Becoming Yeffe Kimball: Modernism, Gender, and the Construction of a 'Native' Identity 1935-1978

By

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Introduction

In Yeffe Kimball's (1906–1978) 1978 *Self-Portrait*, a white horse dominates the picture plane of a large canvas (Figure 1). What appears to be the body of a male rider in traditional Plains Indian regalia, including a feather bonnet with ermine tails and a breastplate, guides the horse who gazes directly at the viewer, drawing attention to its elaborately beaded mask. The horse and rider gallop across an abstract background suggestive of a place where the earth meets a night sky lit by a full moon. Kimball's striking combination of abstraction and meticulous attention to specific elements of American Indian traditional material culture in her paintings was her signature style and folded expertly into existing frames of reference that were deemed acceptable during her long career in the arts. Her choosing to use the iconic image of a male Plains Indian on horseback in her "self-portrait" demonstrates her ability to harness existing gender and racial structures in American art. That she created this canvas in the last year of her life suggests her personal affinity for her assumed American Indian identity.

Yeffe Kimball's "Native" identity is invoked as recently as a few years ago. On October 5, 2017 *Art In America* republished online "23 Contemporary Indian Artists," 1972.[1] The author, Lloyd Oxendine, a member of the Lumbee tribe, convinced the editors to publish a special edition of *Art in America* to focus solely on contemporary American Indian art. In his essay, he essentially offers a brief historiography of the interjection of American Indian arts into the canon of American art. He notes that modern American Indian art was not considered authentic or valuable by non-Natives

[1] Lloyd Oxendine, "23 Contemporary Indian Artists," *Art in America* Vol.60, no. 4 (July 1, 1972): 58, republished October 5, 2017, https://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/magazines/23-contemporary-indian-artists/

unless it contained some reference to traditional Native American forms, but that this perception was changing. Since the 1960s, argues Oxendine, access to education in the arts had expanded for American Indian artists. The Institute of American Indian Arts, Santa Fe, under the directorship of Lloyd Kiva New, began to offer art courses in traditional and non-traditional art forms. Both of these forms, according to Oxendine's analysis, represent American Indian art of the 1970s and later.

Oxendine highlights Kimball's painting, *Comanche-Brave Horse*, 1971 and describes the work as "Totemic but ghostlike, it suggests the frozen march of time across which the modern Indian must view his once vital link to nature through magic. At the same time, it is reminiscent of the mounted animal heads used by white men to decorate their dens—a suggestion, perhaps, of the positions to which Indian culture has been relegated by white society."[2] He views her work in a hybrid model, as linking traditional Native American cosmology with modern experiences shaped by colonial history. As in her *Self-Portrait*, Kimball successfully harnessed non-Native expectations and desires in her aesthetic choices including her evocation of Native mythology and mimicry of a romantic, masculinist warrior figure frozen in an ethnographic present.

Although she consistently stated she was born in a prairie dugout in Kiowa Country, Oklahoma, to an Osage father and a white mother, Kimball was not American Indian. The reprinted version of Oxendine's article includes a very brief statement that the heritage of two of the artists included in the original 1972 article, Yeffe Kimball and

[2] Ibid.

Wayne Eagleboy (claims to be half Onondaga), was subsequently disputed. Posing as a Native American artist is a practice that continues today.

For example, despite questions of his Cherokee heritage, a traveling retrospective of Jimmie Durham's work was exhibited at Hammer Museum, Los Angeles: January 29–May 7, 2017; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis: June 22–October 8, 2017; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York: November 3, 2017–January 28, 2018; Remai Modern, Saskatoon: March 23–August 12, 2018. The exhibit provoked controversy and dialogue, but was not cancelled in the face of outrage on behalf of Cherokee members. Rather, the exhibit was leveraged as a site of discussion on the "complexities" of Native American art. Cherokee artist and critic America Meredith, in response to the retrospective, decried the exhibit stating, "Numerous non-Native people have tried to say, 'Indigenous identity is complex,' as if that ends the conversation. It's complex, but not incomprehensible. There are non-enrolled descendants of many tribal communities who still engage with and contribute to those communities. That is not Durham's case. He is not a member of any of the three Cherokee tribes—the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, the United Keetowah Band of Cherokee Indians, and the Cherokee Nation."[3]

Various means of defining Native identity include political affiliation, cultural authenticity, and tribal belonging, but ultimately Native communities should control who does and who does not belong. In an effort to combat ethnic fraud, the U.S. government ordered the Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990. The Act prohibits the misrepresentation

[3] America Meredith, "Why it Matters that Jimmy Durham is Not a Cherokee," Artnet News, July 7, 2017, https://news.artnet.com/opinion/jimmie-durham-america-meredith-1014164.

in marketing and sale of Indian arts and crafts products. Under the Indian Arts and Crafts Act, the tribes, not the federal government, decide who is an eligible member and can designate anyone they want as a tribal artisan. That Durham continues to receive attention as a Native artist evidences continued denial of the wishes of American Indian peoples in favor of the desires of non-Native institutions nationally and globally. In 2019 Durham was given the Venice Biennale Golden Lion Award.

Likewise, rather than through tribal affiliation and instead through claiming Oklahoma as her birthplace and moving to New York City to study art, Kimball leveraged both critical places and distinct post WWII American sensibilities that reified her assumed identity and solidified her long-term career. Kimball's forging of an American Indian identity benefited her in a variety of contexts during her professional career. This dissertation, through a discussion of Kimball's work and career, offers a window into intersections of performances of race, gender identities, and what it meant to be a modern American artist at mid-twentieth century. This significant contribution allows scholars to rethink challenging identity narratives in America—a nation built on complex identity relationships including and affected by the assimilation of American Indian peoples and the appropriation of their cultures. To ignore women like Yeffe Kimball with complicated identity histories can only affirm a patriarchal, assimilationist narrative. Striving to make meaning out of this complexity will allow for continued unpacking of what it meant to be a female artist in modern America and affirms the extent to which European-American identities, institutions, and art practices control American Indian imagery.

This dissertation investigates Kimball”s construction and masquerading of a particular American identity in the period when she was active as an artist, 1935 (when she first enrolled at the Art Students League) to 1978 (the year of her last work and the year she passed away), as a means by which to examine how American institutions continue to impact and frame understandings of American Indian arts. Her successful career exposes corruption in major arts institutions that prefer their own imagined version of what constitutes American Indian cultures. My work addresses the utility and social consequences of her adoption of an American Indian ancestry in particular places. Early in her career, while studying at the Art Students League in New York City, this identity set her apart from her colleagues. Her move to New York was essential in her belonging to the modern American arts scene. Claiming ties to Oklahoma, known as Indian Country, allowed for her to harness the myths associated with a place where American nationhood was less readily understood as compared to other places at the time.

Kimball’s paintings reveal ways romanticized ideals of American Indians resonated not only with the artist, but also with the larger institutions and practices in which her artwork circulated. Her artwork was a means through which she could present and reaffirm her self-fashioned identity and she capitalized on audiences' assumptions. During her lifetime, her works were shown in venues such as the Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa; the Frank Rehn Gallery, New York; the Tirca Karlis Gallery, Provincetown; and the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. These institutions, funded in part or

fully by wealthy white patrons, controlled representations of American Indians through display of their curated collections.

In addition to her popularity in art circles, Kimball associated with senators, authors, and socialites; she was also renowned for her activist efforts on behalf of Native American youth, health, and political organizations and in the 1950s organized an ethnographic photographic project resulting in the production of over five thousand images.[4] Kimball presented the photographic project to Mr. Robert L. Bennett of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and in her acquisition request letter she states it was her hope that the collection be placed where it would, "assist the Indian student in learning about his heritage, the customs and rituals of other tribes, where it will serve the needs of the scholar and student when this culture has been assimilated."[5] Kimball accepted assimilation as inevitable.

Kimball's interest in American Indian cultures was matched by her artistic projects addressing space exploration. Her abstract paintings of space were exhibited widely in the United States and Europe. In March 1962, James Webb, administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, suggested that artists be enlisted to document the historic effort to send the first human beings to the moon. NASA welcomed and respected the resulting artistic renditions as evidenced by the now archived handsome publication, *Eyewitness to Space*.[6] Kimball was one of two women

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[4] The archives are at the Institute of American Indian Arts at Santa Fe. Yeffe Kimball collection, IAIA-MS009.
[5] Yeffe Kimball collection IAIA-MS009.
[6] Lester H.Cooke and J. D. Dean, *Eyewitness to Space: Paintings and Drawings Related to the Apollo Mission to the Moon, Selected, With a Few Exceptions, From the Art Program of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (1963 to 1969)* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1971).

invited to participate among the group of forty-seven invitees. Her works were celebrated for their ingenuity in acrylic paint development as well as for style. In *Red Dwarf*, 1960, Kimball builds layers of blue, yellow, red, and green acrylic, mixed often with sand, into thick impasto mounds reminiscent of the desolate, rocky lunar landscape (Figure 2).[7]

Kimball's artistic inspiration draws from her understandings of Native American cultures and from the artistic training she received at the Art Students League. Also influential to her was the work of the primitivist modernist Fernand Léger. She claims to have studied with him while she was traveling in Europe. Other artists of the time, Jackson Pollock for example, replicated American Indian imagery and methods as a form of appropriation; they turned to what they saw as the traditional cultures of America, rather than relying on traditions from their own cultural backgrounds, and mimicked the symbols and ideas of these cultures in order to navigate their own social and spiritual yearnings. Kimball, however, took her interest in Native cultures to an extreme. Posing, passing, and performing identity are interpolated into her individual art practice. Her success during her lifetime demonstrates how we understand and situate ethnic fraud into American art history. Her work demonstrates how identity is mutable in America and can be manipulated through mimicry.

American Indian peoples, material cultures, and visual imagery play a particular role in the construction of the United States of America, a nation that has relied on American Indian cultures for its own identity.[8] Unfortunately, Native Americans continue

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[7] Russell O. Woody, *Painting with Synthetic Media* (New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1965).
[8] See Robert Berkhofer Jr., *The White Man's Indian* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978); Shari M. Huhndorf, *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); Mario

to be considered through conventional lenses as “noble savages” and “colonial victims” rather than as vitally significant to the development of the nationhood and culture of America. Shifting and mutable identities, a collective fascination with American Indian cultures, and nativism (a return to ethnic origins as well as the notion that one’s identity is defined by racial difference) in post-war America coupled with a general misunderstanding about the diversity of Native American cultures solidified Kimball’s success in falsifying her identity and served as a means of promoting her particular form of American Modernism.[9]

The phrase “American identity” itself is a modern concept. Previously, people spoke of a national character or American nationality, rather than American identity.[10] Historian Phillip Gleason notes that ideological and ethnic elements have interacted in complex ways in the United States of America and that their relative salience has varied from one epoch to another.[11] Kimball molded her assumed Osage persona based on false perceptions of American Indian identity. The early years of her self-fashioning coincided with a period in which many were questioning what it meant to be an American. Her assumed American Indian identity matched expectations following histories of erasure and assimilation. Kimball’s narrative demands an acknowledgement

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Caro, “Owning the Image: Indigenous Arts Since 1990,” in Patsy Phillips *et al., New Native Art Criticism: Manifestations* (Santa Fe, NM: Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, 2011); Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998); Vine Deloria Jr., *Custer Died For Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (New York: Macmillian, 1969).

[9] Walter Benn Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism* (Durham: Duke University Press), 1995.

[10] Philip Gleason, "Americans All: World War II and the Shaping of American Identity," *The Review of Politics* 43, no. 4 (1981): 483-518, http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/stable/1406904.

[11] Ibid.

that race, gender, and place complicate understandings of identity in America and that discourse on American Indian art continues to be entangled into these ideas.

During the 1930s, the time when Kimball began to study painting in New York, the U.S. experienced tensions related to the Great Depression and to ever-growing anxieties about modern life. Some artists emphasized these tensions by selecting them as subject matter for their work. Edward Hopper, for example, focused on vacant New York streets lined with old buildings to reveal the feelings of isolation felt by many living in the modern, bustling city. Even when in the company of others, people in his works appear to be alone. In *Nighthawks*, 1942 three figures sit at the counter of a diner at night, each seemingly lost in his or her own thoughts. Other American artists of this time nostalgically focus on farming and rural life. Recognizable works of this type include Grant Wood's *American Gothic*, 1930. This painting depicts a middle-aged couple standing in front of their well-crafted and sturdy wooden house built in the American Gothic style. The work was intended to emphasize the resilience of American farmers in the face of the Great Depression, though many viewers feel the work is sarcastic due to the grim-faced and puritanical appearance of the couple.

While the subject matter in Native paintings is similar to non-Native paintings during this time in that both emphasize human subjects and activities, their differences are colossal. Artists in both categories drew from different traditional backgrounds. Native painters of this time were persuaded, and forced, to focus on traditional activities as subject matter while non-Native painters constructed images of individual lives impacted by current changes with modernity. The Euro-Americans of Hopper's works,

for example, live and breathe street scenes of New York City. Viewers of this time would not expect for one of Hopper's diners to have been of American Indian ancestry. For the non-Native audience, Indigenous knowledges were not considered and the Native American figure served as an "Other" who engendered feelings of nostalgia for a seemingly more natural past and a sense of comfort in the face of difficult and insecure times.[12] The Native worldview and the Western worldview are thus often inherently at odds with Euro-Americans blindly harvesting imagery of Native cultures as a means of settling their own discomforts in the face of the Great Depression.

Individuals like Kimball are able to pass in the context of a relationship between a subject who does not tell the truth of his or her identity and an audience who fails to ask.[13] To convince others that she was of American Indian ancestry, Kimball needed only to culturally *appear* as such, and this appearance relied heavily on notions of assimilation, conventional narratives, and romanticized, Euro-centric understandings of Native Americans as belonging to a monolithic culture. Equally important to her performance was the fact that the larger social body in the arts world did not question her. While it seems some were aware that she was posing, she was not asked to verify

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[12] Vine Deloria Jr.'s scholarship called attention to the opposing worldviews of Western and American Indian cultures. He argued that American Indian ways of knowing and knowledges were not historical artifacts, but relevant to the modern world. See Vine Deloria Jr., *The Metaphysics of Modern Existence* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979). See also Daniel R. Wildcat, "Indigenizing the Future: Why We Must Think Spatially in the Twenty-First Century," *American Studies* 46, no. 3/4 (2005): 417-440, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40643906.

[13] Susan Gubar, *Racechanges: White Skin, Black Face in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

her heritage.[14] Her ability to develop personal acquaintances with museum directors and gallery owners gave her the power to pass without question.

Kimball utilized personal rapport and social graces to help her enter powerful arts institutions of her time, such as the Philbrook. Letters she wrote to museum directors and gallery owners are amiable and genial, sometimes they include poems and often greetings to extended family members of the addressee. The arts are particularly prone to placing importance on developing personal connections. Personal rapport continues to put Native American artists at a disadvantage as most major institutions of the arts are largely run by non-Native directors, curators, and donors who are unversed in contemporary American Indian politics and identities.

Ethnic fraud continues to impact the arts today. For example, Durham was given the Venice Biennale Golden Lion award in 2019, after controversy over his retrospective and despite the fact that multiple Cherokee artists and curators continue to claim that Durham is not in fact recognized by any of the three Cherokee nations. In an article published in *Indian Country Today*, June 26, 2017, several Cherokee contributors write that “Durham continues to misrepresent Cherokee language, history, and culture. Throughout his career, he has misrepresented other tribes’ practices (giveaways, vision quests, Trickster Coyote, feasts of the dead) and said they are Cherokee. His fabrications insult not only us but also the other tribes whose cultures Durham has

[14] In conversation with Nancy Marie Mithlo on June 11, 2019, she recalled Lloyd Kiva New (Cherokee, 1916-2002) having conveyed to her that people of his generation were aware of fraud issues, but did not care to attend to them. Yeffe Kimball was “good to Indian people” and her ethnic fraud was not of concern.

misappropriated."[15] Examinations of these narratives of ethnic fraud reveal power structures in American art that continue to marginalize and discredit tribally recognized artists.

The social circles of the arts that based understandings of American Indian identities on material culture signifiers alone were immune to the realities of Native Nations and they exerted their power and control over American Indian cultural patrimony. Because racial distinctions are largely socially constructed, Kimball was able to rely on material signifiers to pose convincingly. Kimball wore her hair in braids and donned specific jewelry, mimicking historic photographs of Native peoples (Figure 3). Historian Philip J. Deloria argues that white Americans used the idea of the Indian to create their own national identity, both identifying with American Indians as liberated New World inhabitants and opposing them as "savage others."[16] Kimball's self-fashioning was a function of fluctuating identity opportunities. She embraced the American ideal of "Native America" not only through personal adornment but also her own name preferences such as "Wandering Star." Additionally, she utilized conventional, recognizable Native American imagery in her artwork such as masks, warriors on horseback, and feather bonnets. Her artistic success implies that American Indian arts and cultures were, and continue to be, misrepresented and misunderstood through their reduction to key, replicable icons.

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[15] Cara Cowan Watts, Ph.D. (Cherokee Nation), et al., "Dear Unsuspecting Public, Jimmie Durham is a Trickster," *Indian Country Today*, June 26, 2017, https://newsmaven.io/indiancountrytoday/archive/dear-unsuspecting-public-jimmie-durham-is-a-trickster-Rk7_oZ6TPkmIlQLNJN-gPw/.

[16] Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

Kimball's construction of her racial identity is equally bound by gender. As Anne Middleton Wagner theorized, gender is an active determinate factor in the production and reception of art.[17] American Indianness resonated in specific ways with American women artists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who demonstrated an activist, as opposed to a purely aesthetic, urge. Laura Gilpin, for example, photographed the Native people of the Southwest, relying heavily on her nurse companion to engage with the community members Gilpin chose to photograph. Women of the late 1800s and early 1900s found social activism as an outlet that could both conform to and allow for the rejection of social norms of the time period. These women could fulfill the societal expectation that they be homemakers, teachers, and nurses through activism related to American Indians who were perceived as "child-like" and in "need of help." Inherently racist, at the same time their relationships with specific tribes allowed these women to travel to distant locations across the United States and live untethered from domestic duties. This social structure allowed for them to both adhere to power norms of white womanness through caretaking, yet also roam free from gender expectations related to maintaining the home.

Complex relationships between a sense of belonging to a specific community and activism for that community continue into the present day. Academic Andrea Smith, according to an article of June 2015, has made claims to a Cherokee identity but she is not Native. She has a significant presence within and continually advocates for the organization Women of All Red Nations. Rachel Dolezal, a white woman and former

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[17] Anne Middleton Wagner, *Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner, and O'Keeffe* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1996.

president of the Spokane, Washington chapter of the NAACP, repeatedly stated in interviews, "I identify as Black."[18] These and other women leverage the intersections of race and identity in order to gain access to positions of power.

This dissertation demonstrates how race, gender, and artistic identity, at mid-twentieth century aided Kimball in launching a career as an artist in and environment where European-American identities, institutions, and art practices relied upon American Indian imagery. Kimball's linkages to specific places, Oklahoma and New York City, during this time were also vital to her success. Narratives about "passing" frame larger issues of authenticity and social authority. They problematize identity and raise questions concerning the self: How do artists use their artwork to project their sense of identity? What is Kimball's impact on the American Indian art field today? The important findings of my research on Kimball's case critically inform current conversations about self-identification and the fluidity of racial categories particular to the American context.

Literature Review

American Indian art has largely been absent from dialogues about American art. Recent scholarship attempts to bridge these gaps.[19] Due to her self-proclaimed Osage identity, scholarship on Yeffe Kimball currently falls within the realm of Native American art in American art history. Therefore I primarily engage with the disciplines of art

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[18] Gene Demby, "Should Rachel Dolezal's Story Change How We Think About Race?," National Public Radio, last modified June 16, 2015, http://www.npr.org/2015/06/16/414831852/should-rachel-dolezal-s-stort-change-how-we-think-about-race.
[19] See Angela L. Miller, Margaretta M. Lovell, and David Lubin, *American Encounters: Art, History, and Cultural Identity* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2008).

history, anthropology, Indigenous studies, women's and gender studies, and with the issues of modernism, intersections of race and identity, women in art, and literature on Kimball.

The development of American Indian art history is generally understood to have begun in the second half of the nineteenth century, when anthropologists, photographers, explorers, and others eagerly collected American Indian art and artifacts.[20] To these predominantly European-American collectors, the material culture of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas represented evidence of a "dying" culture. Objects were hoarded as "oddities" and "curiosities" in private collections and in the collections of larger institutions established during this period, such as the Smithsonian Institution and the American Museum of Natural History. In the late nineteenth century, non-Native photographers documented what they presumed to be vanishing Indigenous life, and anthropologists amassed great collections of various objects under the same assumption. These objects, many of which are still on display in museums, were created by members of cultures that continue to thrive despite threat of extinction, what Gerald Vizenor has termed "survivance."[21]

The creation of these large institutions, intended to house what was considered exotic artifacts and historical objects, established the study of American Indian art through exhibitions of material culture. The objects were most often interpreted through an anthropological lens and seen as the embodiment of traditions that are static,

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[20] For a more thorough consideration of this history, see Janet Berlo, ed., *The Early Years of Native American Art History: the Politics of Scholarship and Collecting* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992).

