet a lot of these people, whether they're from film and television, whether they're doing game work, comic books and graphic novels, or science fiction and fantasy. I think they're doing cool things. And I'd like to tell them they're doing cool things. The second part was that I recognized that we needed a trade show for our own work where we could sell our own comics. Then the third part was to create a space where we could reframe the conversations around pop culture so we didn't have to take our time explaining our entire history to each other as we often do in academic conferences. Even when I was writing my dissertation and going through the academy, there was so much of that that was necessary. Right. I couldn't just exist in a space. I

had to tell the whole history and context to so many people. We wanted to create a space where we didn't have to spend time explaining. At the Indigenous Comic Con, it's not on us as Native people to have to explain our existence. It's for you, if you're nonnative, to come in and learn in this space. These were many of the reasons.

I came up with the idea while I was in Australia. I was doing a tour doing poetry and writing and I went to one of the comic shops in Adelaide. In this city, in which there is a huge Indigenous population which is the foundation of their tourism—the majority of comic shops in this city were Western comics and American-based comics. That night I sat down and started sketching out this idea of the Indigenous Comic Con. I drew the original comic con logo while I was there in Australia. The minute I got home, I started contacting people that I knew. I had a very small list at the time. It's bigger now because I've been at it for four years. I think, Jeffrey Veregge (Port Gamble S'Klallam tribe) was the first guy I contacted. He's worked with Marvel and various other projects through the city of Seattle. He was the first guy called up and I said, "Hey, I've got this idea, do you want to do this?" And he was like, "yeah, my brother and I were wanting to do something similar, but you already got it!" That's how it all started in 2016. Since then, we've done events in Denver and in Melbourne, Australia, and then of course 2020 was a dead year. We were two weeks out of launching and we had to shut down. We're hoping to come back this next year, hopefully in the fall. So that's our plan.

Webb: That's a perfect segue into another question I have about tourism—which is a big concept that I've been exploring in the art world. I know in Albuquerque and in Santa Fe there is still a big atmosphere of tourism and curiosity surrounding Native cultures and I know this can be considered both good and bad in different ways. I'm trying to argue that tourist art is an important form of cultural expression in and of itself, but sometimes in the fine arts world it gets put in a negative light. I'm trying to turn that on its head a little bit, but I wanted to ask you: how does the comic con and the bookstore engage with the tourist community in New Mexico?

Francis: That's a really deep question, and I very much appreciate it. I think wrestling with concepts of tourism is very hard because you have to very much consider the impact of colonization-capitalism and how that's taken a toll in on Indigenous people and where art intersects with the necessity for survival and sustainability. So, it's not that there wasn't art prior to that because, as we know, the history of pottery goes very deep, at least from my side. Not even just the pottery but the many types of what we'll say is *utilitarian art*. It's important to question how museum institutions honor the pieces from this history while there are still pieces in modern spaces—in places like the Santa Fe Indian Market. Cultural capital is important in two ways. One, it makes money for folks and two, it allows others to come to know it just as it allows the artists, the illustrators, and the potters to do what they love. There's beauty in that.

When we look into the history, it starts to get a lot murkier, maybe a little bit darker. From a Pueblo perspective, the art and necessity of utility is important. Pottery was meant to be used. I find it hilarious when people talk to me about my Indian rugs, saying those should be on the wall! I know my grandma would be like, "What are you talking about? That's a rug. It goes on the ground." Right? It's not something to go on a wall and be sanctified. It's very interesting that we're taking our pottery and putting it behind glass. Does that mean are we doing a disservice to not only the creator of the pottery, but to all of creation? This was supposed to be used in service of caring. It's a vessel. It is supposed to be used for something, whether it's spiritual or utilitarian. I can't speak for everyone, but in my perspective its life centers around

touch and interaction. I've got mine right back here. *holds up vessel* This is one that was given to me at my wedding. Right. It's personal.

