

VISUAL VIOLENCE IN THE LAND OF ENCHANTMENT

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

Patricia Marroquin Norby

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Brenda Child Adviser, Jennifer Marshall Co-adviser

June, 2013

© Patricia Marroquin Norby 2013

Acknowledgements

Simultaneously working full-time while raising a family and completing a doctoral program has been one of the most rewarding and challenging experiences of my life. Such an accomplishment would not have been possible without the generous support of numerous individuals. The following is a list of truly amazing people including colleagues, friends, and family who believed in this project and in me even when I suffered my own doubts.

To my committee members Brenda Child, Jennifer Marshall, Patricia Albers, and Jane Blocker I thank you for your guidance and encouragement throughout the completion of this project. I am honored to have you as my professional mentors.

To good friends and graduate colleagues at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities including Karissa White, Erik Redix, Scott Shoemaker, Kate Beane, and Rudy Aguilar, I cherish your friendship and the camaraderie we shared. Special thanks goes to Karissa White, Issac Lopit, and Kate Beane for offering a place to stay and providing a sense of warmth and family on so many cold Minnesota winter nights. You helped make the long-distance commute and time away from my own family much more bearable.

My family and our home are so precious to me. I thank my husband Nathan Norby and our children Alejandro Marroquin, Derek Norby, and Madeline Marroquin-Norby for all your love. Your daily presence in my life provided me with a powerful incentive to keep going forward with this work. I am honored to raise three smart incredible children that so strongly value reading, education, and family life. I hope you are proud of mom.

Other family and friends who offered their love, support, and encouragement include my mother Consuelo Godinez Wolf, Rick and Mary Lou Norby, Gordon and Betty Norby, Carol and Harvey Gunderson, Martha Woodworth, Rebecca Crowell, Chris Yocca, Paula Gorski, Hilary Wehrle, and Mary Beth Zundo.

Thank you to the University of Minnesota Twin Cities Department of American Studies, Department of American Indian Studies, and Community of Scholars Program for the consistent academic and financial support. Also thank you to the University of Minnesota Twin Cities American Indian Studies Writing Workshop members including Jeani O'Brien and David Chang for valuable insight during my early writing stages.

Other scholarly programs and institutions that further provided generous support and helpful feedback during the initial shaping of this project include the Newberry Consortium in American Indian Studies at The Newberry library in Chicago, Illinois, and the Otsego Institute for Native American Art History at the Fenimore Art Museum in Cooperstown, New York. Special thanks goes to the Northern New Mexico College in Española, New Mexico for your generous support and for providing me with the opportunity to share my work with the local community.

I came to this project as a studio artist not as an academic researcher or writer, so I am eternally grateful to the very fine research institutions and wonderfully knowledgeable people who guided me through years of archival investigation.

Thank you to Wanda Corn for hours of long-distance conversation on Georgia O'Keeffe during the very early phases of this work. Wanda you are truly a delightful person.

In the Midwest, thank you to Scott Manning Stevens Director of the D'Arcy McNickle Center for American Indian and Indigenous Studies for your enthusiasm for my work. Also thanks to Jade Cabagnet for your thoughtful attention during my visits to Chicago and Boston. Thank you to the Newberry Reading Room team who pulled hundreds of manuscripts for me. A sincere thanks goes to Robin Miller at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire for your shared excitement for combing through government and legal documents on our summer breaks.

In New Mexico a big thank you to dear friends and colleagues Patricia Trujillo, Matthew Martinez, and also Dr. Rusty Barcelo at the Northern New Mexico College. Patricia and Matthew, you provided regenerative energy during a long, sometimes lonely writing process. Thank you to Estevan and Elena Arrellano and the members of the New Mexico Acequia Association for teaching this Midwestern girl about the preciousness and power of water, land, and *querencia*. Thank you to Malcolm Ebright and the Center for Land Grant Studies for your guidance on New Mexico's land grant history. At the University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research I want to offer a special thank you to Ann Massman, Samuel Cisneros, and Chris Geherin. I also appreciated the support of the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum Research Center staff including Eumie Imm-Stroukoff, Elizabeth Ehrnst, and Fran Martone. Thank you to the wonderful people at the Institute for Pueblo Indian Studies at the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico including the late Dr. Joe Sando and Amy Johnson. At the School for Advanced Research in Santa Fe I would like to thank Cynthia Chavez Lamar and Laura Elliff for allowing me the time to examine original Pueblo watercolor paintings. At the New

Mexico History Museum I want to thank Lou Jauregui for providing for me those initial Tonita Peña letters. What a powerful moment to hold Tonita Peña's original letters in my hands. A special thank you to Margarete Bagshaw for taking the time away from your own art to talk about your mother and your grandmother's paintings.

This project would not have been possible without the voices of northern New Mexico's Abiequeño, Hispano, and Pueblo communities. I am so grateful to the Pueblo de Abiquiu Library and Cultural Center board and staff for helping me to make local connections and for providing an incredibly supportive research space and sense of community. A warm and very special thank you to Isabel and Virgil Trujillo and family, Dexter Trujillo, Alice and Seledon Garcia, Tara Reyes, and Sabra Moore. Isabel, Alice, Tara, and Sabra, I am proud to call you my friends. I also want to thank Napoleon Garcia and family for your time and generosity during the early stages of this project. Tio Manzanares, I also thank you for sharing your stories. At San Ildefonso Pueblo a heartfelt thank you to Kathy Sanchez. Kathy you are an amazing woman and your tireless advocacy for American Indian women is commendable. Also at Cochiti Pueblo thank you to Nellie Suina. Kathy and Nellie, your kind hospitality and friendly conversation meant so much on what was a long journey.

DEDICATION

To my mother Consuelo Godinez Wolf who shared with me our family stories and who never let me forget my *Purépecha* roots. Through your own hard work and diligence you demonstrated to me the power of education.

To my husband Nathan Norby and our children Alejandro, Madeline, and Derek, who stuck by me through years of constant reading, writing, and family “vacations” that were really poorly disguised research trips. Thank you for all you put up with and for your love, affection, and laughter.

This dissertation is dedicated to the *Genízaro* people of Abiquiu, New Mexico and to the Pueblo and Hispano communities of northern New Mexico.

ABSTRACT

During the twentieth century three major industries: fine art production, industrial agriculture, and nuclear power production were all introduced to the Rio Grande Valley region of northern New Mexico. The advancement of Pueblo Indian participation with these enterprises and with the growing capitalist economy of this area included private and federally supported art-making, agricultural, and military programs that were initiated and managed by an encroaching Euro-American population that included Pueblo art patrons, political activists, and federal agents. The first two programs, art-making and industrial-level agriculture, which began in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, shared a common goal of drawing Pueblo Indians out of their agriculture-based economies and into capitalist and tourist markets. The third enterprise, nuclear power production, which began in the mid twentieth century, required the participation of this area's indigenous populations via the appropriation of Native lands including the ancestral homelands of Pueblo Indian and Hispano peoples. Although these three enterprises have historically been treated as disparate topics, interconnections between these three industries are visually and materially present in American Indian and American art of this region and time period.

Drawing upon Indigenous concepts of memory and place, this dissertation draws out the interconnections between art, land, and law, and the political and intercultural tensions that are visually and materially present in the artwork of Tonita Peña, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Helen Hardin, three artists who painted throughout the twentieth century (1900-1986) in northern New Mexico. All three artists are women, and all three women

visually and verbally expressed powerful personal connections to the land and landscape of the northern Rio Grande region.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST of FIGURES	ix
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1: The Artist and the Secretary: Historical and Material Contradictions in Pueblo Indian Watercolor Paintings	12
CHAPTER 2: The Abiqueños and the Artist: Rethinking O’Keeffe	85
CHAPTER 3: Atomic Indians: Art, Destruction, and Death	132
CONCLUSION:	189
BIBLIOGRAPHY:	195

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Tonita Peña, <i>Making Pottery</i> ,	82
2. Tonita Pena, Cochiti Pueblo,	82
3. Tonita Pena, <i>Basket Dance</i> ,	83
4. Awah Tsireh, <i>San Ildefonso Girls Firing Pottery</i>	83
5. Awa Tsireh, <i>Burning Pots</i>	84
6. Awa Tsireh, <i>Burning Pots</i>	84
7. “Turns Dead Bones to Live Art” <i>Life Magazine</i>	128
8. Georgia O’Keeffe, <i>Horse’s Skull With Pink Rose</i>	128
9. John Loengard, <i>Life Magazine</i>	129
10. Georgia O’Keeffe, <i>Taos Pueblo, New Mexico</i>	129
11. Sumner Matteson, <i>Typical Town in New Mexico</i>	130
12. Georgia O’Keeffe, <i>Horse’s or Mule’s Skull</i>	130
13. Malcolm Varon, <i>Horse’s Skull</i>	130
14. <i>Tsiping, Cerro Pedernal</i> , or Mt. Pedernal	131
15. Maria Martinez and Enrico Fermi	186
16. Helen Hardin, <i>Mimbres Mama</i>	186
17. Bill Boyson, “Helen Hardin at El Cerro Graphics”	187
18. Pablita Velarde Grinding Earth Pigments 1957	187
19. Pablita Velarde Grinding Earth Pigments 1965	187
20. James Earl Fraser, <i>End of the Trail</i>	188
21. Will Wilson, <i>Auto Immune Response Series</i>	188

INTRODUCTION

“Visual Violence in the Land of Enchantment” examines intercultural and political tensions that are visually and materially present in the paintings of Tonita Peña, Georgia O’Keeffe, and Helen Hardin, three artists who painted throughout the twentieth century (1900-1986) in northern New Mexico. All three artists are women, and all three women visually and verbally expressed powerful personal connections to the land and landscape of the northern Rio Grande region. The Rio Grande Valley and the Piedre Lumbre Basin, the contiguous places where these artists painted, are geographically significant locations that are harshly beautiful and historically rich with intercultural conflicts and exchanges between American Indian, Hispano, and Euro-American populations. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, this area was a bustling flurry of artistic, cultural, and scholarly activity that emerged alongside a growing tourist market and capitalist economy.

Art historical accounts of American Indian and non-Indian art of this region and time are typically presented according to formalist interpretations that emphasize twentieth-century Euro-American viewpoints and aesthetic tastes that consistently dismiss specific contextual and material information embodied within artworks. Following an interdisciplinary approach, this study instead utilizes image, material, and historical data analysis, and pinpoints direct correlations between twentieth-century fine art production and struggles over natural resources: from renegotiated water rights, to the slaughter of Indian-owned livestock, to the poisoning of American Indian lands and bodies via chemical combinations of toxic waste and art material hazards.

In this dissertation I will demonstrate how twentieth-century federal legislation, including legally prescribed aesthetic standards of Pueblo Indian art-making, standards which were conceived and perpetuated by non-Indian art patrons and American Indian art enthusiasts, functioned to naturalize general attitudes of Eurocentric entitlement to lands and natural resources in the northern New Mexican region. This entitlement gave way to acts of encroachment, land appropriation, and industrial violence specifically within the Pueblo Indian and Hispano homelands in the Rio Grande Valley. This dissertation shows how the historical emphasis on form and beauty (aesthetics) in art and art-making practices of this region and time, functioned as *racial and political analgesics* that beautifully, but also systematically obscured northern New Mexican Pueblo Indian and Hispano perspectives and voices. This is a point made evident through the re-contextualization of American Indian art and art-making practices according to *Indigenous* memory, experiences, and concepts of beauty and place.

Aesthetics as Violence?

In 2006, in an *American Indians and Photography* course at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, Dr. Patricia Albers introduced Susan Sontag's concept of "visual violence." Sontag's 1973 work *On Photography* posited her theory of the photographic image, the image-making process, and also the repeated dissemination of visual works as a method of violence.¹ Along with Dr. Albers, we students applied Sontag's visual violence concept to image-documented experiences (photographs) of American Indian peoples throughout North America during the late-nineteenth-through-twentieth-century periods of Westward expansion: a time when American Indian peoples across the

¹ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973).

developing nation tolerated, resisted, and also willingly engaged in these image-making processes.

Within the photographic images of this time, Native peoples posed, performed, turned away, stared down, and even took hold of the cameras that were aimed at their bodies and visually captured their presence. The visual spaces that were circumscribed by the camera apertures and the spatially limited image surfaces simultaneously became spaces for both complicity as well as resistance. Dr. Albers' lectures and Sontag's essay helped bring to focus how images possess elements of violence even when no overt violence is visually depicted. Our image investigations revealed violence to be something more than the overt, shocking, and short-lived moments that jar our senses, bodies, and equilibrium. These are the violent moments that we as viewing audiences have become comfortable with due in part to the fact that we can so easily walk away from them. Albers' course and Sontag's essay urged me to explore my own notions about how visual violence can be subtle, beautiful, and something so pervasive and aesthetically controlled that we don't even see it when it is right before our eyes.

My professional training in fine art and American Indian studies propelled me to expand Sontag's theory beyond the medium of photography. My studio background in two-dimensional art practices including painting, printmaking, and photography piqued my curiosity about other examples of two-dimensional works that perpetuated this mode of violence by way of images, art materials, and creative processes. Anyone who is familiar with studio artists understands their obsession with art materials and production techniques. Artists are not only interested in the final art piece they also examine (and critique); they are deeply invested in the materials and hands-on methodologies behind

the final presentation. In my research, I wanted to expand on the image-making process and investigate how art materials, techniques, and established aesthetic standards, all subjects heavily emphasized in professional art training, might have also functioned as methods of visual and aesthetic violence.

My research process for this dissertation consistently drew from my professional background in Fine Art, Art History, American Indian Studies, and American Studies, a powerful multi-pronged interdisciplinary approach that revealed important interconnections between art, land, and law. In order to limit the scope of my research, I concentrated regionally and temporally on American Indian and American art made by women in northern New Mexico during the twentieth century. I narrowed my study even further by investigating only two-dimensional works of this region and time.

The twentieth century in northern New Mexico's Rio Grande Valley is a period that is historically, culturally, and politically rich. It is a time when Rio Grande Pueblo Indian and other Native communities began steadily producing artwork for tourist and art markets under the influences of federal legislation and non-Indian encroachment onto Pueblo Indian and Hispano homelands. These are influences that pressed these communities out of their subsistence agricultural economies and into capitalist markets.

Art historical scholarship of this period, characterized by a method popularly referred to as the Patronage Model, typically centers on the influence of Euro-American aesthetic standards on American Indian art production. It also generally celebrates the entry of American Indian artists into modern American capitalist markets. These studies, which were initiated during the twentieth century by Pueblo art patrons, some of who were self-styled American Indian art experts and political activists such as Edgar Lee

Hewett, Mabel Dodge Luhan, Amelia Elizabeth White, and John Sloan, emphasized the aesthetic refinement and economic benefits of American Indian art produced at this time. The patrons prioritized Euro-American valuations and viewpoints of this art. Again, they stressed the aesthetic and economic value of this art according to Euro-American standards of this period. These standards included modifications of material and visual choices as well as art-making practices that were imposed on Indian artists via hands-on demonstrations, competitions, and promotion of select artworks that met the specific requirements. The art patrons also consistently overlooked *their own* participation in larger colonization projects of this period, as well as the contemporary Pueblo artists' perspectives about their own artwork.

In 1971 art historian JJ Brody revealed the uneven racial and economic relationship between the Pueblo patrons and the Pueblo Indian artists. Brody's critique exposed the benefactor-beneficiary relationship between the Euro-American patrons and Pueblo Indian painters as not entirely benign. In fact, Brody identified what he described as the "paternalistic racism" of this professional relationship. He described how, through their romantic depictions of the Pueblo Indian artists as primitive and tied to an authentic "aboriginal" past, the patrons maintained control over this art's production and Pueblo peoples' engagement with the modern American capitalist economy.² In this way, Pueblo perspectives about this art and the larger historical events of this time period remained obscure to non-Indian art audiences.

Responding to Brody's assessment, in his 2008 critique of the Patronage Model, art historian Aaron Frye demonstrated how culturally particular information directly related to the imagery and symbolism in watercolor paintings created by the San Ildefonso artist

² JJ Brody, *Indian Painters & White Patrons* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971).

Awa Tsireh who painted throughout the twentieth century. Frye's culturally specific study, which drew upon the scholarship of Tewa anthropologist Alfonso Ortiz, both added to and challenged the interpretations of the Pueblo art patrons. Rather than focusing on a primitive past, his work demonstrated the direct, and visually obvious, connections between Pueblo watercolor painting and contemporary Pueblo experiences. These experiences included a twentieth-century flu epidemic, internal communal conflicts, shifting moiety systems, and Pueblo ceremonies: ceremonies that center on the seasons and Pueblo relationships with place and land. Frye's work highlighted culturally particular information that is relevant to *Pueblo histories*: information that *had always* been present in this art.³

A look at the larger historical context of Euro-American colonization of this region and time relevant to this art, confirms that the Patronage Model was consistently characterized by formal (aesthetic) and economically-based interpretations, that both *gave meaning to* and also *dismissed* specific historical, cultural, and racial information that was materially and visually embodied within fine art works of this period. Recognizing the omission of this critical information, urges the following questions: How do conventionalized visual aesthetics work to suppress the complexities of societies and of ourselves? How do prescribed concepts of beauty wipe out, erase, or render void that which steps out of the "norm," is too complex, or too rich to understand easily and conveniently? How is something beautiful also something dangerous?

³ Aaron Frye, "Local Knowledge & Art Historical Methodology: A New Perspective on Awa Tsireh & the San Ildefonso Easel Painting Movement," *Hemisphere* (University of New Mexico Press, 2008); Alfonso Ortiz, *The Tewa World: Space, Time, Being, and Becoming in a Pueblo Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

This dissertation is divided into three sections that are an attempt to demonstrate the interconnections between twentieth-century art production, land, and law. Each section focuses on an individual artist and elements of her personal and professional story, which have been recorded in a range of artistic, scholarly, and archival documents including: personal correspondence, art historical studies, government documents, periodicals, films, and their own visual artworks. While the lifetimes of these three artists did temporally overlap, interestingly, there is no evidence that demonstrates much interaction between them despite their shared professions and the geographic region that they all loved and visually referenced in their paintings.

Chapter One: The Artist and the Secretary: Historical and Material Contradictions in Pueblo Indian Watercolor Paintings

This chapter centers on Pueblo watercolor painter Tonita Peña (San Ildefonso/Cochiti Pueblo), one of the most well known American Indian painters of the early twentieth century. Peña's watercolor paintings intersect fine art, tourism, and natural resource politics. The Euro-American introduction of watercolor painting, an aqua-dependent art medium, to Pueblo Indian communities of arid New Mexico a place where water is sacred and water politics prevalent, demonstrates a number of conflicting inter-cultural values. The commoditization of this precious natural resource for non-Indian tourism and political agendas becomes strikingly obvious through an examination of personal correspondence, art historical texts, federal legislation, and agricultural programs of this region and period. Peña's watercolor paintings materially manifest twentieth-century modes of colonization, including land and water appropriation, while

they simultaneously function as expressions of Pueblo visual and cultural resistance. This section emphasizes Peña's professional art experience through her correspondence with the anthropologist Lansing Bloom: a man she barely knew, but who had a great deal of influence on her professional career. In both her paintings and letters Peña expressed active resistance to Euro-American colonization projects and communicated her commitment to the Pueblo de Cochiti community, her family, and her art.

Chapter Two: The Abiqueños and the Artist: Rethinking O'Keeffe

Chapter Two critically examines American artist Georgia O'Keeffe's southwest landscape paintings. When evaluated within the context of twentieth-century colonization and westward expansion, O'Keeffe's visual appropriation of the northern New Mexican landscape through her paintings reads as visual violence and historical erasure.

O'Keeffe's long-term occupation at El Pueblo de Abiquiu, or Abiquiu, New Mexico, exposes a history of overt cultural dismissal: historical accounts about this artist and her work demonstrate willful disregard of Abiquiu's local knowledge, political structures, and the Genizaro and Hispano people and their perspectives. The historical omission of local people and their perspectives for the advancement of this modern American art narrative underscores the complex but uneven relationship between this artist and her Abiqueño neighbors, upon whom she greatly depended. O'Keeffe's reconstruction of Abiquiu's "La Tapia," the historical hacienda that was once used as an Indian slave trade center and prison is also examined. O'Keeffe's questionable purchase of this property through the Catholic church, rather than in negotiation with the local people, dismissed the historical land grants of Abiquiu and the political and cultural relationships by which

the Abiqueño people lived. Focusing on a major American artist such as O'Keeffe, and the Indian and non-Indian responses to both the artist and her work, demonstrates how art and generalized attitudes of Euro-American entitlement from this period functioned within larger colonization projects. This chapter highlights American Indian and Hispano resistance to these colonization processes.

Chapter Three: Atomic Indians: Art, Destruction, and Death

Chapter three examines the historical connections between Pueblo Indian artists and the Cold War. This chapter broadens the scholarship on the life and art of Helen Hardin (Santa Clara Pueblo), the internationally honored painter and printmaker who died at age forty-one of breast, lung, and bone cancer. Santa Clara Pueblo, Hardin's home community, is located less than twenty miles downstream from Los Alamos National Laboratories the creation site of the Manhattan Project. Born in 1943, Hardin belongs to a generation of Pueblo Indian and New Mexican peoples who were unknowingly and repeatedly exposed to radiation pollution due to toxic waste dumping at Los Alamos. Relative to the history of this environmental racism, this chapter examines Hardin's art production techniques, which further exposed her body to hazardous material and chemical toxins. In the midst of Hardin's career federal regulations regarding art material hazards and safe art-making practices were passed. This chapter explores the many physical dangers that artists had long faced, which propelled these legal regulations. Hardin's career embodied the gendered and racialized hierarchies that American Indian women artists contended with during the 1960's. This was a historical moment when American Indian male art "stars" were celebrated throughout the commercial art world

while American Indian women artists, some of who were publicly promoted as “fashion darlings,” professionally struggled while working in environments that were not conducive to their health and safety. Despite the numerous challenges she faced, Hardin was an extremely technically talented artist whose paintings were exhibited internationally. Hardin’s story highlights the interconnections between art-making and nuclear energy development two industries that required the engagement of American Indian communities during the twentieth century.

This dissertation follows an interdisciplinary approach that steps outside the limited art historical scholarly conventions from this region and time. The art historical methods of this period relied upon Euro-American aesthetic interpretations and tastes, and what Brody refers to as “historical distortions,” which were used to promote Pueblo Indian art to a Euro-controlled art market.⁴ This dissertation challenges these “historical distortions.” Critical to this research are the voices and perspectives of Pueblo Indian and Hispano people who actively engaged with art-making during twentieth century both as a method of economic and cultural survivance and as an expression of political resistance. American Indian and Hispano perspectives are present in the artwork they produced and in their personal correspondence, interviews, and in the political campaigns they organized that challenged colonization and land appropriation processes of this period. These methods of expression consistently affirmed and reaffirmed Indigenous concepts of memory and place and their historical, cultural, and spiritual connections to the land and region of northern New Mexico.

⁴ Brody, *Indian Painters & White Patrons*, 70-71.