[21] Gerald Robert Vizenor, *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008).

ahistorical, and on the verge of extinction.[22] From their inception, museums have controlled understandings of Native American cultures and continue to interpret objects of cultural patrimony largely from the perspective of non-Natives. Art historian and curator Susan Vogel argues for ethics in museum practices concerning anthropological collections.[23] Most of the objects in these institutions were not made to be seen in such venues. Museums have an obligation to be transparent of curatorial narratives and to disentangling information about objects from the narrative ascribed to them through organized exhibitions.[24]

Modern American Indian art is most often understood in terms of hybrids that lie in the convergence zones of art and anthropology. The hybridity model accepts Native American art as mixtures of Native traditions with European techniques. Because hybridity embraces White, anthropological assumptions about what Native traditions embodied before colonization, the model locks Native traditions into the past and considers European techniques to be inherently of the modern world. In fact, modernity affected Native traditions that are, like any traditions, constantly in flux.

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[22] For a history of the development of the historiography on Native American art, see Janet Berlo, "Introduction: The Formative Years of Native American Art History" in *The Early Years of Native American Art History the Politics of Scholarship and Collecting,* ed. Janet Berlo (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992), 1-21.

[23] Susan Mullin Vogel, "Always True to the Object, in Our Fashion," *Exhibiting Cultures: the Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, Ivan Karp & Steven D. Lavine eds. (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press,1991), 191-204.

[24] On November 16, 1990, The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) was enacted to address the rights of lineal descendants, Indian tribes, and Native Hawaiian organizations to Native American cultural items, including human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony. How is this completed when the provenance of American Indian objects is often unknown? Who is selected to act as a community representative? Though a move to correct mistakes of the past, issues of power and control are not resolved by NAGPRA.

The hybridity approach is problematic and affirms inaccurate assumptions concerning traditional as inherently historic and modern as quintessentially contemporary. In predominantly non-Native scholarship, tensions continue to exist between Native Americans and modernity. According to these models, a Native person cannot also be a modern artist unless working in European-trained styles with the incorporation of Native imagery. Art historian Bill Anthes argues one of the main impediments to the scholarly recognition of a modern Native American art is its definition as traditional. Citing recent writings on hybrid modernities, he challenges the boundaries constructed between art made by American Indians and art created by European and American modernists.

Anthes envisions modernity as an intercultural encounter. Like other authors writing in roughly the same time period, Anthes builds on Mary Louise Pratt's vision of a "contact zone" where colonial "others" are mutually transformed by each other's ideas and aesthetics even amidst an imbalance of power.[25] In this model, Kimball, a non-Native artist, is written into a narrative of Modern Native American art as exemplar of an extreme form of American "primitivism" and inevitable appropriation in a world where cultures collide and mix. It is important to note that Anthes and related scholars are essentially writing about an American experience of Native American art, where Kimball's self-fashioning and career fit. In an Indigenous Studies model, Native American and Western approaches to the arts are separate worlds that operate simultaneously. Inclusion or insertion of Native arts into a Western canon is not

[25] Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," *Profession*, Modern Language Association (1991), 33-40. See also Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London;New York: Routledge, 2008).

representative of a sovereignty model for Indigenous scholarship which exceeds the frame of American arts.

An imbalance in power allows for the acceptance and normativity of many works made from the perspective of non-Native artists appropriating motifs, mediums, and themes from Indigenous communities to be considered purely modern works. Art historian Jackson Rushing, for example, explores how Abstract Expressionists of the 1930s and 1940s romanticized American Indian cultures and appropriated visual forms in exploration of a universal purity, or feelings and ideas that they believed could be collectively understood as part of the human condition, regardless of community upbringing. Rushing demonstrates the ways in which these American artists incorporated elements of Native cultures into their paintings and proves that the modernism of New York's avant-garde depended on American Indian art and culture to a degree previously unrecognized in the art-historical literature.[26] Paintings made by Native artists utilizing traditional forms are not "modern" yet works made by non-Native artists during the same time period that appropriate Native traditional forms are considered "modern."

The hybrid model foregoes the fact that many Native American artists may not wish to be included in an American art canon. American artists appropriated American Indian cultures, and the art making trajectories of these differing cultures are non-commensurate. Philosopher Vine Deloria Jr., a member of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe, argued that Indigenous knowledges are often counter and in direct opposition to

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[26] Jackson W. Rushing, *Native American Art and the New York Avant-garde: a History of Cultural Primitivism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).

the very premise of Western cultures. In his book, *Custer Died for Your Sins*, Deloria Jr. asserts “Indians are alive, have certain dreams of their own, and are being overrun by the ignorance and mistaken, misdirected efforts of those who would help them.”[27] Westerners have attempted to destroy Indian cultures and assimilate Indian individuals into white society. The clashing epistemologies between Westerners and Native Americans should be recognized as also existing in the world of art, which is not immune to the colonial trajectories of Western nations.

Native history of American Indian art is developing. Current explorations in the field of American Indian art are, in many ways, tied to curatorial methodologies that emerged in 1992 and that prioritize Indigenous perspectives. Organized by the Heard Museum in 1994, *Watchful Eyes: Native American Women Artists* showcased works by several Native American women. In the foreword to the exhibition catalog, museum director Martin Sullivan noted the absence of Native women from art historical and curatorial discourse and practice as the impetus for this exhibit. In another example, the 2000 Barbican Art Gallery’s exhibition, *Native Nations: Journeys in American Photography*, highlighted scholarship that prioritized Indigenous voices and perspectives, challenging the photographic representations of Native subjects from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the exhibition catalogue, artists and scholars Jolene Rickard (Tuscarora) and Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie (Taskigi/Diné) reread historic photographs, to subvert conventional narratives and articulate visual sovereignty. More recently, scholarship by visual anthropologist Nancy Marie Mithlo (Chiricahua Apache)

[27] Vine Deloria Jr., *Custer Died For Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1988), xiii.

and artist Tom Jones (Ho-Chunk) foregrounded the perspectives of Native individuals photographed by Horace Poolaw (Kiowa). Their traveling exhibit, *For a Love of His People: The Photography of Horace Poolaw*, Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian New York, 2015, subverts traditional readings of Native subjects in visual images. Contemporary art critic Mario Caro examines aesthetic strategies employed in visual representation of American Indians as part of a function of nation building.[28] Following Caro's discussion, I examine Kimball's employment of aesthetic strategies in a selection of her works to reveal how her painted images both align with romanticized notions of authentic American Indian art traditions through subject matter and subvert conventional narratives through her expressive style. Her linking to specific places, Oklahoma and New York City, during the early years of her self-fashioning allowed for her to play on insecurities of nationhood during the 1930s and 40s. During this time, non-Native institutions largely controlled definitions of Modern Native American art. Harnessing her ability to build a personal rapport with white directors and curators, she leveraged misunderstandings about Native American art of her era and she confidently situated herself into existing structures of American art.

Ethnic fraud such as practiced by Kimball functions as part of larger processes of social domination. English and Women's Studies scholar Susan Gubar proposes the term "racechange" to define "a cultural performance whereby one member of a defined social group masquerades as another" in order to enjoy the privileges

[28] Mario Caro, "Owning the Image: Indigenous Arts Since 1990," in Patsy Phillips *et al*., *New Native Art Criticism: Manifestations* (Santa Fe, NM: Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, 2011).

afforded to the dominant group.[29] Gubar rightfully suggests that cross-racial impersonations are taboo and therefore understudied. English and Ethnic Studies scholar Shari Huhndorf contends, and I agree, that it is only possible to entertain a positive interpretation of this phenomenon if one attends solely to its effects on the dominant European-American society.[30] Furthermore, racechange, or ethnic fraud, in post-war America resonates in specific ways with women and women artists who, perhaps, approach posing differently due to their self-consciousness as subjects frequently viewed, watched, and displayed.

Kimball's self-fashioning reflects a dominant to subordinate power shift. It is her very privileges as a white person that allowed for her to navigate the social strata, and she used these shifts strategically, even as Native artists with recognized ancestry such as Oscar Howe (Yanktonai Dakota) were turned away from acceptance by mainstream museums as discussed at length in Chapter Three. Kimball's works were included in iconic Native art exhibitions because the institutions that selected the "best" Native arts, either for sale, prizes or exhibitions preferred a version of Native arts and Native artists that attended to wealthy white desires. These desires were for accessible Native representations, grounded in images of traditional material culture and individuals that were non-threatening and rooted in Darwinian theories of the "other" as different, closer to nature, and less civilized. Kimball's inclusion and success reveal the unequal power relations and monopoly of the Native arts field by well-meaning but uninformed and biased practitioners. Untangling the social structures that enabled her inclusion in these

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[29] See Susan Gubar, "Racechanges" and Kimberlyn Leary, "Passing, Posing and 'Keeping it Real'," *Constellations*, 6:1 (1999), 85-96.
[30] Huhndorf, *Going Native.*

exhibitions exposes power structures that continue to fracture and misrepresent Native American art.

This dissertation demonstrates the intersectionality of Native identities, exhibition spaces, modernity, ethnic fraud, and gender in the mid-twentieth century. It exposes the power of art practices and institutions that sought to control American Indian imagery**.** Kimball claimed ties to Oklahoma, known as Indian country, a place where nationhood was in infancy at the time. She then trained and lived in New York, a pivotal location for an aspiring artist. Kimball's leveraging of these two key places from within institutions of power that she navigated with social grace aided in the launching and subsequent success of her career as a self-identified American Indian artist.

Methodology

My work builds on current conceptions that the history of early modern America cannot be properly understood without a deep understanding of the history of Native America and Indigenous Americans. Contemporary scholarship emphasizes entanglements as the structure of the history of colonialism. Many belief systems connect the multifarious cultures of North America, which sometimes strangle each other and other times allow for the creation of new forms. As current art historians have attempted to define American Indian art, there have been missteps and fractures. Within this context, my work here explores one woman's practice of ethnic fraud as a way to tease out a few of the tangles of American history and to reveal the colonialist power structures that continue to impact Native artists. Because the scholarly work on Kimball

is limited, my project relies primarily on semi-structured interviews with Kimball's family members, art historians, and Native scholars, in addition to library and museum archival research.

I first encountered Kimball's photographic work when I began graduate work at the University of Wisconsin–Madison with Nancy Marie Mithlo in 2010. At Smith College in 2002 and 2003, Mithlo had organized a project involving the scanning of images from the Yeffe Kimball photographic archive at the Institute of American Indian Arts with the twin goals of saving the decaying photographs and returning the images to their communities of origin.

During this time, I also started work on the Horace Poolaw Project, established by Poolaw's daughter Linda Poolaw (Delaware/Kiowa) in 1989 at Stanford University, and participated in the research initiative co-directed by Mithlo and Tom Jones. I began thinking critically about how to make photographic archival collections meaningful in new ways for our post-modern audience and about the impact of the ways that photographic images are circulated and consumed. Working on the Poolaw Project inspired me to consider ways to connect images from Kimball's photographic project to their communities of origin.

Very little scholarly research had been done on Kimball's photographic project and I wished to begin my inquiry by seeking out information about individual photographers and how the project had been funded. As this was not available in the literature, I began an email correspondence with atomic physicist Harvey Slatin, Kimball's widower. Semi-structured interviews formed the foundation of my learning

about Kimball's early life and career. I met with Slatin in Stamford, New York, to talk about his life with Kimball. He was in his late nineties at the time and remembered general things, but when I showed him copies of the photographs he was not able to recall specific information regarding who was depicted or who the photographers had been. My fascination with Kimball increased based on his character descriptions of her as a "mover and shaker" whom everyone wanted to know. She would convince him to eat different types of Native recipes she had been learning, which Slatin would eat regardless of his taste preference.[31] He seemed to know she wasn't Native. When asked, he wouldn't give me a direct response; he simply replied, "I would have loved her had she been from Mars." When he told me I reminded him of the small in stature, yet profoundly influential Kimball, I was determined to uncover more about this relatively obscure artist.

In addition to the work at Smith College, the only other contemporary scholarly work is a chapter on Kimball in Bill Anthes' 2006 publication, *Native Moderns: American Indian Painting, 1940–1960*. I met Anthes at the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum Research Center and the School for Advanced Research co-hosted symposium on September 6 and 7, 2013. The symposium arose out of questions encountered by the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum staff as they prepared the exhibition *Georgia O'Keeffe in New Mexico: Architecture, Katsinam, and the Land*, which I discuss further in Chapter Three. Anthes shared a box of slides, notes, archival material, and a digital file he had received from Kimball's family, materials that informed my research.

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[31] See Yeffe Kimball and Jean Anderson, *The Art of American Indian Cooking* (New York: Lyons Books, 1965).

This shift in my focus from Kimball's photographs to her paintings led to collections research between late 2015 and 2016, including a trip to the Philbrook to meet with curator Christina Burke and to view the Kimball works in their collection. I also viewed work at the East Oklahoma University where several of Kimball's space paintings from the Southern Plains Indian Museum are currently held and were on view during my visit. Many of Kimball's works are quite large, and the articulation of her brushstrokes and her skill as a colorist make an impact. Her later works required that she develop her own synthetic paints, emphasizing her commitment to creative advancement as an artist.

However, the collections research did not fully convey a sense of Kimball's character. One does not simply become a world-famous "Osage" artist by chance, and Kimball's successful mimicry illustrated to me that, in addition to the quality of her painting, her personality, charisma, and character certainly impacted her ability to succeed during the course of her career. I became curious about her family influences and decided to connect with her family by starting an Ancestry.com page. Though I was initially skeptical of the site, it quickly became a place for me to save copies of important documents such as birth and death certificates and to access links to tribal enrollment records. Still, I was continually mindful of who owns and creates pages, as Ancestry.com is an open and public source.

Through Kimball's Ancestry.com page, Kimball's nephew Bob Gant sent me numerous photos of her grandparents and her siblings, Honest Brice and Jessie, as well as of their original homestead cabin north of Rayville in Ray County, Missouri. Gant also

sent newspaper clippings. He had delightful memories of Kimball—he remembered her always telling stories and always “dressed like an Indian.” He was not receptive to my mild inquiries suggesting that Kimball was not Native. Though all evidence points to Kimball’s upbringing as Euro-American, Gant would not disclose any definitive details, evidencing the power of family legend.

Many white family narratives reveal a deep-seated need to claim a Native heritage, and genealogical inquiries were critical for my research. While it is entirely acceptable for some non-Native individuals to be welcomed and even adopted into Native communities, records of these incidences often exist on sites with family trees, photographs, and oral histories. Kimball is, notably, not one of these individuals.

Any project in Indigenous Studies requires the acknowledgement and discussion of terminology. “American Indian” derives from the colonialist narrative whereby Christopher Columbus, convinced he had discovered India, referred to the people he encountered as “Indians.” With the rise of Indian rights movements after the mid-twentieth century, the United States government responded by proposing the use of the term "Native American.” The term "Native American" was meant to recognize the primacy of the tenure of Indigenous peoples and came into vogue as part of larger efforts to acknowledge ethnic diversity in the United States while simultaneously maintaining an overarching American unity. Groups became identified as hyphen-Americans, such as African-Americans, Irish-Americans, and Italian-Americans, and the term Native Americans became the preferred term.

The word "Native" has a generic meaning referring to anyone or anything that is at home in its place of origin. "Native" also has a pejorative meaning rooted in English colonization that carries the connotation of "primitive," which itself has both a generic definition meaning "first" or "primary" and a pejorative definition meaning "backward" or "ignorant." As the term "American" derives from the Italian explorer, Amerigo Vespucci (1454–1512), the term "Native American" does not avoid the problem of naming from an outsider's perspective.

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Indigenous peoples have become increasingly vocal in how they wish to be named. Basic to a history of racist treatment is a dominant group's insistence that the original inhabitants of the land are not permitted to name themselves. Whenever possible, I elect to use the specific tribal name most commonly chosen by the given community. In other instances, I use the terms "American Indian" and "Native American" and "Native and Indigenous" interchangeably and in accordance to the specific time period of the topic.

Outline of Chapters

The Introduction presents the literature relative to my main themes and positions my contribution within this larger body of literature. Acknowledging whiteness, this study reveals the conditions through which a Euro-American woman constructed an American Indian identity for artistic practices. Chapter One introduces Yeffe Kimball's biography, beginning with what is known of her early life and then considers the institutions of art that she leveraged to establish her career. This Chapter attends to the significance of

Kimball's alignment with specific places in her self-fashioning. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, Kimball studied at the Art Students League in New York, where her works were also exhibited. She exhibited regularly at the Philbrook Annual of Native American Art beginning in 1946, claiming her birthplace was Oklahoma. Harnessing non-Native fantasies about where authentic Native American peoples lived coupled with her ability to seamlessly relate socially to non-Native directors, curators, and gallery owners formed the foundation on which she built her career.

The Philbrook Museum was established in 1938 when American petroleum businessman Waite Phillips and his wife Genevieve donated their Tulsa villa to the community of Tulsa, Oklahoma. They envisioned that Philbrook would become a cultural institution housing, preserving, and displaying works of art including those representative of Native American peoples. It was the funding of this wealthy white family and others that allowed for the Philbrook Annual of Native American Art, which took place from 1946 until 1979. These families portrayed themselves as indigenous to the soil of Oklahoma and at the same time they exploited the Indigenous history of the land on which the Philbrook was built. Exhibiting and promoting Kimball's work, the institution embraced her as both Indigenous to the history of the land and to their own new ownership of the place.

Chapter Two illuminates the style, iconography, and subjects utilized in Kimball's art that aided in the launching of her career, and emphasizes that as a self-identified Osage woman Kimball was allowed to follow the trends of Native painting as largely defined by non-Native critics and a male-dominated art world. I formally analyze works

by Kimball that were accepted into major exhibits, as well as other works in her oeuvre, and discuss the social conditions that existed through which Kimball, a non-Native woman, was invited and accepted to participate in the exhibits. I additionally examine the structural arenas, including art schools and institutions, within which Kimball's work circulated to argue that rigidly defined societal values of "Indianness," while harming other Native artists, actually aided Kimball.

Recognition in the Philbrook's annual exhibition was a significant validation of an artist's work. When one of Oscar Howe's dynamic, abstract, figurative paintings was rejected from the 1958 show, he was compelled to interrogate the aesthetic paternalism that dictated the parameters of the museum's concept of authentic Indian art through a letter to Jeanne Snodgrass in which he stated that artists were denied the "right for individualism," and that the museum only accepted "pretty, stylized pictures."[32] After this rejection, the museum began a new category for non-traditional forms of American Indian painting.

The significance of the Philbrook Annual reverberates today. In 2014, curator Christina Burke organized *Impact: The Philbrook Indian Annual, 1946 to 1979*. Of this show she states, "The Annual provided a new forum for Native American art and artists. It was a venue in which they could experiment and explore new ideas. And that led to the whole idea of what is Native American art."[33] The importance of Howe's intervention

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[32] Oscar Howe, letter to Jeanne Snodgrass (King), April 18,1958; quoted in Jeanne Snodgrass, "The Preeminence of Oscar Howe," in Frederick J. Dockstader, ed., *Oscar Howe: A Retrospective Exhibition* (Tulsa: Thomas Gilcrease Museum Association, 1982), 19.

[33] James D. Watts Jr., "Exhibit Shows Philbrook's Impact on Indian Art," *Tulsa World*, October 19, 2014, https://www.tulsaworld.com/scene/artsandentertainment/exhibit-shows-philbrook-s-impact-on-indian-art/article_a9f7f13c-111b-5165-85cb-1847a4fe5c52.html.

cannot be overstated, as this now shapes historical understandings of modern Native American art as showcased at the Philbrook Annuals.

The final chapter explores the intersections between appropriation, feminism, and artistic production, focusing on the works of several artists including Laura Gilpin (1891–1979), Leon Polk Smith (1906–1996), Elizabeth Durack (1915–2000), and Jimmie Durham (b. 1940) who, in different ways, adopted Indigenous identities as a means of self-fashioning their artistic careers. Durack's artistic career evidences a parallel colonial narrative, as the Australian artist created and signed works using an Aboriginal style and the name Eddie Burrap. Leon Polk Smith, alternatively, merely suggested that he had a Native background and was able to paint abstract works as would any European painter of the time. Some scholars continue to accept his Cherokee heritage, yet this claim is largely disputed.

The lives and works of these artists offer comparatives that emphasize the power of institutions such as museums to shape how, why, and in what ways artists did and did not use Nativeness in various manifestations during their careers. The Philbrook Museum in particular played a key role in defining American Indian art in the modern era and it is still the case today that institutions control representations of American Indian art and artists. Many prefer to forward their own imagined versions of what constitutes, in this case, American Indian nations.

As they present information to broad, public audiences, institutions such as museums have tremendous impact. They thus have an ethical responsibility to appropriately care for and display American Indian cultural materials and to accurately

represent American Indian peoples. That artists committing ethnic fraud continue to be given priority in exhibition space is a corruption and dishonor to both American Indian nations and the American public who visit these institutions.