I'll frame it this way. Whenever I go into the art galleries, I shudder a little bit because I imagine a lot of tourists are going to buy these and be like, "Well, now we have a little piece of the Southwest." Well, I have one that was given to me by my aunt and another one that was given to me by my mom. I was taught that if you buy one for yourself, it's bad luck. Perhaps, I am not *that* superstitious about it, but it's hard to recognize the cultural opinions behind those transactions.

When we created the Comic Con, because it's pop culture, it creates a different attitude towards Indigenous cultures for tourists. It's like, oh, people are doing an Indigenous version of Han Solo. The tourism and the way in which we look at capitalism in that space becomes something a little bit different, but it does have deeper and darker roots. I look at creating the Comic Con as a way, really, of trying to create a space where Native creatives have a chance to move beyond a lot of the cultural tourism that's so very expected in places like Santa Fe and Albuquerque and in our Pueblos. Very often participating in the [tourist market] is a necessity for a lot of folks. The reality is that's how many folks make money and so they need tourism, but I think that's a symptom of colonialism.

I'll say it's a different type of tourism, but it creates a different attitude towards Pueblo cultures, too. [The Comic Con] draws an audience who would look at cultures not because they see an object or an artifact to make themselves more Southwestern, but because they have a truer understanding of it. There's a much deeper reflection. So, in a way, the objects that might be purchased at a Comic Con go back closer to the original ways. They're not just purchased as decoration to make a wall inside a home look more Southwestern, or to add to a collection. The things we sell are things that people really take to heart. They're ether buying it to support the artists or they're so overwhelmed by it and it will take a place of honor in their home.

Webb: I do have two more questions that I want to ask you. One of these questions is about a term that's been circulating a lot in the museum world lately: the term, *decolonization*. It's been a popular buzzword, and I've heard several different reactions to this term and what it can mean and when it cannot mean. I wanted to ask if you have an opinion on it? What does this term mean for you?

Francis: I think it's very important when we talk about decolonization that we understand Western and white spaces (and I'm using *white* here as a concept of white supremacy, colonization, uber capitalism, which are all intertwined). Indigenous is the flip of that, so there's *colonizing* and there's *indigenizing*. Decolonization is a way of reassessing several things: acknowledging that museum or institutional or spaces have always been built upon colonial platforms. If you look at anything around critical race theory or Indigenous crit, there is the assumption that it's omnipresent, and it's never going away. So, you have to ask how do people of color operate within those spaces? There are first steps—and I tend to be a little bit more optimistic here. Decolonization basically draws awareness to the fact that these organizations have been involved in a method, a means, and a mode of colonizing—for example, museums have taken objects and artifacts to take care of them *for* Native peoples. That is a patriarchal colonial stance, right? It comes from a fundamental belief that Native peoples and Indigenous peoples cannot take care of our own things. It's almost like we're children—it is infantilizing

Native and Indigenous people. Even though when museums return them, the objects may be buried in the sand and [the museum] will never see them again.

It is a Western and white fantasy that basically disassociates modern humanity with ancient humanity so modern humanity cannot exist as Indigenous. I can trace my time and my people back, at the very minimum, to my grandmother's house which is the same house that [Pueblo] people have lived in for probably 1000 years in one form or another. There's a disassociation within the academy and within places that need to be decolonized. I look at this mostly in the academy because I think we also need to be decapitalized. There's a lot of things that we need to do in these spaces, especially if we're looking at the ways in which collections have developed and how they've excluded Native voices (I'll say this up to a certain point, because there was a point where they start including Native voices). In the past, Native folks were only included in our natural history museums.

I think when we talk about the term *decolonization*—and this is from my own, academic perspective—it's starting to get slightly overused in the same way that *social justice* is starting to get slightly overused. Terms get blurry because they're evolutionary and malleable. It takes good scholars to continually redefine what it means from age to age and from generation to generation. And we start to get kind of lazy. For me, I would say it's the way in which Institutions evaluate and take accountability for colonial practices that have been embedded in the walls and the DNA of the Institution, itself. Only with this reckoning can we begin to move forward in our conversation. It's disrupting the majority of colonial assumptions that have been the foundations of Institutions, especially museums.