CHAPTER ONE

The Artist and the Secretary: Historical and Material Contradictions in Pueblo Indian Watercolor Paintings

In northern New Mexico during spring 1921, in letters to her benefactor, the anthropologist Lansing Bloom, Pueblo watercolor painter Tonita Peña wrote:

The Cochiti people [are] going to start works at the ditch. I have to pay a man to work at the ditch for me because I have to plant wheat and corn and make a garden...I have a field too [sic] plant and I have to look for a man to plant my land...I want to see if you will help me with some money so I could pay the man when they work....⁵

Tonita Peña's words communicate the artist's personal and professional concerns during a time of intense Euro-American colonization into the Rio Grande Valley of northern New Mexico. Upon first glance, Peña's requests to Bloom might appear to be strictly financial. However, when her concerns are contextualized according to Pueblo seasonal and agricultural cycles it becomes clear that Peña's list of responsibilities is inextricably tied to the *Pueblo de Cochiti's* agricultural calendar. This she communicates through her specific references to seasonal planting, gardening, corn, and wheat. Springtime in northern New Mexico's agricultural communities focuses on field preparation, irrigation ditch repair, ditch cleaning, and planting. Peña's reference to the ditch cleaning schedule at Cochiti, or "works at the ditch," affirms her attentiveness to, and observation of, her community's agricultural calendar. When understood in this context, the request of

⁵ Tonita Peña to Lansing Bloom, February 20, 1921 and March 19, 1921 (Edgar L. Hewett papers, Palace of the Governors, New Mexico History Museum, Fray Angelico Chavez History Library).

money to “pay a man to work at the ditch for me” can be read as a practical method for balancing her familial and communal obligations with her desire to paint: a creative call that, for Peña, lasted over forty years, and, at the time of her correspondence with Bloom, prompted hiring-out her agricultural responsibilities.⁶

Tonita Peña’s personal life and artistic career provide an opportunity for comprehending, on a personal level, strategies used by Pueblo artists for managing the onslaught of environmental, artistic, and economic demands imposed on New Mexico’s nineteen Pueblo communities during the early twentieth century. Documented in her brief-but-telling correspondence with Bloom, Peña’s account sheds light on the inordinate requirements behind the production of Pueblo watercolor paintings. Both within and outside their communities, Pueblo watercolor painters faced numerous challenges as they produced this art for non-Indian audiences. In their art, some painters vigilantly upheld Pueblo cultural boundaries. These artists refused to create images that visually revealed culturally or religiously sensitive information to outsiders. In order earn a living, other Pueblo painters, pushed these internal limitations to satisfy non-Indian demands for this restricted information. Some of these artists were permanently ostracized from their homes.⁷ Those who were successful at maintaining long-term artistic careers very carefully negotiated a number of conflicting forces that influenced their work. Tonita Peña’s long-term participation in this industry demonstrates this feat.

⁶ Marilee Jantzer-White, “Tonita Pena, (Quah Ah) Pueblo Painter: Asserting Identity Through Continuity and Change,” *American Indian Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 3, University of Nebraska Press.

⁷ Bill Anthes, “The Culture Brokers: The Pueblo Paintings of Jose Lente and Jimmy Byrnes” in Bill Anthes, *Native Moderns: American Indian Painting, 1940-1960* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 30-88; Katherin L. Chase, *Indian Painters of the Southwest: The Deep Remembering* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2002), 22-50.

Peña utilized art-making as a means for financially providing for her family. Her paintings satisfied non-Indian expectations for, and aesthetic restrictions of, her art.⁸ She was successful at mastering a non-local art medium and creating images that visually and materially appealed to a non-Indian audience. However, in letters, her words underscore her personal and artistic ambition toward *her own* creative expression as well as her responsibilities as a Cochiti Pueblo community member. In her writing to Bloom the artist articulates an acute self-awareness and understanding of her own engagement with the multiple political, cultural, and economic forces that were working to shape her art. Through words it is clear that Peña's experiences as a Pueblo Indian woman and an artist define her art and her art-making beyond twentieth-century American modern art histories, which, consistently centralize Euro-American viewpoints and aesthetic qualifications for Pueblo Indian artists and their art.⁹ However, Peña's voice grounds her art in her personal experience: an experience that was clearly shaped by the Tewa and Keresan communities and her personal ties to the Pueblo Indian lands and landscape where she spent her entire life.

In northern New Mexico, the prolific production and promotion of Pueblo watercolor paintings that began around 1890 and lasted until World War II was one of several "art panaceas" initiated by Anglo intellectuals such as Edgar Lee Hewett, Mabel Dodge Luhan, Amelia Elizabeth White, and John Sloan, all patrons of American Indian art who inaugurated a series of art and craft promotional programs that responded to the

⁸ Jennifer McLerran, *A New Deal For Native Art: Indian Arts and Federal Policy, 1933-1943* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009).

⁹ JJ Brody, *Indian Painters & White Patrons* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971); David W. Penney and Lisa Roberts, "America's Pueblo Artists: Encounters on the Borderlands" in W. Jackson Rushing III, ed. *Native American Art in the Twentieth Century: Makers, Meanings, Histories* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999) 21-38.

“vanishing Indian” mindset of the time period. Nineteenth and early twentieth-century national economic forces including industrialization, urbanization, and increased tourism from Eastern cities to less populated regions in the West, all influenced this fatalistic thinking.¹⁰ The work of these scholars, patrons, and political activists, several of whom were self-created American Indian art experts, has for nearly a century set the tone for scholarly interpretations of Pueblo Indian art. These interpretations emphasize the aesthetic quality and economic benefits of this art and have omitted larger historical issues such as Euro-American population encroachment and natural resource conflicts, colonial conflicts of this period that are directly relevant to this art’s production.

Art Historians Leah Dilworth and Elizabeth Hutchinson both note that in the Southwest an increased interest in American Indian material culture directly correlated with the establishment of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway system during the late nineteenth century.¹¹ In New Mexico non-Indian anxieties about disappearing Indian populations were perpetuated and even self-fulfilled by the rapid Euro-American encroachment upon irrigable lands and water in the Rio Grande Valley: a mass appropriation of natural resources that, for centuries, had supported the Pueblos’ self-sustaining, subsistence economy.¹² By the early 1920s, the increased dispossession of Pueblo homelands along the Rio Grande Valley erupted into environmental and natural

¹⁰ Historians also point to Frederick Jackson Turner’s “Frontier Thesis” of 1893 and his theory of the “closing” of the American frontier and end to westward expansion as one starting point for this fatalistic anxiety.

¹¹ Leah Dilworth, *Imagining Indians in the Southwest: Persistent Visions of a Primitive Past*, (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 129; Elizabeth Hutchinson, *The Indian Craze: Primitivism, Modernism, and Transculturation in American Art 1890-1915* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), 223-229.

¹² Native American art historians consistently point to the 1890’s as the emergent point for Pueblo watercolor paintings and to the World War II years as a moment of “hiatus” in this works rapid production.

resource conflicts between Indian and non-Indian communities that required government intervention. These conflicts coincided with U.S. federal Indian policies that, at this time, imposed newly developed agricultural and art programs upon northern New Mexico's Indian communities. These projects focused on American Indian communities' economic development and the federal laws that were born out of these initiatives were rooted in *Euro-American* concepts of race, relationships with the environment, and aesthetic production. These institutionalized programs and laws would permanently impact the Pueblo Indian economy, natural resources, and art.

As Pueblo communities throughout northern New Mexico became increasingly entangled with innumerable legal struggles to protect their irrigable lands and water, the advent of the Pueblo watercolor paintings occurred.¹³ Created from European-made watercolor paints and fine art papers, these water-based images portrayed heavily edited and visually romanticized scenes of Pueblo life. Deceptively simple, the paintings portrayed scenes of “daily Pueblo life,” and typically included brightly colored images of Pueblo Indian women and men participating in seasonal dance ceremonies, making pottery, or baking bread. In these images, the carefully detailed “genre scenes” of isolated Pueblo figures engaged in productive activities were set against stark white backgrounds (Figure 1). The overall visual effect of the paintings is one of striking contrast and pictorial simplicity.¹⁴ However, despite their clean graphic elegance, the historical

¹³ A consensus among Native Art historians identifies the archeologist Jesse Walter Fewkes as the first Euro-American to “commission” works of this type. According to numerous art historical accounts, during the 1890s Fewkes worked with members of the Hopi community in Arizona, where he supplied them with watercolor paint and paper. See: Brody, *Indian Painters & White Patrons*, 76-81; Berlo & Phillips, *Native North American Art*, 217.

¹⁴ The term “genre scenes,” which references the “everyday life” of Pueblo Peoples portrayed in these paintings is regularly used to describe these images. See Janet C. Berlo & Ruth B. Phillips, *Native North American Art* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 217; Aaron Frye, “Local Knowledge &

context relevant to these images is highly complex and fraught with intercultural and racial collisions.

By the mid 1920s these *landscape-less* images were rapidly being produced specifically for non-Indian audiences. In northern New Mexico, non-Indian art patrons and scholars heavily emphasized the aesthetic and economic value of this work according to their own Euro-American standards. Although well intentioned, the creative endeavors of the art patrons actually worked in tandem with larger colonization projects. In this way the heavily mediated production and scholarship behind this art functioned as aesthetic and historical disruptions to broader understandings of Pueblo land and landscapes. In spite of the cross-cultural exchange that was embedded in the production and consumption of these works art historical analyses of these images do not typically depart from the formal (aesthetic) or patronage (Euro-American) studies models, in order to include the historical correlations between these paintings and northern New Mexico's land and water conflicts of this time. This chapter will investigate these associations. In doing so, this study pushes beyond the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century conventionalized standards of American modern aesthetics: imposed aesthetic systems that intentionally and unintentionally accommodated Euro-American expansionist projects. When reading these watercolor images according to a larger historical milieu these landscape-less paintings visually validate dominant attitudes about westward expansion during this time period. Within this context, the blank white backgrounds read as pictorial confirmations of American colonization processes as boundary-and border-less: a clean open space waiting to be filled.

However, when these paintings are evaluated according to Pueblo spiritual and historical associations with land, the removal of the Pueblo landscapes from these images can be understood as a conscious act: an intentionally imposed conceptual boundary and visual demarcation of Pueblo place. From this culturally specific perspective, the possibility for Pueblo Indian artists to have strategically directed the non-Indian gaze *away from* Pueblo sacred spaces becomes probable. The clean white backgrounds, which became so vital to the prescribed American modern aesthetics of the time, convey a potent visual cue; you can look at our dances, and you can look at our dancing bodies, but you *cannot* have this land.

Engagement with Tonita Peña's individual experience and also Pueblo aesthetic articulations of their reciprocal relationships with land, water, and the natural world, help highlight the role of twentieth-century Pueblo artists in a mutual, if imbalanced, exchange with non-Indian art benefactors: European-American artists, scholars, and entrepreneurs who, at this time, greatly depended upon Pueblo people to further their own economic endeavors and also gain access to natural resources. Tonita Peña's texts, her letters and her paintings, offer key evidence of vital connections between Pueblo land and water conflicts and Pueblo art produced at this time. It is rare that the individual voice of an artist is incorporated into the scholarly discussions of American Indian art from this period. Importantly, Tonita Peña's writing articulates a Pueblo woman's perspective, a viewpoint that is significant to this art historical period, but is perceptibly lacking. This study engages an analysis consistent not only with Peña's artistic career, but also with the

many references to Pueblo cultural expressions that were visually embodied within her paintings and alluded to in her letters.¹⁵

Like her professional contemporaries, throughout her career, Tonita Peña negotiated intricate social, economic, and political circumstances both within and outside her community, the *Pueblo de Cochiti*. As the above writing excerpt demonstrates, the artist was consciously aware of accommodating her communal obligations at Cochiti and also following her professional inclinations. Her letters and paintings reveal an active yet carefully crafted position within her own community and also northern New Mexico's tourist industry and capitalist economy. Contrary to popularized art historical accounts of the time, which portray these painters as economically victimized and venerate the Euro-American art patrons, Peña, as well as other Pueblo watercolor painters, did not always readily defer to non-Indian aesthetic or marketing demands. Instead, some artists, Peña in particular, openly questioned and even challenged their benefactors. They also demonstrated an acute awareness of both their Pueblo and non-Pueblo viewing audiences. For Peña, this sense of double-consciousness encouraged an element of performance both within her image making and in the creation of her artist persona. In this way, Peña's individual story relates, more generally, to twentieth-century Pueblo Indian artists' coping strategies that helped them to maintain vital communal connections and fulfill familial responsibilities as they publicly and professionally engaged with non-Indian society and modern art markets.

¹⁵ Penney and Roberts, "America's Pueblo Artists: Encounters in the Borderlands" 21-38; Jill D. Sweet, *Dances of the Tewa Pueblo Indians: Expressions of New Life* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2004); Kate Peck Kent, *Pueblo Indian Textiles: A Living Tradition* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1983); Chase, *Indian Painters of the Southwest: The Deep Remembering*, 22-26.

Individual histories, like Peña's are highly relevant to the art historical discourse of Native Modernism. They disrupt the classifications developed and maintained by Anglo art patrons, government boards, and art scholars that apportioned value on Pueblo artists and their art. These systems dictated economic and aesthetic value through prioritization of issues such as authenticity, art vs. handcraft, traditional vs. non-traditional. These dualistic parameters helped regulate the formal and aesthetic development of Pueblo Indian artworks according to Euro-American aesthetic tastes. Non-Indian patrons and promoters grappled with these classifications. They eventually supervised their institutionalization into federal law and educational curriculums. Simultaneously, individual Pueblo Indian artists, like Peña, utilized art-making and the sale of their art as a means for communal and self-preservation.¹⁶ As we shall see, Pueblo concepts of community and "preservation" did not necessarily coincide with Anglo valuations and goals for this art.

As they produced their work, some Pueblo artists also maintained important roles in their communities as secular or ceremonial leaders. Others balanced familial, agricultural, and ceremonial responsibilities along with art making. As art professionals, Pueblo Indian painters, potters, weavers, and jewelry makers all shared an astute awareness of the business market and audiences they were engaged with. Tonita Peña's painting career exemplifies this feat. Her story not only speaks to the inherent paradoxical nature of this art and its production, materials, and historical context, it demonstrates that, for some Pueblo artists, art making was *supplemental* to Pueblo agricultural economies and *secondary* to communal responsibilities and relationships. Contrary to art marketing

¹⁶ McLerran, *A New Deal For Native Art: Indian Arts and Federal Policy, 1933-1943* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009), 1-103.

campaigns of this time, Pueblo Indian art making was not *the* method; it was *one* method of Pueblo economic and cultural sustainability. Pueblo artists like Peña understood that ultimately their survival depended on their connections to their communities. However, in order to better understand the significance of Peña's individual contribution to this art practice and the challenges that she and other Pueblo painters successfully negotiated, we must first examine the complex discourse behind Pueblo watercolor paintings, and how the production of these images directly corresponded with Pueblo agricultural histories and connections to land.

Pueblo Watercolor Paintings: A Discourse of Collaborations and Contradictions

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, along New Mexico's Rio Grande River, external pressures greatly intensified for Pueblo Indian engagement in two main capitalist enterprises: commercial agriculture and commercial art making. These economic endeavors were, at their most basic levels, programs aimed at assimilation. Veiled in notions of "preserving," while ironically, modernizing Pueblo Indian cultures, these projects were intentionally designed to encourage Pueblo peoples out of their traditional subsistence economy and into the American capitalist system, but only according to Euro-American agendas.¹⁷

Following the U.S. annexation of the New Mexican territory (1848), agricultural and environmental survey studies were conducted throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Data results from these reports assessed Pueblo agricultural practices as primitive and outdated. In response, federal farming programs were initiated

¹⁷ James A. Vlasich, *Pueblo Indian Agriculture* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 78-87.

that focused on modernizing and improving Pueblo agricultural techniques. However, as historian James Vlasich points out, both the report assessments and the federal program goals dismissed the fact that the Pueblos' "irrigation and agriculture predated the American government by more than three centuries."¹⁸ In fact, according to Vlasich, Pueblo peoples' achievements cultivating beans, maize, and melons are documented in Spanish expedition narratives of the sixteenth century and also historical records of the Mexican occupation period (1821-1846). Complex irrigation systems, rock gardens, and heirloom produce varieties, material remnants that are still extant today, all tangibly record the rich histories and innovative agricultural technologies of Pueblo peoples.¹⁹ During the early twentieth century, however, the subsistence arid farming techniques of these local communities did not coincide with the intentions of the U.S. agricultural programs.

In his study: *Pueblo Indian Agriculture* (2005), Vlasich notes that prior to New Mexico's statehood (1912) designs for mass agricultural projects in the southwest were already in place. The 1890 U.S. census, for example, included site-specific observations and detailed comparative analysis of environmental and agricultural conditions at individual Pueblo communities. Conclusions from these surveys were used to identify prime locations for implementing big agriculture in Pueblo territories. Similar investigations continued through the twentieth century. Following New Mexico's statehood, the Preston-Engle Report and the Brookings Institution's Merriam Report, both created in 1928, focused on Pueblo living conditions, economy, irrigation systems, and crop surveys. These report results helped further the cause for commercial farming

¹⁸ Vlasich, *Pueblo Indian Agriculture*, 99.

¹⁹ Vlasich, Introduction, 1-8.

on Pueblo Indian lands using modernized methods and on-site demonstration farming. These ambitious projects were created with intentions to displace the Pueblo communities' subsistence agricultural practices in order to meet the needs of a rapidly encroaching non-Indian population. However, due in part to Pueblo resistance, lack of accessible water, and also competing land grant claims between Indian, Hispano, and Anglo claimants that lead to long-term legal disputes, U.S. efforts at modernization this would soon prove to be a slowly unfolding process, drawn out over various stages.

Pueblo agricultural concepts, including attitudes toward land and the natural environment, challenged the new government programs. Pueblo farming methods had always conformed to the fragile arid environment and their agricultural calendar was elaborately integrated with seasonal ceremonies. Reciprocal and *practical* relationships between humans and the natural world were articulated in Pueblo symbology systems that referenced water, rain, plant life, and the earth. This symbology was artistically and variously represented in ceremonial dances, dance outfits, songs, Pueblo languages, and place names. These aesthetic expressions supported agricultural practices that, for centuries, had sustained Pueblo communities.²⁰

During the early twentieth-century push for more industrialized agricultural practices, on what was a quickly dwindling *irrigable* land base, some Pueblo peoples actively resisted what they saw as impositions on their lifeways. These Puebloans ardently maintained their agricultural practices. However, other Pueblo community members chose to partake in the modernization processes. They adopted the new

²⁰ Jill D. Sweet, *Dances of the Tewa Pueblo Indians: Expressions of New Life* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2004); Kate Peck Kent, *Pueblo Indian Textiles: A Living Tradition*; Chase, *Indian Painters of the Southwest: The Deep Remembering* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press: 2002).

machineries and more expedient strategies. Rather than centering on ceremonial and seasonal cycles, these new farming methods focused on maximum production and profits.²¹

Alongside these competing agricultural enterprises, as irrigable Pueblo lands and local natural resources were increasingly becoming limited by Euro-American encroachment and demands, private non-Indian art benefactors and patrons encouraged production of Pueblo Indian art including: watercolor paintings, pottery, textiles, and jewelry.²² These patrons oversaw the production and exhibition of choice works. However, their support of select art works, specific artists, and particular styles and mediums swiftly evolved into a system of aesthetic control and regulation.

In 1935, according to the Indian Arts and Crafts Act, “quality” control of Pueblo Indian art was officially delegated to the Indian Arts and Crafts Board (IACB). This new federally appointed board consisted of “five commissioners... of both public officers and private citizens,” who held the power to “create Government trademarks of *genuineness and quality* for Indian products and the products of particular Indian tribes or groups; to establish standards and regulations for the use of such trademarks.”²³ In *A New Deal For Native Art: Indian Arts and Federal Policy, 1933-1943* (2009), art historian Jennifer

²¹ Vlasich, *Pueblo Indian Agriculture*, 125-293. In this work Vlasich details the contradictions of how federal funding, under the New Deal Programs, assisted with land purchases that helped Pueblo Indian communities recover some of their land bases. However, much of this land was not irrigated or farm-ready. Non-Pueblo populations had already encroached upon much of the highly desirable irrigable lands along the Rio Grande. Ironically while Pueblo land bases grew at this time, their agricultural spaces were simultaneously shrinking.

²² McLerran, *A New Deal For Native Art: Indian Arts and Federal Policy, 1933-1943*; Suzanne Forrest, *The Preservation of the Village: New Mexico's Hispanics and the New Deal* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), 47-128.

²³ “Indian Arts and Crafts Board: Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1935,” Indian Arts and Crafts Board, U.S. Department of the Interior: <https://www.iacb.doi.gov/iaca35>, (emphasis mine).

McLerran demonstrates that a main goal of the newly founded IACB and other organizations such as the New Mexico Association on Indian Affairs (NMAIA) was to lead Pueblo peoples away from their subsistence agricultural economy and into art production and capitalist markets.²⁴ The author states:

“The NMAIA saw as one of their primary functions provision of assistance to the Indians in making the transition from an agricultural to a cash-based economy. They believed the most appropriate base for such efforts would be found in production and sale of high-quality Indian arts and crafts.”²⁵

McLerran’s historical overview of the organized production, promotion, and sale of Indian art during this period makes evident that associations such as the IACB, which began in 1935 and the NMAIA, which was started in 1922, organizations that were dominated by non-Indian art patrons and political figures, were influential in legally institutionalizing regulated American Indian art-making. Like the government sponsored agricultural programs, these art programs had been evolving for decades.

The history of the IACB, for example, began in the late nineteenth century. The arrival of railway systems into the New Mexican territory in 1879 brought groups of wayfaring American and European intellectuals, artists, and tourists into the Pueblo homelands. This new transportation method also created opportunities for Pueblo and Hispano people to partake in American capitalist systems. Some Pueblos and Hispanos left their communities for jobs as laborers on the railway. Others found work in the developing agricultural industry. Others produced art for tourist markets. All these occupations brought about new relationships with non-Indian entrepreneurs and impresarios. As early as 1890, wealthy Anglo art patrons, who had relocated to the

²⁴ McLerran, *A New Deal For Native Art: Indian Arts and Fedral Policy, 1933-1943*, 12.

²⁵ McLerran, *A New Deal For Native Art: Indian Arts and Fedral Policy, 1933-1943*, 57.

Southwest from urban centers on the East Coast, began financially and materially sponsoring small groups of Pueblo watercolor painters, along with individual artists.²⁶ These benefactors, many of whom were either artists themselves, trained academics, or social and political elites, were directly involved with regional archeological studies and active in developing cultural venues in the Santa Fe area. These institutions included, for example, the School of American Research and the Museum of New Mexico, two venues that would eventually feature extensive collections and exhibitions of Pueblo Indian art and archeological items. It was the founders of these institutions who set the path for the intellectual discourse of Pueblo Indian art.

In historical examinations of Pueblo Indian art, Anglo art patrons such as Edgar Lee Hewett, Mabel Dodge Luhan, Amelia Elizabeth White, and John Sloan, all active participants in the Santa Fe and Taos art scenes of the early twentieth century, have all received considerable scholarly attention and popular acclaim for their “discovery” and promotion of Pueblo Indian artists and their art. Their roles as benefactors brought this work into entirely new contexts and did much to gain widespread public attention for this work. For nearly a century, subsequent art scholars have sustained the intellectual and promotional approach of the art patrons, which centered on the historical and aesthetic interpretations of these non-Indian art benefactors. This method of American Indian art appreciation and scholarship is now routinely referred to as the “patronage model.”²⁷ By

²⁶ Native art historians consistently point to the (southwestern) Anglo art benefactor-to-Indian beneficiary relationship beginning in the late 1890s-1900 with the anthropologist Jesse Walter Fewkes and his relationship with painters and potters at Hopi. See Berlo & Phillips, *Native North American Art*, 217; Brody, *Indian Painters White Patrons* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971), 76-84; Chase, *Indian Painters of the Southwest: The Deep Remembering*, 26-40.