We live in an era in which an artist of non-Native heritage, Jimmie Durham, has received one of the highest arts honors and continues to be celebrated for his ability to reflect the “complexities of Native identities.” This demonstrates the extent to which Native perspectives continue to be ignored. While I am certain it is not nor ever was the intent of arts institutions to support artists who illegitimately claim Native heritage, as locations of education they have a responsibility to strive toward ever more awareness in how they approach Native arts and how they engage with Native communities. When inaccuracies have been repeated for decades, it is time to relinquish control of representations of American Indians and listen to Native artists, arts professionals, and community leaders, especially when they adamantly reject any given narrative.

Chapter One - Effie Violet Goodman, A Wandering Star

Like wandering stars that have no predetermined path or expected orbit, artist Yeffe Kimball traversed the expanse between early twentieth-century rural Missouri farm life and mid-twentieth century New York City's urban arts scene. The Bible warns never to follow a wandering star, an allegory for an immoral soul, "the blackness of darkness forever," directionless and wasteful.[34] Perhaps these ideas sparked the adult Kimball to name herself "Mikaka Upawixe," which she described as Osage for Wandering Star. Maybe she saw herself as directionless, or perhaps without a direct path from which to trace her Native American origins, a silent admission of guilt, knowing that she had fabricated this heritage. We may never know why Yeffe Kimball adopted an indigenous identity. This chapter will examine her biography to discover how this ambitious and dynamic young woman launched her career as a modern "Native American" artist as well as to elucidate the larger art world's fascination with Native American art and culture that shaped her refashioning. My research in this chapter demonstrates that Kimball's alignment with specific places in her self-fashioning reveals the ways insecurities about nationhood in Oklahoma and anxieties about modernity in New York in the 1930s and 1940s lofted the harvesting of Native American aesthetics by non-Native American artists and created the space through which Kimball successfully passed.

[34] Jude 1:13.

While her ethnic fraud is reprehensible by today's standards, her success as a woman artist in modern America is remarkable. Her achievements involved not only the consistent creation of new works of art, but also precise social navigation of both non-Native institutions of arts and Native communities. She joined several organizations devoted to Native American activism, she tirelessly researched collections, and composed articles that advocated for awareness of American Indian arts. All of this was possible because of her social charisma and ability to befriend both non-Native directors, curators, and gallery owners as well as Native artists and community leaders.

Over the course of her intriguing life, Kimball changed her name several times before finally adopting "Wandering Star" as her Native name and "Yeffe Kimball" as her English name. Her birth name, "Effie", a diminutive of the name "Euphemia," refers to the saint of that name who was martyred for her faith and means "to use words of good omen." But, upon Kimball's arrival in New York in the mid 1930s, the artist abandoned her given name in exchange for "Yeffe", a form of the Middle English word *yeven*, meaning, "to give alms or gifts, voluntarily." This was a suitable name selection for a woman who dedicated her lifetime to preserving and sharing what she had learned about Native American cultures.

There is power in naming and privilege in self-naming. For better or for worse, warns the esteemed art critic Lucy Lippard, social existence is predicated on names.[35] "Naming", states Lippard, "is the active tense of identity, the outward aspect of the self-representational process, acknowledging all of the circumstances through which it

[35] Lucy R. Lippard, *Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America* (New York: The New York Press, 2000), 262.

must elbow its way."[36] Kimball's name change was certainly as purposeful as her decision to align herself with a cultural heritage to which she did not ancestrally belong. Additionally, she had the freedom of mobility both culturally and economically; she was not bound to place by tradition and she acquired a reasonable income both through marriage and by other means to support her career. Self-naming and self-placing, her exploitation of specific places along her journey, aided her in launching a successful career as a globally recognized, modern Native American artist.

In the nineteenth century, non-Native settlers, including Kimball's paternal grandparents, Jessie W. Goodman (1847-1926) and Mary A. Clevenger (1843-1903), established homesteads in the western regions of the United States. On April 23, 1834 Rev. William Turange and Rev James Williams founded the first existing religious organization in Ray County, Missouri, the New Garden Regular Baptist Church. John Clevenger, likely Mary's father, was a member and, according to marriage documents, Kimball's grandparents were married in Ray County by Reverend Turnage on April 12, 1868.[37] Jessie Goodman had fought in the Civil War. By 1900, Mary had given birth to five children, two of whom, according to the county census records, had died. A surviving son, Oather Alvis Goodman (1879-1958), married Martha C. Smith (1876-1969) and they became Kimball's parents.

Effie Violet Goodman's birth date, "March 1906" is recorded in the Goodman family bible.[38] Records validate she was born on March 30, 1906, and according to

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[36] Ibid.
[37] "State of Missouri, Marriage Records, 1805-2002," s.v. "Mary A. Cleavenger, 1868," available at *Ancestry.com*.
[38] Mary Goodman Watson (sister of Yeffe Kimball), notes from interview by Bill Anthes, Ada, OK, 1999.

census records of 1910, she lived in Ray County, Missouri. Kimball spent her infant years in a small farm cabin about forty miles outside of Kansas City, Missouri, a few miles northeast of the smaller town of Rayville, Missouri in an area known as Crooked River Valley. She was the third child born to her parents, Oather Alvis Goodman and Martha C. Smith, who had at least six children. As a teenager, Kimball lived with her grandfather Jesse for whom, according to a statement made by Kimball's sister Mary, she had a great admiration. Schools, groceries, and other necessities were a distant walk away from the Goodman family's cabin. Kimball most likely attended one of the rural schools scattered around the county at that time. These documents assert that Kimball did not grow up in Oklahoma as she would later claim.

Counter to the marriage documents described above, continuing family legend chronicles an alternative narrative in which Kimball's grandparents, Goodman and his wife, Mary Clevenger, married in Indian Territory, Mountain Park, OK, about 500 miles southwest of Ray County and the place where Kimball later publicly asserted to have been raised. Tribal enrollment records to support a claim the Kimball has Osage ancestry have not been found. There are no available records about Jesse Goodman's mother (Kimball's great-grandmother) and, thus, it is possible that there is an ancestral connection there. The family has no documented tribal affiliation, but the biological connection to Native American ancestry implied by the family story that her grandparents had married Indian Territory, provided the impetus from which Kimball grew into her self-fashioned Osage persona.

Kimball's proximity to various Native tribes undoubtedly was also an influence. The original Osage were dispersed, yet remained the dominant local tribe. In a semi-structured conversation with Kimball's nephew (Greg Watson) in May of 2018, he stated that Yeffe Kimball's sister, Mary Watson, reiterated that the Osage "took her [sister] in" and that Kimball "felt Indian." In an email correspondence, her widower Harvey Slatin stated that Yeffe became fascinated by Indian cultures at a very young age. He additionally stated that Seneca author and artist Jesse Cornplanter had adopted her.[39] While it is possible that Kimball was adopted into the Osage community, there is, at present, no substantial oral or written record of this. Despite generalities in statements regarding how Kimball was potentially influenced, they provide evidence that the Osage were actively present in the area and that Native American cultures had an influence on young Effie.

Tensions between Native tribes and non-Native settlers were undeniably high throughout the mid to late nineteenth century and into the twentieth in the Crooked River Valley, where Kimball spent her youth.[40] An historic text composed in June 1881 pejoratively describes the Osage as "barbarous" and cited a specific incident. "One day in July, 1818, a band of marauding savages, belonging to the Osage tribe, camped in

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[39] Harvey Slatin, email message to the author, January 13, 2012.

[40] Osage dominated the area of Rayville, Missouri until they were forcibly removed in 1825 from Missouri to a small reservation in what is now southern Kansas. When President Andrew Jackson signed into law the Indian Removal Act of 1830, displaced tribes from the southeast parts of the United States lived in various parts of Missouri for short times, further disrupting Osage that remained in Missouri. Rayville, MO, laid out in 1871, is approximately fifty miles from Kansas City, MO, named in 1838. This entire area was part of the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 and was renamed Missouri Territory from 1812-1821. The Indian Intercourse Act of 1834 set the general boarders of Indian Territory just west of this area, bordering MO. In time, the borders of Indian Territory were reduced to the state of Oklahoma, beginning the myth in the imaginations of Euro-Americans that all Indian people live or are from this State. The Osage were forcibly moved again in 1870, like many other tribes across the Nation, to an area in Oklahoma.

the yard of a Mrs. Macelroy, a widow, living near the mouth of Fishing river." The record goes on to report in gruesome detail how neighboring settlers came to Macelroy's aid, shooting at and killing Osage who remained in her yard when they arrived, even while suffering severe wounds upon the strike of an Osage's tomahawk.[41]

Relationships did not improve with time. In the early 1870s, the Osage had been driven from their ancestral lands to an area of rocky, presumed to be worthless land in northeastern Oklahoma. Decades later, it was discovered that this land was rich in some of the largest oil deposits in the United States. Prospectors had to pay the Osage for access to that oil and by the early 1920s the Osage were considered the wealthiest people per capita in the world. This sparked what journalist David Grann considers a conspiracy against the Osage Indian nation in Oklahoma where a series of unsolved murders arose. Violent incidents increased in frequency and intensity, and became known as the "Reign of Terror" against Osage peoples.[42]

A possible marriage sometime between 1920 and 1930 has the potential to illustrate a more direct connection for Kimball's identity change. According to surviving relatives, it is during this time that Kimball met and married the man whose surname she kept.[43] Very little is known about him and there are no known records of this short, possibly annulled, marriage. We do know, however, that she continually referred to herself by Kimball, even after subsequent marriages. Was he Osage? According to

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[41] Missouri Historical Company, *History of Ray County, Mo* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Company, 1881), https://archive.org/details/historyofraycoun00miss.
[42] David Grann, *Killers of the Flower Moon* (New York: Doubleday, 2017), 92.
[43] Jill Patterson, niece-in-law of Yeffe Kimball, phone conversation with author, March 3, 2015. Also, Bill Anthes interview notes with Harvey Slatin, July 1999.

Kimball's widower, Harvey Slatin, the marriage was annulled and without either written or oral documentation, impossible to assess.[44]

We may never understand exactly why Kimball considered herself to be a Native American artist, though her sister said that she was always artistically driven and she eventually took work as a designer at Hartzfield's, a department store in Kansas City. It is during this time that she met Herman Delman (1895-1955), New York's great showman of the footwear industry. Meeting Delman was most likely the reason for Kimball's move to New York and marked the beginning of her physical wanderings away from Missouri.

Born Herman Nudelman, Herman Delman rose to fashion fame over the course of his life and career. He was described in a student-curated exhibition of his designs for the Museum of Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) as having "savvy proficiency" as a businessman and an extroverted personality that charmed celebrities. His shoes were associated with iconic movie stars, including Marilyn Monroe and Joan Crawford. Meeting Delman also marked Kimball's first encounter with scandal and publicity as noted in a Kansas City Times article from 1958, "Princess Yeffe Violet Goodman Kimball Delman…is no stranger to the limelight. She has been in and out of it ever since 1935 when Elsie Delman, first wife of Herman B. Delman, millionaire shoe designer and racing stable man, sued her for $100,000 for alienation of affections."[45] This quote additionally illuminates existing stereotypes about Native American women through the author's characterization of Kimball as an "Indian Princess." By 1935, Kimball had

[44] Bill Anthes interview notes with Harvey Slatin, July 1999.
[45] "Tells Dotto Quiz Affidavit Details," *Kansas City Times*, August 28, 1958, vol. 121, no. 25.

enrolled at the Art Students League, taking courses between the years 1935 and 1939 as “Yeffe Kimball”. Arriving with the seeds of her upbringing, this school of art training cultivated the completion of her transformation-her new persona and her artistic imagery of Native American peoples were perfectly matched to the atmosphere of Primitivist Modernism percolating during this era in New York City. Two of her instructors and possible early influences included John Corbino, who wrote the introduction to the catalog of her first show, and George Bridgeman, listed as an instructor on her enrollment record. She stated on her resume that she took courses with Fernand Henri Léger in New York. Léger was in America from 1940-1945 bringing with him, as did other WWII expatriates, European Modernism.

Kimball’s marriage to Delman was most likely part of the reason for her move to New York City. With Delman’s connections, she easily maneuvered into the prevailing art scene and eventually launched her career as a Native American artist. Going forward, she signed documents as Yeffi V. Delman, adding the “Y” to her given name, Effie. Additionally, until the end of her life, she asserted that she was from Mountain Park Oklahoma, born in 1914, nearly one decade later than her actual birth. With her move to New York, Effie Goodman had begun her transformation into the Osage artist, Yeffe Kimball.

While Mountain Park as her home town is gleaned from the family myth, her choice to align with this place at this early stage in her art career is significant. Oklahoma connotes the “authentic Native.” Because Indian Territory, the general boundaries of which were first established in 1834 by the Indian Intercourse Act, was

ultimately reduced to lands in Oklahoma State, the area has long been understood as the place where Native peoples resided. Significant to the arts, the 1920s marks the time when artist and arts educator Oscar Jacobson began working with Kiowa students in Norman, Oklahoma and launched a Native arts program there. These events solidify an understanding that an authentic Native artist would be from Oklahoma.

Living in New York City proved to be essentially significant to Kimball's career. She began to exhibit work with the prestigious Frank Rehn Gallery sometime in the 1930s. Throughout its existence, Rehn Galleries specialized in representing American painters. Rehn Galleries, upon a move in 1923 to Fifth Avenue where it began operating as a commercial gallery, enjoyed a regular following among museum curators and visiting collectors. In addition to representing Kimball, the gallery worked with many significant American artists over the duration of its operation (1918-1981) including Peggy Bacon, George Bellows, Edward Hopper, Irving Kaufmann, Alexander Russo, Elizabeth Sparhawk-Jones and others. In letters to the gallery, Kimball referred to the operator and owner as "papa", evidence of her want to portray not only professional significance but also personal rapport necessary for her inclusion.

Indeed, Kimball's first entry into the Philbrook (Tulsa, OK) Annual of Native American Art in 1946 was initiated through the Rehn gallery where she also had her first solo show in that same year. The jury for the Philbrook Annual regularly accepted her works while rejecting works by tribally affiliated artists such as noted Yanktonai Dakota artist Oscar Howe whose work was rejected in 1948. Seen as an individual bridging a perceived gap between the modern/European world and traditional/Native American

world, her work was read visually as both modern European and traditionally Indian in the fashion that non-Native art critics believed was the most authentically possible.

The 1930s and 1940s non-Native viewer did not expect Native American art to be oil painted on canvas. Rather, they expected objects of material culture such as baskets, beadwork, and pottery. Native American painting appeared on such items and when transferred to the two-dimensional, the expectation was that these objects of material culture, or some facet of traditional Native life, take precedent. For example, works by the Kiowa Six, a group of artists working in Oklahoma in the early twentieth century and discussed in Chapter Two, emphasized traditional dance and regalia. These artists worked in gouache, thickly applied to fine watercolor paper. Composed in a flat and decorative style, these works met the expectations of non-Native viewers.

The marriage between Delman and Kimball did not last, but she remained in New York and maintained her self-fashioned identity for her lifetime. In 1948, the artist married atomic physicist Harvey Slatin, best known for his work on the Manhattan Project. After this time and into the 1950s, Kimball's artistic imagery shifted toward abstraction, like that of many New York artists of the time, and she began exploration of themes related to outer space. To create these works, the ingenious painter invented her own acrylics and explored different canvas shapes to achieve the texture and effects she desired. Their allure and artistry caught the attention of the National Air and Space Association and in 1962 Kimball was the first woman commissioned by NASA to depict her interpretations of outer space concepts. She spent much time at Cape Canaveral, FL researching the project; however, she never completely abandoned her

Native themed works and it is as a Native American artist that she became widely known and popularly embraced, as evidenced via her televised appearance on the show *Dotto* in 1958 where, again, Kimball found herself immersed in a public scandal.

"Wandering Stahhhr" she replied with the grace and ease of Hollywood's finest 1950s actress, as she explained her Osage name to host Jack Narz on the televised episode of the popular quiz game.[46] Integral to mid-century American pop culture, CBS's *Dotto* ran five days a week and, beginning in the summer of 1958, weekly in prime time on NBC. The episode in which Kimball appeared is remarkable for sparking controversy in game show production. Two contestants who answered a series of questions worth various points played the game. If they answered correctly, the contestant was shown a "connect the dots" image; the number of dots connected was equal to the total value of the points gained for the specific correct response. The winner was the one able to identify the individual depicted. When a third contestant, Ed Hilgemeyer, announced that he had found a notebook containing the answers that Yeffe Kimball's opponent, Marie Winn, was delivering on stage, fraudulence in reality types of television was revealed. Television shows claiming to be live, unfiltered reality were found to have been pre-scripted, puncturing the veil between the truth and entertainment. But Winn was not the only contestant falsifying information during this episode. Kimball's performance went unquestioned. Her name and that she was from Oklahoma, as well as her use of material signifiers (hair, clothing, jewelry) convinced both the televised audience as well as the many viewers in their homes that she was,

[46] Brian Schwartz, "Dotto," YouTube, May 19, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=132&v=o8IyKHxHhh8.

indeed, a famous Native American artist. This and subsequent televised as well as radio appearances launched her celebrity status. The producers of *Dotto* paid Kimball $4000 for losses as the cheated participant on the fixed episode.[47]

Kimball was a recognizable figure during her era. She composed articles for the *Reader's Digest* from 1945-1949, authored Native American style cook books, and illustrated several children's books.[48] She also composed essays for a State Department publication, *Amerika*, a Cold War propaganda publication lauding the USA and written in Russian for distribution in the Soviet Union with intent to inform Soviet citizens about American life. She made periodical radio and television appearances, including the *Good Morning Show* with Will Rogers, Jr. between 1954 and 1957 and the *Today* show, where she interviewed with Hugh Downs. She became a life member of the Art Students League, serving as its Vice-President for a time, and she served as the vice-president of Arrow, an organization for the progression and artistic, social and economic welfare of Native Americans. Kimball's choice to move to New York proved invaluable to her career, yet she continued to cling to the story that she was from Mountain Park, Oklahoma, enhancing the plausibility of her self-identified heritage.

In 1958, the same year that Kimball appeared on *Dotto*, she purchased a home in Provincetown, MA, thus solidifying her celebrity status as an artist. From the 1940s to

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[47] United States House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, *Investigation of television quiz shows. Hearings before a subcommittee of the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, House of Representatives, Eighty-sixth Congress, first session* (Washington, United States Government, 1960), 300, https://archive.org/details/investigationoft01unit/page/300.

[48] Ruth Brindze and Yeffe Kimball, *The Story of the Totem Pole* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1951); Charles Gallenkamp, *The Pueblo Indians in Story, Song and Dance* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Folkways, 1955); Jean Anderson and Yeffe Kimball, *The Art of American Indian Cooking* (New York: The Lyons Press, 1965); George Boyce, *Some People are Indians* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1974).

the 1950s, Provincetown was a summer center of Abstract Expressionism represented by such painters as Franz Kline, Jackson Pollock, Lee Krasner, Robert Motherwell, Helen Frankenthaler, Fritz Bultman, and Hans Hofmann who taught classes there. A desirable location for a burgeoning modern art professional, galleries of high quality artwork proliferated there into the 1950s and 1960s.[49] This is also the year that began what Julie Heller and Whitney Smith refer to as the "Pivotal Decades of Provincetown Art."[50] Tirca and Karlis opened their gallery in the summer of that year. An enthusiastic proponent of modern art and abstraction, the Tirca Karlis was renowned for exposing modern American art to the public and the gallery faithfully exhibited works by artists such as Milton Avery, Ed Giobbi, Lester Johnson, Franz Kline, and Lilian Orlowski. Kimball exhibited annually here for six years, beginning in 1958, when the gallery moved to Commercial Street.

Kimball continued to network with significant individuals in the art world for the duration of her long career, exhibiting internationally in 1965 at the Hellenic American Union in Athens, Greece. In 1966, her artistic achievements were celebrated in an exhibition titled *A 30-Year Retrospective of an American Woman Painter*. In the catalog for this show, which traveled from the Philbrook Museum to the Department of the Interior Gallery in Washington, D.C. she is described as a woman of American Indian ancestry and an authority on American Indian art and culture. When she applied for a social security number in 1964, Yeffe listed her birth date as March 30, 1914, born in

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[49] See Ronald A. Kuchta, *Provincetown Painters, 1890's-1970's* (Syracuse, NY: Visual Arts Publications, 1977). See also, Steve Barrie, "Oklahoma's Outstanding Painter Purchases Home Here," *The Advocate*, August 14, 1958.

[50] Julie Heller and Whitney Smith, "Tirca Karlis Gallery: Pivotal Decades of Provincetown Art," *Resource Library*, New Britain Museum of American Art, August 17, 2011, http://www.tfaoi.com/aa/9aa/9aa618.htm.

Mountain Park, OK to Martha C. Smith and Jesse W Kimball, thus imprinting the fabricated details of her life forevermore on official record.