I'll tell you a story about this. When I went to Australia, I had the good fortune to visit the Australian Museum of Adelaide with one of the curators—he is a great scholar and activist of Indigenous Australia. The museum had recently hired a new curator and this curator is non-Indigenous, but definitely had a decolonized mindset because the first thing he drew our attention to was the museum's vast collection of boomerangs. "Hey, check out our boomerangs. Want to see some more boomerangs? Here are some more boomerangs." This was incredibly fascinating to me because it essentially said that the entire identity of these Indigenous peoples—who were seafarers, who had created entire civilizations, and who learned to live in equilibrium with the natural world—their identity had been condensed *to a boomerang*.

The same concept holds true with Native and Pueblo people. Pueblo people have become known as the ones who built the apartments and make pottery. But we also had extensive trading networks, we had incredibly sophisticated societies. Oh, and by the way, we lived in a desert for one thousand years without modern conveniences. I know you see this kind of thing all the time as an emerging museum practitioner, those museums with walls after walls of Indigenous masks and holy artifacts without any context. Decolonization looks at saying, "this shouldn't be about boomerangs anymore."

This pottery tells a bigger story. It needs to be held and delicately cared for, but it also needs to be spoken to. It needs to be honored. This vessel was important to someone. Your obligation or the next person's obligation to decolonizing the museum means that you respect and reflect upon these things not just as something you're cataloging or showcasing to others, but as something you hold just as dear and sacred as the people one thousand years ago did because it somehow came into your care. For whatever reason, the Creator put it into your care. You need to give your love to it. You need to put your heart in it. And you pass along its story to others. That's what decolonization means in my mind.

Webb: I have a question that came to my mind very recently, so I apologize if my wording isn't perfect here. I have been criticized a little so far about the ambitious scope of this project because, as you said earlier, this academic space requires me to address over 400 years of history, and I have chosen to do this while focusing on contemporary arts. However, I've seen, especially in this past year, how different moments from the past become even more relevant in the present. I've been following the monument protests in Albuquerque and the removal of the conquistador statue of Juan de Oñate. I've noticed, more and more contemporary artists taking those moments from the past and making them contemporary. I've been following the work of Virgil Ortiz and he is now creating a series reimagining the Great Pueblo Revolt—I'm really interested in how artists are engaging with history through contemporary activism. Do you see it as important to allow the past to shape our contemporary conversations? How do you see this playing out in the future?

Francis: So, I'm going to send you down the rabbit hole for being ambitious—you're in it now! I think you need to look up the research of *Indigenous futurism* as outlined by Dr. Grace Dillon. She's an Anishinaabe scholar at Portland State University and she coined the term Indigenous futurisms. If you look at Indigenous epistemology, philosophy, ontology—all of our big buzzwords from the academic side—what becomes necessary to understand is that Indigenous frames of time are cyclical, they're not linear. We've always understood that—this idea that time cycles on itself. I don't think of it as two-dimensional. I actually think of it as a three-dimensional spiral. So, think of the cyclicality (I think that's probably the most appropriate term): its shape depends on how you move. Your perspective of it changes depending on where you are within it. So, if I take this three-dimensional figure that is a spiral—potentially an infinite spiral—and I turn and look at it this way, it looks like a circle. If I turn another way, it looks like a spiral. And so, when all of these little interconnected points turn like this, it gives me a direction, it gives me a form.