²⁷ In Frye’s, “Local Knowledge & Art Historical Methodology: A New Perspective on Awa Tsireh & the San Ildefonso Easel Painting Movement,” 46-61, Frye states that the patronage model method started in 1971 with the work of Jerry Brody and his critique of the “paternalistic racism” of the Pueblo art patrons in

the mid-twentieth century this study model was prevalent alongside anthropological approaches, which categorized American Indian art as “artifacts.” The new approach of the patron-scholars called for a perspective of American Indian art *as art* rather than anthropological or ethnographic specimens. Although the art patrons presented this work within American modern art contexts, they also upheld a strong position on cultural preservation. They diligently maintained what they believed to be an aesthetic lineage between modern Pueblo art practices and ancient Pueblo histories. The patrons encouraged contemporary Pueblo artists to revive specific styles and visual patterns from archeological items found at local excavations.²⁸ They also heavily promoted Euro-American concepts of genuineness and authenticity and deemed themselves the experts on Pueblo people and culture. Additionally, the art patrons emphasized and even *romanticized* the “unique” and “collaborative” nature of their beneficiary positions. Motivated in part by social activism, the patrons viewed themselves the heroes of what they believed to be a vanishing race. Art became the vehicle by which they would rescue Pueblo people and culture.²⁹ The racial, political, and economic unevenness of these associations was smoothed over via the benefactor-to-beneficiary practices that were aimed at gaining exposure (and money) for this art and also “preserving” *authentic* Pueblo culture. This was a precarious promotional tactic. It required Pueblo peoples’ engagement with modern Anglo economic systems while it simultaneously confined

Indian Painters White Patrons. However, I argue that this examination method has been in place since the very beginning of this art movement, which began in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

²⁸ Two of the most well known of these “revival” narratives concern the work of Hopi potter Nampeyo and the black on black work of Maria and Julian Martinez from San Ildefonso.

²⁹ Margaret D. Jacobs, “Shaping a new Way” White Women and the Movement to Promote Pueblo Indian Arts and Crafts, 1900-1935, *Journal of the Southwest*, Vol. 40 No. 2 (Summer, 1998), 187-215.

them to an aesthetically controlled ethnicity, an “authentic” past. According to McLerran, in these associations “Native peoples were relegated to the position of pre-industrial other.”³⁰

Utilizing the artwork, preservation of essential “Pueblo-ness” was achieved by monitoring the quality, production, and sale of works as they entered and exited the art markets. Educational art training, which included non-Indian art patrons’ visits to Pueblo communities where they coached Native artists on aesthetic quality, helped to refine particular styles and designs that the non-Indian experts deemed appropriate to this art. Competitions, organized by the benefactors, rewarded artworks that best demonstrated prescribed aesthetic qualifications. The self-styled scholars of Pueblo art also published articles for art audiences and collectors with guidelines for properly acquiring quality Pueblo art.³¹ With a few exceptions, the sales of Pueblo Indian art did generate a limited-modest income for Pueblo artists at this time. However, in some cases, it was the art patrons who managed the profits. During the early 1920s these financial arrangements sometimes caused disagreements between artists, anthropologists, and institutional administrators. In 1922, for example, San Ildefonso pottery “revivalist” and art patron Rose Dougan critiqued Hewett for underselling Pueblo artwork. Historian Margaret Jacobs has suggested that these tensions ran along gender lines and were due in part to Anglo women’s resentment about being overshadowed by their male counterparts. However, Jacobs also points to conflicting views among groups of Anglo women about

³⁰ McLerran, *A New Deal For Native Art: Indian Arts and Federal Policy, 1933-1943*, 5.

³¹ McLerran, *A New Deal For Native Art: Indian Arts and Federal Policy, 1933-1943*, 57-63.

either preserving or assimilating Pueblo peoples into the dominant society.³² Art historian JJ Brody points out that such disagreements among the non-Indian patrons were reflective of larger “control issues over cultural and political affairs.”³³ Indeed the benefactor role came with a great deal of social position and power, and factions among the art experts developed as Pueblo art gradually gained national prominence. The tensions caused by these competitions for power also surfaced in the relationships between the art patrons and the Pueblo Indian artists.

For Pueblo artists the uneven economic situations between the patrons and themselves did not always suit individual needs. Moments of tensions that did develop are present in the correspondence of Tonita Peña. For instance, in February of 1921, after inquiring about payment for her artwork, Tonita Peña wrote to Lansing Bloom:

“You know M Bloom, I did not ask you how much it cost my work, I just let you pay what every you want and I am glad for what you pay me.”³⁴

And in May, 1921:

“Well Mr. Lansing B. Bloom I am to tell you I been waiting for the pay for the last painting...I don’t care what ever you pay so just only you help me to by something to eat...and I think you better send me some more paper...”³⁵

To Bloom Peña is direct about her needs. She verbally signals to him to her awareness of

³² Jacobs, “Shaping a New Way: White Women and the Movement to Promote Pueblo Indian Arts and Crafts 1900-1935, *Journal of the Southwest*, 187-215.

³³ JJ Brody, *Pueblo Indian Painting: Tradition and Modernism in New Mexico, 1900-1930*, (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 1997), 109-115.

³⁴ Tonita Peña to Lansing Bloom, February 18, 1921, Cochiti, New Mexico, (Edgar L. Hewett papers, Palace of the Governors, New Mexico History Museum, Fray Angelico Chavez History Library) punctuation added by author.

³⁵ Tonita Peña to Lansing Bloom, May, 1921, Cochiti, New Mexico, (Edgar L. Hewett papers, Palace of the Governors, New Mexico History Museum, Fray Angelico Chavez History Library) punctuation added by author.

the imbalanced nature of their professional relationship and her recognition that Bloom controls the pricing of her work and the distribution of her payments. Certainly, for Peña and for other Pueblo artists, this was a situation that must have created apprehension as they negotiated capitalist systems. In Peña's case, she seems clear about the economic function of her work for herself and her benefactor. By stating "You know...I did not ask you how much it cost my work, I just let you pay what every you want..." the artist acknowledges her understanding of a non-Indian controlled art market and that the art patrons also benefited from the production and sale of her art. Peña's professional approach is practical and direct as she advocated for herself. In fact, in some letters, she disallowed Bloom the privilege of dismissing her input about the particular dances she chose to portray, her preferences for particular paints and paper, and also the demands of her personal schedule. Certainly this was no small feat during a time when non-Indians controlled the art materials, markets, and the profits.

Interestingly, however Peña also alternately clinched small moments to flatter Bloom by playing up the inequality between them. On occasion she refers to herself as a "poor lady" and to Bloom as "good" and a "friend." In fact, in the same February 1921 letter, after expressing her impatience (and her anxiety) about not being paid, the artist also takes a moment to praise Bloom: "*I know when a man is good like you he always feel sorry with the poor lady.*" As we shall see, Peña's complex reactions to her benefactor were shared by other Pueblo artists of this time.

Historian Margaret Jacobs identifies specific examples of Pueblo Indian artists' strategic placation, outright rejection, and occasional mocking of non-Indian assumptions about "authentic" Pueblo art. Jacobs cites moments like these as Pueblo Indian artists'

simultaneous “catering to and resentment of” the authoritative position assumed by the non-Indian benefactors.³⁶ Indeed, how odd an experience it must have been for the artist’s to sit patiently as non-Indian authorities promulgated their expertise about Pueblo people’s and their art.

There is no doubt that the promotional success of Pueblo Indian art at local markets and at national exhibitions brought about political notoriety and social praise for the non-Indian art patrons. Their social connections, aesthetic tastes, and money were entwined with the commercial development of this work. However, in art historical accounts *non-Indian dependency on Pueblo Indian artists* for furthering their own agendas has been greatly underrated. The benefactor role is presented as altruistic. The personal, political, and economic self-interests of the Pueblo art patrons are rarely addressed.³⁷ Their associations with the Pueblo Indian artists allowed many art benefactors to fashion successful academic, commercial art, and political careers. Their own professional achievements and promotions at this time depended upon the artistic labor of Pueblo and other Indian peoples. However, the historiographic record, which follows patron perspectives, has offered little regarding Pueblo Indian opinions of the non-Indian benefactors and the reciprocal benefits of these connections.³⁸

Recognizing the economic function of Pueblo Indian art, for *both* non-Indian patrons and Pueblo Indian artists, requires dispelling the myths surrounding these images.

³⁶ Jacobs, “Shaping a New Way: White Women and the Movement to Promote Pueblo Indian Arts and Crafts 1900-1935, *Journal of the Southwest*, 206-208.

³⁷ JJ Brody and Jennifer McLerran are two Native art Historians who do address this topic.

³⁸ Rationalizations for this omission have centered on the “secrecy” of Pueblo Indian religions and ceremonies. However, in 2008 Bill Anthes’ examination of the personal and professional correspondence of Isleta Pueblo painter, Jose Lente with his art benefactor offers new insights into Pueblo Indian artists’ perspectives concerning their roles as “cultural brokers.” See: Anthes, *Native Moderns: American Indian Painting, 1940-1960*, 30-58.

One common myth circulated about the benefactor-beneficiary relationships concerned the “uniqueness” and rarity of each patron-artist connection. This was a tangent off the romantic “vanishing Indian” myth, one that allowed the art patrons in Santa Fe to view themselves as rescuers of a dying race. However, the New Mexican arts revivals were not isolated. Beyond Pueblo Indian art, various art and craft revivals were in process during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In fact, Jennifer McLerran and historian Suzanne Forrest both acknowledge regional arts and crafts movements occurring nationally, and internationally, at this time. They have determined that the Pueblo art patrons were not the first, or the only endorsers of regional or Indigenous art and that the promotional methods of the Pueblo art patrons were not necessarily unique: nor were they entirely benign. For instance, examining arts and crafts movements in Mexico, McLerran draws international correlations between European art patrons and Mexican government subsidies; the programs that resulted from this international interest ironically were designed to incite nationalist pride. Also, in her work, Forrest identifies continuities between the Appalachian craft revival of the southeastern United States and also the Spanish Colonial and American Indian arts revivals in Santa Fe. Both McLerran and Forrest identify political motivations behind all of these creative movements. Forrest states: “...the crafts revivals had their immediate origins in a romantic regionalism that was an expression of American nationalism.”³⁹ Indeed, the common threads of “romanticism and nationalism” fueled U.S. national, cultural, and political movements, and these movements culminated in the federal New Deal programs of the Depression

³⁹ Suzanne Forrest, *The Preservation of the Village: New Mexico's Hispanics and the New Deal* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989); McLerran, *A New Deal For Native Art: Indian Arts and Federal Policy, 1933-1943*, 33-42.

era. These programs ostensibly encouraged “self-sustainability.” However, they also simultaneously monitored “American” artistic expressions and managed American Indian engagements with the capitalist economy.

The intensive production and marketing of Pueblo Indian art during the early twentieth century, was in part driven by what had become economically depressed living standards in the Pueblo Indian communities along the Rio Grande.⁴⁰ However, it must be kept in mind that these substandard conditions at the Pueblos were assessed according to modern Euro-American capitalist values of progress and profit. In agricultural terms, measurements were calculated according to maximum production “potential,” and, again, overlooked the long-term success of local subsistence agriculture, as well as the fragile condition of New Mexico’s semi-arid environment. The effects of mass Euro-American encroachment into the Pueblo and Hispano territories and how this rapid population increase stressed local natural resources, most specifically irrigable land and water, was not considered as a factor.

Indeed, according to Suzanne Forrest, in northern New Mexico while American Indian and Hispano population numbers sustained or slowly grew, “between 1870 and 1910 Anglo [population] numbers swelled from 2,760 to 119,406.”⁴¹ According to this calculation, Anglo populations increased by approximately three thousand people *every year* for forty years. In addition to this population surge, Forrest considers the damaging effects of dramatic changes to Pueblo arid-agricultural practices. In particular, Forrest notes the “increase in pressure on natural resources from new forms of animal husbandry

⁴⁰ McLerran, *A New Deal For Native Art: Indian Arts and Federal Policy, 1933-1943*, 65-101.

⁴¹ Forrest, *The Preservation of the Village: New Mexico’s Hispanics and the New Deal*, 1-31.

and commercial agriculture.”⁴² Surely these changes must have set off alarms for Pueblo communities. Vlasich has noted how modifications to the arid farming practices consistently struggled due to contrasting Indian and non-Indian cultural values. He states:

“Around the turn of the century, government agents tried to bolster the Pueblo farm program by introducing modern techniques, agricultural education, and machinery. This action met with limited success because it often conflicted with Pueblo traditions.”⁴³

Pueblo resistance at this time demonstrates that the new mass-production approach clashed with Pueblo agricultural and ceremonial practices, which had carefully balanced, and *were balanced by*, intimate knowledge of the arid ecological environment, seasonal patterns, and weather fluctuations in the Rio Grande valley. However, contrary to popular Anglo perspectives that relegated Pueblo peoples to a primitive past, this knowledge was not romantic. Instead, this awareness was necessary and practical to long-term survival in the semi-arid region.

Misunderstandings, and even outright dismissal, of Pueblo Indian histories and cultural practices were a constant source of tension. Intercultural conflicts and legal clashes over land and water were constant. Federal cases such as the *United States v. Joseph* (1876) and *United States v. Sandoval* (1913) questioned legal jurisdiction over Pueblo lands, as well as Pueblo peoples’ “Indian status.” In both these cases essentialist notions of “Indianness” were intensely scrutinized. Legal interrogations about Pueblo Indians’ general competency also arose. This was not new. During nineteenth-century litigations regarding ownership and management of natural resources that were legally under American Indian proprietorship but also heavily desired by Euro-American

⁴² Forrest, *The Preservation of the Village: New Mexico’s Hispanics and the New Deal* 1-31.

⁴³ Vlasich, Introduction, xi-8.

entrepreneurs and prospectors, inquiries into American Indians' competency relative to their race were not uncommon. Following the General Allotment or Dawes Act of 1887, a federal legal measure that aimed at breaking up Indian reservations across the nation into privatized allotments, legal disputes over Native lands consistently included investigations into Native peoples' racial make-up and blood quantum. In these cases Indians who possessed a white ancestor, even a distant one, were deemed competent and capable of managing the sales of their property to non-Indian investors. However, the land and properties of "full-blooded" Indians, who were regarded incompetent, were held in trust by the federal government for over twenty years.⁴⁴

In twentieth-century New Mexico, questions concerning Pueblo peoples' citizenship and race in accordance with land and water disputes became standard. These issues played out in art arenas as well. In 1924, for example, as Indian populations across the nation were granted U.S. citizenship and voting privileges under the Snyder Act, Pueblo and other Indian peoples in New Mexico and Arizona were *denied* suffrage rights. Ironically, in New Mexico, the very people and cultures that were upheld as symbolic representatives of true "American-ness," were not U.S. citizens for the first two decades of the twentieth century. Issues of Indian citizenship helped reinforce preservationist ideals of *authentic* Pueblo art and culture as unmediated by Euro-American influences. This JJ Brody pinpoints as the "paternalistic racism" of the art patrons. The patrons' prescribed aesthetic qualifications for Pueblo art actually contradicted their own campaigns for authenticity and cultural preservation. The non-Indian political platforms for art production as a means of Indian "self-sufficiency" did not sum up to equal rights.

⁴⁴ Colin Calloway, "Kill the Indian Save the Man" in *First Peoples: A Documentary Survey of American Indian History* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2008), 376-381.

Instead, non-Indian constructions of Pueblo Indians through the lens of “romantic primitivism” allowed access to *some* financial and material benefits via the benefactors. As McLellan further points out, non-Indians’ reluctance to view Pueblo people as active and competent contributors to modern society actually helped shape the parameters of Pueblo Indian art. She writes:

“...Acknowledging native artists’ successful negotiation of their positions as colonial subjects through accommodation to market demands would have precluded the need for the assistance that the government and other interested groups offered. What was more desirable to primitivists was a reified “Indian” with a reified preindustrial product that elided any traces of colonial relations.”

The paradoxical nature of the relationship between the non-Indian art benefactors and Indian beneficiaries became most obvious during extraordinary situations. In 1922, the Pueblo art patrons, along with other political and social activists, worked alike with the nineteen Pueblos to defeat the Bursum Bill. According to Tisa Wegner, the bill which was introduced by New Mexican Senator Holm O. Bursum, included sections that directly attacked Pueblo creative expressions and “intended to regulate Pueblo culture and sovereignty.”⁴⁵ However, one of the Bursum Bill’s main goals was to permanently resolve ongoing land grant disputes between the Pueblos, Hispanos, and Anglos that had historically plagued the region. The bill, which was written in support of *non-Indian* claimants to Pueblo lands and water rights, once again, pushed the Pueblo communities into political action over land and water.⁴⁶ Because the non-Indian land claimants included poor Hispano and Anglo farmers, as well as wealthy landholders, the bill, and

⁴⁵ Tisa Wenger, “Land Culture and Sovereignty in the Pueblo Dance Controversy,” *Journal of the Southwest*, Vol. 46, No. 2, Summer 2004.

⁴⁶ Joe S. Sando, *Pueblo Profiles: Cultural Identity through Centuries of Change*, (Santa Fe, Clear Light Publishers, 1998).

the manner in which it was defeated, politically divided Pueblo Indian and their Hispano neighbors.⁴⁷ This was largely due to an oversimplification of complex interpersonal, environmental, and historical relationships, by the Euro-American politicians. For centuries the Pueblos and Hispano peoples had functioned in parallel communities that both utilized arid agricultural methods. These communities depended on, and maintained, the complex irrigation systems that supported their subsistence economies. However, due to the complexities and contradictions of first the Spanish and Mexican land grants, and then later the imposition of U.S. legal systems, the land and water issues were divergently viewed. Relative to the Bursum Bill each cultural group faced a loss. Both the Pueblo and Hispano communities viewed their land bases to be under particular threat.

Not surprisingly, the Indian advocates and art patrons sided with the Pueblos. Again, cries for preservation of Indian peoples and cultures fueled their activism. In an intense political contest that utilized published critical commentaries, letter writing campaigns, and travel of a Pueblo delegation to Washington D.C., the bill was successfully defeated. The patrons and social activists publicly embraced their political victory. Their assistance with defeating the Bursum Bill legitimized the art patrons' place in New Mexico. It also announced their allegiance to the Pueblo communities. In fact, some Pueblo advocates, especially John Collier, adamantly refused to acknowledge the legal rights and needs of Hispano communities and the intricacies of the Pueblo-Hispano relationships. Even after his colleagues began to reconsider such an extreme position, Collier continued his political assault on the Hispano communities. In 1924, the Pueblo Lands Act was passed and the Pueblo Lands Board was created to directly deal with the competing land claims. According to Forrest:

⁴⁷ Wenger, "Land Culture and Sovereignty in the Pueblo Dance Controversy," *Journal of the Southwest*.

“Once efforts were made to draft a suitable compromise bill, however, cracks began to appear in the Collier team. Most New Mexicans, who attempted to understand the historic roots of the problem, wanted Hispanic land claims to be considered along with Indian claims. The very idea infuriated Collier... The paradoxical result was that the Hispanos lost their self-assumed grazing privileges on the Pueblo grants and thereby the means to pursue their traditional pastoral activities; while the Indians, traditionally horticulturists, were left without farming land and water rights... The Hispanos had no alternative but to increase their dependence on wage labor. The Indians turned to tourism.”⁴⁸

The outright dismissal and extreme position against Hispano people, especially by Collier, encouraged the conferral of an “outsider” status for New Mexico’s Hispano communities despite their tri-centennial presence. This targeting of Hispano peoples by the American Indian proponents conveniently distracted from the art patrons’ own participation in larger colonizing projects of this time such as the intense Euro-American population growth, natural resource appropriation, and the aesthetic distillation of Pueblo Indian art.

Native Modernism

According to Brody, the first generation of New Mexican Pueblo watercolor painters came from San Ildefonso Pueblo, Tonita Peña’s birthplace. Known as the “self-taught” group because of their limited “formal” art training, this cohort came into prominence between 1910-1920 when their work was heavily sought after and promoted by the Pueblo art patrons.⁴⁹ Made-up of mostly young men who had connections to local archeological digs and also the San Ildefonso day school, several members of this generation sustained long professional careers. Tonita Peña, who is identified as the only

⁴⁸ Forrest, *The Preservation of the Village: New Mexico’s Hispanics and the New Deal* 47-62.

⁴⁹ Brody, *Indian Painters White Patrons*, 81-118.

woman to *consistently* participate in this initial cohort, also maintained a prolific painting career that outlasted those of her male counterparts and continued for over forty years. Like some of her colleagues, Peña was introduced to watercolor techniques at the Pueblo day school at a young age. Peña's art training, however, extended beyond the tutelage of the local school matrons. According to biographical accounts family time for Peña involved building and decorating pottery, making ceremonial regalia, gardening, and preparing Pueblo foods. Her immediate knowledge of Pueblo life and the integration of aesthetic expressions were foundational to her work. Visual cues to seasonal, ceremonial, and communal concepts are present in the intricate details of her images. Peña and her cohort are considered the originators of Pueblo watercolor painting and their work is recognized as groundbreaking to the development of this new art genre eventually identified as Native Modernism.

Brody describes Native Modernism as a southwest regional art movement that developed under the trifecta of Anglo intellectualism, twentieth-century federal New Deal reform programs, and northern New Mexico's tourist industry.⁵⁰ Pueblo watercolor paintings in particular are identified as exemplar of this highly "complex and contradictory" art category.⁵¹ Art historians David W. Penney and Lisa Roberts indicate that these works index Pueblo people's entrance into the American capitalist economy both in terms of their materiality (watercolor and paper) and their purpose (commodity).

⁵⁰ J.J. Brody, "Other Native Modernists: What's In a Name," in *Essays On Native Modernism: Complexity and Contradiction in American Indian Art* (Washington D.C. and New York: National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, 2006) 31-41; Molly H. Mullin, "The Patronage of Difference: Making Indian Art "Art, Not Ethnology"" *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Nov., 1992), 395-424.

⁵¹ The terms "complex and contradictory" are used by Native Art Historians when describing these images, see: National Museum of the American Indian Smithsonian Institution, *Essays On Native Modernism: Complexity and Contradiction in American Indian Art* (Washington D.C. and New York: National Museum of the American Indian, 2006).

In art historical examinations the introduction of new materials or formal techniques tangibly marks economic shifts in indigenous art production, as do changes in natural resource access, intercultural and intergenerational exchanges, and fluctuations in gender roles. All such changes are relevant to the Pueblo watercolor images.

The paintings also mark a historical moment when, following World War I, numerous intercultural and interracial forces collided as (Anglo) Americans sought to solidify a national identity separate from European influences. This identity depended upon establishing a uniquely “American” national aesthetic. American Indian art provided a *symbolic* vehicle for achieving this goal. Always materially and technically innovative, American Indian art was viewed by the patrons as aesthetically balanced somewhere between old and new, both “primitive” and modern, and *truly* “American.”⁵² Co-opting this art’s history in compliance with Euro-American values and agendas appeared natural. The patrons emphasized an esoteric visual and aesthetic lineage that was rooted in *ancient* Pueblo traditions of pottery making, kiva mural painting, and dance ceremonies.⁵³ This appropriated history added a layer of mystique to the work. No doubt, this was a main reason for this art’s attraction. Although elements of a more practical agricultural history were visually apparent in the image details, the non-Indian promoters heavily emphasized their co-opted artistic genealogy rather than the perspectives of the Pueblo artists. According to Penney and Roberts, this scripted narrative conveniently provided the most ardent patrons a “seamless connection to the past” despite the most obvious contradictions: the use of European-made materials, the contemporary art

⁵² Mullin, “The Patronage of Difference: Making Indian Art “Art, Not Ethnology”” 395.