On April 12, 1978 resting peacefully at her vacation home in Santa Fe, Kimball passed away. Surrounded by and eulogized by Native elders and leaders, including George Morrison, Lloyd Kiva New, Will Rogers, Jr., and others, Kimball was praised for her tireless activist efforts on behalf of Native peoples. In a memorial dedicated to Kimball, Cochiti artist Joe Herrera stated, "Her graciousness to help anyone at anytime can well and vividly be recalled. Her untiring efforts during crucial times meant a great deal to many of us and especially to our elders…We consider Yeffee a part of our Pueblo people's progress and satisfying results. All of us would like to be living memorials of her beautiful example, who though dead yet speaks."[51] In her obituary printed in the *Boston Globe*, April 12, 1978, she is honored as, "A pleasant vital woman who wore her long gray-black hair in braids, she was both a thinker and doer, constantly seeking new avenues to explore both in her art and life. As an artist, she helped pioneer in the use of acrylic paints was an innovator in utilization of the shaped canvas, whose concave and convex surfaces she filled with spatial abstractions, swirling with movement, flowing shapes and vibrant color."[52] These quotes allow us to understand Kimball as an energetic, socially engaged, mover-shaker type of woman with a passion for life and the gusto required to reach the highest levels of achievement in American arts. She was both a beloved philanthropist and crass self-achiever, a dichotomy made possible in part by her own charismatic career-motivated vigor, but also because of an

[51] Kimball Memorial Service Documents, May 6, 1978.
[52] Obituary of Yeffe Kimball, *Boston Globe*, April 12, 1978.

American culture that embraced generalized misunderstandings and misrepresentations of Native American peoples.

The belief that Kimball was an artist of Native descent was widely held, evidenced by her inclusion in several surveys and dictionaries of Native American artists, including *The Sweet Grass Lives On: Fifty Contemporary North American Indian Artists*, 1980; *The St. James Guide to Native North American Artists*, 1995; *American Indian Painters: A Biographical Directory*, 1968. When Kimball's actual background was revealed in Bill Anthes' 2006 publication, *Native Moderns: American Indian Painting, 1940-1960*, the news struck family members. Kimball's niece-in-law, Jill, in particular had no idea that Kimball was not of Native descent, stating she was "shocked" to learn of it.[53] She remembered fondly her aunt, a woman who always wore her hair in braids and donned spectacular silver and turquoise jewelry, telling remarkable stories about America's Indians. Other family members adamantly negated Anthes' legitimate claims. Azalia Gant, Yeffe's niece and daughter of Kimball's sister, Jessie Goodman (Teegarden), remembers Kimball as "Real sweet. She would tell them all about the Indian and all the kids would be tickled. She told them they were one fourth Indian."[54] Azalia's son, Robert Gant, continues to research this family narrative and also remembers meeting Yeffe when he was a child. She was a memorable character, always dressed like an "Indian Princess." Without criticizing the efforts of this delightful and kind individual, it has to be noted that there are, at this time, no records to verify these claims of American Indian ancestry.

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[53] Jill Patterson, niece-in-law of Yeffe Kimball, phone conversation with author, March 3rd, 2015.
[54] Azalia Gant, niece of Yeffe Kimball, phone conversation with author, September 16, 2016.

While it is indisputable that, by today's standards, Kimball's posing as Native is reprehensible, study of her choices requires sensitivity and a consideration of the aftermath of Anthes' analysis. He argues in his chapter that Kimball falsified her identity as a decisive career move in a masculine dominated art world. He additionally states, "Kimball's Indian act brought a whiff of the exotic to a career that might have otherwise been unremarkable."[55] "Unremarkable," a new descriptor applied to Kimball that now overshadows the career of a woman who was not only admired, but also respected for her charisma, character, and tireless activism. She was an individual simultaneously attending school, working, creating, writing, and participating in leadership roles with activist groups. The artist's striking paintings are no longer exhibited by the institutions that collected them, including the Southern Plains Indian Museum in Anadarko, Oklahoma, to which many of Kimball's works as well as what remains of her personal papers were donated before her passing. Access is not given to researchers requesting to view her papers and other documents held by the Southern Plains Indian Museum.[56]

Anthes' positioning reflects both historic and continued gender bias in the art world. Kimball, a woman who falsified her identity, is the only woman painter given an entire chapter in his book on Native American painters.[57] Anthes argues that Kimball practiced an extreme form of "primitivism," the term used to describe the fascination with non-Western arts and traditions felt by many American artists of the modern era. Many American artists were appropriating Native cultures for aesthetic gain and for

[55] Anthes, *Native Moderns*, 123.
[56] When I requested access in 2016 to the collections at the Southern Plains Indian Museum, I was denied due to challenges of staffing.
[57] Anthes, *Native Moderns*.

filling their sense of unease during difficult economic and political times. While this is true, Kimball's experience is much more complex. I add to his discussion that her ability to successfully pass reveals broad political structures and biases that continue to shape the art world. Examination of her career acts as an intervention into these existing power structures. Institutions of art that accepted Kimball's works perpetuated inaccuracies about American Indian cultures and misinformed the visiting public.

Anthes mentions that Kimball found a niche in the male dominated art world that seemed to only have space for any one woman artist at a time. Consider the 1946 quote in the *New York Sun* by art critic Henry McBride, "Georgia O'Keeffe had better watch out. Her rival now appears on the desert horizon," for example.[58] Kimball was a threat who could out-shine O'Keeffe while multiple men were capable of occupying the status of artistic genius at any one time and place. I argue that this is an essential core structure of the American art world that Kimball masterfully leveraged. In addition to revealing existing power dynamics, Kimball's works are aesthetically important and one must consider questions of aesthetic value such as, How does an aesthetically pleasing artistic legacy balance in contrast with ethnic fraud? Does "good" art then make fraud ok? Does the fact that she was likely interpreted differently because of her gender have higher relevance than fraud?

Gender politics of Kimball's era created an uncomfortable tug of war between female artists' identity as women and as artists, something of which they were constantly made aware. To achieve success in this male-dominated environment,

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[58] Henry McBride, *New York Sun*, 1946, quoted in Donald B. Humphrey, "A 30-Year Retrospective of an American Woman Painter," in *Kimball* (Tulsa, OK: Philbrook Art Center, 1966), n.p.

O'Keeffe, Kimball, Krasner and others often adopted alter –egos of sorts. Lee Krasner, for example, harnessed the power of naming to avoid stereotypes accompanied by the gendered qualifier woman, against which, argues art historian Ann Wagner, she would struggle for her entire career through her choice to assign the androgynous "Lee" and, at times, "L.K." to her paintings rather than her given name, Lenore, or later Mrs. Pollock.[59] Georgia O'Keeffe, without changing her physical identity, morphed into a mythical personae that appealed to art critics and that relied on a romanticized version of "Americanness". O'Keeffe was fascinated with the desert geography. In a 1916 letter to Anita Pollitzer she discusses her happiness with living alone in the southwest and writes, "There is nothing here" and "Everything is so ridiculously new."[60] Later, she moved permanently to New Mexico, became a recluse and merged herself with the land. Her imagery of blue sky and lone skulls suggests the solitude of the place, one that she took ownership of. Her artwork and her letters deny attention to generations of Indigenous people living there both before and contemporaneously.

Kimball's narrative evidences cultural entanglements of the modern art scene that defy the categories currently prescribed to American art. Her work does not belong in a survey of Native American art and we should instead position her as a female, American artist responding to the social and cultural climate of her era. Perhaps attempts to untangle the sticky layers that connect Native American art to that of American art demand new categories that are less binary and instead embrace the

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[59] Anne M Wagner, "Lee Krasner as L.K.," in *The Expanding Discourse Feminism and Art History*, eds. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (Oxford: Westview Press, 1992), 425-436.
[60] Clive Giboire, ed, *The Complete Correspondence of Georgia O'Keeffe & Anita Pollitzer* (New York: Touchstone Books, Simon & Schuster Inc., 1990).

complicated blending and bleeding into one another that results from colonialist encounters.[61]

While neither can be fully disconnected from the other, if we wrestle works by individuals posing as Native away from histories of Native American art, room may open for Native artists to define their own works, histories, and trajectories on their own terms. “We have not yet developed a theory of multiplicity that is neither assimilative nor separative—one that is, above all, relational.” declares Lippard.[62] Existing categories in American art that rely on juxtapositions of difference and sameness were leveraged by Kimball. Exposure of her passing and of her distinct relationship to institutions of art provide the necessary impetus for new theories to continue developing.

Kimball’s early life as the daughter of rural Missouri farmers may have given her a sense of connection to the Osage community, whose ancestral home is found in present-day western Missouri. Family narratives of biological relationships to Osage people including a story about a marriage in Mountain Park, OK, a town located in reservation territory that opened to non-Native peoples in 1901, may have added fuel to her interest in Native America. While in New York during the rise of artistic modernism, Kimball networked with significant art gallerists who successfully marketed her paintings. She mobilized her savvy social networking skills to manipulate institutions into accepting her fraudulent identity. The privileges of both mobility and self-identification were available to her largely because she was not actually tribally affiliated and did not

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[61] See, Angela L. Miller, Margaretta M. Lovell, and David M. Lubin, *American Encounters: Art, History, and Cultural Identity* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2008).
[62] Lippard, *Mixed Blessings*, 263. Since this publication, new theories of Native art have emerged. See Patsy Phillips, *et al*, *New Native Art Criticism: Manifestations* (Santa Fe: Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, 2011).

face the same social challenges that an affiliated, contemporaneous Native American individual, and a woman in particular, may have.

The self-identification as an American Indian artist that aided in the launching of her successful career is at the core of challenges to her narrative. Had she been culturally raised Native American on a reservation in Indian Territory, her ability to navigate the Euro and masculine dominated art scene may have been less seamless. Not all people in 1920s rural areas of Missouri or Oklahoma had access to the venues of power that she maneuvered with relative ease. Her ability to rise to the upper echelons of the American art world is a testament to her resilience, artistic talents, and social charms. Kimball's mid-1930s move to New York City ignited her transformation into a self-identified Osage artist and gave her an edge in the art world that propelled her into fame as America's leading Native American artist of the mid-twentieth century. The great irony is that her identity was fraudulent. Her success exposes corruption in ways institutions of art represent Native America through embracement of their own fantasies and desires about what embodies Native American art while ignoring the realities of Native American experiences.

Kimball's decisiveness at self-naming and self-placing allowed for her to manipulate specific art galleries and individuals that shaped and promoted her remarkable career. Through place, she gained access to worlds that allowed for her to be both a quintessentially modern American artist of New York (and later Provincetown) and an authentic Native American artist from Oklahoma in a manner that, while damaging because of its falsehood, was embraced by both non-Native art critics and

Native artists. The practice of falsely assuming the identity of a marginalized peoples represents one of the less-benevolent choices of some Euro-Americans, yet it deserves to be critiqued and explored as a theme and product of America's entangled moderns rather than discarded as pejorative and ignored for its abrasiveness. Through examination of the lives and works of individuals like Kimball, we unearth the fluidity of identity that was possible in early twentieth-century America, a time before scrupulous record keeping and new mixings of a plethora of different peoples, and reveal the interconnections that define American art.

Chapter Two - Modern Styles, Institutions, and the Launching of Kimball's Career

In her essay on gender, modern art, and Native women painters, art historian Cynthia Fowler considers the unrecognized presence of Native women painters in the first half of the twentieth century, a time when American Indian art was gaining some recognition by East Coast art museums and positioning within the discourse of American modern art.[63] Despite the marginalization of Native women, Yeffe Kimball, known as an Osage artist at the time, achieved acclaim. Her inclusion in numerous exhibits and publications on American Indian art evidences her success. I will examine the structural arenas, including art schools and institutions, within which her work circulated to argue that rigidly defined societal values of "Indianness," while harming other Native artists, actually aided Kimball. Through analysis and comparison, this chapter illuminates the style, iconography, and subjects utilized in Kimball's art that aided in the launching of her career. As a self-identified Osage woman, she was not bound to histories of Native American painting that emphasized documenting traditional dance and ceremony in a decorative style as was taught at the Studio School. Kimball decisively manipulated male-centered expectations and stereotypes that resonated with critics, judges, and gallerists of her time. Together, Kimball's artistic choices and her privilege as a white woman contributed to the unique acclaim she achieved in an era when Native women were not receiving the recognition they deserved.

[63] Cynthia Fowler, "Gender, Modern Art, and Native Women Painters in the First Half of the Twentieth Century," in *American Women Artists, 1935-1970 Gender, Culture, and Politics*, ed. Helen Langa and Paula Wisotzki (New York: Routledge, 2016), 41-58.

Style, Iconography, Subject

Kimball's personal interest in Native identities as subjects for her paintings is evident after only a few years at the Art Students League where she studied with established American artists George Bridgeman, William McNulty, and Jon Corbino. Her earliest sketches from these classes favor animals with poetic names such as *The Lovers*, featuring two parrots sitting close together on a tree branch, and figure drawings of nude females and dancers. Kimball's signature, mature style masterfully engaged the formal elements of the European Modernist style she learned at the school and simultaneously explored themes of Native life and culture. This combination was seen as revolutionary during her time.

In addition to studying at the Art Students League, Kimball has stated that she studied painting under Fernand Léger between 1940 and 1941 in Paris and in New York City. Léger passed through established foundational styles of European Modernism, working in Impressionism, Neo-Impressionism, and Fauvism before emerging as one of the original Cubists between 1915 and the early 1920s. He navigated different informal groups and exhibition societies that constituted the Parisian avant-garde. His work and his Cubist inventiveness paralleled the styles of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque by 1910, but he soon developed his own style. Following his service in World War I, Léger's work took on an ordered style removed from Cubism and aligned with a return to the classical European tradition of painting. He began to explore the female nude as a subject, like many Parisian artists who had made a similar shift after the war.[64] During

[64] Robert L. Herbert, "Léger, the Renaissance, and "Primitivism"" in *Millet to Léger Essays in Social Art History* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2002), 143-152.

this exploration, Léger painted *Le Grand Dejeuner*, 1921-22, and developed his signature style, which he would later pass on to his students, including Kimball.

Léger's style maintains allegiance to figurative subject matter and never delves into true abstraction. He combines machine-like forms with the classical, female nude. Less rigid and mechanical, Kimball's work also maintains allegiance to figurative subject matter while exploring modernist techniques of color and form. Rather than align with subjects traditional to European art, such as the female nude, she emphasized an interest in American Indian themes. Her explorations into American Indian subjects aligned with trends in European modern art where artists were looking away from "the art of imitation" as seen in works by Renaissance painters, and toward abstraction, constructive geometry, and the willful imposition of clear pattern, as seen in traditional works by many non-European artists.[65]

Modern art, particularly in the United States, is not singularly a European "invention." Rather it is deeply entangled with works of non-European art and material culture. The New York artists of Kimball's era borrowed heavily from non-Western traditions, especially those of many different Native American cultures.[66] In his essay, "Art Against Primitivism: Richard Bell's Post-Aryanism," art historian Nicholas Thomas demonstrates how a European fascination with non-Western art styles led to the marginalization of indigenous arts and "leads European audiences to reject indigenous

[65] Ibid.
[66] See Jackson Rushing, *Native American Art and the New York Avant-Garde: A History of Cultural Primitivism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995) and Ann Eden Gibson, *Abstract Expressionism Other Politics* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1999).

art that fails to conform to traditional styles." [67] Assumptions and expectations surrounding what authentic, non-Western art was "supposed" to look like stunted the success of many modern Native painters who broke from what was understood as "traditional Indian painting." Some Native artists chose to abandon visual works corresponding to their Native heritages for fear of career marginalization and inability to explore personal artistic interests under the damaging expectations of the European art dealers and critics while Kimball used this paradigm and these expectations to her advantage.[68]

Kimball's work was recognized as American Indian art because of her assumed background. She incorporated elements of Native material culture into her work and referenced indigenous narratives through representational imagery rather than reflecting upon lived, cultural exchanges of ideas in her self-fashioning. Her knowledge was based in scholarship. Kimball was an avid reader and researcher. Her personal library, donated to the Southern Plains Indian Museum in Anadarko, OK, included hundreds of books, magazines, and periodicals primarily on Native American subject matter—from fiction, such as *Gray Wolf Stories - Indian Mystery Stories* by Bernard Sexton, to anthropological texts such as Franz Boas's *Handbook of American Indian Languages*—as well as books on modern European art including Jaime Sabartes's *Picasso, an Intimate Portrait* and Pierre Clossowsky's *Les Impressionistes*.[69] Other

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[67] Nicholas Tomas, "Art Against Primitivism: Richard Bells' Post-Aryanism" *Anthropology Today* vol 11, no. 5 (October 1995): 15-17.
[68] Artists such as Leon Polk Smith will be discussed further in Chapter Three. See also Gibson, *Abstract Expressionism*.
[69] Harvey Slatin created a comprehensive list of publications from Kimball's library that were donated to the Southern Plains Indian Museum, Anadarko c. 1980.

notable titles from Kimball's private library include James Seaver's *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs Mary Jemison The White Woman of the Genesee*, an account of Jemison's capture by members of the Seneca tribe in the 1750s.

Kimball's 1948 painting *Manabozo and Friends* is a prime example of her artistic approach combining modernist aesthetics with Native American subject matter. She modernizes with broad strokes of oil paint an image of the male hero named in the title and borrowed from the Ojibwe. In this large work, two rows of abstract animals, perhaps deer, with delicately curving antlers dominate the picture plane and recede into the distance. The front pair of deer each nestle a cheek on a kneeling figure that rests between them. In the distance, a geometrically formed sun rests beyond the rows of animals and seems to hover just above the figure's head.

The boy is Manabozo, a benevolent culture hero of the Anishinaabe tribes. Stories about this individual vary between communities, but he is typically said to be born of the West Wind or of the Sun. His mother died when he was a baby and so the boy was raised by his grandmother. He is a trickster figure, but unlike many tricksters who model immoral behavior, Manabozo is a "virtuous hero and a dedicated friend and teacher of humanity."[70] Kimball's use of large canvas and oil paint links the Indigenous culture hero to European styles of art making.

Another work that exemplifies Kimball's approach is *Old Medicine Man*, ca. 1959 (Figure 4). In this oil on board, Kimball depicts two figures, one is an elderly Medicine Man and the other is a mysterious figure behind and to the right of the first. The

[70] "Legendary Native American Figures: Nanabozho (Nanabush)," Native Languages of the Americas, accessed June 2, 2019, http://www.native-languages.org/nanabozho.htm.

red-toned palette emphasizes shape and form and imbues the work with a mystical quality. A mysterious figure looms in the background. Its mask-like face stoically gazes at the viewer with square lips, eyes, and nose that are reminiscent of a wood carving. While it is less clearly outlined, this figure echoes the shape of the Medicine Man's face. The man's blanket, wrapped tightly around his body, is formed by interlocking geometric shapes. Though abstract, the blanket recalls chilkat weaving. A form of weaving practiced by Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian, and other Northwest Coast peoples of Alaska and British Columbia, traditional chilkat blankets are still worn by high-ranking tribal members on civic and ceremonial occasions. The wooden form of the secondary figure recalls First Nations Northwest Coast totem carving.

This work was awarded a prize in the Philbrook Annual of 1959, and the museum subsequently purchased it for their collection. In 1949, Kimball had catalogued over six thousand art objects made by Pacific Northwest Coast First Nations people for the Portland Museum, which provided the influence for the imagery used in her later works. She combined this knowledge of First Nations art with the modernist painting techniques and styles she learned at the Art Students League, a combination that solidified her place in the history of non-traditional American Indian Art. Her incorporation of imagery was not always from the culture group she claimed belonging to. She was depending on a pan-Indian sensibility and this diffuse adaptation of all things Indian is an indication of her lack of engagement in her own self-proclaimed Osage community.

Awards Kimball received for her participation in the Philbrook Annuals of Native

American Art with submissions of works like *Old Medicine Man* evidence her success as an American Indian painter. Art historians Janet Berlo and Ruth Phillips highlight the importance of this Annual and comment on its significance to modern era American Indian artists.[71] Exhibiting artists submitting entries to the competitive exhibition via mail participated in the hopes of achieving recognition, the exhibits often traveled through the United States, Latin America and Europe and awarded artists received a cash prize. Bernard Frazier, Philbrook Museum director at the time, established the Annual with five main ideals: to acquaint the world with Native American painting, to encourage the collection of Native American painting, to maintain high standard through competent jurors, to document the records of Native American life and cultures through traditional expressions, and to stimulate a renaissance of this expression by encouraging Native American artists.[72] The Annual was integral to furthering the careers of many artists and the guidelines initially outlined by Frazier shaped the styles of works that were selected by the jurors and hence exhibited. The Philbrook Annual is historically impactful and shaped current understandings of Native American modernism.

Significance of Institutions and Art Schools

The Philbrook Art Center, now the Philbrook Museum of Art, was established in 1938 by oil baron Waite Phillips (1883–1964) and his wife Genevieve (1887–1979). To honor local culture and set itself apart from other museums, the Philbrook focused on Native American art, relying on the Center's collections, which primarily consisted of

[71] Janet C. Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips, *Native North American Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
[72] Jeanne Snodgrass King, "Foreword," in *Visions and Voices: Native American Paintings From the Philbrook Museum of Art*, ed. Lydia L. Wyckoff (Tulsa: Philbrook Museum of Art, 1996), 11-13.