So, it always kind of depends on the direction from which I'm looking. And I think that's the context in which we exist. The context gives us the framework, but I don't think it stops being a cycle, a spiral. So, to the Pueblo people, this concept of time is really important. That's the sun dagger, you know, that's where we come from. So, when we talk about bringing the past with us, it's not necessarily about the past, but about the intersections of our temporality as Indigenous humans. When I'm on the spiral, I can look back and see all of those previous points of intersection and I can see all of the points in the future. The easiest way I can explain it is that it's not about *referencing* the past, it's that my past is a knapsack. I always carry it with me. It is always with me. It is here. It's not a burden. And if you think about it, a deeper way of looking at it is through the traditional stories which you see in pottery. Those are our traditional stories that have been recreated in a graphic, three-dimensional design. That's how we tell stories. These were our traditional ways to tell stories. But as we're telling it, we're in the present. As you're imagining it, you're in the present. So, you become the hero twins, you become the trickster, you become connected to the people through this spiral, through this three-dimensional object. That's why I love Virgil's work. I think his work is incredible because it shows that the revolt didn't end. And I don't mean that it *didn't end*—like, oh, the Spanish came in and that was the so-called "bloodless reconquest"…I know how it worked and I know history. But the rebellion never ends because the spirit of rebellion *is always with us*. We're fighting for equality, we're fighting for rights, we're fighting for these spaces of representation. So, that's how I understand it. It's taken me a while to figure that out, but that's how I bring my visions into the present day. I like to tell

stories of history, but I also like to make sure that they're tied to the present. And then they tell of a future. If you look at any of the comics that I've created, they tell about the great *before time*, they tell about the *now time*, and then they project away to what I say is a bright and beautiful future, because I want it to be understood that Indigenous peoples are still going to be around. We made it through this, and we're going to make it through the future.

You know, there's a lot of scholarship out right now that's talking about our land like: #LandBack or #sustainability and looking at Native people. There's a part of me thinking, "guys, we've been through it all." 90% of our population died in one hundred years from first contact. We were truly the concept of cultural decimation! And yet, here we are. We're still around. We still have traditional values and beliefs. We're going to be facing a climate crisis that is untold that has never been since the times of our ancestors. Y'all should follow our direction. We've been through situations like this before. And I think a lot of Indigenous peoples are kind of pointing at decolonizing and indigenizing as a means of survival. It's a projection that we have into the future because we come from this past and it's constantly cycling on itself.

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ABSTRACT

LAGUNA SPIRIT & IDENTITY:

STORIES OF CIRCULATION AND SURVIVANCE IN THE ART OF LAGUNA PUEBLO

by
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The Laguna Pueblo has evolved as an enduring symbol of Pueblo cultural identity, an identity in which history, storytelling, religion, and art production remain central and inseparable. During the past three centuries, the community influenced and was influenced by currents of outside peoples and agendas. From colonial Spanish missionary expeditions to the Santa Fe railway operation, to the influx of American tourists traversing the iconic Route 66—throughout its lifetime, the Laguna Pueblo has been a cultural attraction to outsiders. Today, Laguna artwork has traveled into the collections of national museums and into the homes and personal collections of American citizens, while the artwork of its church and historic mission site, *San José de Laguna* remains a popular tourist attraction as well as a source of memory and spiritual identity. By retelling the story of the Laguna Pueblo through its artwork and exploring its history from a postcolonial perspective, this project considers Laguna artmaking as an act of agency and survivance. I argue that the spirituality of the Laguna people is manifest in their art, even within the art and architecture of the very mission intended to convert them.

How can art history, a discipline traditionally dependent upon the methodologies of western theorists, ethically and responsibly credit the stories of identity and spirituality buried beneath centuries of colonial trauma, misappropriation, and commercialization? Critiquing founding art historian Aby Warburg, I will consider the strength and resilience of Laguna cultural identity through its art production, even as that identity is distorted and put on display. Interviewing contemporary Laguna artists and following the stories and journeys of objects and artists throughout Laguna's history from the seventeenth century through the present day, I will demonstrate how art making at Laguna has become a cultural and spiritual practice of both celebration and resistance, carefully subverting stereotypes while shielding and reinforcing cultural identity. I will argue that the life stories of Laguna artworks may reveal new ways in which cultural identity can expand, diminish, persevere, and transform.