⁵³ Penney and Roberts, “America’s Pueblo Artists: Encounters in the Borderlands,” 21-38.

context, and the economic purpose and intention of these works.⁵⁴ Brody points out that the Pueblo art patrons were known to dramatize myths of racial and cultural authenticity and “ancient vanishing cultures” for marketing benefit.⁵⁵ Whether intentionally or unintentionally, Anglo art patrons and benefactors perpetuated numerous contradictions surrounding this art. Their desires to authenticate their own sense of “American indigeneity” was betrayed via romantic narratives that were grounded in primitivism, especially the notion of Indians as an inferior “other” in need of rescuing.⁵⁶ Art historians further point out that the numerous identifiers for this work, which have included: Pueblo Easel Painting, Pueblo Watercolor Painting, Modern Indian Painting, and specifically Native Modernism, suggest the inherently paradoxical nature of this art and its historical context.⁵⁷ Ironically, as Penney and Roberts explain, saving the Pueblos from Euro-American encroachment and assimilation processes awkwardly rested on imposed commercial values of the Pueblo people, their homes, and the objects they made as tourist commodities.⁵⁸ These material and historical contradictions are further complicated by twentieth-century modes of Westward expansion, population encroachment, and natural resource conflicts: all modernization processes that directly influenced the production and stylization of this art and, just as importantly, the daily lives of Pueblo peoples.

⁵⁴ Penney and Roberts, “America’s Pueblo Artists: Encounters in the Borderlands,” 31.

⁵⁵ Brody, *Indian Painters White Patrons*, 47-72.

⁵⁶ For an extensive study on “romantic primitivism” among twentieth-century Anglo art patrons see Brody, *Indian Painters White Patrons*.

⁵⁷ See for example Anthes, *Native Moderns: American Indian Painting, 1940-1960*; National Museum of the American Indian Smithsonian Institution, *Essays On Native Modernism: Complexity and Contradiction in American Indian Art* (Washington D.C. and New York: National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, 2006).

⁵⁸ Penney and Roberts, “America’s Pueblo Artists: Encounters in the Borderlands,” 36.

By the 1930s, Pueblo Indian art, including the watercolor paintings, was widely exhibited and drawing national and international attention. Brody cites an exhibition at the Museum of New Mexico in 1918 as a starting point, and the 1931 *Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts* at the Grand Central Art Galleries in New York as the height of this work's public appearances.⁵⁹ Ironically, the increased attention also attracted more tourism and relocation into New Mexico, all of which further stressed local natural resources and Pueblo territories.

During this time, within the individual communities, Pueblo Indian children were consistently introduced to basic watercolor painting techniques in government-funded day schools. The practice of the Pueblo watercolor painting genre was centralized at the Pueblo day schools and local boarding schools, such as the Santa Fe Indian School, which opened in 1890. To Pueblo Indian students, non-Indian instructors disseminated specific watercolor techniques and lessons in visual aesthetics, formal characteristics that permanently distinguished these images from any other American Indian art genre; the blank white backgrounds, the isolated figures, and the colorfully bold, flat, pictorial style of this work became institutionalized curriculum. In 1932 the establishment of 'The Studio' under the direction of Dorothy Dunn forever solidified the Pueblo watercolor painting aesthetic, and numerous Native art historians have noted the formulaic results from The Studio's instruction. From their public emergence around 1900, through national and international exhibits, the watercolor paintings became collectible items and

⁵⁹ Brody, *Indian Painters & White Patrons*, 192; Mullin, "The Patronage of Difference: Making Indian Art "Art, Not Ethnology"" 395-424.

reached a popularity peak around World War II.⁶⁰ Tonita Peña's career follows this historical trajectory.

Quah Ah, Tonita Peña

Quah Ah, (Little Pink Shell) or Tonita Peña was born in 1893 at the Tewa pueblo, San Ildefonso (Figure 2). San Ildefonso is one of the nineteen Tewa, Tiwa, Towa, Keresan, and Zuni Indian pueblos that predate Spanish, Mexican, and American occupations. While these communities share similarities, they are differentiated geographically, linguistically, and culturally. Each Pueblo is recognized as a sovereign Indian nation. San Ildefonso is a northern pueblo located in the Rio Grande Valley approximately twenty-three miles northwest of Santa Fe in Santa Fe County. San Ildefonso is the Spanish name for the historic Tewa village *Po-woh-ge-oweenge*, or, "Where the water cuts through," a title that signifies this community's location and relation to the Rio Grande River. *P'oe* is the Tewa term for water. It can also reference a path or journey. Tewa stories, histories, visual symbols, and names are rich with references to water, and also specific bodies of water such as the Rio Grande and Chama rivers, which have always been valuable natural resources and landmarks for San Ildefonso and other pueblos.⁶¹ Other important natural features include the Jemez

⁶⁰ Brody, *Indian Painters & White Patrons*; Berlo & Phillips, *Native North American Art*, 209-239; David W. Penney and Lisa Roberts, "America's Pueblo Artists: Encounters in the Borderlands 21-38; Samuel Gray, *Tonita Pena, 1893-1949* (Avanyu Publishing, 1990).

⁶¹ Tewa Scholar Esther Martinez fondly relates childhood experiences growing up near the confluence of the Chama and Rio Grande rivers at San Juan Pueblo. Esther Martinez, *My Life in San Juan Pueblo: Stories of Esther Martinez* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 1, 9, 101, 161; The Poeh Cultural Center logo at Pojoaque, New Mexico visually references the Tewa communities' connections to water, rivers, and the earth. This museum focuses on the emergence, existence and histories of the six Tewa Pueblos. Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, Albuquerque, New Mexico 2009. <http://www.indianpueblo.org/19pueblos/sanildefonso.html>

Mountains, the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, Black Mesa, and, anchoring the pueblo facing north, an enormous cottonwood tree. All these natural features, and more, ground San Ildefonso spatially, temporally, and spiritually. They mark geographical location, as well as the pueblo's spiritual and ancestral histories. For example, atop *Tun Yoh*, or Black Mesa, Pueblo peoples strategically avoided hostilities with the Spanish and other competing Indian groups. At *Tun Yoh*, Pueblo ruins, petroglyphs, sacred natural spaces, and ceremonial altars are located in proximity to San Ildefonso and assert Tewa people's historical presence.⁶² Through language, song, ceremony, material culture, and visual references Pueblo histories and cosmologies are embedded into daily life and Pueblo children consistently engage with this communal knowledge.

In 1903, at age 10, Peña along with her classmate Awah Tsireh, age 4, and other young children, attended the government-sponsored day school located at San Ildefonso. According to JJ Brody, around this time, day school instructor, Esther B. Hoyt, introduced basic drawing and watercolor painting techniques using crayons, watercolor pigments, brushes, paper, and water.⁶³ Hoyt, who worked long-term for the Indian Service, was hired in 1900 to work with children twelve and under at San Ildefonso. There, she taught reading, writing and watercolor painting skills. Hoyt also collected students' work, some of which she promoted outside the pueblo.⁶⁴ Because of the day school's proximity to local archeological projects such as Frijoles Canyon, now known as

⁶² Alfonso Ortiz, *The Tewa World: Space, Time, Being, and Becoming in a Pueblo Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969) 19, 141-142; Joe Sando, *Pueblo Nations: Eight Centuries of Pueblo Indian History* (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 1992); Vincent Scully, *Pueblo: Mountain, Village, Dance*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

⁶³ Brody, *Indian Painters, White Patrons*; Brody, *Pueblo Indian Painting: Tradition and Modernism in New Mexico, 1900-1930*, 3, 39-40.

⁶⁴ Brody, *Pueblo Indian Painting: Tradition and Modernism in New Mexico, 1900-1930*, 39-40.

Bandolier National Monument, it would not be considered uncommon for non-Indian day school instructors to have social and professional connections with anthropologists, scholars, and artists, who might have visited the classrooms and observed the children. Tonita Peña's biographer, Samuel Gray and art historian Marilee Jantzer-White both indicate that these were the circumstances that led to Tonita Peña's artistic "discovery" in a local school, at either San Ildefonso or Cochiti Pueblo, by Edgar Lee Hewett.⁶⁵ However, Brody cites a different time period for the beginning of Peña's *professional* painting career, which he claims began around 1920. By either account, it seems clear that by the early 1920s Peña was actively engaged with painting professionally and Hewett financially and materially supported her work. Brody further estimates that for a year and a half, between 1920-1922, Hewett paid Peña "Almost \$130" for forty paintings. According to Brody's calculation, at this time, when sales were good, Peña would have earned approximately seven dollars a month for her work. This she used to support herself and her three children Helia, Richard, and Joseph.⁶⁶

Although raising a family was certainly a catalyst for Peña to become serious about painting, other events prior to 1920 also shaped Peña's life experience and perhaps motivated her to utilize her creative talents professionally. Tragically, in 1905 the artist lost her mother and sister to influenza.⁶⁷ Art historian Aaron Frye has examined the effects of this twentieth-century pandemic on Pueblo communities and their art. Frye

⁶⁵ Samuel L. Gray, *Tonita Peña: Quah Ah 1893-1949* (Albuquerque: Avanyu Publishing, 1990), 12; Jantzer-White, "Tonita Pena (Quah Ah), Pueblo Painter: Asserting Identity through Continuity and Change," 369-382.

⁶⁶ Brody, *Pueblo Indian Painting: Tradition and Modernism in New Mexico, 1900-1930*, 113-120; Gray, *Tonita Peña: Quah Ah 1893-1949*, 12-13.

⁶⁷ Gray, *Tonita Peña: Quah Ah 1893-1949*, 12-13.

states that at San Ildefonso the epidemic toll was devastating. The loss of large numbers of Pueblo community members broke up families like Peña's, causing major shifts in clan or moiety systems, ceremonies, and visual art.⁶⁸ This was certainly the case for the artist and her family, and another major change that directly followed further reflects this situation. Peña, who, at this time, was just twelve years old, was sent by her father to live permanently with relatives at Cochiti Pueblo.

Cochiti, which is a southern pueblo, is located over fifty miles south of San Ildefonso and is a *Keresan* Pueblo. There, Peña adjusted to a new life, became more proficient in the Keres language, and also became accustomed to Keresan ceremonies and cultural practices. Following a three-day journey on foot, Tonita settled in with her aunt and uncle, Martina Vigil and Florentino Montoya who were active potters.⁶⁹ In her new home, Peña's creative interests were encouraged. According to Gray, Peña not only continued to paint, she learned pottery making and decorating, and, for a time, attended St. Catherine's Indian School in Santa Fe. These changes suggest that, at this time, Tonita was speaking four different languages: Tewa, Keresan, Spanish *and* English. We also know, through her letters, that Peña was proficient at writing in English as well. This in itself is a significant accomplishment, especially in light of the loss that Peña had already experienced by this age. While still quite young, Tonita Peña demonstrated an ability to adapt to extraordinary and sometimes difficult circumstances. In 1908 at age fourteen Tonita entered her first marriage. At fifteen she became a mother. In 1920, by age

⁶⁸ Frye, "Local Knowledge & Art Historical Methodology: A New Perspective on Awa Tsireh & the San Ildefonso Easel Painting Movement," 46-61.

⁶⁹ Gray, *Tonita Peña: Quah Ah 1893-1949*, 12-13.

twenty-seven, Peña was twice widowed with three young children. There is no doubt that at Cochiti, both the artist and her art matured.

In her work, Peña steadily demonstrated technical skill with pen, ink, brushes, watercolor, tempera paints, and paper. A gradual shift in her mastering of the water-based medium is reflected temporally and visually in her images. In her earlier paintings streaks of color pigment and water are noticeable. In water-based imagery, color streaks and flooding are common with novice painters. These marks give her developing works a rougher, less polished appearance. As Peña's daily practice with the fluidity of this medium became more consistent these small visual imperfections disappeared giving her work the clean graphic appearance that would become Peña's hallmark. The artist also demonstrated a strong ability with adjusting pictorial scale. During the 1930s, under the Works Project Administration she was commissioned to paint large-sized murals at the Santa Fe Indian School Dining Hall. She also painted a mural at a private residence in Cochiti Canyon that is now owned by the University of New Mexico. Visually and spatially translating information from a small two-dimensional surface to a space of much larger proportions is no easy task. Artists can encounter various technical and even physical issues resulting in image distortion. However, Peña's ability to recall and translate visual information and spatial relationships is evident in the composition of figures in her work, both small and large. Beyond technical skill, Peña visually communicated her personal connection to Pueblo ceremonial dances through her intricate detailing of Pueblo dance outfits, ceremonial items, and precise dance formations of the hundreds of Pueblo people and figures that she portrayed. Specific visual elements in her work reveal an intimate knowledge of ceremonial dance meanings: a stepped weaving

pattern of clouds on a kilt, the long swaying motion of a man's white dance sash, or, shifts in color of an evergreen branch held in a woman's hand; these are all symbolic references to falling rain, water, fertility, and agriculture: meanings that are central to the Pueblo ceremonies and dances, and which celebrate life and life renewal.⁷⁰ Her paintings thoughtfully depicted the Cochiti community's physical enactment of their reciprocal relationship with the natural world. Peña drew from her immediate relationships to the San Ildefonso and Cochiti communities. From these personal connections she was able to successfully negotiate and maintain her own creative space.

Peña's work is recognized for its intricately detailed, bold, clean-lined accuracy. Today her paintings are valued for both their aesthetic quality and their cultural information. Fine art collections such as The School for Advanced Research in Santa Fe, Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, and the Peabody Museum at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts all include examples of her work. In 1931 Peña's work was exhibited nationally in the Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts at the Grand Central Galleries in New York. This group exhibition, which was organized by the Santa Fe art patrons and their colleagues, toured nationally for three years and greatly influenced modern American concepts of American Indian art. Jennifer McLerran notes:

“Fifty watercolors, the largest number ever shown together, were exhibited, along with pottery, sculpture, masks, basketry, weaving, quillwork, and beadwork. The *three thousand viewers* who attended the expo's opening day saw ancient American Indian art from various tribes and the contemporary work of the Pueblo and Plains Indians.”⁷¹

⁷⁰ Kate Peck Kent, *Pueblo Indian Textiles: A Living Tradition* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1983); Jill D. Sweet, *Dances of the Tewa Pueblo Indians: Expressions of New Life* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2004).

⁷¹ McLerran, *A New Deal For Native Art: Indian Arts and Federal Policy, 1933-1943*, 55 (emphasis mine).

Undoubtedly, Peña's work helped to shape and was shaped by public responses to this particular exhibition. The 1931 exposition, and the work featured there, would set the aesthetic tone for popular expectations of what American Indian art was, who made it, and how and *where* it should be presented. These standards were sustained throughout the twentieth century, and just one year following the exposition they were institutionalized at the Santa Fe Indian School studio.

Four years following the New York show, the Indian Arts and Crafts Act legally institutionalized aesthetic frameworks for both producing as well as viewing this art. As stated earlier, these guidelines were set according to the tastes of the Indian art patrons, several of whom were on the IACB board, and they would reach beyond national boundaries. During the 1930s-1940s American Indian paintings, along other works, were exhibited at the Venice Biennale in Italy and also The World's Fair in Paris France in 1949. In 1950 Peña's *Cochiti Eagle Dance* was published in the two-volume portfolio of Southwestern Indian paintings *American Indian Painters*, which included examples from Pueblo, Dine (Navajo), and Apache artists. The collection was published in France and included colored plates along with short biographies of each contributing artist. In 1955-1961 Peña's work was exhibited in Austria and Germany on a European tour organized by the University of Oklahoma.⁷²

Although Tonita Peña never traveled internationally, her work did. In an interview she stated: "I have never been outside the Pueblo country, but I have learned from the corn, the rain, and the eagle, and the buffalo." The artist's brief statement not only

⁷² Both the 1950 publication and the European tour were connected to art scholars/promoters O.B. Jacobson and Jeanne D'ucel who were well known for their support of Plains Indian art of Oklahoma, specifically the Kiowa Six. Jacobson and D'ucel were professionally connected with the University of Oklahoma Art School. O.B Jacobson and Jeanne D'ucel, *American Indian Painters*, (Nice, France: C. Szwedzicki, 1950) 3, and 7-8; Oklahoma State Historical Society website: okstate.edu

referenced Pueblo cultural concepts, it also played up popular and romantic sentiments about American Indians at this time. The artist was known for her ability to play to her audience. This same interview reads:

“Tonita says that her favorite subjects are children and animals, but she has painted many other things in her desire, which amounts to a weakness, to suit popular demand and to make sales.”⁷³

By all accounts it is clear that Peña’s interactions with non-Indian art audiences and prestigious institutions, which began early in her career, gave her an edge in dealing with her public. Peña knew her audience. The above quote demonstrates the artist’s complicity with the patron’s demands. However, it also speaks to non-Indians’ investment with creating a sense of authenticity and perpetuating their own power over both American Indian people and this art by presenting Peña’s complicity with “popular demand” as a “weakness” rather than a practical economic measure. Throughout much of her adult life, and through her entire painting career, the artist both connected and contended with art institutions and people. Early on she established interdependent professional relationships with her benefactors. Her connections with Edgar Lee Hewett, Lansing Bloom, and Kenneth Chapman exhibit a self-determination and personal assertion, as demonstrated in her writing, which boldly expressed her negotiating savvy and candor.

Peña and Bloom

Contrary to the heavily romanticized notions of benefactor-beneficiary relationships of this time, the professional connections between Anglos and Indians were laden with complications due to racial, gender, and economic inequalities. Pueblo Indian

⁷³ Jacobson and D’ucl, *American Indian Painters*, 3-8.

artists, both women and men, consistently encountered assumptions of superiority made by their Anglo benefactors. Additionally, unlike their Euro-American contemporaries who relocated to New Mexico to build independent lives for themselves as scholars and entrepreneurs, Pueblo women artists like Peña struggled with practical issues such as access to art supplies, long distance travel, or raising children: daily issues that created obstacles and even hindered production of their work. In the early 1920s, during the Indian arts and crafts boom in Santa Fe, Pueblo artists relied upon their patrons to carry out promotions, exhibitions, sales, and payments for their work. This was largely due to the fact that the same women and men who acted as their beneficiaries, also organized and controlled the art markets where their work was bought and sold. Although, it is true that, historically, all artists have been required negotiate within aesthetic and professional hierarchies that have affirmed specific art mediums, artists, and audiences, it is also true that not all artists have had to deal with these classifications equally. For example, non-Indian women artists of Peña's generation dealt with their own variety of professional issues. They wrestled with the patriarchal boundaries of art institutions and the privileging of male biases about themselves and their art. Anglo women artists of this generation worried about being essentialized and their work being devalued as mere "women's art." However, these women also had the advantages of their race and economic status to depend upon. Pueblo artists, female or male, did not share these advantages. However, Pueblo women, who were also grandmothers, mothers, and wives, valuable members of their communities, were not altogether victimized either. They had their communities that they relied upon and who relied upon them. They also had their art that *they knew* was highly desirable to the non-Indian consumers. As we shall see, they

also recognized, and sometimes resented, non-Indian audiences' romantic and patronizing inclinations toward them, their culture, and their art. They cinched opportune moments to exercise their own sense of authority over their lives and their work.

At the time of their communication, Peña was a twenty-eight-year-old mother, widow, and prolific watercolor painter who was gaining public interest in her detailed images of Pueblo seasonal dances. Bloom was a forty-one-year-old highly educated, well-travelled scholar, amateur archeologist, and administrator at the School of American Archeology and Museum of New Mexico, where he was an assistant to Edgar L. Hewett. In early spring 1921 Peña and Bloom produced a series of letters. Their exchange passed between them, both then living in northern New Mexico at the Pueblo de Cochiti Pueblo in Sandoval County, which is located approximately thirty-five miles southwest of Santa Fe where Bloom's office was located at the Museum of New Mexico. While, by today's standards, thirty-five miles might not be considered significant, travelling this distance on foot would've taken one long arduous day. In early twentieth-century New Mexico rough dirt roads, exposure to extreme weather, and the aridity of the Southwest climate would have placed particular challenges on this thirty-five mile journey. Also, the lack of personal telephones made post mail and telegrams the communication methods of choice. During this period it was not unusual for someone to correspond on a daily basis, sometimes writing several letters a day. A contemporary comparison would be our own daily practice of email exchanges with family, friends, or professional colleagues. Only, the communication exchange of Peña and Bloom's day would have occurred at a considerably slower pace. The consistent and strikingly candid correspondence between Peña and Bloom included cordial regards, financial negotiations, art material requests,

and health inquiries. Also included were regular updates about the artist's creative productivity at Cochiti, reports of community events, and the many challenges Peña faced balancing familial and communal obligations with painting.

With Bloom, the artist openly shared her anxieties regarding her responsibilities as a wife and mother. In April 1921, for example, Peña expressed worry regarding the health of her family:

“And now I will tell you Mr Bloom I am glad my Dear baby got well. And today I got a letter from the Sister school that my little daughter is sick and I am very sorry for her. I don't know what I will do. I want to go and see her...My daughter name is Helia Chavez she is at St. Catherine's school...”⁷⁴

Undoubtedly the responsibility of raising a family alone must have brought about many concerns for this young widow. Her first husband, Juan Rosario Chavez died from illness in 1912. Peña's second husband, Felipe Herrera was killed in a mining accident in 1920. The early loss of her mother and sister, and then later her two husbands, must have made her daughter Helia's illness even more distressful for Peña. All this, in addition to being separated from her young daughter who was living at the St. Catherine Indian School full-time, must have been a lot to manage for this young mother and artist.

Correspondence with someone she knew, at least professionally, perhaps alleviated some of the daily stress that Peña was experiencing at this time. Indeed, the artist certainly had a great deal of weight on her shoulders. This we know through her frequent references to family, money, and professional issues in her letters. Although painting did provide some financial and emotional relief for Peña, the income from this work was dependent on Santa Fe's fluctuating tourist market, and her benefactors managed it.

⁷⁴ Tonita Peña to Lansing Bloom, April 8, 1921, (Edgar L. Hewett papers, Palace of the Governors, New Mexico History Museum, Fray Angelico Chavez History Library).

Additionally, the commissions of five dollars, seven dollars, on up to twenty dollars, were irregular, and did not always cover her family's expenses. For instance, throughout the colder months and low tourist season of winter 1921, Peña frequently requested from Bloom financial advances for purchasing flour, coffee, and cloth from the market located at Cochiti. Although Bloom did advance her money, these payments were accompanied with short chidings that reminded Peña of all the previous payments and supplies he and Hewett had already provided to her.⁷⁵

Accessing fine art materials independently from her benefactors was another source of frustration for the artist. Financial challenges and long distance travel were two key factors that exacerbated this particular issue. According to Samuel Gray, in 1921 the art supply distributor nearest Cochiti was located forty-four miles away in Albuquerque. The store's location accommodated University of New Mexico students and faculty, including Hewett and Chapman who, at different times, both supplied Peña with her favorite "Winston Brand watercolor paints and fine art paper."⁷⁶ Requests for supplies, specifically paper, were regular in her writing. The phrase "I think you better send me some more paper..." appears in over half of her spring 1921 letters to Bloom. This particular issue, lack of art supplies, the artist contended with on a regular basis. It motivated her to keep account of the paper supplied to her. In February and March of 1921 she deliberately reminded Bloom of exactly how many sheets of paper he originally sent, how many paintings she had finished, and how much paper she still had. Whether or not keeping inventory was required is not clear. However, the artist's diligence toward

⁷⁵ Lansing Bloom to Tonita Peña: February 15, 1921, (Edgar L. Hewett papers, Palace of the Governors, New Mexico History Museum, Fray Angelico Chavez History Library).

⁷⁶ Gray, *Tonita Peña: Quah Ah 1893-1949*, 16.

this matter demonstrates that the inaccessibility of art materials posed a genuine problem. Despite this complication, and others, as we shall see, Peña did demonstrate professional loyalty. On March 19, 1921 she wrote to Bloom:

“Here I am sending you the painting what I have done. You sent me 12 drawing paper. I paints 10 paper and took two of them for myself. Many people want to by the painting what I have done but I wont sell it is better to sent it to you.”