Clark Field's 1942 gift of Indian crafts. The Center's grand opening included displays of traditional artifacts from various Plains tribes as well as contemporary American Indian paintings loaned by University of Oklahoma art professor Oscar Jacobson and one of his students, Spencer Asah.[73]

Noticing that contemporary American Indian paintings were receiving less attention than traditionally styled paintings and crafts in 1945, Bernard Frazier, the museum's director at the time, emphasized the selection of contemporary Native works for an annual exhibit.[74] Frazier insisted that the contemporary works must maintain connections to traditions of the past, thus defining parameters for works based largely on current notions of what "Indian painting" should look like. These judgments reflected the high value of American Indian painting being done at the Santa Fe Indian School Studio, directed by Dorothy Dunn between 1932 and 1937, as well as the expectations for what qualified art as authentically Native."[75] Much scholarly attention has been given to this school.

Artist and author David Martine in *No Reservation: New York Contemporary Native American Art Movement*, notes how Native American artists such as Allan Houser (Chiricahua Apache), Oscar Howe (Yanktonai Dakota), and Joe Herrera (Cochiti/San Ildefonso) so disliked the Studio School style instruction that they left to

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[73] Thomas E. Young, "Philbrook Museum of Art," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, accessed December 19, 2017, www.okhistory.org.
[74] Linda W. Reese and Patricia Loughlin eds., *Main Street Oklahoma: Stories of Twentieth Century America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013).
[75] For further discussion see John Traugott, "Native American Artists and the Postmodern Cultural Divide," *Art Journal,* vol. 51, no. 3, Recent Native American Art (Autumn, 1992), 36-43.

pursue their own artistic directions.[76] These new directions in Native American painting—which frequently incorporated three-dimensional rendering rather than two-dimensional and allowed for individual artists to select their preferred approach to abstraction—were rejected by judges in the early years of the Philbrook Annual. During these years when Yeffe Kimball's self-fashioned style was accepted, individualism in American Abstract Expressionism was prioritized. These rejections sparked controversy. In 1958, the judges deemed a painting by Howe too contemporary to be "Indian art." Howe criticized the panel for its narrow view, which prompted the Philbrook to create a new category for Non-Traditional Painting the following year.[77]

Attempts to define which artists were part of American Indian communities was complicated during the mid-twentieth century while artists, curators, and directors simultaneously sought to define what was and what was not acceptable as American Indian painting. These attempts were further convoluted by issues of gender. In her book *Engendered Encounters: Feminism and Pueblos Cultures, 1879–1934*, Margaret Jacobs outlines the entanglements that existed between gender and race in the modern era in the American Southwest with a focus on highlighting women's contributions to the arts of this era. Jacobs asserts that Dorothy Dunn, the Studio School director, was one of a group of "anti-modern" white women philanthropists, and teachers who navigated highly defined parameters of acceptable behaviors for white women in public and private realms. She argues that an upheaval in American, white, middle-class views of

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[76] David Bunn Martine, edited by Jennifer Tromski, foreword by Dore Ashton, *No Reservation: New York Contemporary Native American Art Movement* (New York: AMERINDA, 2017), 234.
[77] Philbrook Museum of Art, "What is "Native Art?," The Philbrook Museum, accessed December 19, 2017, www.philbrook.org.

proper gender roles and sexuality at the turn of the twentieth century also influenced a change in white attitudes and policy toward American Indians. Because women in the last decades of the nineteenth century were typically seen as the moral guardians of the family, white women in the early 1900s could and did take advantage of this position to argue that they should have a more prominent role in enforcing public morality.[78]

Some white women, in defiance of male-dominated prescribed roles, claimed they could both play a public role and maintain appropriate connections to realms of the domestic through activism in American Indian communities. Kimball, an avid supporter of American Indian causes, created artwork in her efforts to make modern Native American artists and cultures more visible. However, she took on an Osage persona defined by her own ideas of inclusion in this culture and community. By the 1930s, many white Americans like Kimball had become intent on promoting their own vision of what it meant to be an Indian. The ideas and attitudes of the dominant non-Native population defined perceptions about American Indian peoples and cultures. Acceptance of the dominant narratives in tandem with the marginalization of Native voices and perspectives was the social paradigm in which Kimball developed her persona and her artwork and these dominant narratives were largely controlled by men. Kimball was not only appropriating for self-gain, she was extending and perpetuating patriarchy.

Current understandings of modernism reveal systems of power and control that deserve to be critiqued. American women of the early twentieth century working in

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[78] Margaret D. Jacobs, *Engendered Encounters: Feminism and Pueblo Cultures, 1879-1934* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999).

modernist styles have not been given the full attention they deserve for shaping American modernism in the arts. As Jacobs argues, these women often looked to Native American cultures not only in order to define an art for America that was unique from European trends, but also in order to shape their identities and roles in society that broke free from late 19th century ideals and gender norms of the recent past.

Mabel Dodge Luhan (1879–1962), a patron and considerable promoter of the visual arts in the United States from 1913 to 1947, embraced Native American cultures as inspiration for artists while in Taos, where she built an artists' mecca, that some called the American equivalent to Greece or Rome. The Taos artists' residency became a site where the foundations of American Art would be explored and defined. The visiting artists combined the history of Western art traditions with their observations of American Indian arts, cultures, and traditions to firmly root their practices into the American landscape and develop an original American art. As art historian Wanda Corn argues, while Luhan, like many visual artists of the time, emphasized form and aesthetics over valuing and understanding the cultural meanings of Native American arts, her collections efforts brought national attention to bodies of work and artists who had little visibility either in the Southwest or across the nation.[79]

Luhan was a "mover and shaker," a powerful force in promoting Native American art in the United States.[80] She frequently invited artists, musicians, and authors to her home and artists' sanctuary in Taos. After a visit to the Taos complex in 1947, Kimball

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[79] Wanda M. Corn, "Introduction Mabel Dodge Luhan & Company," in eds. Lois P. Rudnick and Ma Lin Wilson-Powell, *Mabel Dodge Luhan and Company American Moderns and the West* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2016), 11-22.
[80] Mabel Dodge Luhan, *Movers and Shakers: Volume Three of Intimate Memories* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1933).

was so impressed that she wrote to Luhan, imploring her to donate her collection of "early Indian paintings" to the Philbrook Museum and highlighting the significance of its annual Native American art exhibit. Both Kimball and Luhan supported the circulation of Native American art, as it served to define both American modernism and their own identities as cultural icons.

The first juried annual at the Philbrook Museum was held between July 23 and September 29, 1946, and included an invited panel of three jurors: Potawatomie artist Woody Crumbo, Anglo artist Charles Banks Wilson, and Native art collector Clark Field. Later Annuals featured two to three judges and usually one or two of them were Native artists familiar with the cultural origins and contemporary practice of the paintings. It is essential to add that these jurors were nearly always men. The rare exceptions include Willena Cartwright in 1955, Alice Marriott in 1958, and Clara Lee Tanner in 1959. In addition to not obtaining seats as judges, women were equally unlikely to receive awards for their work at the annual. Over the course of the annual's first ten years, only five women received prizes for their works. Two of those five women were Jimalee Burton, a Cherokee/Cree woman from Oklahoma City, for her work *Buffalo Dance*, and Yeffe Kimball for her work *To the Happy Hunting Ground*. Both of these works were included and awarded in 1947, the second year of the show, representing two out of fifteen total prizes given away that year.[81]

[81] Charts and tables listing prizes awarded for each category by year included as the Appendix to Stephanie Peters, *Creating to Compete Juried Exhibitions of Native American Painting, 1946-1960*, Unpublished Master's Thesis, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona, May 2012.

Contrasts and Comparisons to American Indian Women Artists of Kimball's Era

Jimalee Burton (Cherokee/Cree, 1906 - 2000) was from Oklahoma City. She studied painting at the University of Tulsa, Oklahoma with Alexander Hogue and later in Mexico with Carlos Mérida.[82] Today she is best known for her written work *Indian Heritage, Indian Pride: Stories That Touched My Life,* as well as for her graphic drawings. *Buffalo Dance*, awarded the Third Purchase Prize for the Woodland Region, exemplifies Burton's painting style (Figure 5).[83] In this abstract work, spears emerge from tendrils of fire and diagonally cut across the picture plane, piercing a hide. A painted mask hovers in the distance as if witnessing the scene. The work powerfully evokes the Buffalo Dance, part of an annual ceremony where male dancers imitate the movements of the buffalo, and the drums, songs, and firelight that traditionally accompany the performance. Additionally, the work reflects the artist's American modern art training received at Tulsa and provides a prime example of the new modern Native art for which Kimball had achieved fame. Burton expresses tradition in a modernist visual language. However, unlike Kimball, Burton chose not to enter the New York art scene of the late 1930s and mid-1940s. Instead, she spent much of her life in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and later Sarasota, Florida, where she dedicated her life to creating a painted and written record of Native American legends. Burton prioritized engagement with her own community while Kimball maintained her commitment to American institutions of art.

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[82] Lydia L. Wyckoff, ed., *Visions And Voices: Native American Painting from the Philbrook Museum of Art* (Tulsa: Philbrook Museum of Art, 1996), 41.
[83] Wyckoff, *Visions And Voices*, 103.

Oklahoma became the location of an influential school of Native American painting during the early 20th century. Unfortunately, issues of gender inequality existed at this school of painting, as they did in many other schools during this era, making careers as an artist more challenging for women. At the University of Oklahoma–Norman, Oscar Jacobson taught a group of young artists who would become known as the Kiowa Five—James Auchiah, Spencer Asah, Jack Hoeah, Stephen Mopope, and Monroe Tsatoke (who was also known as “Hunting Horse”). However, the term Kiowa Five omits the sixth, and the only female, member of the group of six Kiowa artists that had come to Norman in response to Jacobson’s invitation, Lois Smoky.

Smoky has not been given the credit she deserves in the history of Native American art despite the fact that her work was included in most of the early exhibits of the group that would come to be known as the Kiowa Five. In fact, Smoky’s parents rented a large home in Norman in which all six Kiowa students lived while they were at the school. Smoky fought against resentment that she felt from her Kiowa colleagues, as it was customary among the tribes of the Plains for women not to draw or paint in a representational style. Yeffe Kimball, as an outsider to traditional Native communities, did not combat similar cultural pressures and was not marginalized in the same way as Smoky. When Smoky returned to the reservation after only a few short years of painting, she did not pursue a career in the art world as Kimball did. Instead, she married and devoted herself to her husband and family. Lois Smoky likely remains

overlooked in situations when the Kiowa Five artists are mentioned because she did not continue to pursue painting as a career.[84]

Additionally during the early 20th century, Native American artists Acee Blue Eagle, Woody Crumbo, and Dick West Sr. began teaching Native students in the arts at the Indian School in Muskogee, Oklahoma, now the Bacone Junior College. Artists Archie Blackowl, Fred Beaver, F. Blackbear Bosin, and Jerome Tiger emerged from this school. The established conventions of painting for Native peoples foregrounded by the Santa Fe Indian School Studio, developed by the students of Oscar Jacobson at the University of Oklahoma, and pursued at Bacone in Muskogee met the standards of the Philbrook judges and were awarded cash prizes. Artists were categorized geographically, as is much of the study of Native American Art. In 1947, for the second Philbrook Annual, F. Blackbear Bosin, Richard West, and Yeffe Kimball received awards for the Plains group; Patrick DesJarlait, Tom Dorsey, Jimalee Burton, Fred Beaver, and W. Paul Rogers received awards for the Woodlands group; Jose Rey Toledo, Allan Houser, Gilbert Atencio, Velino Shije Herrera, and Joe H. Herrera received awards for the Southwest group; and Oscar Howe won best in show.[85]

Kimball received an Honorable Mention in the Plains group that year, possibly because of her decisiveness in selecting a style and subject matter. When her submission to the first Philbrook Annual, her painting titled *Sacred Buffalo*, was rejected

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[84] In her dissertation, Mary Jo Watson brings attention to Smoky and her significance. See Mary Jo Watson, "Oklahoma Indian Women and Their Art" (Ph.D. diss., University of Oklahoma, 1993). See also Jacobson House, “About the Kiowa Six,” The Jacobson House Native Art Center, accessed November 1, 2018, https://jacobsonhouse.org/kiowa-five/#lois.

[85] Stephanie Peters, “Creating to Compete: Juried Exhibitions of Native American Painting, 1946-1960” (Master’s Thesis, Arizona State University, 2012), 69-79.

by the judges, she had time to learn what types of works appealed to them. The judges felt that the small oil painting depicting a white buffalo, sacred to the Plains Indians, silhouetted against a dark and abstract night sky lacked any "real Indian mood."[86] Significantly, although it was rejected from the Annual, *Sacred Buffalo* was exhibited in an adjacent gallery where works by the jurors as well as earlier Native American painters such as Tsa-To-Ke, Ma-Pe-Wi, Mopope, and Mootzka were displayed.[87] The decision to exhibit her work despite its rejection by the judges was made by director Bernard Fraizer who apologized to Kimball for the rejection in a personal letter and statement that he took it upon himself to make certain the work was visible during the Philbrook Annual. For the second Annual, Kimball made adjustments based on the judges' comments and captured what she hoped would be a favored theme, the "happy hunting ground," the mythological destination of a three-day journey after death.[88] Synthesizing established American Indian pictorial traditions in its graceful and simple forms, Kimball's painting titled, *To the Happy Hunting Ground* aligned with the accepted, established trajectory of modern Native painting, both visually and in subject matter, and was rewarded by the judges as a result. As modernist styles developed and became more acceptable in the arena of American Indian painting, the judges of the Annual continued to accept Kimball's works for exhibition.

The Studio Style work of Eva Mirabel was also accepted for exhibit in the 1947 Annual, but it was not awarded a prize. Her piece, *The Drummer,* also aligns visually with established conventions of Native painting and male-dominated subject matter.

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[86] Anthes, *Native Moderns*, 129.
[87] Letter from Bernard Frazier (Philbrook Director 1947 - 1950) to Kimball, August 2, 1946.
[88] David Grann, *Killers of the Flower Moon* (New York: Doubleday, 2017), 23.

However, the themes in Maribel's paintings typically relate to the realms of women, and one wonders if she consciously chose to submit *The Drummer* to increase her odds of receiving a purchase prize. Mirabel studied and taught first at the Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, but later chose to study at the Taos Valley Art School in 1949 where she painted in the style characteristic of the Dunn Studio: flat, unmodulated areas of color defined by darker outlines. During this time, Mirabel actively participated in Pueblo communal life and frequently took part in ritual dances at Taos Pueblo where she lived for the remainder of her life. Her 1958 work *Taos Woman Carrying Bread* is an exemplar of her style (Figure 6). The two-dimensional figure of a woman rests against a background that is plain, untouched, and devoid of images. The woman appears to walk across the page while holding a basket filled with bread. She wears traditional Pueblo dress, including a brightly colored wool shawl, turquoise beads, and white buckskin boots. Her hair is cut in the style worn by young married women. The meticulous, realistic detail of the breadbasket's woven designs and the color of the sash around the woman's waist evidence Mirabel's intimate familiarity with the subject and engagement with imagery from her own community. The artist chose to paint the woman carrying bread because baking, consuming, and trading bread has been an essential part of Taos life through the centuries. This differs from Kimball's approach in that Kimball exhibits imagery from outside her own self-proclaimed community.

In contrast to Mirabel's reliance on personal experiences to inform the visual expression of her work, Kimball's paintings rely on learned information as well as her formal training in the abstract techniques of the New York art world. In her 1939 work

Zuni Maiden, for example, a woman with a whitewashed pot balancing on her head strolls away from the viewer into an unknown, deep turquoise distance. A sunset blend of pinks, oranges, and blues articulated in broad, flat strokes surround the woman. Similar expressionistic strokes constitute the woman's simple burnt-orange shawl fringed with what appear to be fraying, thick red threads. She holds a nondescript white pot steady with a short pole (Figure 7).

To accompany Kimball's Zuni maiden as she journeys away from the viewer, black curvilinear lines form two figures who faintly emerge with arms waving above thin heads donning horned masks. These figures, reminiscent of the katsina figures of southwest legend, infuse Kimball's painting with a mystical quality. With her command of the formal elements in this piece, Kimball leaves the viewer not with an impression of an actual Zuni woman, but with an icon meant to represent the passage of time and transformational journeys into other worlds.

The contrasts between these two works by Mirabel and Kimball evidence Kimball's distance from her subject. Unlike her contemporary, Kimball would have seen the white pots from the perspective of an outsider and having viewing them in a variety of sales and auction catalogs of the 1930s. Several magazines featured Native American arts and crafts as objects of material culture for American home decorating. Art historian Elizabeth Hutchinson traces the increasing visibility of Native American art in the early twentieth century as informing the resurgence of interest in Native American art in the interwar years, the time when Kimball launched her career.[89] Additionally, the

[89] Elizabeth Hutchinson, *The Indian Craze: Primitivism, Modernism, and Transculturation in American Art, 1890-1915* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

"Indian Craze," of 1890–1915, states Elizabeth Hutchinson, "facilitated the development of American modernism," yet "was ambivalent about the potential for Native Americans to be modern artists."[90] This ambivalence was something that Kimball attempted to change as she defined her work and her identity. The Studio Style in which Mirabel worked, while prized by the Annual judges as fine Native American painting, was lodged in the systemic hierarchy of American art as "decorative" and, therefore, less valuable than the European modernist style of painting that Kimball embraced.[91]

Kimball rose to fame in the American art world during the 1940s and 50s while Native women painters struggled. Pop Chalee (1906 - 1993), also known as Marina Lujan, for example, did not receive awards at the Philbrook Annuals and was not embraced by the larger arts world until later in her life.[92] Her work was often disparaged for its "Bambi" aesthetic; her wide-eyed horses were too cute for the modern art critic. However, Chalee remained dedicated to the flat, crisply outlined works of the Studio Style. In 1994, after her death, her work was included in the Heard Museums exhibition of Native Women artists, *Watchful Eyes: Native American Women Artists*. In the exhibition catalogue, curator of the exhibition Theresa Harlan combats criticisms of works by older generations of Native women, such as those by Chalee, as grounded in beliefs that do not take into consideration the historical circumstances under which these women artists worked. She states, "Many of the older artists experienced physical

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[90] Ibid, 229-230.
[91] For more on the relationships between gender, race, and the arts and crafts movement see Melanie Herzog, "Aesthetics and Meanings: The Arts and Crafts Movement and the Revival of Amerian Indian Basketry," in Bert Denker, ed.*Substance Of Style: Perspectives on the American Arts and Crafts Movement* (Winterthur: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1996), 69-91.
[92] Margaret Cesa, *The World of Flower Blue: Pop Chalee an Artistic Biography* (Santa Fe: Red Crane Books, 1997).

and mental punishment for refusing to assimilate while forced to attend government boarding school. Despite their experiences of familial and cultural deprivation in these schools, they understood that to think Native meant to survive as Native."[93] The significance of Chalee's works, and the works by the women included in the exhibition, is that they express Native thoughts and ideas that ultimately equated to the survival of their cultures.

Kimball received another award at the 1947 Annual for her oil painting, *Unconquered* (Figure 9). In this piece, her command of color and line are striking in her articulation of a male rider galloping on horseback across the picture plane. Tails and hair flutter behind the white-headed, blue-bodied, horse and its rider, implying swift movement. The image of a second, blue-headed horse appears galloping just ahead of and seemingly connected to the first. The figures in this large painting are depicted abstractly, yet a long, red ribbon that trails behind the rider as if blowing in the wind evidences his Plains Indian affiliation as does his roach and abstract breastplate. Silk ribbons recall trade between the French and the Osage during the late seventeenth century. The outline of a bird rests on the man's outstretched arm. Perhaps a cormorant, bird symbolism in the Peyote Religion focuses on the role of several types of birds as messengers or conveyors of prayers to the Creator and fans made of the feathers of waterbirds are used by women in the Native American Church.[94] Red, blue, and white dominate this work and possibly represent the contrast of colors as symbolic

[93] Theresa Harlan, "To Watch, To Remember and to Survive," in *Watchful Eyes: Native American Women Artists* (Phoenix, AZ: Heard Museum, 1994), 10.
[94] Garrick Bailey, *Art of the Osage* (St. Louis, MO: Saint Louis Art Museum, 2004), 119-120.

of the duality of the cosmos in the Osage worldview.[95] Blue may also represent courage and red markings on the horse may represent blood or painted images that many Plains Indian tribes would create to decorate their horses before riding into battle. The representation of this rider and his horse, like the pots in *Zuni Maiden*, reveals Kimball's reliance on material culture to affirm her identity in her artwork.

While it is possible that the blue horses simply reflect her modernist art training, it is more likely that Kimball, with her interest in Native cultures and her substantial library, had seen Plains Indian ledger drawings and hide paintings in which blue horses were fairly common. Some Lakota people rode blue roan horses. Sashes such as the one in the hand of Kimball's rider appear in ledger drawings and hide paintings that had been on exhibit at the Museum Of Modern Art show *Art of the American Indian* in 1941.[96] In paintings like *Unconquered*, Kimball visually articulated the knowledge she acquired through reading and viewing collections, and the paintings served to reinforce her identity. Because she included aspects of Native material culture in her works and because images of males were relatable and expected by her primarily male audience, her viewers assumed that she must be an authentic Native artist, in a generic sense.

