



ART LIBRARIES SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA

**Art Libraries Society of North America, 34th Annual Conference
Fairmont Banff Springs, Banff, Alberta, Canada, May 5-9, 2006**

**Session I: Speaking Out: Indigenous Artists
and Collaborations with Museums, Universities, and Libraries
Saturday, May 6, 9 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.**

Moderator: Patricia Cutright, Pratt Institute

Speakers:

Beth Carter, Ethnology Curator, Glenbow Museum, Calgary

Jane Sproull Thomson, Lecturer, University of Calgary, and Curator of Art,
Red Deer College

Marilyn Russell, (Ojibwe) Director of Library Programs, Institute of American Indian
Arts, Santa Fe, New Mexico

Joane Cardinal-Schubert, Blood (Blackfoot), Peigan, First Nations Artist

Recorder: Yvonne Boyer

Introduction of speakers

The purpose of the session is to speak of collaborations and connections between professionals in museums, libraries, universities and artists on the subject of contemporary indigenous artists. Artists and scholars discuss issues of identity and spiritual values in the context of Native communities. What can we do to support and make the work of these artists relevant?

1. Beth Carter, Ethnology Curator, Glenbow Museum, Calgary
"Speaking is a Dialogue"

The Glenbow Museum is fifty years old, founded by Eric Harvey, oil businessman and collector of artifacts and historical materials. A task force of the early 1990s established guidelines for Canadian Museums Association on the subject of museums and First Peoples. Its report of 1992 gave guidelines for rethinking roles of museums toward First Peoples in terms of collection content, training of First Peoples for museum work, and issues of access to museums. Glenbow embraced the report as a model for new ways of working in this area and changed from a more traditional model to a new one, more engaged with these issues. The museum founded First Nations advisory committee, started school programs in aboriginal galleries presented by aboriginal people, and added tours for elders and children.

Best known project is *Nitsitapiisinni (Our Way of Life)*, completed in 2001, largest and most complex project, most commonly known as the Blackfoot Gallery, now a

permanent exhibit. A group of 17 elders, representing four Blackfoot communities, advised the museum on this project, choosing artifacts and developing themes. Museum staff and community members worked as collaborators. This collaboration resulted in reevaluating the role of curators to work more closely with the community. A decision was made to spend more time out of the museum, to offset a sense of intimidation felt by community members. The museum also created a First Nations Liaison position, with an aboriginal staff to speak to the community.

Other, smaller projects were devoted to same issues with the role of curator as facilitator and collaborator.

Small circular space within permanent exhibit is devoted to these smaller and temporary exhibits. *Logo Indian* is an exhibit on the art of Kevin Mackenzie, Vancouver artist. He includes his own art and items from the museum collection. He used logos from business and military sources such as Apache helicopters and Tomahawk missiles. An aboriginal intern curated the show with the artist.

The goal is to make the workings and policies of the museum more transparent to the communities it serves, to build relationships with community, and to build self-esteem among community members.

Secrets and the Pain that Comes with Them is an autobiographical exhibit by Gale Cardinal (Cree Culture), on the subject of her difficult and challenging life, now put into words and images that speak to relevant and topical issues for the aboriginal community. Carter worked with the artist by photographing sites relevant to the theme of the exhibit.

Other examples of such exhibits are: *Ten Grandmothers Project*, using quilt making as the medium for the wisdom of aboriginal woman for a strong family and another project, *Nakota Nation Pride*, where high school students curated displays of works in the museum collection and of their own art work, using imagery of the horse culture and grass dancing.

As a result of these changes in curatorial practice and outreaches to communities, the indigenous people are now happy to visit the museum.

2. Jane Sproull Thomson, Lecturer, University of Calgary, and Curator of Art, Red Deer College

"Learning Native Art History: Native Art Sources Used by Curators and Teachers"

Thompson teaches three different courses in a program called Weekend University to address needs of full time workers or those who have delayed their education. There is great variety of backgrounds in students. The attempt is to give students an experiential opportunity in a long period of study in a given Saturday, typically eight hours in two sessions.

