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## *Response: Pedagogy Round Table*

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The presence of Native North American art in university classrooms is relatively recent and precarious. A few art historians began to teach indigenous materials originating north of the United States Mexico border in the 1960s.<sup>1</sup> Determined to pursue a PhD in 2007, I counted my potential mentors on one hand. As I write, members of that group, including my former advisor, Janet Catherine Berlo, are beginning to retire, leaving gaps in graduate training for this already tiny field. Furthermore, if droves of qualified applicants are not clamoring to write about Kiowa graphic arts, miniature Haida crest poles, or Pomo basket weaving at world's fairs, we must look closely at the role of undergraduate education in inspiring intellectual dreams and shaping professional paths. As I complete my first year of teaching in a tenure-track position in the Department of Art History at the University of Delaware, a PhD-granting program with strengths in American art and material culture studies, I am optimistic that Native North American art history can grow in higher education despite a shortage of dedicated platforms. Here I merge a few stories with strategies for securing the entanglement of indigenous materials in allied fields, informed by the current reality of fierce competition for the imagination—of hiring committees and students alike.

Scholars have used the term *entanglement* to describe the complex cultural scenarios that arise under conditions of colonization and globalization, which in turn spur research across fields, such as American, Native American, and contemporary.<sup>2</sup> Equally, the concept suggests a pedagogical survival strategy. During the three years that I watched the academic job market, no position exclusively devoted to Native North American art was advertised.<sup>3</sup> In the fall of 2014, I applied to the University of Delaware for an assistant professorship “in the history of art from 1945 to the present with specialization in American art...within a global context.” During the interview process, I was asked how I felt about teaching the work of Donald Judd, Barnett Newman, and Andy Warhol. It crossed my mind that it might be efficacious to declare my enthusiasm for these subjects without referencing indigenous themes. Instead, I spoke about the relationship Judd had to colonial landscapes at Marfa, and Newman’s exhibition, *Northwest Coast Indian Art*, held at the Betty Parsons Gallery in New York City in 1946. I mentioned Warhol’s screenprints of American Indian Movement activists, collections of Southwest silver jewelry, and influence on the Indian pop politics of Fritz Scholder.<sup>4</sup> This was the version of art history that energized my own thinking, filled with the mutually transformative mingling of Abstract Expressionist mystics and Navajo pragmatists, white cubes and Red Power, Campbell’s soup and frybread.

One year later, I strained to translate interview claims into surveys of contemporary art and Native North American art. The former was effortlessly popular. “There are seats available in my other class!” I typed repeatedly in response to emails pleading admittance. Maybe it was the mysterious heading of the latter in the course catalogue, “EXPERIMENTAL: No Reservations: Native N. Am.,” that failed to inspire confidence. Perhaps young residents of the First State, where Lenape people were colonized early and are not federally recognized, struggled to see the relevance of indigenous topics to their lives. Certainly my evening time slot competed with sports games and happy hours. Thanks to the advocacy of my department chair and the dedication of eleven wonderful students, my survey stuttered forward as a seminar. Our intimate scale allowed for close study of neglected Northwest Coast masks, Inuit drawings, and Pueblo pottery in the University Museums, animated discussion before the photogravures of Edward S. Curtis’ *The North American Indian* in Morris Library Special Collections, and glimpses into the extraordinary storerooms of the Penn Museum. While I am committed to a dedicated spot for Native North American art in the curriculum at the University of Delaware, the experience deepened my conviction that the subject suffers in isolation. The long-term survival of a standalone course rests on simultaneously integrating indigenous arts into adjacent, agenda-setting American and contemporary surveys, while making a compelling case that such materials transform whatever they touch.



The results look much like a scrappy sculpture I love to teach: Jimmie Durham’s (b. 1940) *Not Joseph Beuys’ Coyote* (1990), a grinning, brightly painted coyote skull mounted on a stick, with shells for ears and waving arms made of animal horn and a rear view mirror (fig. 1). I introduce classes to this work by screening a documentary clip of the performance cited by Durham, Joseph Beuys’ *I Like America and America Likes Me* (1974).<sup>5</sup> The German artist traveled from John F. Kennedy airport to the René Block Gallery in New York City on a stretcher in a screaming ambulance and spent three days

reckoning with a live coyote. Captivated by the antics of the canine, students are drawn into debates about the nature of the emergency, the ethics of human-animal and United States-European relations, and the uneasy parallels between gallery and cage. They are then invited to sort through the material evidence of homage and refusal, linking Cherokee and German artists on American ground. Relating the works of art prompts students to see the coyote as a culturally contested figure—urban killer of housecats, symbol of “the whole American trauma with the Indian, the Red Man,” or teasing trickster—caught up with competing claims to territory and identity.<sup>6</sup> The exercise belongs equally in American, Native American, and contemporary art classrooms. To facilitate students’ emotional and intellectual engagement in indigenous art, I am challenged to fold foreign materials inside familiar frameworks, where they can begin to unsettle notions of home and nation. Ideally, teaching interconnected histories will prompt new ones to unfold, as students become agents of their own entangled educational paths.

## CAPTION

Figure 1. Jimmie Durham (b. 1940), *Not Joseph Beuys’ Coyote*, 1990. Coyote skull and mixed media, 63 x 28 x 29 in. Courtesy of the artist.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I refer to Douglas Fraser at Columbia University, Bill Holmes at University of Washington, and J. J. Brody at University of New Mexico. On the development of the field, see Janet Catherine Berlo, ed., *The Early Years of Native American Art History: The Politics of Scholarship and Collecting* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1992); W. Jackson Rushing III, *Native American Art in the Twentieth Century: Makers, Meanings, Histories* (New York: Routledge, 1999). An American art textbook that stands out for integrating indigenous objects and histories is Angela Miller, et al., *American Encounters: Art, History, and Cultural Identity* (New York: Pearson, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Nikos Papastergaidis, ed., *Complex Entanglements: Art, Globalisation, and Cultural Difference* (London: River Orams Press, 2004); Wendy Bellion and Mónica Domínguez Torres, “Teaching Across the Borders of North American Art History,” in *A Companion to American Art*, ed. John Davis, et al. (London: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 193–210.

<sup>3</sup> Colorado State University, Fort Collins and the University of Colorado, Boulder, hired Native Americanists in hybrid positions advertised as American/Native American in 2014 and 2015, respectively.

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<sup>4</sup> See Ralph T. Coe, "American Indian Art" in John W. Smith, ed., *Possession Obsession: Andy Warhol and Collecting* (Pittsburgh: Andy Warhol Museum, 2002), 112–125; Kristine Ronan, "Fritz Scholder's Indian Kitsch: Indian Pop Politics, Clement Greenberg, and the FBI," In *Dialogue: Fritz Scholder and the Art World*, Denver Art Museum, January 7, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> See Katrien Jacobs, *Healing the Western Mind Part I: Joseph Beuys in America*, 1996. VHS, 16:46: <https://vimeo.com/3541170>.

<sup>6</sup> Excerpted in Caren Kuoni, ed. *Energy Plan for the Western Man: Joseph Beuys in America* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1990), 141.