Kimball's harnessing of gender in her subject matter is perhaps most obviously revealed in her *Self-Portrait* of 1978 described in the Introduction. The painting's carefully chosen details seem to suggest to the viewer that Kimball has intimate knowledge of Plains Indian material culture. While this work reveals ways she

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[95] Ibid, 196.

[96] Frederic H. Douglas and Rene D'Harnoncourt, *Indian Art of the United States* (New York City: The Museum of Modern Art, 1941) also available at https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_2998_300061960.pdf.

harnessed existing gender and racial structures in American art to launch her career, the painting's title, *Self-Portrait*, and time period (1978 was the year of her death) indicate that this image acts as self-reflective of her identity. Kimball's self-fashioning as "Indian" is overlaid here with her self-representation as male, a powerful image that claims masculine identity as symbolic of success.

For decades, Kimball was recognized as a spokesperson for modern Native arts. In her survey of modern Native women painters of 1999, for example, author Patricia Broder refers to Kimball as "an authority on American Indian art and culture," noting that Kimball "served as consultant on Native arts for several museums."[97] Broder identifies Kimball as one of the first American Indian artists to pursue an education in mainstream modern art and to embrace the tenets of modernism. When considering the legacy of Yeffe Kimball, however, it is vital to consider contemporary concerns such as those expressed by leading critic and artist America Meredith (Cherokee) who asserts that falsely representing oneself as Native while also achieving a position of popularity and success is damaging to understandings of Native peoples and their cultures.[98] Kimball combined her self-defined evocations of American Indian material culture. Her experiences in school and in art exhibits were marked by gender bias, as teachers and judges prioritized art featuring male-dominated subject matter over art featuring more typically female themes. Additionally, the arts scene of the 1930s and 1940s itself was dominated by male judges, curators, directors, and artists. Kimball's privilege as a white

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[97] Patricia Janis Broder, *Earth Songs, Moon Dreams: Paintings by American Indian Women* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).
[98] America Meredith, "Why it Matters that Jimmy Durham is Not a Cherokee," Artnet News, July 7, 2017, https://news.artnet.com/opinion/jimmie-durham-america-meredith-1014164.

person allowed her the freedom to incorporate male figures, subject matter, and style into her paintings without consideration of Native ideas about gender and visual art practices. Her style was embraced by the majority non-Native critics and a male-dominated arts world in general and she was able to achieve recognition as a modern American Indian woman painter during a time of marginalization for this demographic in the arts, both complicating the history and obscuring the realities.

Chapter Three - American Indian Arts and American Modernists

The work being created in the New York art scene during the era of Jackson Pollock and Yeffe Kimball borrowed heavily from non-Western art traditions.[99] The influence of Native art for non-Native artists of the modern era has a long history. The trend stemmed from the increased availability of American Indian art beginning in 1890. Massive collecting of American Indian artifacts and material culture by institutions and individuals and the patronage of basket makers and potters whose works were featured widely in design catalogs fed what art historian Elizabeth Hutchinson has called "the Indian craze."[100] Department store displays encouraged domestic interior designs that incorporated American Indian inspired motifs. The painting and photographing of American Indian peoples by non-Native artists and anthropologists, and the borrowing of aesthetic appearances of traditional designs and styles all exemplify ways in which early twentieth-century popular American culture looked to American Indian cultures in the shaping of its own cultural identity.

This obsession of artists, collectors, scholars, and institutions run by persons of European backgrounds in the United States was widely referred to as "primitivism," the act of looking to art forms outside of the "classical" European traditions for inspiration. Primitivism refers to the set of assumptions imposed upon peoples, cultures, and artifacts deemed closer to the origins of humankind and not as sophisticated as those associated with Europe. While the term "primitive" is now unacceptable, "primitivism" is

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[99] See Jackson W. Rushing, *Native American Art and the New York Avant-Garde: A History of Cultural Primitivism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995) and Ann Eden Gibson, *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).
[100] Elizabeth Hutchinson, *The Indian Craze: Primitivism, Modernism, and Transculturation in American Art, 1890-1915* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 3.

still the term used in the sort of critique invoked here and in truth involves the appropriation of Native American traditions and the harvesting of Native American aesthetics. Primitivism restricted American Indian artists of the era, some of whom avoided incorporating visual references to their own traditional backgrounds in their art for fear of being labeled and stereotyped.

While certain objects created by non-Western peoples were elevated from ethnographic curiosities to prized artworks through their exhibition in major museums, little thought was given to the artists' perspectives or current experiences. For example, the curators of a 1941 exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art titled *Indian Art of the United State*s highlight Indigenous works of art and attempt an effort to correct misunderstandings. In the introduction to the exhibition catalogue they state, "This publication, as well as the exhibition upon which it is based, aims to show that the Indian artist of today, drawing on the strength of his tribal tradition and utilizing the resources of the present, offers a contribution that should become an important factor in building the America of the future."[101] The language of the text is gendered. Later, they state, "...it should be possible to arrive at a satisfactory aesthetic evaluation of the art of any group without being much concerned with its cultural background."[102] Despite efforts to the contrary, those individuals who created the objects were still judged through the racist lens of colonialism.

Yeffe Kimball moved beyond simply borrowing American Indian traditions through her self-identifying and posing as an Osage to legitimize her art. This chapter

[101] Frederic H. Douglass and Rene D'Harnoncourt, *Indian Art of the United States* (New York, NY: The Museum of Modern Art, 1941), 10.
[102] Ibid, 11.

considers thematic, aesthetic, and stylistic choices by several artists of Kimball's time who engaged with the themes of Nativeness and modernism in different ways. Many, like Kimball, appropriated elements of American Indian identity to varying degrees. My exploration emphasizes the importance and centrality of American Indian arts in the United States in the shaping of an American Modernism.

Adolph Gottlieb, Barnett Newman, Jackson Pollock, Richard Pousette-Dart, and Mark Rothko all shared an interest in what art historian Jackson Rushing has described as "paintings that referred to atavistic myth, primordial origins, and primitive rituals and symbols, especially those of Native American cultures."[103] These artists, particularly Pollock, appropriated forms and myths from American Indian art traditions. However, while Rushing primarily examines the works of key male painters, the work of women painters of the time can be evaluated by similar metrics.[104]

During World War I, influential gallerist Alfred Steiglitz turned away from exhibiting the work of European Modernists and focused instead on featuring the works of American-born artists including Georgia O'Keeffe. These artists were seeking to define an authentic American Modernist art during a time of increased industrialization, capitalism, and consumption in the United States. As art historian Frances K. Pohl asserts, these artists believed that "through representations of natural forms, art could help heal the emotional wounds caused by society's enslavement to material goods."[105] Their explorations led them to Santa Fe and Taos, regions they felt were filled with

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[103] Rushing, *Native American Art and the New York Avant Garde.*
[104] Ibid.
[105] Frances K. Pohl, *Framing America: A Social History of American Art* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2017), 365.

fresh, new, unsullied landscapes and where many artists and photographers had been traveling after seeing advertisements for the Santa Fe Railway since the 1890s.[106]

Forms of cultural appropriation such as playing and dressing up as an American Indian, asserts historian Philip J. Deloria, aided in the development of a distinct American identity. He argues that, always fascinated with self-definition, Americans have "engaged racialized and gendered Indians in curious and contradictory ways."[107] From the colonial period to the present, Deloria argues, the "Indian" plays a central role in the stories Americans tell about themselves. Adding to Deloria's work, Shari M. Huhndorf chronicles acts of cultural appropriation in its modern manifestations, beginning with the 1876 U. S. Centennial Exhibition, to argue that the conquest of "Native America" repeats as non-Natives emulate American Indians and ultimately reassert historic power relationships. While individuals, and specifically the artists considered in this chapter, may not consciously acknowledge their acts to be cultural appropriation, they are feeding familiar narratives of conquest by undermining the ability for Native artists to speak for themselves.

O'Keeffe made the first of many journeys to the Southwest in the first decade of the 1900s. Enchanted by American Indian visual and material culture, she created numerous drawings, watercolors, and paintings of katsina tithu—dolls traditionally carved out of cottonwood root and given to young Hopi children as teaching tools and as introductions to the culture's numerous immortal beings. With the rise of artist colonies in the Southwest in the early twentieth century, these dolls and other forms of

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[106] Pohl, 388.
[107] Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 5.

American Indian material culture became subject matter for modern American and European artists. Non-Native notions of American Indian visual culture as unique from their own understandings and values influenced how these non-Native artists considered abstraction as a universal aesthetic. Although it has not often been acknowledged in popular American culture, O'Keeffe often objectified American Indian traditions and visual cultures rather than deeply engaging with their spiritual and cultural significance.

Seeking to amend this perspective, art curators Barbara Buhler Lynes and Carolyn Kastner organized a 2012 exhibit in Santa Fe, New Mexico titled *Georgia O'Keeffe in New Mexico: Architecture, Katsinam, and the Land*. In this exhibit, the curators acknowledged O'Keeffe's well-documented relationship with the Southwestern landscape while also exploring O'Keeffe's little-studied relationship with American Indian and Hispanic art and culture. The exhibit curators attempted to emphasize that O'Keeffe had a deep appreciation for the diverse cultures of the Southwest by juxtaposing real katsina tithu, grouped in a display in the middle of the room, with O'Keeffe's paintings and drawings of katsina dolls, which lined the walls of the room. O'Keeffe's tithu imagery progressed from realistic studies of katsina dolls to more abstract interpretations of the subject. The curators' incorporation of the dolls allowed for viewers of the exhibit to consider and engage with O'Keeffe's chosen subject matter. It did not, however, sufficiently prove that the artist cared about katsina tithu beyond their aesthetic value to her as a painter.

Wall text in the exhibition included commentary from Hopi artist Ramona Sakiestewa that read: “O’Keeffe titles her work with her own associations, like *Kachina with Horns from Back* or *Paul’s Kachina* or *Blue-Headed Indian Doll*, which takes them out of the realm of collecting or ethnography. She studies them in no other way than for her own art-making.” Sakiestewa’s interpretation suggests that O’Keeffe was interested in Hopi/Pueblo culture, but that her drawings and paintings seem like the work of an artist interested in the dolls as objects, separating the figures from their cultural and spiritual significance. In a review of the exhibition, *Phoenix New Times* art critic Katrina Montgomery also noted the degree to which O’Keeffe’s art fails to engage with Hopi culture; she stated that even after walking around the gallery several times “it felt impossible to bridge the metaphorical (and physical) distance between the katsina tithu figures and O’Keeffe’s renderings of the figures. The examples of real katsina dolls are not particularly edifying in terms of O’Keeffe’s work, which seems completely divorced from actual Hopi tradition.”[108]

While the exhibit did correct, as the curators put it, the “misconception that O’Keeffe had little if any interest in New Mexico’s diverse cultural communities,” it did not provide evidence that O’Keeffe had any kind of reverence, understanding, or depth of knowledge about those communities. This type of appropriation continues to damage the potential for respectful relationships between American Indian peoples and mainstream Americans. Though O’Keeffe attended Hopi festivals and was fascinated by

[108] Katrina Montgomery, “Georgia O'Keeffe Exhibition Fails to Connect with Native American Culture at Phoenix's Heard Museum,” *Phoenix New Times*, February 11, 2014, https://www.phoenixnewtimes.com/arts/georgia-okeeffe-exhibition-fails-to-connect-with-native-american-culture-at-phoenixs-heard-museum-6554063.

the dancers' colorful costumes and the sounds of their drumming and singing, her descriptions of the events in letters to Stieglitz emphasize the visual elements of the performances, rather than their cultural significance. O'Keeffe's position as an established artist since the mid-1920s has kept her on a pedestal and prevented critics from fully exploring her appropriation of American Indian art forms.

Replicating forms was only a starting point for some New York artists like O'Keeffe who traveled to the Southwest, many of whom were invited by Mabel Dodge Luhan. Luhan was incredibly influential to the making of American Modernism. In essays and books, Luhan's biographer Lois Palken Rudnick, places Luhan at the center of several major modernist projects in American arts, politics, and culture during the first half of the twentieth century.[109]

From 1913 to 1947 Luhan was one of the great promoters of the visual arts in the United States. In Taos, when she was thirty-nine, she established a residential arts colony that connected politicians, artists, collectors, and writers. Art historian Wanda Corn notes in her introduction to *Mabel Dodge Luhan & Company*, a book dedicated to Luhan's influence on American Modernism, that she "fed and nurtured the arts by setting up conditions in which artists met other artists and kindred spirits and by providing creative individuals with financial and social support."[110] Luhan collected works by the region's Pueblo Indians and exhibited them in New York City. She played a germinal role in making Taos a destination for tourists, artists, and other non-Native

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[109] Lois Palken Rudnick, *Mabel Dodge Luhan: New Woman, New Worlds* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000).
[110] Wanda M. Corn, "Introduction: Mabel Dodge Luhan & Company," Lois Palken Rudnick *et al*., *Mabel Dodge Luhan & Company: American Moderns and the West* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2016), 15.

visitors to the region curious about the unique regional cultures forged by the Hispano, Native American, and Anglo communities.

As a Taos artist colony was being established by Luhan, her husband, and its many visiting artists (including O'Keeffe who was invited by Luhan in 1929), dressing up in American Indian styles of clothing was becoming a fashionable trend.[111] Curator Rayna Green argues that by the 1930s, "The Indianized Southwest, becomes more than a canvas or a scene for the camera lens; it becomes a Style."[112] Luhan's colony was significant in the development and perpetuation of a fantasy of the Southwest and its Indigenous peoples. Kimball, too, visited Luhan in Taos around 1947. In her follow-up letter to Luhan dated "Monday, 21, 1947," Kimball mentions having looked at Luhan's early "Indian paintings" and suggests she consider donating them to the Philbrook Museum as it "has begun what I think is very important, an annual exhibition of Indian Painting." Kimball made plans to visit Luhan and her husband at Taos again and these conversations situate her as integrated into the prime community of artists of the time. Like O'Keeffe, Kimball was a valuable and highly established artist of her era. During the course of her long career, her work was included in more than one hundred exhibits and featured in over fifty solo shows.[113] Her work is in permanent exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the Dayton Art Museum, the Portland Art Museum and in other locations including the Department of Interior, in Washington.[114]

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[111] Abraham A. Davidson, *Early American Modernist Painting: 1910-1935* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), 267.
[112] Rayna Green, "The Tribe Called Wannabee: Playing Indian in America and Europe," *Folklore* 99, no. 1 (1988): 43, doi:10.1080/0015587x.1988.9716423.
[113] Gretchen M. Bataille and Laurie Lisa, *Native American Women: A Biographical Dictionary* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 172.
[114] From her obituary April 12, 1978, published in the *New York Times*.

In Chapter Two, I discussed how Cherokee artist and critic America Meredith evidenced the harm that can result from individuals falsely representing themselves as Native. The artist about whom she was speaking, Jimmie Durham, has long claimed to be Cherokee and has used activism as one method of authenticating this identity. Like Kimball, Durham's biographical information is perplexing. He was born on July 10, 1940 in Houston, Texas.[115] He has claimed he was born in Nevada County, Arkansas and also Washington, Arkansas.[116] He was, like Kimball, dedicated to activism and was involved with the American Indian Movement in the 1970s. He has made issues of colonialism and American Indian identity the central themes of his work. That Durham is not Cherokee, culturally, biologically, or through active engagement with the Cherokee community is emphasized by claims of tribal representatives who state, "Durham is neither enrolled nor eligible for citizenship in any of the three federally-recognized and historical Cherokee Tribes: the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians of Oklahoma, and the Cherokee Nation."[117] He has "no known ties to any Cherokee community."[118]

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[115] Sheila Regan, "Jimmie Durham Retrospective Reignites Debate Over His Claim of Native Ancestry," *Hyperallergic*, June 28, 2017, https://hyperallergic.com/387970/jimmie-durham-retrospective-reignites-debate-over-his-claim-of-native-ancestry/.

[116] Lucy R. Lippard, "Jimmie Durham—Postmodern Savage," *Art in America*, February (1993): 62-68. See also Bruce Elliott Johansen, *Encyclopedia of the American Indian Movement* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2013).

[117] Cara Cowan Watts, *et al*, "Dear Unsuspecting Public, Jimmie Durham Is a Trickster," *Indian Country Media Network*, June 26, 2017, https://newsmaven.io/indiancountrytoday/archive/dear-unsuspecting-public-jimmie-durham-is-a-trickster-Rk7_oZ6TPkmIlQLNJN-gPw/.

[118] Steve Russell, "Rachel Dolezal Outs Andrea Smith Again; Will Anybody Listen This Time?," *Indian Country Today Media Network*, July 1, 2015, https://newsmaven.io/indiancountrytoday/archive/rachel-dolezal-outs-andrea-smith-again-will-anybody-listen-this-time-h7m2k-3PP0qPj7n0fH5Pcw/.

Recent controversy surrounding a retrospective of Jimmie Durham's work at the Walker Art Center in June, 2017 evidences continued tensions in the art world regarding Native American art. Long believed to be Cherokee, Durham's artistic achievements, like Kimball's paintings, satisfy the expectations of non-Native curators, critics, and gallerists. His works are celebrated for bridging and rectifying the perceived gap between arts made by Native Americans and arts made by Westerners. In 1993, Lippard described Durham's works as peeling away, "the decorative wrappings that disguise the American Indian in the United State's colonial present."[119] Yet Durham's claim to Cherokee heritage is questionable and deniable. Some Native American art theorists and critics consider the continued celebration of works by self-fashioned Native American artists like Durham as evidence of non-Native attitudes and misperceptions about Native American art and not as inherently elucidating experiences of Native peoples in a contemporary world.

Enrolled member of the Cherokee Nation and author Ashley Holland states in her response to writer Jonathan Griffin's feature article on the exhibit, "Durham and non-Native scholars want to argue that his art is forcing a critical look at how colonizers have romanticized and stereotyped Native peoples, but many of the references to Cherokee traditions in his work reek of pan-Indian pandering."[120] For example, many Cherokee citizens with deep ties to the community do not know their clans, yet Durham asserts his affiliation as "Wolf Clan." He claims to have received a "real name" from a

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[119] Lucy Lippard, "Jimmy Durham - Postmodernist 'Savage'," *Art in America*, February (1993): 62-68.
[120] Ashley Holland, "Issues and Commentary: The Artist Formerly Known as Cherokee," *Art in America* August (2017), https://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/magazines/issues-commentary-the-artist-formerly-known-as-cherokee/.

Coyote, but this animal does not play the trickster role in Cherokee stories as Durham claims. Durham's retrospective, rather than reaffirm past understandings, could serve as a site for critical dialogue on relationships between institutions and Native American art and, as Holland states, moments to "rethink and reevaluate artists whose own understanding of themselves may have changed as much as their art over the years."[121]

Despite this disputation of his claims to Cherokee descendancy, Durham remains the most well-known Cherokee artist according to a recently published fact sheet in *First American Art Magazine*. Like Yeffe Kimball, Durham used his position of privilege as outside traditional Native communities to achieve success in the art world. His success is damaging to other Cherokee artists because attention is given to him and his work rather than to works by members legitimately included as part of the Cherokee community. The work of other Native artists is trivialized and often misunderstood.[122] The ability to determine who is and isn't part of a tribe is an essential element of what makes tribes sovereign entities. To individuals, membership means citizenship and all the emotional ties and treaty rights that come with it. When interfacing with a global audience, integrity in self-presentation is essential. Durham continues to both claim and deny his heritage, yet museums and galleries continue to present his work as American Indian culminating with his awarding by the Venice Biennale of the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement.

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[121] Ibid.

[122] Brian Boucher, "Cherokee Artists and Curators Denounce Artist Jimmie Durham as a Fraud, Saying He 'Is Not a Cherokee'," *Art World*, June 27, 2017, https://news.artnet.com/art-world/cherokee-curators-artists-jimmie-durham-cherokee-1007336.

Many non-Native artists have engaged in a similar practice of ethnic fraud.[123] Robert M. Church, Director Philbrook Museum from 1950-55, in a letter to Yeffe Kimball, July 2, 1952 seems to be ironically (considering his addressee) entertained by the idea. "You will be amused in the latest development in the American Indian Annual. Some young American woman in Alaska passed herself off as an Eskimo and won a prize at the show which I think is most amusing, although a little terrifying when one realizes the widespread effect that might result from such a thing."[124] The casualness on behalf of Robert Church seems to stem from his friendly acquaintance with Kimball and his lack of knowledge regarding her own ethnic fraud. Agnes Gough, to whom Church refers, falsely assumed an Alaskan Native identity in her pursuits as an artist. Listed as Cherokee in *Earth Songs, Moon Dreams*, Patricia Broder's 1999 book on paintings by American Indian women, Gough is celebrated as "one of few American Indian artists to devote her efforts to painting the ceremonies of the Alaskan Eskimo."[125]

Gough was born in Kentucky in 1902 and studied at Western Kentucky University before traveling the country and ultimately teaching high school in Anchorage, Alaska in the late 1940s -1950s. During this time, she created paintings of Alaska's Native peoples and began submitting her works to the Philbrook Museum for the American Indian Annual. There seems to have been an assumption made on behalf of the

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[123] The U.S. Department of the Interior Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990 prohibits misrepresentation in marketing of American Indian or Alaska Native arts and crafts products within the United States. "It is illegal to offer or display for sale, or sell any art or craft product in a manner that falsely suggests it is Indian produced, an Indian product, or the product of a particular Indian or Indian tribe or Indian arts and crafts organization, resident within the United States." See U.S. Department of the Interior, "The Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990," accessed June 15, 2019, https://www.doi.gov/iacb/act.