In this same writing, however the artist also takes the opportunity to alert Bloom that both he and Hewett had competition:

“Some people want to by from me but you see the paper belong to you and I can not sell...”⁷⁷

Visits from art collectors and tourists to the Pueblos were not infrequent. These visits would have provided Peña with the opportunity to make money apart from any mediation from her benefactors. Whether or not Peña had agreed to refrain from business transactions with interested parties other than Hewett and Bloom is uncertain. In her letters, not only does she declare her hesitation to sell to prospective clients, she also plainly expresses loyalty to Bloom. Was this perhaps a business strategy to gain Bloom’s attention and prompt more frequent, and perhaps larger, payments? The exact arrangements of the artist’s business relationship with Hewett, or Bloom, are not clear. However, we do know, through correspondence, that her connections with other Anglo art patrons were not as well established. For instance, Peña’s association with Kenneth Chapman was not regular at this time. In February 1921, the artist requested from Bloom information about where she could write to Chapman, after Chapman had sent Peña a set of watercolor paints along with a letter. However, these supplies were distributed to the artist *via Bloom*. This suggests that there might have been established professional

⁷⁷ Tonita Peña to Lansing Bloom, March 19, 1921, (Edgar L. Hewett papers, Palace of the Governors, New Mexico History Museum, Fray Angelico Chavez History Library).

boundaries in regard to benefactors working with specific artists. Chapman was largely known for working with Pueblo potters and pottery. Since there is no record that Peña made pottery as regularly as she painted at this time, it can be assumed that it was Hewett and Bloom who managed sales and payments for her watercolors. Bloom also deferred to Hewett regarding sending the artist payments and supplies. Hewett traveled extensively as a professional consultant, and director, to other institutions, therefore it was not infrequent for him to be unavailable.⁷⁸ This may have been a main reason for the time lapses between financial compensation and deliveries of art materials that caused Peña so much worry.

In addition to delayed payments and lack of art supplies, Peña also faced some surveillance over her work. In her writing, the artist commented on people stopping by or watching from outside her window as she painted.⁷⁹ Whether or not these viewers were strictly members of the Cochiti community, or non-Indian tourists observing Peña while she worked, or both, is not clearly stated. According to historian Charles Lange, on at least one occasion, Cochiti community members did officially question Peña's images for exhibiting culturally sensitive information. This interrogation occurred sometime after 1940 during her third, and final, marriage to Eпитacio Arquero. According to Lange, Arquero, who was Governor of Cochiti at the time, was able to successfully defend Peña and her work. Peña continued to paint and Arquero went on to be Cochiti Governor three

⁷⁸ Lansing Bloom to Tonita Peña: February, 15; March, 12; March, 21, 1921, (Edgar L. Hewett papers, Palace of the Governors, New Mexico History Museum, Fray Angelico Chavez History Library).

⁷⁹ Tonita Peña to Lansing Bloom, March 19, 1921, (Edgar L. Hewett papers, Palace of the Governors, New Mexico History Museum, Fray Angelico Chavez History Library).

more times.⁸⁰ Certainly these trials were particular to Pueblo Indian artists. Non-Indian artists of Peña's generation did not have to negotiate these cultural restrictions. However, despite the challenges she faced from both Indian and non-Indian audiences, Tonita Peña refused to disengage herself from her art.

Peña's letters and paintings reflect a series of extremely rapid changes for the Rio Grande Pueblo communities. As stated earlier, by the early twentieth century Pueblo peoples had dealt with three national governments including Spain, Mexico, and the United States.⁸¹ Peña's letters were written just nine years after the inauguration of New Mexico's statehood. They also followed, by three years, the 1918 flu epidemic that ravaged the Rio Grande Pueblos. Her letters and her paintings also corresponded with the passing of the 19th Amendment that granted Anglo American women the right to vote. Even though Peña herself would not be granted suffragist rights for another *twenty-seven years*, this new level of authority for non-Indian women fueled white-feminist debates over cultural preservation or reformation of Pueblo life ways and culture.⁸²

According to Margaret Jacobs, the Anglo feminists of the New Mexican art scene were divided into two camps: those who believed in preserving Pueblo religion and culture, and those who believed in Pueblo assimilation into dominant American society. Interestingly, although they saw themselves in opposition with one another, these two groups of women were very much alike. According to Jacobs, "white women found in the Indian arts and crafts movement an arena in which both to exert a new source of cultural

⁸⁰ Charles Lange, *Cochiti: A New Mexico Pueblo, Past and Present* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1959) 179-181 and 449.

⁸¹ Joe Sando, *Pueblo Nations: Eight Centuries of Pueblo Indian History*.

⁸² Aaron Frye, "Local Knowledge & Art Historical Methodology: A New Perspective on Awa Tsireh & the San Ildefonso Easel Painting Movement." 46-61.

authority and to shape a new version of womanhood.”⁸³ These women appropriated Pueblo Indian people, culture, and art to their own causes. Both groups were economically driven and racially biased. The preservationists strove to preserve “traditional” Pueblo culture and art but only according to their aesthetic tastes. They believed refining Pueblo art and selling to select buyers and collectors would be economically beneficial to the Pueblos. On the contrary, the reformists fought to assimilate Pueblo people into American society according to their political and social agendas. They believed the mass production of Pueblo art for tourist markets to be a better economic choice. Both groups of women assumed they knew what was best for Pueblo communities and, more specifically, Pueblo women. According to Jacobs, Pueblo art became an arena for expressing white feminist values. She states, “White women transformed Indian women artists into powerful symbols of their competing notions of women’s roles in modern America.”⁸⁴ Anglo women further projected their notions of feminism, women’s equal rights, and sexuality onto Pueblo ceremonial dances and the images painted of them. Both groups hyper-sexualized the dances. The preservationists saw the dances as expressive of female sexual freedom. The reformists believed the dances to be sexually exploitive and morally reprehensible. This particular issue reached a new level during the 1920s when the preservationists and the reformists alike sought government intervention to further their own political positions. The conflict did result in an official adjudication. Between 1923-30 the Bureau of Indian Affairs enforced restrictions on Indian dances. These restrictions determined the time, season, and types of

⁸³ Jacobs, “Shaping a New Way: White Women and the Movement to Promote Pueblo Indian Arts and Crafts 1900-1935, 187-215.

⁸⁴ Jacobs, “Shaping a New Way: White Women and the Movement to Promote Pueblo Indian Arts and Crafts 1900-1935, 188.

dances that could be performed. They also restricted the age of the dancers. According to Margaret Jacobs, “[the ban] forbade anyone under fifty from dancing.”⁸⁵ Jacobs states:

In the controversy over Indian dances, female moral reformers tended to view Pueblo dances as symbols of sexual disorder that must be curbed. "New feminists" lauded these same dances as emblems of sexual liberation that should be preserved. Pueblo men in the debate rejected both of these views of their dances and their culture. Instead, they highlighted a multitude of other interests, centered around land and water rights, deepening economic dependence on non-Indians, and the intrusions of new Protestant missionaries, government bureaucrats, anthropologists, writers, and artists.⁸⁶

Through their work with Pueblo artists, which included art classes, lectures, and hands-on demonstrations at the Pueblos, both groups viewed themselves as personally rescuing Pueblo women from the patriarchal oppression of both Pueblo and white men. Euro-feminist projections onto the seasonal dance ceremonies and later the paintings of them continued well into the twentieth century. In 1994, for instance, art historian Marilee Jantzer-White viewed Tonita Peña’s work as subversive to Pueblo gender prescriptions due to Peña’s visual framing of female dancers in her paintings. She states,

“Her depictions frequently chose as their focal point a moment which highlighted the female role... Peña powerfully emphasizes the primacy of women within the Pueblo sphere...Aesthetic considerations blur into reality, as Peña deconstructs fixed Pueblo and western notions about Pueblo female identity.”⁸⁷

Assessments such as Jantzer-White’s, as well as the perspectives of the American preservationists and reformists, need to be appreciated according to the social, racial, and professional position of the scholar and also their historical milieu. The co-opting of

⁸⁵ Margaret Jacobs, “Making Savages of Us All: White Women, Pueblo Indians, and the Controversy over Indian Dances in the 1920s,” in Frederick E. Hoxie, Peter C. Mancall, and James H. Merrell, editors, *American Nations: Encounters In Indian Country, 1850-Present*, (New York; Routledge, 2001) 173-198.

⁸⁶ Jacobs, “Making Savages of Us All: White Women, Pueblo Indians, and the Controversy over Indian Dances in the 1920s,” 178-179.

⁸⁷ Jantzer-White, “Tonita Pena, (Quah Ah) Pueblo Painter: Asserting Identity Through Continuity and Change,” *American Indian Quarterly*, 376-377.

American Indians and their art as representative of Euro-American feminist agendas has a history that dates back to the earliest suffragist movements. We might never know if Peña's depictions of Pueblo women were intentionally "feminist" according to Euro-American feminist concepts. Peña's paintings need to be examined within their own cultural and historical context along with a serious consideration for Peña's personal life, her community, and her artistic career.

Beyond gender, there are other possible explanations for Peña's compositional choices. For example, Peña's biographer Samuel Gray, states that Peña herself was known to have participated in Cochiti's seasonal dances. Peña's familiarity with the dances, and more specifically, her knowledge of the steps and movements of the Pueblo women dancers, perhaps drew her attention, her visual and aesthetic focus, to the female figures in her paintings. The historical documentation describes the artist working in her home and also during the colder months, not in direct observation of the dances, therefore it is not unlikely that Peña painted from memory. Also, considering the large crowds that the seasonal ceremonies drew, and also the heavy amount of communal preparation and participation required for preparing for these ceremonies, it seems uncertain that she would have painted on site. This would suggest that Peña painted from memory. Having danced herself she would have had a strong recollection of a woman's role in the ceremonies. Also, as outsiders we cannot know if Peña was restricted by the Cochiti community to only paint specific dances, or dancers, a point that deserves consideration. However, through her letters we do know that Peña, as well as other Pueblo artists of this period, were keenly aware of their audience's tastes. They made art for a specific audience—white people. In January 1921, for example, Peña wrote to Bloom:

“I want to know what kind of dances you want me to paint. Just tell me of the dances. I paint just the way they wear there dresses and I haven’t paint this other kind of dances yet.”⁸⁸

Peña and Bloom’s exchange reveals much about Euro-American expansion into the Rio Grande Pueblo communities. Their relationship reflected an evolving interdependency between Pueblo communities and rapidly encroaching non-Indian populations. Euro-American intellectuals, artists, and entrepreneurs greatly depended on New Mexico’s Native populations for natural resources, economic wellbeing, and professional success. They needed Pueblo people and their collaboration in order to project a highly desirable image of their own political and cultural progressiveness. In Peña’s individual case, the artist ostensibly seemed eager to please Bloom and Hewett. However, at moments she also demonstrated impatience and resistance toward the authoritative position taken by her benefactors. This Margaret Jacobs refers to as “[Pueblo women’s] overt conformity but covert defiance of white women’s [and men’s] promotion of arts and crafts.” For example, Jacobs states, “Indian women artists often seem to have catered to their white patrons on the surface, but resented and sometimes ridiculed white women’s assumptions behind their backs.” Although, in her paintings, Peña followed the modernist visual prescriptions of the day (the blank white backgrounds and the isolated carefully detailed figures), in her letters Peña consistently, and frequently, referred to her personal and communal responsibilities. This demonstrates the artist’s thoughtful negotiation of her art patrons’ and her audience’s desires, along with her own economic needs and the requirements of her family and community. The regularity of Peña’s comments about her family, her community, and such matters as

⁸⁸ Tonita Peña to Lansing Bloom, March 19, 1921, (Edgar L. Hewett papers, Palace of the Governors, New Mexico History Museum, Fray Angelico Chavez History Library).

“planting a garden, making a garden, and ditch working” all demonstrate the artist’s adherence to her community and the cultural values of the Pueblo de Cochiti.

Material Contradictions of Pueblo Watercolor Paintings

Consider for a moment, the Euro-American introduction of watercolor painting to Pueblo communities of northern New Mexico. Watercolor is an *aqua-dependent* art medium. It is an art method that consists of four main materials: colored pigments, absorbent paper, brushes, and *water*. Water is necessary in order to activate the paint’s viscosity (fluidity) so that it can be applied across the painting surface. Water also helps bind the paint pigments to the paper.

In New Mexico water resources are scarce and water politics prevalent. Pueblo Indian communities consider water sacred. Reverence is given to visual, linguistic, and physical references to water, rain, clouds, and lightening. Water distribution, agriculture, and seasonal ceremonies require communal participation and are necessary to Pueblo communal and cultural survival. In all its various forms, water is integral to birthing, naming, and seasonal ceremonies.⁸⁹ Historically, water has been consistently associated with intercultural and political conflicts between the Pueblo nations and Spanish, Mexican, and American governments. Pueblo historian Joe Sando has identified religious persecution, forced agricultural labor, and—significantly--drought as key factors that lead to the Pueblo Revolt in August 1680. Sando has emphasized the priority given Pueblo seasonal ceremonies involving water and rain even during the most critical moments of Pueblo history and in the centuries since, he writes:

⁸⁹ Alfonso Ortiz, *The Tewa World: Space, Time, Being, and Becoming in a Pueblo Society* (University of Chicago Press, 1969).

“Even during periods of intensive work-such as hoeing and irrigating, harvesting, drying and storing food or medicinal herbs for later use-religious observances were not neglected. When ceremonies demanded, other members of the extended families took care of seasonal business while certain men stayed in the kiva (ceremonial chamber) *to pray for rain*.⁹⁰

According to Sando, during the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 one key military tactic that led to Pueblo victory over the Spanish also involved water:

“In Santa Fe Governor [Antonio de] Otermin attempted to put up resistance. But after a few days, when the natives cut off the water supply, Otermin ... decided to leave.”⁹¹

Indeed water is integral to New Mexican history. To understand the powerful legacy of this natural resource one need only visit this arid region where an everyday adage states “El Agua es la vida.” (Water is life.) About the history of irrigation systems, acequias, and water in the Southwest, the scholar Jose A. Rivera has asserted “stealing water was a sin.”⁹² Rivera’s statement reveals the tenuous nature between humans and water, and with each other. In northern New Mexico relationships with water are politically and spiritually charged. In all its “material and ethereal forms, water unifies contrasting seasons of annual cycles and reaffirms the interdependency of people, [agriculture], and landscape.”⁹³ Of the Tewa and other Pueblo communities’ relationship with water the anthropologist Alfonso Ortiz states:

⁹⁰ Joe S. Sando, *Pueblo Profiles: Cultural Identity through Centuries of Change*, (Santa Fe, Clear Light Publishers, 1998).

⁹¹ Sando, *Pueblo Profiles: Cultural Identity through Centuries of Change*.

⁹² Jose A. Rivera, 5th Annual Celebrando Las Acequias, Aridlands Institute, Embudo, New Mexico, June, 2012; Jose A. Rivera, *Acequia Culture: Water, Land, & Community in the Southwest*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998).

⁹³ Kurt Anschuetz, “Soaking It in: Northern Rio Grande Pueblo Lessons of Water Management and Landscape Ecology,” in Laurie Weinstein, editor, *Native Peoples of the Southwest: Negotiating Land, Water, and Ethnicities* (Bergin and Garvey, 2001).

“In the Tewa’s--as in all Pueblo Indians’ unceasing quest for rainfall, that which seems to bring them closer to the source of this precious moisture [such as clouds, lightening, or mountains] is endowed with unusual sacredness.”⁹⁴

Tonita Peña’s writing evidences the numerous contradictions embedded within the materiality of Pueblo watercolor paintings. Both her words and her adopted art practice exemplify the paradoxes of watercolor pigments, papers, brushes, and water being utilized to make images that have been historically promoted as “traditional” to Pueblo peoples. In her letters, Peña referred to seasonal “ditch digging,” cleaning, and ceremonial dances, all communal activities that date back centuries and are intricately linked with water, agriculture, and life renewal. Pueblo farming practices have always depended on reciprocal relationships with land and water. These two natural resources are literally inseparable, one depends upon the other, and humans are dependent on both. In 1921, Cochiti’s farming and agricultural practices relied upon group stewardship of land, water, and crops. Beyond planting, weeding, watering, and harvesting, Cochiti farming methods also involved: seed collecting and storage, environmental awareness and attention to climate fluctuations, maintenance of water irrigation systems, and communal participation in agricultural ceremonies, songs, and dances. In her writing Peña asserted her personal obligation to the Pueblo de Cochiti and their agricultural practices: a highly organized system of reciprocity grounded in communal engagement and the pueblo’s ongoing commitment to the sustainability of the Rio Grande Valley’s land and water.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Alfonso Ortiz, *The Tewa World: Space, Time, Being, and Becoming in a Pueblo Society* (University of Chicago Press, 1969).

⁹⁵ Kurt F. Anshuetz, “Soaking It in: Northern Rio Grande Pueblo Lessons of Water Management and Landscape Ecology,” in Laurie Weinstein ed. *Native Peoples of the Southwest Negotiating Land, Water, and Ethnicities* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Bergin and Garvey, 2001) 49-78; Jill D. Sweet,

In northern New Mexico, evidence of complex water networks date back to the 12th century, they include remnants of irrigation ditches, runoff and ground water capturing, and dry and flood farming. These technologically adaptable farming strategies have historically supported, enhanced, and complicated Pueblo life. Under the Spanish, Mexican, and U.S. national governments relationships with water became even more complex and water conflicts have continued for over a century and a half after the signing of the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hildago.⁹⁶ Water accessibility, water quality, water conservation and management, and environmental protection of this precious natural resource, all these issues have played out in impassioned disputes resultant from dissimilar attitudes toward water. Environmental scholar Laurie Weinstein refines these intercultural and racial collisions to one main point:

“It is no wonder that water conflicts pit insiders against outsiders, especially when one group sees water as a sacred gift from the creator and the other sees water as a divisible commodity.”⁹⁷

The presence and utilization of an aqua-dependent pictorial medium within the arid lands of the Rio Grande Pueblos exposes another layer of the complex art historical lineage of the Pueblo watercolors. In fact, these paintings are an odd amalgamation of various pictorial genres that include figure studies, portraiture, ethnographic studies, and landscape surveys. The broader history of watercolor as an art medium is relevant to the Pueblo images. Visual and art historical scholars understand that the historical lineage of

Dances of the Tewa Pueblo Indians: Expressions of New Life (Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research Press, 2004).

⁹⁶ Anschuetz, “Soaking It in: Northern Rio Grande Pueblo Lessons of Water Management and Landscape Ecology,” (2001) 49-78.

⁹⁷ Laurie Weinstein, Introduction, in Laurie Weinstein, editor, *Native Peoples of the Southwest: Negotiating Land, Water, and Ethnicities* (Bergin and Garvey, 2001) 14.

the medium, and its past purposes and intents, is important to the final product. For example, one would not simply study a photographic image of an American Indian without also considering the image's historical context, the history of photography as a visual practice, and also the medium's contentious history with Indigenous communities. Prior to the nineteenth-century advent of photography painting was the consistent mode for geographic, familial, and historic documentation particularly for European and Euro-American religious, political, and personal purposes. Image-making, specifically oil and water-based paintings were conducive to colonization processes. For example, 18th-19th century English and American paintings that celebrated agrarian life, as romanticized as they might have been, provided visual records of uncultivated landscapes waiting to be tamed, or portraits of wealthy landowners, their families, and the rolling acres of their well-kept private estates.⁹⁸ Within European contexts, the fine art papers, watercolor pigments, and sable brushes of the watercolor medium are items that are historically associated with wealth, social status, and leisure. Also, watercolor as a documentary record includes militaristic, wildlife, and geographic expeditions. These endeavors included topographic studies, mapmaking, and landscape surveys that were intended to encourage exploration and then colonization purposes. Early visual records of Indigenous peoples of the Americas are resultant from these excursions. These images focused specifically on the physical attributes, bodily adornment, and cultural customs of Native groups for non-Indian consumption, pleasure, and record. In 1585 on an English expedition to Roanoke Island, artist John White documented some of the earliest images of American Indian people in what is now North Carolina. During the 19th century, Karl

⁹⁸ Hugh Prince, "Art and Agrarian Change, 1710-1815," in Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels, editors, *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the symbolic representation, design and use of past environments*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 98-118.

Bodmer and George Catlin both traveled extensively throughout the contiguous U.S. and produced extensive studies of numerous Indian communities. These early images have had a long-lasting impact on our national collective consciousness regarding the mental images that come to mind when we think of Indigenous peoples. White, Bodmer, and Catlin all utilized various visual mediums, including watercolor.⁹⁹

Pueblo water connections are not only materially manifest in the watercolor images, the patterns and designs of ceremonial outfits and the accessories held as the dancers move rhythmically together also reference water (Figure 3). Bursting clouds, falling rain, lightening bolts, or shaken rattles that invoke the sounds and patterns of rainstorms, all of these symbolize human connections to water, life, fertility and cultural continuity.¹⁰⁰ In the Pueblo paintings the artists always carefully render these small but meaningful details, a further indication of their significance and also the Pueblo artists' commitment to cultural continuity.¹⁰¹ Throughout the agricultural seasons, the physical and spatial reenactment of these vital relationships via visual symbols, dance, and song, are even more potent when enacted as a community within the Pueblo landscapes.

⁹⁹ Suzanne Mewborne, "The Art of John White," (North Carolina Museum of History, Office of Archives and History, 2007) 1-3; Virginia Historical Society, "The Town of Pomeiooc: Early Images of Virginia Indians" www.vahistorical.org.

¹⁰⁰ Kent, *Pueblo Indian Textiles: A Living Tradition*; Sweet, *Dances of the Tewa Pueblo Indians: Expressions of New Life*, 69-75.

¹⁰¹ Sweet, *Dances of the Tewa Pueblo Indians: Expressions of New Life*, 70.

Erasing The Land

Sometime between 1919-1922, Awa Tsireh (Alfonso Roybal), Tonita Peña's childhood classmate, painted *San Ildefonso Girls Firing Pottery*, (Figure 4).¹⁰² According to JJ Brody and Aaron Frye, this image is markedly notable among Pueblo watercolors of this period particularly because of its depiction of a specific location. Through careful detailing of the plaza, architecture, and landscape, it is visually evident that Tsireh chose to incorporate distinct location markers that defined this image as representative of a particular place. Also, rather than secluding the figures within a blank white void, like so many watercolors of this time, Tsireh portrayed Pueblo people as actively engaged within an identifiable space. The figures' relationship to and interaction with the San Ildefonso environment is explicit. For example, a large smoking pit centers the image's middle ground where two women are firing pots. Close by, a third woman is seated on a rug polishing a black olla. Near her, more pottery pieces, which are decorated with *Avanyu*, the water serpent, lightening bolts, and a bird, are also in the polishing stage. Retreating into the background is a fourth figure and close by, another figure is seated within, or emerging from, a hand-built wooden shelter. A dog rests on the plaza ground while a rainstorm approaches in the distance. The mountains, vegetation, water, sky, rain, and clouds are all carefully portrayed in the background. The adobe homes and structures of San Ildefonso frame the entire scene. Although it is not historically clear whether Tsireh

¹⁰² There is some historical discrepancy regarding the date of this image. In 1971, Brody dated this image c. 1919. See Brody, *Indian Painters White Patrons*, 92-93. Later in 1997, the painting was dated c. 1921-22, see Brody, *Pueblo Indian Painting: Tradition and Modernism in New Mexico, 1900-1930*, 36-37. In 2008, Aaron Frye re-dated the Tsireh image, c. 1919, see Frye, "Local Knowledge and Art Historical Methodology: A New Perspective on Awa Tsireh and the San Ildefonso Easel Painting Movement" 48. Despite this temporal confusion, the content of this image has had considerable impact on the visual analysis of Pueblo watercolor paintings.

painted this image from memory or directly from observation, his painterly consideration of these distinct details that are particular to San Ildefonso, signal the artist's familiarity with his subject matter. It is through his attention to his home, the people who live there, and the local landscape, that the viewer can easily understand the relevancy of this place to Tsireh's creative and individual perspective as he painted this work.