One course is called Inuit Art, emphasizing the Canadian component, leading to another course called Inuit Graphic Art and Survey of Native North American Art. Sources and materials tend to be experiential and experimental, such as using texts like *The Trickster Shift: Humor and Irony in Contemporary Native Art* by Allan Ryan, due to his unique approach to the art. It is important to look at Native American art

from a different perspective, to provoke a shift in consciousness. Students tend to be non-aboriginal and need extra background in that culture. Anthropology and archaeology are also useful methods of teaching unfamiliar material, as is breaking up the course into discussion groups to analyze art works based on important themes such as racism, stereotyping and reappropriation of land. Many of the students don't have access to a library, so much teaching material is placed on a website for the course, based on Blackboard. To break up long class periods, a mixture of teaching materials is necessary, such as music and film, including the award winning and all-Inuit produced film *Atanarjuat*.

Other class events include gallery visits, exhibition projects, storytelling (the history of the people, the cultural heritage), discussions of Native art issues (stereotyping, sexism, reclaiming land, etc.) independent research and publication projects.

Future plans for these courses are for distance learning, based on an all-online course.

3. Marilyn Russell, (Ojibwe) Director of Library Programs, Institute of American Indian Arts, Santa Fe, New Mexico "How Art Libraries Support Indigenous Artists"

The Institute of American Indian Arts is dedicated to educating Native American people, based on a 1962 Congressional initiative and executive order by the Kennedy administration. We need to identify how librarians can support the educational mission of IAIA. It is a fully accredited four-year art school, offering degrees in many media and Indian studies. The mission statement supports Indian culture and creativity comprehensively. The library supports all aspects of the mission.

The artwork of three members of the IAIA art faculty was featured (Linda Lomahaftewa, Norman Akers, Karita Coffey), emphasizing their themes and quality of the imagery. Works by Director Russell were also shown, especially from the "Spirit Woman" series with the emphasis and use of symbols.

The library also serves the community as a center for gatherings of different kinds, in order to provide access to materials and to provide a forum for open discussion. The library has subscriptions to over fifty tribal newspapers, a valuable resource for the community.

The challenges for the library include adjusting to digital media and distance education and to making good choices in times of rapid change. All librarians need to establish strong collaborations with other librarians throughout the world, in order to support research and education as comprehensively as possible in this global environment.

4. Joane Cardinal-Schubert, Blood (Blackfoot), Peigan, First Nations Artist "Sharing Contemporary UPspeak on Anthro/Ethno Aboriginal Art Soup"

Cardinal-Schubert spoke of the need of a historical study of early aboriginal artists, those who made it possible for the contemporary recognition of this field. The early aboriginal artists were the illuminators and scribes, providing historical billboards.

She read her poem written for an exhibit called *Revisions*, which included eight male artists and herself. She spoke of her family and educational background and years spent as a curator and as an exhibiting professional artist. She discussed an installation/performance piece, *Preservation of the Species: A Lesson, and Archive*, as examples of her major work that have toured widely. She spoke of her creative process as circular rather than linear, which allows her to come back to points in the circle when she needs to.

Aboriginal people with advanced degrees in art and art history are not being hired, due to social forces such as racism. A major issue facing aboriginal artists is that of labeling, which has changed over the years from Indian to aboriginal, with many in between, causing identity confusion. She emphasized the importance of the museum to communicate with the artist for the meaning of the work art. She discussed her participation in a conference at the Banff Centre, *Making a Noise*. She expressed concern with terms such as post-modernism and post-colonialism, as they do not apply to the contemporary situation. Another term of concern was "uncivilized" as applied to contemporary native peoples, who were already highly civilized before contact with Europeans.

She displayed several artworks, such as *Four Directions*. Influences on her work include ancient pictographs, the night sky, and modern billboards. She gave interesting backgrounds to the making of several paintings, multi-media pieces, and installation/performance works.

She discussed teaching projects at Banff Centre, such as a ten-minute DVD of several thirty-second video pieces on the subject of self-governance and self-determination by aboriginal people. The format of these video pieces is based on television public service announcements.

Respectfully submitted by Yvonne Boyer, recorder of the session.