[124] Robert Church, Letter to Yeffe Kimball, July 2, 1952, Philbrook Museum of Art Archive.

[125] Patricia Janis Broder, *Earth Songs, Moon Dreams: Paintings by American Indian Women* (New York: St. Martin's Press,1999), 144.

museum's director at the time, Robert Church, that Gough was Native Alaskan simply because of her enthusiasm for the geographic location and because she spent time working there. In a letter he sent to her in 1952, he wrote: "It did not occur to me in our long correspondence you did not have some Eskimo blood, in view of intense enthusiasm for your people up there. However, it seems that on your visit here everyone was astonished to find you are very American."[126] Gough received a third place award with a $50 prize in 1952 for her submission as an Inupiat artist. At this time, request for tribal affiliation was not required on the application form for the Annual. The watercolor on paper, *Eskimo Ceremonial Dances*, accentuates the different furs worn by the dancers who don unique traditional masks (Figure 8). When the painting was later included in Broder's 1999 book, Gough's misidentification as "Eskimo" is mentioned, but then followed by a declaration that Gough was Cherokee. At this time, there is no evidence in the form of citation in this book to support the claim that Gough had any American Indian ancestry, family, or lineage.

This phenomenon is not restricted to America; examples exists in other colonialist empires. Australian artist Elizabeth Durack (1915-2000), a white woman of Irish descent, created a series of her works under the false identity of an Aboriginal man named Eddie Burrup. On the contemporary website about Durack maintained by the curators of her estate, it is explained that Burrup was invented as "a device for Elizabeth Durack to obtain independent assessment of a breakthrough in work and ideas that had been gestating for years."[127] The website also lists the elaborate biography Durack

[126] Robert Church, Letter to Agnes Gough, 1952, Philbrook Museum of Art Archive.
[127] "Elizabeth Durack," The Estate of Elizabeth Durack, accessed June 15, 2019, http://www.elizabethdurack.com/index.php.

created for Burrup: “Eddie Burrup was born circa 1915 at Yandeyarra Station on the Yule River in the Pilbara region of Western Australia. His father and grandfather had helped establish this station in the 1880s. He learned to ride when very young and worked as a stockman on Yandeyarra and adjacent properties. Familiar with several traditional languages, he spoke mostly the century-old lingua franca of the bush (now known as kriol) that persists in some remote areas today.” Durack’s critics note her creation of this false identity as an appropriation of Aboriginal culture because she replicates traditional Aboriginal paintings under this pseudonym, yet the curators of Durack’s estate describe it as an “artistic” endeavor and defend her body of work against claims of wrongdoing. Some art critics highlight Durack’s sensitivity in her depiction of other subjects such as her portraits of Papuan women from the 1960s, which feature women as leaders and vital community workers in ways that portraits by other Western artists did not.[128] Regardless of the potential for sensitivity, her oeuvre is damaging because it misappropriates Indigenouse traditions.

Other modern-era artists, while not “becoming” Native in an extreme sense, took American Indian peoples and bodies as the subject matter of their work in their own pursuits of an American identity. For artists Laura Gilpin and Dorothy Eugene Brett, who traveled to Taos to stay with Luhan during the height of Luhan’s artist invitations to New Mexico, 1929-1947, choosing American Indians as the subject matter of their art satisfied their desires to distance themselves from established nineteenth-century

[128] Roxanne Missingham, “Controversial Artist Elizabeth Durack Gave Us a Sensitive Insight Into the Lives of Papuan Women,” March 6, 2018, https://theconversation.com/controversial-artist-elizabeth-durack-gave-us-a-sensitive-insight-into-the-lives-of-papuan-women-79423.

norms. Many of the artist settlers in Taos were women. They shared with Luhan a vision of the land as primal and liberating and, like Yeffe Kimball, they achieved success in the art world by appropriating Native culture.

Laura Gilpin was an American photographer born in 1891 and is best known for her landscape images as well as her images of American Indians, particularly of groups living in the Southwest. In her major text, *The Enduring Navajo*, published in 1968, she states her intent to "create a visual image of these people."[129] The book reads partly like an anthropological field text and partly like a travel diary as she writes about her experiences traveling with her life-long friend, Elizabeth "Betsy" Forster. Gilpin broke down gender barriers in the early twentieth century, and she was able to do so by leveraging her privilege as a white person using Native people as her subject matter. Gilpin's images, rendered in a Pictorialist style, are often criticized as reiterating romantic visions of a "vanishing other," a conventional narrative equated with the Pictorialist-style photographs of American Indian peoples from the early twentieth century. Yet Gilpin's aspiration to be a landscape photographer is not a normative one for her gender, rather it is an incursion into a male domain and as a woman, Gilpin was afforded access to Navajo/Diné women that probably would not have been possible to the same degree for a male photographer.

In his 1998 essay on Laura Gilpin and Willa Cather published in *American Literature*, Literary scholar Jonathan Goldberg proposes that Gilpin's work, especially *The Enduring Navajo*, be regarded as a lesbian project and discusses ways this topic

[129] Laura Gilpin, *The Enduring Navajo* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968).

has been skirted by her critics.[130] Images of women appear most often in Gilpin's book, and by no means are they photographed only in the maternal, heteronormative setting of the "mother and child." Many are in groups, within their homes, and/or working. An image of Forster appears only once, but she is discussed throughout the text, in which Gilpin utilizes the third person, evidencing the strong relationship shared between the photographer and the nurse. Scholarship, argues Goldberg, hints at Gilpin's homosexuality, but never overtly brings it to the fore. In his discussion of Gilpin's photograph of an Acoma water hole, he describes the modernist geometric framing of the image as "autoerotic, and potentially homoerotic."[131] Though Gilpin's work as a landscape photographer was not typical for an early twentieth-century woman in America, she still benefited from racial privilege.

When asked by Gloria Steinham in an interview in *Ms. Magazine* in 1975 what it was like being a woman photographer, Gilpin replied that she didn't understand the question and was simply living by her own rules. Gilpin saw herself as a successful artist who worked as she pleased, with whom she pleased, outside of the Euro-normative gender constructs of the time. However, it seems probable that she did not realize the extent to which her success relied on the Navajo/Dine'—images of their bodies allowed her to pursue her career and Forster's work with them allowed for Gilpin to enter and photograph the Navajo/Diné community.[132]

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[130] Jonathan Goldberg, "Photographic Relations: Laura Gilpin, Willa Cather," *American Literature* 70.1 (1998): 63-95.
[131] Ibid, 71.
[132] While most recognize the term Navajo, I also include Diné here, a word from their own language to describe themselves and meaning "the people."

The format of *The Enduring Navajo* reflects her non-Native perspective. Following Gilpin's lengthy dedication of the book to Forster, the preface, acknowledgements, and a graphic map, the book begins with a series of landscape photographs, iconically modernist from today's perspective. Wide open vistas of triangular mountains, curvilinear waters, and contrasting lights and shadows pan off into the distance. These images are vacant, devoid of any signs of technology and, from the Modernist perspective, they capture the last open areas destined for erasure by encroaching technology. The next section of the book includes portraits and scenes of the daily lives of people Gilpin encountered while traveling with Forster; the image of Forster at work is included very early in the book, among the portraits. Following the visual narrative of this sequence, a casual reader is likely to assume that the land had no people prior to Gilpin's arrival. In this way, Gilpin's book aligns with conventional colonial narratives about the conquest of the Southwest and the "discovery" of its Native peoples.[133]

Less well-known to American Modernism, Dorothy Eugenie Brett (1882-1977) also traveled to Taos to join the Luhan art colony in the mid-1900s. In a photograph taken by Gilpin, Brett poses before an easel with one of her most finely executed and confident ceremonial paintings, *Feather Dance,* c. 1930.[134] Brett was an aristocratic

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[133] This added note was inspired by a presentation at the Otsego Institute given by PhD Candidate Patricia Norby on May 21, 2012. In her presentation, she critiques O'Keeffe's vacant landscape portraits as consciously negating the fact that generations of peoples have lived on the Southwestern lands long before modernist artists, including photographers, arrived. Perhaps O'Keeffe could not, or would not, include figures in her works, but the absence in scholarship of her daily relationships with Indigenous employees within her household, reifies the colonial, "vanishing Indian" narrative.

[134] Lois Palken Rudnick, *Mabel Dodge Luhan: New Woman, New Worlds* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), 138.

British painter who studied at the Slade School of Art. She is most often considered part of the Bloomsbury group, a twentieth-century movement of English artists who broke from traditional styles of painting and looked to the decorative arts for inspiration. Brett moved to Taos in 1924 with the writer D. H. Lawrence, with plans to embark on the creation of a utopian city they named Ramamadan. Brett became a citizen of the United States in 1938.

Like other modern-era Whites, Brett considered American Indians in her own fashion. Her paintings recall the Studio School style, but add depth as one might expect from a European traditional painting. She applies her painting style of centrally focused designs and bright primary colors learned from the London's Slade School of Art to her subject of American Indian dancers. She called these works, "Ceremonials." A comparison of her work, *Turtle Dance*, 1947, to Awa Tsireh's *The Green Corn Ceremony at Santo Domingo*, illustrates this (Figure 10 and 11).[135] Tsireh uses open, vacant space, a more birds-eye view, and a linear composition as typical of the Studio School style, discussed in Chapter Two. Brett fills the space, pressing her figures against the picture plane and expressing what art historian Malin Wilson-Powell describes as feelings of claustrophobia and discomfort that these dances could cause for some non-Native visitors.[136]

A consequence of mainstream American culture's fascination with Indigenousness is the repression of American Indian modernism on its own terms. An

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[135] Malin Wilson-Powell, "Mabel Dodge Luhan: A New Way to See and New Things to Say," in Lois Palken Rudnick, *Mabel Dodge Luhan & Company: American Moderns and the West* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2016), 67-146.
[136] Ibid, 98.

important example is Oscar Howe, a Yanktonai Dakota artist from South Dakota, who was rightly frustrated with audiences who could not see his dynamic figurative paintings as both Native and European in influence. Demonstrating their own biases, jurors excluded his Philbrook submission of 1958, *Umine Wacipe*, from award consideration because, as they wrote, it was "a fine painting . . . but not Indian."[137] The judges held tightly to existing notions that American Indian art not be innovative and not incorporate elements outside of the artist's own cultural background. Howe's work incorporated jagged, vertical forms with intense, non-naturalistic colors that distorted the figures and the space. Decisions made by the early Philbrook Annual judges were rooted in systemic stereotypes regarding expectations for the visual characteristics of American Indian painting. Largely arbitrary and subjective, these decisions are deeply informed by notions of the "other". Howe responded to this rejection via a letter in which he expressed his frustration and demanded an end to the suppression of Native American art.

Howe and other members of his generation were trained in the style of Dorothy Dunn's Studio School at the Santa Fe Indian School, 1932 - 1937. Their experience in military service, travel, and education after their time at the School offered these artists a more cosmopolitan view of art that was informed by world travel and modernism.[138] Howe was experimenting with new forms and the Philbrook judges would not accept this. Modern-era art critics expected artists from so-called "primitive" cultures to create "primitive" art no matter what their personal histories included, and this expectation

[137] Anthes, *Native Moderns*, 130.
[138] Anthes, *Native Moderns*, 159.

considerably limited the scope of what many American Indian artists were willing, wanting, and able to create for the larger art world. These judgments were rooted in colonial ideologies. There must exist a primitive/other as comparative to affirm the status of high art made in European traditions. Art historian Daniel Miller explains, "primitivism is an aid to the formation of images of Us and the Other, which promote and refine negative and derogatory stereotypes, to produce a stronger indictment of other peoples whom we are thereby the more likely to oppress when we encounter them, or in its positive aspect produces romantic images of nobility which lead to an equally unrealistic set of expectations".[139]

Art historian Ann Gibson rightly argues that some modern-era critics, when placing value on artworks, considered artists' ethnic identities in their determinations of aesthetic and cultural worth. Artists with non-European ancestry that were looking to their own heritages and traditions as inspiration were seen as simply doing "what came naturally," rather than receiving credit as intellectuals with professional skills. Simultaneously, European descendants who looked to non-European traditions for their artistic inspiration often did so without reflecting on what the use of those forms and designs might mean to living American Indian artists. Many artists used these forms and designs without any clear or developed realization that such actions amounted to appropriation.[140] Noting Jackson Rushing's work *Native American Art and the New York Avant-Garde*, Gibson argues that the fault does not lie with the individual artists in these

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[139] Daniel Miller, "Primitive Art and the Necessity of Primitivism to Art," in Susan Hiller, *The Myth Of Primitivism: Perspectives on Art* (London; New York: Routledge, 1991), 69.
[140] Ann Eden Gibson, *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 60.

cases. Rather, she maintains, this sort of artistic appropriation was a social function of the ideals of universalism, a philosophical concept that some ideas are shared and applicable to all humans, prevalent in the post WWII era. Universalism is a tool of appropriation. What is deemed a "quality" work of art is understood to have determined hierarchies that favor characteristics prized by those who defined it in the first place. Particularly in the case of modern art, universalisms "stop short" in Gibson's words, at the boundaries of race and gender.[141] Recent American Indian scholarship foregrounds the prioritization of Indigenous perspectives as essential to invalidating universalism.[142]

During the modern era, ideas of foreignness, exoticism, and savageness came to stereotype not just the art styles of non-Europeans, but also living American Indian and African American people, among other cultures. Artists whose cultures could have been identified as "primitive" and who wanted full acceptance as contemporary intellectuals were often the most determined to avoid reinforcing stereotypes in their own work. Yet, continued tensions regarding Native identity underscore the imperativeness of continued scholarship. The case of Leon Polk Smith serves as one very complicated example of an artist for whom questions of identity, social location, affiliation, and passing are layered and contradictory.

Smith was born near Chickasha, OK in 1906. According to Smith, his mother and father were both "part Cherokee."[143] As a teenager, he lived with his family in Ada,

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[141] Gibson, xxii.
[142] See Melanie Anne Herzog and Sarah Anne Stolte, "American Indian Art: Teaching and Learning," *Wicazo Sa Review* 27, no. 1 (2012): 85-109 and Sandy Grande, *Red Pedagogy: Native American Social and Political Thought* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004).
[143] Leon Polk Smith, "Artist Statement: Biographical Memories, 1964," Leon Polk Smith Foundation, accessed June 15, 2019, https://leonpolksmithfoundation.org/research-resources/artist-statements/.

Oklahoma, in Pontotoc County, often called “Indian Territory,” where the majority of the population was either Chickasaw or Choctaw. Smith is considered one of the founders of hard-edged minimalism, yet his work had not been interpreted through the lens of his American Indian background until recently.[144] The conventional narrative asserts that this is largely because Smith downplayed his own heritage yet brief investigation calls to question the validity of Smith’s claims to a Cherokee identity.

American art historian Ann Gibson interviewed Smith in 1990 and states that Smith never emphasized his American Indian heritage as informing his art work, but mentions that his mother was “part Cherokee.”[145] Others repeat that Smith was Cherokee, but emphasize that he was discreet about it.[146] Gibson continues her discussion of Smith’s work and his intentional masking of his background as a decisive choice. He felt that any association with his heritage during a time when interpretations of “primitive” art were conflicting with his own understandings of these types of works would ultimately only lead to misrepresentations of his life and his art. He believed there was “no such thing as primitive art—only works of different cultures such as African, American Indian, and Precolumbian,” which he saw as more highly developed than the dominant art institutions described.[147] Though he claims to disassociate from his Cherokee heritage, Smith’s interest in the minimalism and abstraction of artist Piet Mondrian was, according to a statement he made to Gibson, a “logical extension of the

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[144] Randolph Lewis, "The Native Roots of Modern Art: Rereading the Paintings of Leon Polk Smith," *The American Indian Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (2001): 94.
[145] Gibson, 61.
[146] See Dore Ashton, *The New York School: A Cultural Reckoning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).
[147] Gibson, *Abstract Expressionism*, 63.

abstract spatial organization and geometric precision used in Native American baskets and saddle blankets that he had seen in his parents' and friends' homes."[148] Smith remained devoted to minimalist abstraction throughout his career, but a majority of the scholarship on his work continues to frame these paintings within the context of his claims of Cherokee ancestry. While previous literature mentions his identity as relevant, new scholarship reinforces this heritage, yet denies evidence of deep relationship to any American Indian cultural upbringing.

In his 2001 exploration of Leon Polk Smith's works, American Studies scholar Randolph Lewis suggests that now is a time for the reinterpretation of Smith's works with a focus on his paintings with consideration of his American Indian background to reveal how much his Native identity truly did make its way onto his canvases. According to our postmodern standards, in this frame of analysis, an artist can be both influenced by European modernism and American Indian traditions while also reflecting the complex entanglements of these two cultures. I believe this is valid, yet not inclusive. While some American Indian artists' works do reflect these entanglements, not all are bound by the colonial dogma and instead demand attention from the perspectives and trajectory of American Indian art within a framework of its own history.

Toward the end of his life, Smith seemed even more open to critics examining his work through a multicultural lens. For example, in 1993 while discussing his 1938 work *A Stroll in the Forest*, Smith states the work's directness and color were influenced by American Indian art.[149] While Lewis demonstrates the richness of opening up the

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[148] Ibid, 61.
[149] Carter Ratcliff, Brooke Kamin Rapaport, Arthur C. Danto, and John Alan Farmer, *Leon Polk Smith: American Painter* (Brooklyn, New York: Brooklyn Museum, 1996), 19-20.

interpretive lens of American art to include multiple ways of looking at the various artistic influences, relationships, and trainings individual artists in this complex society are exposed to, he does not offer evidence that Smith's connections to a Cherokee identity are valid.

Despite Smith's claims to Cherokee identity and scholarship's adherence to this as frame for interpretation of his work as aligning or not aligning to traditional forms of Native art, there is no evidence other than Smith's statements that he is indeed Cherokee. Preliminary research does not reveal his name on Dawes Rolls and a basic ancestry search online does not link his family to the Cherokee people. Many Americans cite a Cherokee ancestor in their family lineage. A recent article by historian Gregory D. Smith outlines why many Americans think they are Cherokee. Foregrounding ways Cherokee responded to political and social changes during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Smith summarizes that ultimately many Americans, particularly in the South in traditional Cherokee territories, romanticized this identity. After removal of the Cherokee from their Southeastern homelands during the 1820s and 1830s, many whites in the antebellum South, striving to maintain their rights of self-government against the federal government, imagined a link to the Cherokee and an "Indian Princess" in particular. "By claiming a royal Cherokee ancestor, white Southerners were legitimating the antiquity of their native-born status as sons or daughters of the South, as well as establishing their determination to defend their rights against an aggressive federal government, as they imagined the Cherokees had done. These may have been self-serving historical delusions, but they have proven to be

enduring."[150] Family legends are powerful markers of identity and often resist examination. With new DNA technologies, many non-Natives find their beliefs in Cherokee ancestry are more common than actual blood ties. The former NFL running back Emmitt Smith, for example, believed that he had a distinct Cherokee relative. After submitting a DNA test as part of his 2010 appearance on NBC's *Who Do You Think You Are*, he learned he was mistaken.[151] Ethnic fraud is a growing problem as more individuals claim Indian descent with motivation by desire for personal gain or spiritual fulfillment. Groups such as the National Congress of American Indians and its leaders, such as Native American historian Vine Deloria, tackle this issue.

Rather than avoid these complexities in art history, I argue these complexities are entangled into the rich fabric of American identity. While I regard it as incorrect to willingly accept ethnic fraud, dismantling of these narratives reveal constructs of race and gender that define America and modern art. These intersections, encounters, and entanglements are only now being thoroughly explored. Reframing examination of the works of modern-era American artists through a wide array of perspectives allows for us to re-introduce Kimball's legacy as a significant woman artist into the history of American art. Once Kimball's identity as an Osage artist was established in the 1930s and 40s, art critics viewed her work through this monothematic and rigid lens. She capitalized on her position, allowing for her to enjoy a long and successful career as an artist during a time when males dominated the discipline. Critics described her later

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[150] Gregory D. Smithers, "Cherokee Blood: Why Do So Many Americans Believe They Have Cherokee Ancestry?," Slate Group, accessed March, 2019, https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2015/10/cherokee-blood-why-do-so-many-americans-believe-they-have-cherokee-ancestry.html.
[151] Ibid.

space paintings, for example, as a natural extension of her Indian heritage. Removed from any association with American Indian imagery, traditional practices, or exhibit of material culture, these works remained rooted in interpretation as "Native" art because of the assumed background of the artist.[152]

Of these same paintings, Kimball wrote: "The Indian artist, while documenting his people, finds it natural to invest his work with the cosmos since every aspect of Indian life shows concept of man's place in the universe and his relationship to everything in it," evidencing her own conflations regarding both race and gender. Kimball's statement on her later works reinforces the thesis of this dissertation - her embracement of "American Indian" as understood by public imagination and as rooted in a male identity aided her success during a time when many Native artists avoided associations with their tribal affiliations because it would damage the integrity of their work.[153] A reexamination of Kimball's work that takes her assumed cultural heritage into account reveals the complex social relationships she was navigating. A reevaluation of the artists examined in this chapter through unpacking of the cultural, political, and social entanglements in which they created art reveals a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of their works.