Brody and Frye have both critically analyzed this image relevant to the formal mediations imposed by the Pueblo art patrons during this time period. Brody has stated that the removal of specific background imagery, and references to land and place, from Pueblo watercolors created after 1919, was the direct influence of non-Indian aesthetic tastes. During the early twentieth century, Pueblo art patrons and scholars viewed visual references to landscape and architecture as *inauthentic* to these watercolors. Landscape imagery, particularly paintings, had long been used within European and Euro-American communities to visually convey property ownership, promote expansion and colonization projects, and promote nationalist agendas.¹⁰³ In New Mexico, during the early twentieth century, landscape paintings were read according to Euro-American cultural contexts and visual histories. Following the patron mindset, Pueblo depictions of their own familiar landscapes were designated "Euro-American" and therefore inauthentic to the watercolor images. According to the patrons, the watercolor paintings should not include any references to landscape or the surrounding regional environment. Image backgrounds should be flat and devoid of spatial allusions that did not follow the traditions of ancient

¹⁰³ Prince, "Art and Agrarian Change, 1710-1815," 98-118; Brian Osborne, "The Iconography of nationhood in Canadian art" in in Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels, editors, *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the symbolic representation, design and use of past environments*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 162-178; Angela Miller, introduction to *The Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics 1825-1875*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 1-20.

kiva murals and pottery decorating. In personal correspondence, Pueblo art patron Elizabeth Huff declared that the work of two artists, Cresencio Martinez and Alfredo Montoya, was not “real Indian art” because it included background imagery such as trees and animals, and according to Huff, “imitated white artists.”¹⁰⁴

This theory elided Pueblo aesthetic and reciprocal relationships to land and landscape. It also disregarded Pueblo artistic agency and the artists’ expressions of their own sense of place in new and innovative ways. Brody states, this generally patronizing disposition toward Pueblo peoples had more to do with racist attitudes that were grounded in notions of romantic primitivism and Euro-American desires to conceptually confine Pueblo peoples to an ancient primordial past. In their scholarship and promotion of this art new genre, the patrons consistently related the blank white negative spaces to ancient ceremonial kivas, rock art, and pottery excavated at local archeological digs, art forms that were typically regarded as authentic. They did not visually convey spatial relationships according to methods of linear perspective or the vanishing points of European art traditions.¹⁰⁵

Throughout the development of the Native Modernism discourse, the removal of the landscapes has been singly attributed to Euro-American aesthetic demands. The striking pictorial contrast between the ethnographically detailed anonymous figures and the blank white backgrounds became this art’s signature formal attribute. At the height of its popularity (1920s-1935), the style maturation of this work coincided with the visual erasure of the northern New Mexican landscape. When historically contextualized, this

¹⁰⁴ Jacobs, “Shaping a New Way: White Women and the Movement to Promote Pueblo Indian Arts and Crafts, 1900-1935,” 196.

¹⁰⁵ Brody, *Indian Painters, White Patrons*, 95.

pictorial shift has as much to do with the political, social, and environmental issues occurring within the northern New Mexican Pueblos, as it does with American modern aesthetics. However, examinations of any additionally motivating factors, beyond Euro-American tastes, that may have prompted and also sustained the continual removal of the background imagery have yet to be explored. Given the rapid encroachment of non-Indians into Pueblo territories at this time, and also the mass appropriation of land, water, and other natural resources, it seems probable that, for both the Anglo art patrons and the Pueblo artists, this intentional omission was even more politically charged than mere pictorial style or aesthetic preference. One thing is certain, the erasure of *overt* references to land and place from these paintings conveyed multiple and even conflicting visual messages. The blank white backgrounds offered a space for numerous, and sometimes fantastic, interpretations. A closer examination of the blank white spaces *and San Ildefonso Girls Firing Pottery*, will demonstrate these points.

Painted when the artist was twenty years old, *San Ildefonso Girls Firing Pottery* confirms Awa Tsireh's familiarity with San Ildefonso daily life within this particular landscape. As stated earlier, the artist's connection to this place is visually apparent via pictorial representations of the Rio Grande Valley region, pueblo architecture, vegetation, water, mountains, sky, rain, and clouds. Whether from memory or direct observation, the painting documents the artist's individual experience and relationship to particular people and spaces of northern New Mexico. These essential visual and spatial elements, which Tsireh so carefully portrayed in his 1919 image, become obvious once they are visually erased and separated from the figures portrayed. Consider for example, two of Tsireh's paintings from 1920 and 1921 (Figures 5 and 6). These two images share compositional

similarities with the 1919 version. However, all obvious references to land, landscape, and place are omitted. The extraction of the background imagery deliberately shifts the viewer's attention. The blank white negative space directs the viewer's focus toward the isolated Pueblo figures, the pottery firing process, and the decorated pots in the foreground. All of these elements then become visually (and therefore conceptually) dominant.

When *San Ildefonso Girls Firing Pottery* is materially analyzed, the specific purpose of this image and its intended audience is clearly understood. For instance, the cleanly cut watercolor paper and watercolor paints, are easily identifiable as non-local art materials. Watercolor paper is designed to support the heavy application of the water-based paint. Its porous highly absorbent surface makes this material ideal for pigment or color adherence, and keeps the paint colors rich and vibrant. This sturdy, but compact and lightweight material, which weighs only a few ounces, encourages fast drying, portability, and allows for layering of numerous applications of color. The arid environment of New Mexico would have further accelerated the drying process and allowed time for rapid production of these works. All these physical attributes are ideal for painting on location and observational exercises. This lightweight material is also compatible with framing and long-distance shipment. The Pueblo watercolor images could have been purchased in New Mexico and then easily shipped to far-off locations where they could then be framed and exhibited. Moreover, compared to other painting and art mediums, watercolor paintings have historically been relatively inexpensive thus making production costs low and profit margins high. In other words, these paintings are ideal art market and tourist items.

The back of *San Ildefonso Girls Firing Pottery* (1919-1922) is stamped with the initials ELH and SAR for Edgar L. Hewett, and the School of American Research in Santa Fe. The price of this painting, which is also marked in the image's reverse side, is five dollars. This textual information confirms this work's purpose as an art market commodity that was intentionally created for a particular audience.¹⁰⁶ Awa Tsireh's personal background, the small size of this image, the subject matter, and the non-local art materials all combine into a hybridized postcard-window. In fact, Brody refers to paintings of this genre and period as "documentary souvenirs": paper portals into northern New Mexican Pueblo life, painted by Pueblo people, but specifically intended for non-Indian viewers.¹⁰⁷

During the institutionalization of the Native Modernist style, non-Indian art instructors and art patrons pushed for the editing of visual references to the dusty southwest landscape. Pitched as artistic stylization, this omission temporally correlated with Euro-American reformist attitudes, which, in New Mexico, stressed modernizing and "cleaning up" the Pueblos, their agricultural practices, and their art. As Margaret Jacobs has demonstrated, white female moral reformists were particularly active in this role. They "sought to uplift Native Americans through arts and crafts." The reformists promoted "order and purity in Pueblo homes," and equated artistic industry and practice with "good character." Jacobs states that in the eyes of some reformers, Pueblo Indian women who did not follow their prescriptions for hygiene, health, domesticity, or art

¹⁰⁶ Brody, *Pueblo Indian Painting: Tradition and Modernism in New Mexico, 1900-1930*, 206.

¹⁰⁷ JJ Brody, "Other Native Modernists: What's in a Name" in *Essays on Native Modernism: Complexities and Contradiction in American Indian Art* (NMAI, 2006) pp. 31-41.

production were viewed as “idle, dirty loafers.”¹⁰⁸ These judgments were not limited to the female reformists. Pueblo art preservationists advanced their own purist notions that were veiled in appeals for artistic refinement and aesthetic authenticity. Considering these racialized mindsets, these works, with their stark white backgrounds, could easily be understood as a result of visual sanitization. In his study of her instructive style at the Santa Fe Indian School Studio from 1932-1937, Brody points to art teacher Dorothy Dunn’s emphasis on “good taste.” He writes: “Good taste may be considered the most accurate two-word description of what Studio painting was all about.”¹⁰⁹ While Brody may simply be pointing out Dunn’s emphasis on clean form and style within the Pueblo paintings, Dunn’s professional history, and her connection to and awareness of female reformists and their work among Pueblo communities, may have influenced Dunn’s stress upon restricted subject matter and minimal, if not immaculate, backgrounds. In fact, Dunn was known for her encouragement of specific compositional and design methods. Her artistic regiment eventually raised resistance from American Indian art students who chose not to limit themselves to Dunn’s prescriptions for Pueblo “authenticity.”¹¹⁰

Among Native art scholars, there exists a general consensus that the Pueblo watercolor paintings were a result of early twentieth-century collaborations between wealthy non-Indian intellectuals and young “untrained” Pueblo artists.¹¹¹ In fact, the early

¹⁰⁸ Jacobs, “Shaping a New Way: White Women and the Movement to Promote Pueblo Indian Arts and Crafts, 1900-1935,” 200-205.

¹⁰⁹ Brody, *Indian Painters White Patrons*, 136.

¹¹⁰ Bruce Bernstein and W. Jackson Rushing, *Modern by Tradition: American Indian Painting in the Studio Style*, (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1995), 15.

¹¹¹ Penney and Roberts, “America’s Pueblo Artists: Encounters on the Borderlands,” 21-38.

group of watercolorists, which Peña and Tsireh both belonged to, has consistently been referred to as the “self-taught” group. They are identified as not having any “formal” art training. It must be kept in mind that such labels are Eurocentric evaluations. Pueblo communities of the Rio Grande Valley had consistently practiced various art forms both prior to and following European contact. “Formal art training” within Euro-American art and educational systems largely involves hands-on practice with materials and methods, direct observation, discussion of techniques and results, and learning about the aesthetic history and practices of various communities and cultures. These “formal” training methods, and variations of them, were consistently present in Pueblo communities. Pueblo artists learned from one another. They discussed their work and the results. They shared strategies. The late nineteenth and early twentieth-century hype over Pueblo art and aesthetics stresses the fact that appreciation of this art was new to Euro-Americans, *not Pueblo people*. For the Pueblos, knowledge about styles and techniques had been shared across generations. However this history and of artistic experiences were taken for granted as non-Indian experts set out to refine the Pueblo techniques. This situation sometimes raised resentment between the artists and their patrons. Jacobs puts a finer point on this issue by relating a personal experience of the Pueblo art patron Elizabeth Dehuff, she writes:

“Some women artists were more blatant in their objections to white women’s assumptions. DeHuff quoted a Pueblo woman exclaiming, “I don’t need nobody to teach me about pottery!...My grandmother teach me long ago!”¹¹²

Dehuff’s experience demonstrates the intergenerational sharing of art knowledge and practices within the Pueblos. This narrative counters the more prevalent art historical

¹¹² Jacobs, “Shaping a New Way: White Women and the Movement to Promote Pueblo Indian Arts and Crafts, 1900-1935,” 207.

accounts of this period, which regarded the Anglo art patrons as the experts of the “newly discovered,” Pueblo art, life, and culture. The art patrons took credit for the twentieth-century artworks, which they extolled as an Indian art “revival.” However, the application of pictorial elements and design patterns on ceramics and the aesthetic embellishment of clothing, dance outfits, and other utilitarian items had consistently been a part of Pueblo life: a point that becomes obvious via non-Indian and Indian professional relationships of this period. Upon their arrival to the Pueblos, Euro-American archeologists, anthropologists, artists, other scholars, and collectors all relied upon the historical and creative knowledge of Pueblo people. Some Pueblo people shared this information. Others did not. During this period, non-Indians hired Pueblo men and women to lead them to and work at excavation sites, answer their questions about ancient histories and ceremonies, and also replicate samples of found art objects. However, interest in Pueblo histories and cultural information benefited the non-Indian art patrons, anthropologists, and scholars, who privileged certain artists, mediums, and methods, and not others. Debates over Pueblo authenticity within the watercolors overrode recognition of the cross-cultural formal and material traits of these works. As Brody states, “The Santa Fe intellectuals appear to have been perfectly convinced that they were not influencing the painters, that the artists were indeed tapping into aboriginal roots, but the evidence indicates otherwise.” Non-Indian hesitancy to embrace the intercultural elements of this art was one of many social and historical contradictions relevant to this work.

Tonita Pena and Awa Tsireh both painted under Hewett’s guidance. These artists became two of the most successful Pueblo watercolor painters of the early twentieth

century. Their paintings were favorite tourist items and exhibitions including their work drew crowds of tourists to the Rio Grande Pueblo communities. Their paintings, along with other Pueblo works were promoted as “free expressions” of Pueblo culture.¹¹³ However, these generalized statements about free expression were consistently contradicted by non-Indian desires for specific imagery. The demand for choice images required multiple repetitions, or editions, of the same Pueblo dance scenes. However, in small ways each artist altered details of the repeat works. Changes were made according to compositional and content choice, and also each artist’s technical ability. Location further affected the images. In each community the dance ceremonies were performed by distinct moieties. Representations of the seasonal moieties, such as the winter or summer moieties influenced the visual details of designs, patterns, colors, and accessories of the dance outfits portrayed in the watercolors.¹¹⁴ Each artist’s home community also influenced their work. Although, in their seasonal ceremonies the pueblos shared similarities, each community performed unique songs and choreography, and their styles and accoutrements also varied. Peña painted at Cochiti Pueblo, while Tsireh painted fifty-five miles north at San Ildefonso. Throughout their careers both artists met patron and tourist demands by painting variations of the same dance performances. These included: the Buffalo Dance, the Eagle Dance, the Tablita or Corn Dance, the Basket Dance, and, numerous images of Pueblo Indian women making pottery.¹¹⁵ Aaron Frye has suggested

¹¹³ Penney and Roberts, “America’s Pueblo Artists: Encounters on the Borderlands,” 21-38.

¹¹⁴ Marilee Jantzer-White, “Tonita Pena, (Quah Ah) Pueblo Painter: Asserting Identity Through Continuity and Change”; Frye, “Local Knowledge and Art Historical Methodology: A New Perspective on Awa Tsireh and the San Ildefonso Easel Painting Movement.”

¹¹⁵ Both Bruce Bernstein and JJ Brody offer examples of these repeated scenes painted by Tsireh, Peña, and the generations that follow in: Bruce Bernstein and W. Jackson Rushing, 1995; Brody, 1971, 1997, and 2006.

that the repetitiveness of specific images had much to do with Pueblo religious practices and that Pueblo artists were permitted to paint images of dances that were open to non-Indian audiences and did not reveal religiously sensitive information. For example, according to Frye, the highly popular “Buffalo Dance” image is indicative of this ceremony’s non-local origin, since among the Pueblos, this ceremony has historically been open to the public and is therefore less religiously restrictive. Frye’s assessment suggests that pictorial variations within the watercolor images were due in part to Pueblo cultural values and desires to protect religious or culturally sensitive information from outsiders. In other words, Pueblo artists were actively modifying images according to Pueblo desires, needs, and cultural boundaries. There is some plausibility to this evaluation. By the twentieth century, the Pueblos had been enacting regulations on photography and other image making methods within their community boundaries.¹¹⁶ In some known cases Pueblo artists were monitored and even disciplined by their communities for creating culturally sensitive paintings.¹¹⁷ These individual cases support Frye’s theory and elucidate possible reasons for Pueblo artists’ complicity with the blank white backgrounds. Consider for instance, that when so much of Pueblo religious and ceremonial life was directly tied to the land and landscape, completely omitting any visual depictions of sacred spaces, which were not meant for tourist consumption, would have preemptively eliminated any unforeseeable problems regarding non-Indian curiosity. According to Cochiti Scholar Joseph H. Suina, since the Spanish occupation,

¹¹⁶ Dilworth, *Imagining Indians in the Southwest: Persistent Visions of a Primitive Past*; Melody Graulich, “I Became the Colony: Kate Cory’s Hopi Photographs” in *Trading Gazes: Euro-American Women Photographers and Native North Americans, 1880-1940*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

¹¹⁷ Bill Anthes, “The Culture Brokers: The Pueblo Paintings of Jose Lente and Jimmy Byrnes,” 30-88.

Pueblo secrecy has been a consistently valuable tool with maintaining privacy from outsiders. It is a protective measure. Suina states,

“Secrecy became synonymous with preservation and was elevated to the status of community wide effort to save native religion... The credit for maintaining a rich native religion for more than the 300 years of intercultural relations must be given to the most important weapon: secrecy. Attempts to eliminate native religion took on renewed vigor with the advent of the U.S. government, which sought to obliterate the total native culture as well.”¹¹⁸

The long-term restrictions enforced by Pueblo people regarding images created within their communities were in place during the advent of the watercolor paintings. These regulations not only affirm Frye’s theory about possible religious sensitivity, they also demonstrate that Pueblo peoples understood the potential for visual as well as aesthetic acts of violence. Images have the power to communicate specific ideologies. They are also tools for appropriating information not meant for popular consumption.

The visual, and therefore conceptual, removal of Pueblo landscapes from the Pueblo watercolor paintings has historically encouraged viewer and scholarly attention to the ethnographic and figurative details of these images. As stated earlier, art scholars have highlighted the formal elements of these paintings, such as color, composition, or repetition in relation to *ancient* Pueblo cultures. The content of these discourses is particularly notable because it demonstrates how gaps in knowledge help to create a space for the application of misinformation.

For example, art historians JJ Brody and Bruce Bernstein have used the following terms to describe the blank white negative space: “*timeless, implied environments, non-illusionist, voids, otherworldly, allusions to space,*” and “*associated with supernatural*

¹¹⁸ Joseph H. Suina, “Pueblo Secrecy: Result of Intrusions,” *New Mexico Magazine*, January, 1992.

beings”¹¹⁹ Brody has further described the shallow pictorial spaces of the watercolor images as “*micro-universes*,” where “life within those spaces follows an unknown and *alien* logic.”¹²⁰ These atmospheric, modern, “space-age” descriptors of the negative spaces were then supported by archeological references that furthered esoteric and heavily exoticized interpretations of the images which restricted Pueblo peoples to either a primordial past or an ambiguous future, and disconnected them from contemporary contexts. According to these interpretations, the isolated Pueblo figures become entrapped within a universal landless void: an endless white frontier that pictorially reopened what Frederick Jackson Turner declared closed in 1893. This visual and conceptual re-opening of spatial limitations and boundaries within these paintings was key to “consolidat[ing] the image of geographic limits of U.S. territory in the minds of its citizenry.”¹²¹ Within the Pueblo watercolor paintings, the U.S. boundaries became *limitless*. The overall visual editing process, which was simultaneously imposed according to non-Indian aesthetic tastes and supported by Pueblo needs for secrecy, helped visually affirm and also encourage twentieth-century expansionist attitudes.

The assertion of an American national identity has historically been presented in contrast to an effeminized Europe. This point was a motivating factor during the establishment of a modern American art aesthetic during the twentieth century. However, in her visual study of twentieth-century images from the U.S.-Mexican border,

¹¹⁹ For example of this language see: Brody, “Other Native Modernists: What’s in a Name”; Bernstein and Rushing, *Modern by Tradition: American Indian Painting in the Studio Style*; Jantzer-White, “Tonita Pena, (Quah Ah) Pueblo Painter: Asserting Identity Through Continuity and Change.”

¹²⁰ Brody, “Other Native Modernists: What’s in a Name,” 31-41.

¹²¹ Claire F. Fox quoting Benedict Anderson in “U.S.-Mexico Border Conflict in U.S. Popular Culture: Recodifications of the Revolution and the Porfiriato,” in *The Fence and the River: Culture and Politics at the U.S.- Mexico Border*, (University of Minnesota, 1999).

specifically during the Mexican Revolution from 1910-1920, Claire F. Fox has demonstrated that timely distinctions of American-ness, specifically throughout the Southwest, required clear-cut dissociations with Mexico, Mexicans, and Mexican indigenous populations. According to Fox, popular media sources of the time, specifically picture postcards and newsreel films visually executed this severing.¹²²

When applying Fox's analysis to the Pueblo watercolors, erasure of the Rio Grande Valley and the Rio Grande River from the backgrounds visually eliminated both geographic and national borders. The extraction of this border landscape from the watercolors pictorially worked to disassociate Pueblo Indians from their historic connections to Spain and Mexico. This very conscious segregation was carried out aesthetically as well as linguistically. Pueblo artists increasingly signed their images using exclusively their "Indian" names, as opposed to their Spanish identifications. In *San Ildefonso Girls Firing Pottery*, for example, the bold black signature at the bottom right side of the painting reads the Pueblo name Awah Tsireh, rather than the artist's Spanish or baptismal name Alfonso Roybal. This publicity maneuver helped to extinguish all cultural and historical connections with the Spanish speaking countries. It also assisted with circumventing the recent Spanish and Mexican occupations of the region, thereby freeing the Pueblo peoples to be completely subsumed within an American nationalist identity. The Anglo scholars and art patrons hurdled over two centuries of Pueblo history to an ancient primordial and indigenous past. Along with the isolation of Indian bodies within the landless voids, the visual removal of Pueblo connections to the earth, via their architecture, agriculture, and culturally significant

¹²² Fox, "U.S.-Mexico Border Conflict in U.S. Popular Culture: Recodifications of the Revolution and the Porfiriato," 70-85.

landscapes, made way for twentieth-century American expansion that in the Pueblo watercolor paintings and in the dominant mindset became limitless.



Figure 1. Tonita Peña, *Making Pottery*, c. 1922
School for Advanced Research /MNM



Figure 2. Tonita Peña, Cochiti Pueblo, New Mexico, c. 1935
Museum of New Mexico



Figure 3. Tonita Pena, *Basket Dance*, c. 1919, Private Collection.



Figure 4. Awah Tsireh, *San Ildefonso Girls Firing Pottery*, c.1919, School for Advanced Research/MNM



Figure 5. Awa Tsireh, *Burning Pots and San Ildefonso Girls Firing Pottery*, ca. 1919
School for Advanced Research/IARC



Figure 6. Awa Tsireh, *Burning Pots and San Ildefonso Girls Firing Pottery*, c. 1921
School for Advanced Research / IAR

CHAPTER TWO

The Abiqueños and the Artist: Rethinking O’Keeffe

"God told me if I painted it often enough I could have it."

Georgia O’Keeffe on *Tsiping*, Cerro Pedernal, 1977

"...A suggestion was made to rename the Cerro Pedernal after O’Keeffe. Local residents responded with petitions and letters strongly opposing what they saw as a minimization of their traditions and heritage."

United States Department of Interior/National Park service, 1992

On February 14, 1938 *Life* magazine printed a photo essay on twentieth-century modern artist Georgia O’Keeffe. The brief—but telling--column highlighted the artist’s latest penchant for collecting skulls and bones in the arid landscape of northern New Mexico, decaying bovine and equine remains that then became the subject of some of the artist’s most recognizable paintings. O’Keeffe had already established a reputation with modern art audiences with her large vulval flower paintings and provocative photographic portraits taken by her husband, art impresario Alfred Stieglitz. At the time of the *Life* publication Stieglitz had been capitalizing on modernism’s desiring gaze, O’Keeffe’s sex, and her artistic talent for nearly twenty years.¹²³ The title of the *Life*

¹²³ Ann Middleton Wagner, *Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner, and O’Keeffe*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 29-103; Wanda Corn, “Telling Tales: Georgia O’Keeffe on Georgia O’Keeffe,” *American Art* Vol. 23, No. 2 (2009): 54-79; Wanda Corn, “The Great American Thing,” in *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 239-291. On O’Keeffe overseeing writings about herself and her work see Wanda Corn, “Telling Tales: Georgia O’Keeffe on Georgia O’Keeffe,” 54-79; William Innes Homer, “Abiquiu is a long way for you to come,” *American Art*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Fall 2006): 8-13; Bram Dijkstra, “White Flowers on Her Doorstep,” *American Art*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Fall 2006): 14-20; Sarah Whitaker Peters, *Becoming O’Keeffe: The Early Years*, (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991).

essay reads: “Georgia O’Keeffe Turns Dead Bones To Live Art.”¹²⁴ The article text is only three paragraphs long and is accompanied by a large photograph of O’Keeffe hauling a large sun-dried rib cage and spinal cord, along with a cattle skull covered in decomposing flesh. Looking away from the camera, under a black Spanish-style hat, the artist studies her massive prize. Below, a smaller photo shows O’Keeffe posing dramatically while lovingly stroking a bleached white “steer’s skull” hung upon a brick wall on the roof of her New York penthouse. The caption under this smaller photo reads: “She looks upon skulls not in terms of death but in terms of their fine composition” (Figure 7).

The *Life* article images and captions *allude to* but never specifically state the particular conditions by which Georgia O’Keeffe was able to collect large decaying (not to mention heavy) bovine and equine skeletal remains. The most specific information simply states “in New Mexico.” Instead the author relies on formalist descriptions such as “design, color, and composition”: concepts that refer to both O’Keeffe’s paintings as well as the decomposing animals. Beyond these aesthetic references, the article provides no historical or cultural context for the images or the subject matter: dead animals.

In what follows I will investigate this context. By doing so, I will also demonstrate how the standard art historical treatments of Georgia O’Keeffe’s New Mexican period, characterized by modernist formalism and gendered interpretation both *give meaning to* and also *dismiss* specific historical, cultural, and racial information embodied within her fine art images. The use of visual aesthetics as *political and racial analgesic* becomes

¹²⁴ “Georgia O’Keeffe Turns Dead Bones To Live Art.” *Life* Magazine, February 14, 1938, 28-31.

evident once Georgia O’Keeffe’s Southwest skull and landscape paintings are re-contextualized according to moments of American Indian and Hispano resistance to twentieth-century U.S. colonization in northern New Mexico.¹²⁵

By considering the American Indian and Hispano experiences, which are directly relevant to O’Keeffe’s Southwest images, this chapter ultimately demonstrates how her work aesthetically naturalized both generalized attitudes of Eurocentric entitlement and specific acts of land appropriation within the ancient Indian pueblo *Avéshu* (Abiquiu), New Mexico.¹²⁶ Additionally, by re-contextualizing examples of O’Keeffe’s skull and landscape paintings according to *Abiqueño* memory and concepts of place this essay ventures new meanings for these images, while also clarifying how O’Keeffe’s Southwest oeuvre developed alongside ongoing projects of U.S. colonization. Moreover, I draw into question the long-standing “O’Keeffe Country” sobriquet so often used to refer to the Piedra Lumbre basin and Abiquiu region; a moniker that elides local peoples and their histories. Along with O’Keeffe’s skull and landscape paintings, this seemingly harmless slogan falsely renders this geographical area historically and physically—as though it were empty beyond the artist’s presence.

I am not interested in either valorizing or demonizing O’Keeffe. It would be unfair for me to do either because, like many people who have written about her, I did not know her personally. As an art scholar I realize that I am working against a well-smoothed

¹²⁵ In conversations with Abiqueño citizens and members of neighboring communities in northern New Mexico, *Hispano* was the preferred term of self-identification beyond the more specific place names or historical/cultural identifiers such as *Abiqueño* or *Genizaro*.

¹²⁶ The Tewa term *Avéshu* is based on the expertise of renowned Tewa scholar Esther Martinez of San Juan Pueblo, see Lesley Poling-Kempes, *Valley of Shining Stone: The Story of Abiquiu* (Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 1997).

grain. A far easier task might be to further polish the “austere, priestess of the desert” persona consistently used to “perpetuate [O’Keeffe’s] artistic legacy.”¹²⁷ However, my professional training as a visual artist and American Indian scholar alert me to specific contrivances and omissions within the O’Keeffe narrative. As an artist (and as a woman) I have pondered the physical possibility for one woman to create the copious body of work that O’Keeffe did during her time in New Mexico while also managing extensive correspondence to family, friends, and business relations, in addition to maintaining two homes, two acres of organic gardens, art exhibitions, and world travel. As an American Indian scholar I am drawn to the experiences of the people who lived in Abiquiu prior to, during, and long after O’Keeffe’s occupation. What are their histories? What are the Abiqueño perspectives of the artist’s presence in the ancient pueblo? And just *why* were there so many skulls and bones in the desert?

My curiosity has urged me to scratch beneath her glossy painting surfaces and uncover a more textured historical layer, one that’s still pertinent to the creation of a national American aesthetic and O’Keeffe’s success: namely the artist’s forty-plus year relationship with her Abiqueño, American Indian, and Hispano neighbors.¹²⁸ There was a complex exchange that involved conflicting racial and cultural perspectives, shifting personal and professional boundaries, power struggles, and, in some cases, deep affection

¹²⁷ “...perpetuating the artistic legacy of Georgia O’Keeffe” has been one of the O’Keeffe Foundation’s (now the Georgia O’Keeffe Museum) key mission points. See the O’Keeffe Foundation Records, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

¹²⁸ I count from the year 1940 when O’Keeffe purchased her first home at Ghost Ranch, which is located fifteen miles outside of the *Pueblo de Abiquiu*. Although O’Keeffe did not move permanently to Abiquiu until 1949 she had already begun establishing relationships with local people in and around the Abiquiu area.

between O’Keeffe and the people who surrounded her, built and maintained her two homes, and cared for her on a daily basis as she created some of her most famous works.

The enduring popularity of O’Keeffe’s Southwest images demands that her New Mexican skull and landscape paintings be re-viewed in light of the devastating historical facts that made them possible, such as forced livestock executions, land grant violations, and land appropriation. These are the details that the popular and scholarly examinations of her life and work consistently leave out. The more scumbly layers of the O’Keeffe narrative, which have since been smoothed into a national narrative, are important as evidence of a much larger ongoing issue: the omission of American Indian and Hispano contributions to our national creative identity and our national identity. This is a historical narrative that has consistently centered on Anglo art patrons and benefactors, one that has minimized American Indian and Hispano peoples’ active contributions to American modern art.

It is my strong belief that, throughout the second half of her career, Georgia O’Keeffe would not have reached the degree of success that she did without the enduring patience and support of Abiqueño peoples. In fact, this is a point I believe O’Keeffe herself realized and one she acknowledged through her “quiet” financial contributions to the Abiquiu community.¹²⁹ Nonetheless, the visual and verbal occlusion of Abiqueno, American Indian, and Hispano experiences—first in O’Keeffe’s paintings and then in the reception of them--has been key to the creation and perpetuation of the Georgia O’Keeffe

¹²⁹ O’Keeffe scholars refer to O’Keeffe’s “quiet” financial contributions to the Abiquiu community as testament to the artist’s sense of modesty and generosity. However, I believe that during the forty-plus years she spent in the pueblo, O’Keeffe developed a deep sense of obligation to and gratitude toward the local people.

myth: the myth of the “isolated” American art icon. O’Keeffe herself participated in this aestheticized nationalist myth, both intentionally and unintentionally; it is a myth that has been insensitive, at best, and culturally and legally disruptive, at worst. This is where I begin.

Creating the O’Keeffe Myth

A full color reproduction of O’Keeffe’s 1931 painting *Horse’s Head with Pink Rose* dominates the layout of the *Life* magazine article (Figure 8). The work is typical of O’Keeffe’s early skull paintings. It is more representational and less abstract than her later skull and bone images and depicts a still life study of a clean white equine skull with a bright pink rose centered on a blue background. The painting’s cool whites, pinks, and blues are indicative of O’Keeffe’s color palette prior to her permanent move to New Mexico when her work became more earth toned; a color shift that was later critically noted by art historian William Agee in 1988.¹³⁰ Art critics and audiences alike were, at this time, consistently more concerned about such formalist details rather than the origins of the artist’s source material. *Horse’s Head with Pink Rose*, which O’Keeffe created in New York, not in New Mexico, sold for “approximately \$5,000.00” according to the essay.¹³¹ Readers of *Life*, many of whom were recovering from the Great Depression, must have been impressed with this sum. The writer then includes a series of follow-up statements that reveal the artist’s connections with famous people such as cosmetics

¹³⁰ William Agee, ““Helga” and Other Problems,” *The New Criterion*, (1988).

¹³¹ “Georgia O’Keeffe Turns Dead Bones To Live Art,” 28-31; Wanda Corn, “The Great American Thing,” 239-291; Roxana Robinson, *Georgia O’Keeffe: A Life*, (New York: HarperPerennial, 1990); Georgia O’Keeffe, [VHS] directed by Perry Miller Adato, (1977; WNET).

magnate Elizabeth Arden and art critic Lewis Mumford, and with respectable art institutions, like New York's Whitney Museum of American Art and the Museum of Modern Art, and the Phillips Memorial Gallery in Washington, D.C. Beyond all that, however, the *Life* vignette is notable because of its strikingly macabre images. Most readers could relate to the fashionably middlebrow text. Additionally attractive is the air of mystery the article creates. O'Keeffe's dramatic clothing, the decapitated heads, the empty desert are all transfixing. The author permits only a surface-level glimpse into O'Keeffe's life and work during this time, adding further to her mystique. However, the little information that *is* offered reveals volumes about the in-vogue criteria by which mainstream audiences had come to appreciate modern art and artists by the late 1930s. For instance, popular publications routinely highlighted artists' well-established, almost Hollywood-like status, their connections with fellow celebrities, and the high prices their artwork and reputations demanded. These details, strategically paired with formalist descriptions of their work, i.e. "design, color, and composition," regularly took precedence over social and cultural context.¹³²

Formalist concerns dominated the criticism of O'Keeffe's art during her lifetime, as they do now. When writers on O'Keeffe *have* moved beyond formalist interpretations, then or now, one theme dominates. Critics, biographers, and art historians—especially male art critics in the interwar period and second wave feminists in the 1960s and 1970s—have recurrently applied sexualized analyses to O'Keeffe's life and work. As art

¹³² For a detailed study of the early development of the formalist language in relation to American Indian art and communities see Elizabeth Hutchinson, *The Indian Craze: Primitivism, Modernism, and Transculturation in American Art, 1890–1915*, (Duke University Press, 2009). Art Historian Aaron Fry makes a strong case for local knowledge and cultural context within fine art interpretations, see: Aaron Fry, "Local Knowledge & Art Historical Methodology: A New Perspective On Awa Tsireh & The San Ildefonso Easel Painting Movement" *Hemisphere: Visual Cultures of the Americas*, Vol. 1 (2008): 46-61.

historian Anne Wagner points out, despite O’Keeffe’s resistance to essentialist interpretations, by the mid-to-late twentieth century, gendered critiques dominated the O’Keeffe scholarship.

Indeed, by the 1938 printing of the *Life* photo essay, O’Keeffe was already well into a long shedding process of the “woman artist” image initially imposed upon her by Stieglitz and his circle.¹³³ The artist’s reinvention of herself as a public figure involved several dramatic changes including her physical appearance. According to art historian Wanda Corn, O’Keeffe stopped posing nude for Stieglitz’s portraits of her and began dressing more conservatively in flowing garments and headwear that concealed her body but accentuated her striking presence. Just as importantly, O’Keeffe made-over the subject matter in her work shifting from flower imagery and New York scenes to the New Mexican landscape. This visually signaled the artist’s desire to separate from the New York art world. As part of this biographical shift, in 1929, O’Keeffe began making seasonal excursions to northern New Mexico including Taos, Abiquiu, and the Piedre Lumbre Basin.¹³⁴

The artist’s annual migration from East to West constituted a strategic progression that began in summer 1929, with her first extended visit to Taos. However, O’Keeffe did not move permanently to New Mexico until twenty years later in 1949, after the purchase of her second New Mexican home, “*la Tapia*,” (adobe wall) in *el Pueblo de Abiquiu*,

¹³³ Wagner, *Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner, and O’Keeffe*, 29-103; Wanda Corn, “The Great American Thing,” 238-291.

¹³⁴ Wagner, *Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner, and O’Keeffe*, 29-103; Wanda Corn, “The Great American Thing,” 238-291; Vivien Green Fryd, *Art and the Crisis of Marriage: Edward Hopper and Georgia O’Keeffe*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

New Mexico.¹³⁵ The early New Mexican period of O’Keeffe’s life and career have drawn considerable scholarly interest due in part to the sufficient archives and personal correspondence that are currently available and also tactically opened for study.¹³⁶ This period, a major shift in her development, is further documented in O’Keeffe’s paintings, as well as period reviews of the changing subject matter.

Depending on their methodological perspective, scholars have interpreted this point in O’Keeffe’s life differently. For instance, this stage has drawn considerable feminist attention. Noting O’Keeffe’s deteriorating marriage and “self-isolation” at this time, writers cite this moment as both an emotional and professional breakthrough for the artist. Art historian Vivien Green Fryd describes O’Keeffe’s trips to New Mexico as the artist’s “declaration of independence,” stressing the artist’s personal and artistic growth.¹³⁷ Current interpretations move away from these gender-based readings. Wanda Corn and Barbara Buhler Lynes’ recent meditations on *place* have broadened the O’Keeffe studies by emphasizing the artist’s reverence for and connection to the northern New Mexican land and landscape: a form of interpretation that O’Keeffe herself insisted

¹³⁵ O’Keeffe purchased her second New Mexican home in December, 1945. Maria Chabot and Georgia O’Keeffe nicknamed the eighteenth century hacienda “la Tapia” during renovations between 1945-49. The term *la tapia* means adobe or garden wall. Unlike the other homes on Abiquiu’s plaza, la tapia is enclosed within a large adobe wall giving it a fortress-like appearance. Also see Barbara Buhler Lynes and Ann Paden, *Maria Chabot-Georgia O’Keeffe: Correspondence, 1941-1949*, (Santa Fe: University of New Mexico Press and Georgia O’Keeffe Museum, 2003).

¹³⁶ The latest release of personal correspondence can be seen in Sarah Greenough, *My Faraway One: Selected Letters of Georgia O’Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011); Further documents related to O’Keeffe’s personal life and the O’Keeffe Foundation located at the Beinecke Library at Yale University are to be released in March 2019 and 2029.

¹³⁷ Fryd, *Art and the Crisis of Marriage: Edward Hopper and Georgia O’Keeffe*.

upon.¹³⁸ Both of these approaches, however, leave out the cultural and racial specifics of the northern New Mexican context of O’Keeffe’s work. Nearly a century of the O’Keeffe scholarship--a body of work that materially grows yet remains methodologically stagnant--is dominated by three analytical modes: formalism, gender, and, more recently, place. As art historical methodologies, the emphases on *form*, *gender* and *place* must force further questions: *Whose form? Whose gender? Whose place?*¹³⁹

Twentieth-century magazine articles that focused on O’Keeffe’s life and work featured striking images of the artist dressed dramatically, bone collecting, or wandering about an “empty” desert (Figure 9).¹⁴⁰ These publications often included bold reproductions of O’Keeffe’s paintings alongside the slick black-and-white portraits of the artist. Consistent with the 1938 *Life* essay format, for example, was “Stark Vision of a Pioneer Painter” (*Life*, 1968) and also *The New Yorker’s* “The Rose in The Eye Looked Pretty Fine” (1974). This visual marriage of O’Keeffe’s figureless desert-scapes along with skillfully composed black-and-white portraits underscored a careful narration of the artist’s daily life in Abiquiu and the Piedre Lumbre Basin. These accounts portrayed the artist’s life in Abiquiu as isolated and remote, far removed from the high profile New York art world. Alluringly haunting photographs of the artist strolling (almost floating)

¹³⁸ Wanda Corn, “The Great American Thing,” 245-250; Barbara Buhler Lynes, Lesley Poling-Kempes, and Frederick Turner, *Georgia O’Keeffe and New Mexico: A Sense of Place*, (Santa Fe: Georgia O’Keeffe Museum and Princeton University Press, 2004).

¹³⁹ See the work of: Jolene K. Rickard, “Indigenous and Iroquoian Art as Knowledge: In the Shadow of the Eagle,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1996); Aaron Frye, (2008), 46-61; Martin A. Berger, *Sight Unseen: Whiteness and American Visual Culture*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Angela Miller, *The Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics 1825-1875*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993); Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels, *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

¹⁴⁰ “Georgia O’Keeffe Turns Dead Bones to Live Art,” 28-31; Dorothy Sieberling, “Stark Vision of a Pioneer Painter,” *Life*, March 1, 1968, 40-53; Calvin Tomkins, “The Rose in the Eye Looked Pretty Fine,” *The New Yorker*, March 4, 1974.

about the Piedra Lumbre emphasized O’Keeffe’s physical and spiritual connection to the desert lands. But, just as importantly, they also visually contrasted and emphasized the “vacancy” of northern New Mexico. Articles perpetuated this myth with romantic verbal descriptions of northern New Mexico as “vast,” “empty,” and “untouchable.”¹⁴¹ Drawing upon the long-standing rhetoric of Manifest Destiny, O’Keeffe herself spoke in terms that furthered this quasi-colonialist attitude. In interviews the artist played up the desert’s “wonderful emptiness,” which she claimed to have discovered in 1912 while teaching in Amarillo, Texas.¹⁴² Another quote puts a finer point on this entitled attitude. In Perry Miller Adato’s 1977 film documentary *Portrait of an Artist: Georgia O’Keeffe*, the artist recalled her initial encounter with the northern New Mexican landscape on-camera in a sweet lilting voice, “When I got to New Mexico that was mine...”¹⁴³

In his study on photography and tourism, Tewa scholar Matthew Martinez emphasizes how, in the early twentieth century New Mexico was still viewed and portrayed by the tourist industry as an exotic land, a foreign place with primitive American Indian and Hispano cultures on the brink of extinction. Martinez, Leah Dilworth and other scholars all note that O’Keeffe followed in the footsteps of earlier artists, anthropologists, and tourists who ventured to New Mexico in and attempt to exchange urban industrialization for spiritual renewal and exotic spectacle. O’Keeffe’s initial visit to New Mexico occurred in 1917: five years after the new state’s inauguration

¹⁴¹ “Georgia O’Keeffe Turns Dead Bones To Live Art,” 28-31; Sieberling, “Stark Vision of a Pioneer Painter,” 40-53; Tomkins, “The Rose in the Eye Looked Pretty Fine.”

¹⁴² Amei Wallach, “Georgia O’Keeffe,” *Newsday*, October, 1977; Sheila Tryk, “O’Keeffe,” 1973. Interview reprinted in “O’Keeffe: Her Time, Her Place,” *New Mexico Magazine*, May 1986.

¹⁴³ *Georgia O’Keeffe*, [VHS] directed by Perry Miller Adato (WNET; 1977). A version of this quote is also reprinted in U.S. Department of the Interior/National Park Service, “Study of Alternatives: Georgia O’Keeffe” (Denver: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992), 6.

and at a time of increased tourism spurred by railroad systems such as the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe lines, and later the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad, or “Chili Line.”¹⁴⁴ During her second more extended, and more publicized, stay in the summer of 1929 O’Keeffe created approximately twenty paintings (oil and watercolor) and various sketches representing her experiences in and around Taos, New Mexico. These early New Mexican studies included few landscapes and focused more on architecture, roadside crosses, and cultural relics such as a porcelain rooster and carved wooden Madonna figure.¹⁴⁵

One image from this period illustrates O’Keeffe’s awkward entry into the American Indian and Hispano spaces that she later adopted as her home. It is an image of the three-story adobe complex referred to as the “North Side Pueblo” in Taos Pueblo. This painting, entitled *Taos Pueblo* (Figure 10) is a highly detailed architectural study of the mountain-shaped adobe dwelling complete with drying racks, wooden arbors, *hornos* (ovens) and ladders.¹⁴⁶ O’Keeffe scholars have described *Taos Pueblo* as “a typical tourist study” because of the prevalence of these visual studies among traveling artists and tourists. However, within her southwest oeuvre, it is one image that complicates the popular “O’Keeffe Country” sobriquet used in northern New Mexico today. *Taos Pueblo*

¹⁴⁴ Matthew Martinez, “Double Take: Tourism & Photography Endeavors Among the Northern Pueblos of the Rio Grande,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2008); Matthew Martinez, “A Living Exhibition: Labor, Desire, and the Marketing of American Indian Arts and Crafts in Santa Fe,” in F. Richard Sanchez ed. *White Shell Water Place: An Anthology of Native American Reflections on the 400th Anniversary of the Founding of Santa Fe* (Santa Fe: Institute of American Indian Arts, 2010); Leah Dilworth, *Imagining Indians in the Southwest: Persistent Visions of a Primitive Past*, (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996); Wanda Corn, “The Great American Thing,” 239-291.

¹⁴⁵ Barbara Buhler Lynes, *Georgia O’Keeffe: Catalog Raisonné* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999); Wanda Corn, “The Great American Thing,” 239-291.

¹⁴⁶ Vincent Scully, *PUEBLO: Mountain, Dance, Village*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

reveals the artist's position as a long-term visitor, or privileged outsider in relation to the American Indian and Hispano communities with whom she would eventually develop long-term relationships. According to Roxana Robinson and Barbara Buhler Lynes, O'Keeffe reworked this image several times prior to and following an exhibition held at Stieglitz's An American Place gallery in February 1930. Although her driven efforts to rework *Taos Pueblo* demonstrate O'Keeffe's own artistic standards, as we shall see, they might also be read as an indication of her lack of familiarity with and disconnection from the local New Mexican communities.

In a letter to her husband Paul Strand, O'Keeffe's traveling companion Rebecca, or, "Beck" Strand expressed puzzlement over O'Keeffe's persistent returns to Taos Pueblo during summer 1929: "*so much for so many times on the same painting and so much for each new one.*"¹⁴⁷ Beck was referring to money. Beginning in the late-nineteenth century, the leaders at Taos, and other Indian pueblos, enforced restrictions in order to manage all the tourism, non-Indian traffic, and cultural and ceremonial appropriation that had been steadily increasing. By the early twentieth century Indian pueblos in New Mexico and Arizona either charged a fee for photography and sketching or banned image making altogether. Pueblo communities sought to maintain boundaries and a sense of privacy from outsiders. Leah Dilworth and Melody Graulich acknowledge that as early as 1915 Hopi communities at Oraibi and Walpi, Arizona had banned photography. However, Pueblo authority varied, and it is probable that painting restrictions fluctuated within individual communities. But in all cases, as Matthew

¹⁴⁷ Rebecca Strand to Paul Strand, letter dated June 4, 1929. Paul Strand Archive, Paul Strand Collection, Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona. Excerpt reprinted in Roxana Robinson, *Georgia O'Keeffe: A Life*, (New York: HarperPerennial, 1990), 335.

Martinez has demonstrated, all of the Eight Northern Pueblos of New Mexico, including Taos, carefully discerned between public and private representations of Pueblo people and spaces. These measures would have directly impacted O’Keeffe’s painting practice. By the time of her arrival, Pueblo peoples were routinely exercising control over images created in their communities, as well as access to specific dances, ceremonies, and daily activities.¹⁴⁸ These issues are evident in *Taos Pueblo*. O’Keeffe’s fee requirement as well as the absence of figures demonstrate a lack of intimate connection to the larger Taos community and the artist’s removed position.¹⁴⁹ At Taos, Beck acknowledged O’Keeffe’s cavalier attitude about money (“*so much for each new one*”). Beck also commented on O’Keeffe’s frequent returns to Taos (“*so much for so many times on the same painting*”). From this we might conclude that *at this time* O’Keeffe thought little about the fact that she was painting Taos people’s *private* homes. Even when required to pay a fee for each re-entry, a tell-tale sign of O’Keeffe’s outsider status, she kept going--a practice that could be read as intrusive. Perhaps, O’Keeffe herself did not recognize the cultural boundaries. This lack of awareness would become a recurring issue for the artist, one that would resurface in her New Mexican paintings and her interactions with local people for years to come.