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[152] Reviews of Kimball and her work as both American Indian and abstract painter appear in the Introduction to the exhibit catalog by Donald G. Humphrey, "A 30- Year Retrospective of an American Woman Painter," in *Kimball* (Tulsa, Oklahoma: Philbrook Arts Center, 1966).
[153] Gretchen M. Bataille and Laurie Lisa, *Native American Women: A Biographical Dictionary* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 172-173.

Conclusion

Kimball's passing as Native is the core of a larger narrative that demonstrates and provokes critique of how that act took advantage of but also contributed to strengthening an exclusionary, devaluative settler colonial dynamic of expropriation that continues into the present. This study contributes to expanding discourse on entanglements in American art and examines the intersectionality of race, gender, and art that is unique to the colonial state. Attempts to untangle the interconnected histories that both bind and separate Native American art and American art demand new categories that are less binary and instead provoke interrogation of the complicated blending and bleeding into one another and the non-commensuration that result from colonialist encounters. Recontextualizing Kimball's self-fashioned identity emphasizes the ways American Indian cultures resonate with non-Native artists and people of the modern era—a trend that continues today.

My consideration of places leveraged by Kimball demonstrates how the insecurities of the American nation of the 1930s and 40s perpetuated the need for non-Native artists to harvest imagery from Native cultures for their own inspiration. This dissertation further argues for the need to revisit the plethora of American Indian women artists from this time while considering Indigenous perspectives. Kimball does not belong in a history of Native American art. American art historians must acknowledge the imperative for Native American artists, scholars, curators and other arts professionals to map the terrain of the history of Native arts in their own fashion.

My interrogation of Kimball's self-fashioning of an identity that resonated in specific ways in the modern era inserts her narrative as an intervention into institutional practices related to American Indian art. The exhibition of work by artists falsely claiming Native heritage and adamantly rejected as Native by Indigenous communities exposes corruption in American institutions that are misinforming the public by adhering to their own desires of what constitutes American Indian art. Publicly funded institutions of culture with large collections of American Indian art and material culture control representations of American Indian peoples. They have a responsibility to present accurate narratives. They continue to disappoint by not considering Indigenous perspectives.

Chapter One presents a clearer and more accurate biography of this important female artist than has previously been made available. The details of Kimball's childhood and early career trajectory are significant in the development of her artwork and successful career. She intentionally obscured her own past and harnessed place in her self-fashioning, a key factor to her success. In doing so, she exploited America's ideas about Native Americans as a platform on which she created her identity and practiced her form of modern art. Claiming her birth in Oklahoma, largely developing its own sense of nationhood and understood as Indian Country in the 1930s, allowed for her the mirage of an association with American Indian identity. By connecting to this state, Kimball affirmed her authenticity as a Native person for a non-Native audience. Kimball's move to New York in the mid-1930s further impacted her career and future as an artist. Her self-fashioned American Indian identity was embraced in this center of the

art world and her career flourished as a result. Her ability to successfully navigate New York's art galleries reflects her skills in gracefully socializing with arts patrons, directors, and curators. With ease she established a personal rapport with the non-Native individuals operating arts institutions. Kimball's White privilege allowed for her to self-name, self-identify, and shape her own identity in ways that appealed to individuals with power in the art world and that were beneficial to her career.

Revisiting her artistic career from the perspective of her non-Native background, as opposed to evaluation of her work as American Indian in origin, reveals that her works depict a distinctly American experience. My analysis of her ability to pass demonstrates ways in which the dominant power structures of the art world have marginalized and misrepresented Native American artists and their work. Sometimes deliberate, such misinterpretations persist in our contemporary colonial settler context.

Rigidly defined societal values of "Indianness," while harming other Native artists, actually aided Kimball**.** As a self-identified American Indian woman, she was not affected by or operating from within the same histories of painting as were Native artists. Chapter Two outlines the specific imagery and subject matter that Kimball utilized in her art work. A majority of Kimball's paintings emphasize American Indian figures, typically male, often alone, and with specific, recognizable objects of material culture that signify "Native" to a non-Native audience. Her 1978 *Self-Portrait* is an example of her adherence to mobilizing mimicry of the myth of the heroics of certain masculinist warrior figures. She couples this imagery with loosely abstract forms, non-representational colors, and non-naturalistic compositions derived from

European-based modernisms. In doing so, she simultaneously exploited non-Native expectations of belonging to and representing American Indian nations while her signature modernist idiom grounded her in the mid-twentieth century American art scene.

Of course, Kimball is not the only artist who has appropriated American Indian material culture, visual culture, and ideas. Many artists of the modern period in America utilized their own understandings of Indigenous cultures in the shaping of their own art practices. Chapter Three highlights key figures in American art who appropriated Native arts in some fashion with a focus on the intersections of race and gender identities. White women of the late nineteenth century took an interest in, and advantage of, American Indian cultures and employed advocacy as a way to both adhere to and reject established norms for women. The early years of the twentieth century released women from the rigid social bonds of gender norms established in the previous century, yet their drive to advocate for Native peoples continued. Efforts to "help" are bound by historic and systemic racism that insists on relieving the "plight" of American Indian people.[154] Kimball is an example of how white women continued these efforts that evolved after World Wars I and II.

While this dissertation focuses on the work of a non-Native woman passing as a Native artist and the acclaim accorded her at a particular historical moment, my work reinforces the continued need to interrogate and complicate previous readings of art of the modern era made by American Indian women. These women faced particular

[154] Vine Deloria Jr., *Custer Died For Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1988).

challenges and obstacles, and their art underwent transitions and changes that demand continued reflection. The conditions that shaped the recognition and marginalization of these women also deserve attention.

There are also distinct opportunities for further study of Yeffe Kimball. Between 1950 and 1960, Kimball organized and executed a large-scale photographic documentary project of American Indian peoples from across the nation. The collection of 5,000 images, housed at the Institute of American Indian Arts and largely unresearched, reveals that Kimball's project was deeply informed by her notions of assimilation and erasure.[155] She sought to capture a unique and exotic idea of Nativeness that formed the basis for mass reproduction of photographic images in the form of postcards, educational film strips, and illustrations for textbooks. Yet the lack of contextual information for many of the images leads an observer of the collection to question the authenticity of its representations of Native peoples. Future research may examine the educational institutions through which the images were intended to circulate to reveal ways that representations of Native American cultures were controlled by these systems. Future scholars will likely also explore issues of citizenship, nationality, and community in this transitional period of American history in an effort to demonstrate the utility of these selected images as iconic forms of Indianness in a rapidly modernizing nation.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Kimball was regarded as both an American Indian artist and an abstract expressionist painter. Like a number of abstract painters of the

[155] The archives at the Institute of American Indian Arts at Santa Fe, Yeffe Kimball collection, IAIA-MS009.

time, she was praised for her use of new synthetic media and was given particular credit in a 1965 publication for her use of this innovative material: “Miss Kimball makes most of her own plastic paints . . . [and] mixes raw acrylic resins, pure powder pigments, plasticizers, preservatives, and stabilizers in a wide variety of recipes. . . . In short, Miss Kimball has taken to the synthetics as to the manner born, and her paintings are a never ending stream of exploration of the new media.”[156] Beginning in the late 1960s, Yeffe Kimball’s abstract paintings of space were exhibited widely in the United States and Europe. One of her space paintings from 1962, *Solar Continuum*, was installed on the terrace of the Chrysler Museum in Provincetown, Massachusetts (Figure 12). It was later displayed outside the TWA Terminal at John F. Kennedy Airport in New York City. The ten-foot-high cylindrical work juxtaposes areas of flat surface with areas built up by acrylic resin paint. These sections appear crater-like in texture. The synthetic resin produces varied effects depending on the additives used with resin varnish, and the resulting composition is evidence of Kimball’s command of new mediums.

Further scholarly research on Kimball’s later abstract space paintings and her work with NASA will contribute to the reframing of mid-twentieth-century women artists during the Abstract Expressionist movement as well as their relationships to science. A focused study on works Kimball created for the NASA project could further explore the intersections between issues of gender, ethnic fraud, and identity in mid-to-late-twentieth-century America. The ways in which her presumed identity was understood to inflect her intuitive grasp of the “mysteries” of space also demand

[156] Russell O. Woody, Jr. *Painting with Synthetic Media* (New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1965), 124.

attention. Questions involved in such work might include: What visual prompts did Kimball reference in her paintings of space? How were these works and their reception informed by her self-fashioned Native identity?

This dissertation and future research on Kimball contribute to the field of American art history through interrogation of her formulation of an identity and her production of an attendant body of work that resonated in particular ways and in specific places at a definitive historical moment. The modern era in America marks a pivotal time when defining and developing a unique American style of art was of great importance to many artists and influential figures in the art world. The majority were educated, white men who committed themselves to, as art historian Wanda Corn writes, the "politics of Modernisms and to a renaissance in the national arts and letters."[157] They designed a cultural space in which to work, cast a critical eye on ordinary Americans, and sought to define cultural America.

While these men and other artists looked to Native America for inspiration, they ran into difficulty fitting Indigenous cultures and peoples into the world of technology, money, and industry. Several artists of this era traveled to the Southwest in search of "authenticity." The emergence of New Mexico as a site for the creation of modern art raised new questions about national identity and, for some artists, turned the quest for an American modernism from the metropolis toward regionalism and alternative community practices.[158] Continued study reveals that white women in particular found refuge in the Southwest. Mable Dodge Luhan came to Santa Fe in 1917 and proceeded

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[157] Wanda M Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 4.
[158] Wanda M. Corn, *The Great American Thing*, 253.

to carve out a cultural space in Taos specifically for modernists. The zealous Luhan offered a site of study for many women artists. Through Luhan, Georgia O'Keeffe, for example, found something Corn argues no one has examined closely enough: a social and intellectual space created by a woman and run according to her own desires. Kimball, too, visited Luhan in Taos and represents another way a particular woman of this time self-fashioned an art career according to her own ideals.

My examination of Yeffe Kimball's success as a self-identified American Indian artist interrogates and intervenes in existing power structures that serve and are served by settler colonial history and culture. Non-Native institutions must take responsibility for how they present American Indian arts and peoples. Exposing the corruption of major art institutions that prefer their own imagined versions of what constitutes, in this case, American Indian nations and their cultural expressions, is one step toward reimagining an American art history that accepts the parallel and distinct history of Native American art.

Illustrations

Figure 1: Yeffe Kimball, *Self-Portrait*, 1978. Oil on canvas. (Collection of Harvey Slatin). In Bill Anthes. *Native Moderns: American Indian Painting, 1940-1960*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006. Plate number 27.

Figure 2: Yeffe Kimball, *Red Dwarf,* 1960. Rhoplex, sand on canvas, 60” x 48.” (Gift of Lillian Rubenstein, 1985, Provincetown Art Association and Museum, Provincetown, MA).

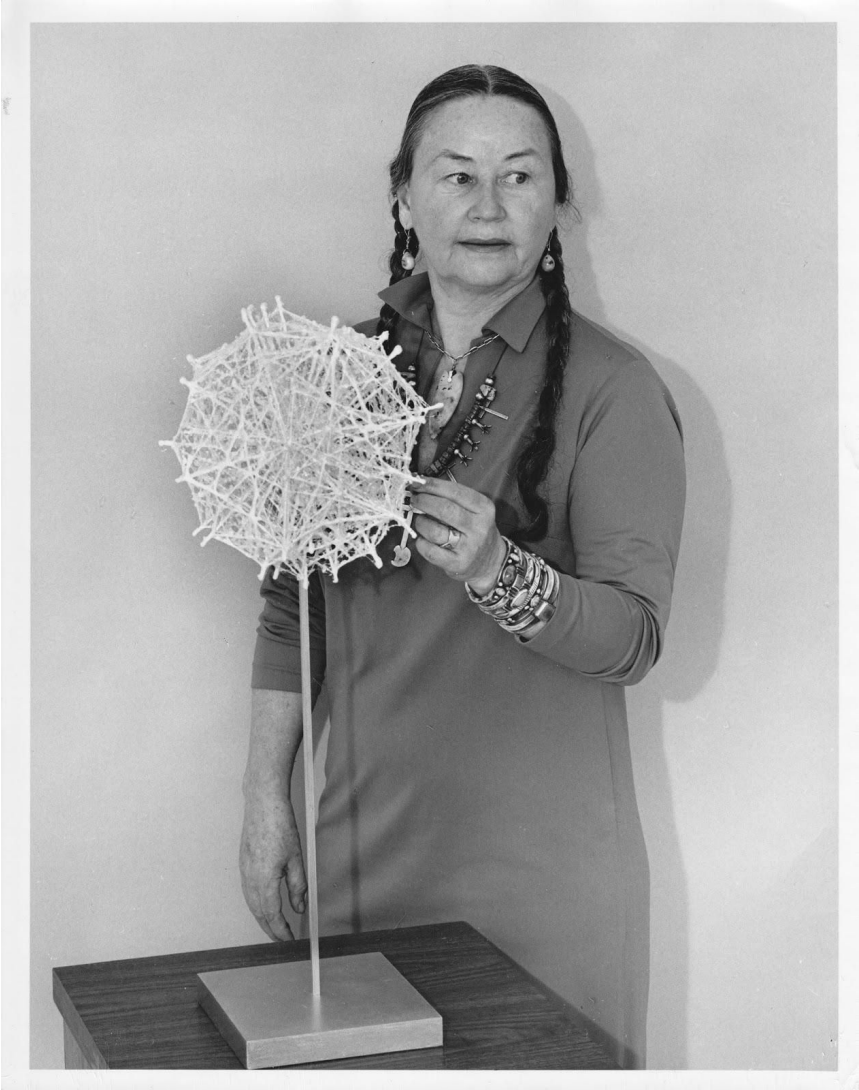

Figure 3: Unknown, *Yeffe Kimball*, c. 1955. Photograph. (Collection of Tom Slatin).

Figure 4: Yeffe Kimball, *Old Medicine Man*, ca. 1959. Oil on board. (Museum purchase, Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa, Oklahoma. 1959.5). In Bill Anthes. *Native Moderns: American Indian Painting*, 1940-1960. Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2006. Plate 23.

Figure 5: Jimalee Burton, *Buffalo Dance*, c. 1947. Oil on canvas. (Museum Purchase, Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1947.24). In Patricia Janis Broder. *Earth Songs, Moon Dreams: Paintings by American Indian Women*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999. Page 161.

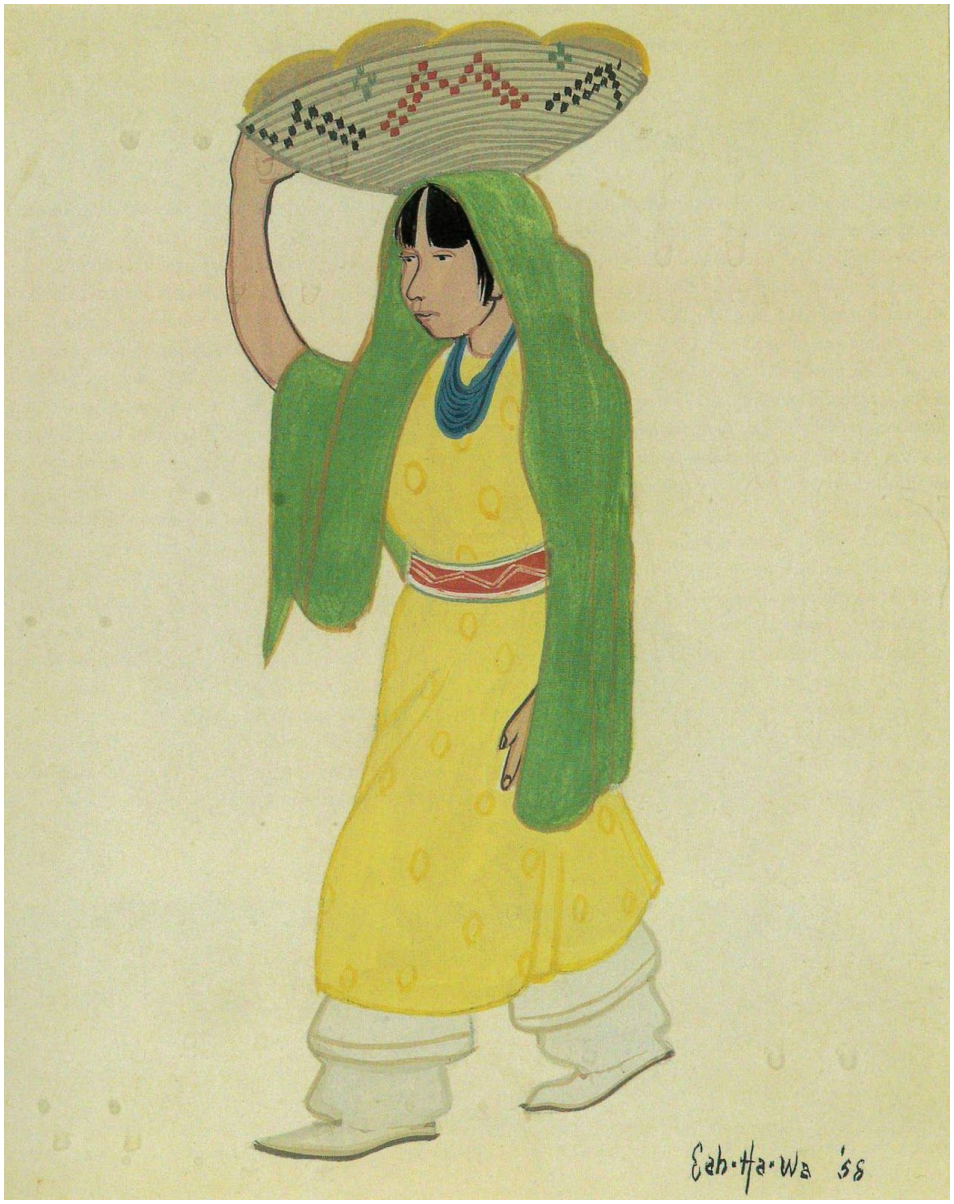

Figure 6: Eva Mirabel, *Taos Woman Carrying Bread*, 1958. Tempera on paper. (Private Collection). In Patricia Janis Broder. *Earth Songs, Moon Dreams: Paintings by American Indian Women*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999. Page 23.

Figure 7: Yeffe Kimball, *Zuni Maiden*, 1939. Oil on board. (Gift of Yeffe Kimball, Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa, Oklahoma. 1968.2.1). In Bill Anthes. *Native Moderns: American Indian Painting, 1940-1960*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006. Plate number 21.

Figure 8: Agnes Gough, *Eskimo Ceremonial Dances*, c. 1952. Watercolor on paper. (Museum Purchase, Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1952.15). IIn Janis Broder. *Earth Songs, Moon Dreams: Paintings by American Indian Women*. London: Macmillan, 2013. Page 144.

Figure 9: Yeffe Kimball, *Unconquered*, 1947. Oil on canvas. (Gift of Gloria Kronenberg, Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1999.6). In Philbrook Art Center. *Kimball*. Tulsa, Oklahoma: Philbrook Art Center, 1966. n.p.

Figure 10: Awa Tsireh Alfonso Roybal, *The Green Corn Ceremony at Santo Domingo*, Watercolor and gouache on board. (Gift of Edgar L. Hewett, Courtesy John and Linda Comstock and the Abigail Van Vleck Charitable Trust, Museum of Indian Arts and Culture). In Lois Palken Rudnick and MaLin Wilson-Powell eds. *Mabel Dodge Luhan & Company: American Moderns and the West*. Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, Harwood Museum of Art, University of New Mexico, 2016. Page 100.

Figure 11: Dorothy Eugene Brett, *Turtle Dance*, 1947, Oil on canvas. (Millicent Rogers Museum, Taos, NM). In Lois Palken Rudnick and MaLin Wilson-Powell eds. *Mabel Dodge Luhan & Company: American Moderns and the West*. Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, Harwood Museum of Art, University of New Mexico, 2016. Page 100.

Figure 12: Yeffe Kimball, *Solar Continuum*, installed at the Chrysler Museum of Art, Provincetown, Massachusetts, 1962. Acrylic resin. (Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York). In Russell Woody Jr. *Painting with Synthetic Media*. New York: Reinhold, 1969. Page 127.

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