¹⁴⁸ Melody Graulich, “I Became the Colony: Kate Cory’s Hopi Photographs” in *Trading Gazes: Euro-American Women Photographers and Native North Americans, 1880-1940*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003) 72-107; Fry, “Local Knowledge & Art Historical Methodology: A New Perspective On Awa Tsireh & The San Ildefonso Easel Painting Movement,” 46-61; Matthew Martinez, “Double Take: Tourism & Photography Endeavors Among the Northern Pueblos of the Rio Grande,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2008); Dilworth, *Imagining Indians in the Southwest: Persistent Visions of a Primitive Past*.

¹⁴⁹ Although O’Keeffe biographers emphasize the artist’s friendship with Tony Lujan, a member of Taos Pueblo and husband of Mabel Dodge-Luhan, as well as O’Keeffe’s attendance to Pueblo seasonal dances, there is no mention of the artist having close relationships with people at Taos or any other Indian pueblo at this time.

Painting, like other art mediums, reaches beyond visual documentation. The act of painting as well as its final product tangibly records an artist's visual parameters, creative interpretation, technical capabilities, and physical limitations. Every artist faces the challenge of mastering their medium within a given situation and environment.¹⁵⁰

O'Keeffe was no exception. In other words, she was not always entirely in control of the images she created or their public reception. Throughout her career, O'Keeffe contended with externally imposed labels and interpretations of her work, an experience that forced her to become a keen negotiator in matters of art business and vigilant about information circulated about her career and personal life.¹⁵¹ However, as the *Taos Pueblo* image demonstrates, O'Keeffe's negotiations were not limited to Stieglitz, his circle, and the American Modern art world. During her time in New Mexico (1929-1986) O'Keeffe would have to continuously acclimate to American Indian and Hispano lifeways. She developed an astute awareness of her outside position relative to these communities. In summer 1929, Beck's language, O'Keeffe's financial obligations to the pueblo, and her insistent returns to Taos all demonstrate O'Keeffe's entrance into ongoing negotiations with communities she was not yet familiar, as well as American Indian and Hispano peoples' very active, yet complicated participation in the production of American modern art.

¹⁵⁰ My professional training as a BFA in painting and drawing and an MFA in printmaking and photography have given me insight into the creative, psychological, and physical challenges of art-making processes which require diligence, time, and energy.

¹⁵¹ For examples of O'Keeffe's attempts to control what was written about her see the extensive O'Keeffe biographies as well as Wanda Corn, "Telling Tales: Georgia O'Keeffe on Georgia O'Keeffe," 55-79.

A Matter of Interpretation

Two years after the initial exhibition of *Taos Pueblo* O’Keeffe would paint *Horse’s Skull with Pink Rose*. The exhibition of this skull image was among approximately a half-dozen bone paintings in her December 1931 show at An American Place gallery.¹⁵² The skulls and bones, another new subject for the artist, were not easily incorporated into the O’Keeffe discourse of this period. As art historian Wanda Corn has shown, after the 1931 exhibition, critical interpretations of her bone images were widely divergent. Unable to impose the usual sexualized readings, O’Keeffe’s regular critics were uncertain how to write about these works. Critic Henry McBride, for instance, spent much of his 1931 review awkwardly conjuring romantic stereotypes of American Indians and pondering the class or breed of the deceased horses. He contemplated, “perhaps the [horses were] steeds of gallant young Indian warriors...or street car hacks consigned to worse and worse tasks and finally dying of prosaic starvation.”¹⁵³ Other responses turned to formalist interpretations that relied upon the aesthetic qualities of the newly found genre. O’Keeffe herself seems to have had her own conflicting responses to the bones. She simultaneously treated them as collectible objects of beauty and also, perhaps because of their availability in the New Mexican desert, casually referred to them as “trash.”¹⁵⁴ Still she maintained a strong attachment to the bones. Following her second summer in northern New Mexico, O’Keeffe went through the trouble of barreling up and shipping

¹⁵² Doris Bry, “O’Keeffe Country,” in Doris Bry and Nicholas Callaway, *Georgia O’Keeffe in the West*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989).

¹⁵³ Wanda Corn, “The Great American Thing,” 239-291.

¹⁵⁴ Sarah Greenough, *My Faraway One: Selected Letters of Georgia O’Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz*, (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2011), letters dated: July 10, 1931 and October 20, 1931.

off bones to New York, an effort that cost her sixteen dollars.¹⁵⁵ Upon her return from Taos and the Abiquiu region that summer, she and Stieglitz spent considerable time posing with and photographing the skulls and bones. She also spent time thoughtfully decorating her New York homes at Lake George and Manhattan with the bones and other New Mexican items.¹⁵⁶ There is no doubt that within American modern art circles the bone images had an impact. As this series developed further and as O’Keeffe’s skull and bone collection grew larger, no one, at least in New York, seemed to know the reality of this imagery or what was happening in Abiquiu beyond O’Keeffe’s artistic endeavors.

In New Mexico, the artist’s reputation for hoarding skulls and bones became well known among local ranch hands and Abiqueños.¹⁵⁷ We know this from O’Keeffe herself, who, in interviews, delightfully quipped about how eccentric she came across to others. In Dorothy Sierberling’s “Stark Vision of a Pioneer Painter,” O’Keeffe reminisced about local attitudes toward her hauling of animal carcasses. “People were pretty annoyed having their cars filled up with those bones. But I took a barrel of bones to New York. They were my symbols of the desert, but nothing more.”¹⁵⁸ Both in interviews and by local people, the artist’s bone affection was noted. O’Keeffe stated, “To me they are strongly more living than the animals walking around—hair, eyes, and all, with their tails

¹⁵⁵ Tryk, “O’Keeffe.”

¹⁵⁶ Wanda Corn, “The Great American Thing,” 239-291; Robinson, *Georgia O’Keeffe: A Life*; Hunter Drohojowska-Philp, *Full Bloom: The Art and Life of Georgia O’Keeffe* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2004); Fryd, *Art and the Crisis of Marriage: Edward Hopper and Georgia O’Keeffe*.

¹⁵⁷ Storytelling of Genizaro artist, storyteller and author Napoleón Garcia, Abiquiu, New Mexico. Garcia and his brother, Jackie Suazo worked for O’Keeffe as young men. See Napoleón Garcia and Ananlinda Dunn, *The Genizaro & The Artist* (Rio Grande Books, 2008); Stephanie Lewthwaite, “Mediating Art Worlds: The Photography of John S. Candelario” in *New Mexico Historical Review* vol. 87 no. 1 Winter, 2012; Lesley Poling-Kempes, *Valley of Shining Stone: The Story of Abiquiu*.

¹⁵⁸ Sieberling, “Stark Vision of a Pioneer Painter,” 40-53.

twitching. The bones seem to cut sharply to the center of something that is keenly alive in the desert even tho' it is vast and empty and untouchable.”¹⁵⁹ For locals, O’Keeffe’s taste for dead animals must have seemed perplexing. But it might also have been viewed as offensive or, at the very least, as insensitive to Abiqueño peoples and their histories.

The Backbones of Avéshu

Avéshu or Abiquiu is a site typically omitted from standard American histories. It is a place where hot hazy American memory has permanently fused O’Keeffe’s painterly visions into a national narrative. O’Keeffe scholars consistently refer to this northwest corner of New Mexico, as the artist’s “faraway nearby.”¹⁶⁰ However, the Piedre Lumbre region was also the site of a number of events important to American Indian and Hispano histories. It was a key location of the American Indian slave trade, the site of this nation’s last occurring witch hunts, and, under U.S. authority during the Great Depression, the setting for forced livestock executions: moments experienced by the ancestors of current Abiquiu citizens.¹⁶¹

In 1754, Spanish colonial Governor Tomás Vélez Cachupín granted the seventeen thousand plus acres of the *Merced del Pueblo Abiquiú* (Abiquiu Land Grant) to thirty-

¹⁵⁹ Tryk, “O’Keeffe.”

¹⁶⁰ O’Keeffe scholars use the phrase “from the faraway nearby” when referring to O’Keeffe’s perceptions of Northern New Mexico, the Piedre Lumbre Basin, and the Abiquiu region. The phrase is from the title of a 1937 painting including an elk skull floating above the desert landscape. See painting 914 in Buhler Lynes, *Georgia O’Keeffe: Catalog Raisonné*, 569.

¹⁶¹ Abiquiu oral historian and tour guide, Dexter Trujillo relayed to me, and also the historian Lesley Poling-Kempes, his own family’s experiences with the American Indian slave trade. Every November Abiqueños honor their *Genizaro* history with dances, songs, and a feast during the Fiesta de Santo Thomas. Also see the documentary film *Without a Tribe: Survival of New Mexico’s Ransomed Captives*, Executive Producer, Cynthia Gomez, (Pipestone Productions, 2011).

four families of emancipated American Indian *criados* (slaves). *Criados* were typically abducted women and children who were traded and forced into servitude until adulthood or death. In Abiquiu, these freed *cautivos* (captives) were from diverse Indian nations and are locally referred to as *Genizaros* because of both their mixed American Indian-Spanish-Mexican heritage and also the political roles they fulfilled to the Spanish government. Establishment of Abiquiu's 1754 Genizaro grant was a strategic military maneuver that created a buffer zone between conflicting Spanish settlements and Plains Indians.¹⁶² Upon entry into Spanish and Mexican households, many Genizaros adopted Christianity, Spanish names, and cultural practices. Abiqueño Genizaros were largely of "[Hopi], Apache, Dine, Pawnee, Ute and Comanche descent," and actively held onto their Indian religions, languages, and identities. Some acted as political and cultural intermediaries between Plains Indian communities, such as the Ute and Comanche, two communities who maintained an active presence around Abiquiu until the nineteenth century.¹⁶³ After U.S. annexation, in 1909 the Court of Private Land Claims patented 16,500-acres of the Abiquiu Land Grant according to the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hildago of 1848.¹⁶⁴

Throughout its extensive history the Pueblo de Abiquiu served numerous purposes prior to and under three national governments. Local architectural ruins directly connect

¹⁶² Center for Land Grant Studies, "Abiquiu Genizaro Grant," (Guadalupita, New Mexico, 2005); Ned Blackhawk, *Violence Over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

¹⁶³ Martinez, State of New Mexico Senate Memorial 59, 2007; Malcolm Ebright and Rick Hendricks, *The Witches of Abiquiu: The Governor, The Priest, The Genizaro Indians, and The Devil*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006).

¹⁶⁴ Ebright and Hendricks, *The Witches of Abiquiu: The Governor, The Priest, The Genizaro Indians, And The Devil*, 2006; Malcolm Ebright, *Land Grants and Lawsuits in Northern New Mexico*, (Santa Fe: Center for Land Grant Studies 2008).

this area to Tewa people whose descendents include contemporary Pueblo and Hopi communities. Under Spanish and Mexican governments Abiquiu served as a quasi-military outpost. The pueblo was also a vibrant trading center that held annual trade fairs and included an Indian slave trade market and prison (Figure 11).¹⁶⁵ According to land grant historians Malcolm Ebright and Rick Hendricks, in 1756-66 Abiquiu was the site of this continent's last witchhunt trials: attempts to forcibly Christianize the Genizaro population and disguise land grant violations and property disputes.¹⁶⁶ During the nineteenth century, under U.S. rule, an Indian agency to Capote and Wiminuche Ute and Jicarilla Apache peoples was located in Abiquiu. This agency was closed in 1883.¹⁶⁷

Today local Abiqueños convey a sense of dignity when sharing their American Indian and Hispano histories that are deeply rooted in these arid lands. Nestled in the Chama River valley between two national forests, el Pueblo de Abiquiu sits northwest of the Rio Grande River in what is now Rio Arriba County. Warm, brightly banded orange, yellow, and red earthen strata enclose this timeworn gorge. Sandstone spires surround this valley where Abiqueño memories stack high, reaching way back and far beyond one American painter. Current Abiqueño families will tell you that their ancestors lived and died in this desert long before O'Keeffe arrived and long before the American occupation

¹⁶⁵ Robert Torrez, *The Southern Ute Agency at Abiquiu and Tierra Amarilla, New Mexico*, (Guadalupita, New Mexico, Center For Land Grant Studies, 1994). Frances Leon Quintana, *Pobladores: Hispanic Americans of the Ute Frontier* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991); Lesley Poling-Kempes, *Valley of Shining Stone: The Story of Abiquiu*; Ebright and Hendricks, *The Witches of Abiquiu: The Governor, The Priest, The Genizaro Indians, And The Devil*, 2006. Also see personal correspondence between Maria Chabot and Georgia O'Keeffe, Letter 25, March 11, 1946 in Lynes and Paden, *Maria Chabot-Georgia O'Keeffe: Correspondence, 1941-1949*, 329-330.

¹⁶⁶ Ebright and Hendricks, *The Witches of Abiquiu: The Governor, The Priest, The Genizaro Indians, And The Devil*, 2006.

¹⁶⁷ Robert Torrez, 1994; Field Offices of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, "Preliminary Inventory of the Pueblo Records" (Washington: National Archives & Records Service, 1980).

of this region. Long before the Piedra Lumbre, or the valley of “shining stone,” was Mexico. Long before it was Spain.¹⁶⁸

Despite Abiquiu’s extensive history—and, as we’ll see, in spite of local protestations--American modern art connoisseurs and historians, along with O’Keeffe devotees, insistently refer to the Piedra Lumbre’s mesas and valleys as “O’Keeffe Country.” This popular moniker flares-up an old irritation chafed long before O’Keeffe’s appearance but rubbed in deeper by the artist’s very public visual and verbal claims to this region.

At the time of O’Keeffe’s arrival, Abiqueño people had already faced innumerable obstacles protecting and maintaining what was left of the original 1754 Genizaro land grant.¹⁶⁹ O’Keeffe’s 1945 purchase of La Tapia, the eighteen-room historical hacienda, was one of many property transactions that became caught within the legal and political labyrinths that interconnected natural resource conflicts with religious, cultural, and racial struggles that all occurred in northern New Mexico during the twentieth century.¹⁷⁰

La Tapia had it’s own complex history. During the Spanish and Mexican periods, the property was owned by Brigadier General José María Chávez and his family, and had been passed down into the twentieth century through several generations. Chávez, who

¹⁶⁸ Abiqueño and Genizaro families have shown that the externally imposed moniker “O’Keeffe country” is on many levels questionable and even offensive to local people. In the 1980’s when U.S. government agencies and O’Keeffe fans suggested renaming a local geographical feature after the artist Abiquiu community members strongly opposed. Lesley Poling-Kempes, *Valley of Shining Stone: The Story of Abiquiu*, 225-243; U.S. Department of Interior’s National Park System reports of 1979 and 1992.

¹⁶⁹ Center for Land Grant Studies, *Abiquiu Genizaro Grant*, (Guadalupita, New Mexico: 2005); Chavez Family Papers, boxes 1-7 (Chicago, Illinois: Edward E. Ayer Manuscript Collection, Newberry Library).

¹⁷⁰ Chavez was known for his military activities and participation in the Indian slave trade. See Lesley Poling-Kempes, *Valley of Shining Stone: The Story of Abiquiu*, 72-73. When O’Keeffe purchased the house, la Tapia had been donated to the Catholic Church and was to be converted into a school for the local children, see Lynes and Paden, *Maria Chabot-Georgia O’Keeffe: Correspondence, 1941-1949*.

lived to be 101, had served in the Spanish, Mexican, and U.S. militaries.¹⁷¹ Members of this prominent family had careers as entrepreneurs, politicians, and attorneys. Built like a military compound with a main house, several outbuildings, and an enclosing wall, La Tapia is one of the largest properties in el Pueblo de Abiquiu. The hacienda itself has had numerous incarnations. Prior to O’Keeffe’s ownership, it had served as a post office, legal office, notary republic, and an Indian prison.

The artist and her friend Maria Chabot attempted to negotiate La Tapia’s purchase for nearly a decade. Chabot, who resided full-time in northern New Mexico while O’Keeffe was still in New York, helped carry out the transaction details and eventual renovation of La Tapia. Chabot also worked for the wealthy Eastern socialite Mary Cabot Wheelwright. She was trained academically in anthropology and wrote articles on American Indian art for *New Mexico Magazine*.¹⁷² However, despite her training, Chabot earned a reputation for her untactful interactions with local Abiqueños. Her contentious relationship with the local people, specifically men, earned her the nickname *Mariona* or “Big Mary,” and helped cast a tenuous beginning on O’Keeffe’s move into the pueblo.¹⁷³

In December 1945, O’Keeffe secured the sale with a generous \$4,000 tax-deductible gift to the Catholic Archdiocese.¹⁷⁴ At the time of purchase, neighbors, such as Joe Ferran, whose family still resides in Abiquiu, had maintained the “abandoned”

¹⁷¹ Ralph Emerson Twitchell, *The Spanish Archives of New Mexico*, vol. one (The Torch Press: 1914), 114.

¹⁷² Jennifer McLerran, *A New Deal For American Indian Art: Indian Arts and Federal Indian Policy 1933-1943*, (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2009), 57-58.

¹⁷³ Tio Manzanares, interview with author, July, 2012. For more on Chabot’s attitude toward the local population see Chabot’s 1946-1949 letters to O’Keeffe in Lynes and Paden, *Maria Chabot-Georgia O’Keeffe: Correspondence, 1941-1949*.

¹⁷⁴ Lynes and Paden, *Maria Chabot-Georgia O’Keeffe: Correspondence, 1941-1949*, 291; Poling-Kempes, *Valley of Shining Stone: The Story of Abiquiu*.

property's water rights on the local *acequia* (irrigation ditch) through continual gardening and raising of stock animals. Additionally, part of the land had already been promised for building a school for local children.¹⁷⁵ This informal process of reincorporating La Tapia back into the *ejido* (common land) reflected inter-generational methods of communally cultivating unclaimed property. It also speaks to Abiquiu citizens' longstanding reputation for ardently protecting the boundaries of the land grant as Abiqueños had always perceived them.¹⁷⁶ At the time of O'Keeffe's purchase, Ferran, as well as other community members, had been gardening and raising stock at La Tapia for nearly a decade. Thus the unexpected sale came as a shock to local Abiqueños. In 1946, Chabot wrote O'Keeffe: "Joe Ferran has had his feelings hurt. He had to move his pigs." And: "I think that Joe Ferran really expected to someday own this place."¹⁷⁷

Ironically, the very people whom O'Keeffe had put out in attempts to sidestep local politics, including Ferran who was the acting Abiquiu Land Grant president, were some of the same community leaders who would officially decide the artist's boundary line. Following O'Keeffe's purchase, the house and acreage were no longer officially included within the Abiquiu Land Grant through a quitclaim deed negotiated by local leaders. The August 1948 deed not only specifically demarcated O'Keeffe's private boundaries from

¹⁷⁵ Joe Ferran's grandchildren now have the surname Garcia. His son-in-law Napoleón Garcia is an artist, storyteller and author. The Ferran grandchildren still live on the Ferran property, which precedes the O'Keeffe's property on the Abiquiu acequia. Also see letters pertaining to Abiquiu property and Joe Ferran in Lynes and Paden, *Maria Chabot-Georgia O'Keeffe: Correspondence, 1941-1949*, 291.

¹⁷⁶ Abiquiu historical documents of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are replete with land disputes, property transactions, and include petitions from local people regarding water and cultivation rights. See Chavez Family Papers, boxes 1-7 (Chicago, Illinois: Edward E. Ayer Manuscript Collection, Newberry Library). For more examples of Abiquiu land disputes in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries see Center for Land Grant Studies, *Abiquiu Genizaro Grant*, 2005.

¹⁷⁷ See letters 14, 19, and 23 of March 1946 in Lynes and Paden, *Maria Chabot-Georgia O'Keeffe: Correspondence, 1941-1949*, 318-328. Also see the Quitclaim Deed negotiated by the Abiquiu Cooperative Livestock Association, Board of Trustees of the Abiquiu Land Grant to Georgia O'Keeffe, dated August 25, 1948.

public lands it also released Abiqueño land grantees from any communal obligations or rights to La Tapia.¹⁷⁸ Although O’Keeffe’s initial purchasing transactions dealt with the Catholic Church, it was Abiquiu citizens who approved her property boundaries, controlled her access to water on the local acequia and permitted removal of stone from communal lands in order to re-build her garden walls.

Negotiating collectively was foreign to both O’Keeffe and Chabot. Their lack of Abiqueño historical and cultural knowledge, as well as inexperience with local relationships and politics was obvious. In March 1946 while overseeing renovations Chabot wrote to O’Keeffe: “I had to make a formal appeal to the Abiquiu Grant in order to remove rock. It’s curious to think of this mesa belonging to a *group* of people; an old... land grant...”¹⁷⁹ O’Keeffe scholars solely attribute the artist’s permanent settling in Abiquiu to her individual tenacity and “pioneering spirit.” However, her legal and neighborly obligations to, and also the hospitality, generosity and enduring patience of the local Abiqueño people—those individuals who greatly contributed to the artist’s success in Northern New Mexico--that deserves reflection.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Land Grant Historian, Malcolm Ebright explained the complexities of such deeds and that each deed is individualized. However, the ultimate purpose of a “quitclaim” is for any previous owner to relinquish rights of ownership to a property, thereby making the statement “I may not own this land,” (Malcolm Ebright, conversation with author, July 2012).

¹⁷⁹ Letter 21, March, 1946 and letters 48-51, April, 1948 in Lynes and Paden, *Maria Chabot-Georgia O’Keeffe: Correspondence, 1941-1949*, 325, 467, 469 (emphasis added).

¹⁸⁰ “Pioneering spirit, individuality, and connection to the land” are all phrases from some of the most prevalent descriptions of O’Keeffe particularly the words: “*pioneer, spiritual, austere.*” I note the word “sage,” used by Wanda Corn, in “The Sage of Abiquiu,” *American Art*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Fall 2006), 26-31, because of it’s double meaning as a both a wise person and medicinal plant that grows rampant in deserts.

Connecting the Bones

O’Keeffe’s period of artistic activity in New Mexico directly coincided with a period of economic hardship for its residents. Like many small rural communities, Abiquiu had always survived economically by relying on kinship systems, subsistence agriculture, and small-scale livestock trade.¹⁸¹ Since Spanish colonization, livestock, including horses, cattle, sheep, goats and pigs gradually became an increasingly important staple, providing income and sustenance during economic fluctuations. At the turn of the century, large-scale agricultural and railroad operations encouraged out-migrating of family members, particularly men, signaling a shift into a cash economy. European-American population encroachment into northern New Mexico during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century fueled land grant contestations. These conflicts were often the result of either questionable or outright illegal sales of irrigable land located within land grant boundaries.¹⁸² Additionally, the establishment of the Carson National Forest in 1908 and the Santa Fe National Forest in 1915 further squeezed local villages by limiting access to their traditionally public grazing lands.¹⁸³

Historians Frances Leon Quintana and Lesley Poling-Kempes cite the early 1930s as particularly trying for Abiqueños. According to both historians troubles of this period began with the onset of the Great Depression. The national economic downturn coincided

¹⁸¹ Sarah Deutsch, *No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class, and Gender on an Anglo-Hispanic Frontier in the American Southwest 1880-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 162-199.

¹⁸² Chavez Family Papers, boxes 1-7 (Chicago, Illinois: Edward E. Ayer Manuscript Collection, Newberry Library).

¹⁸³ Frances Leon Quintana, *Pobladores: Hispanic Americans of the Ute Frontier* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991); Lesley Poling-Kempes, *Valley of Shining Stone: The Story of Abiquiu*, 146-149; Sarah Deutsch, *No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class, and Gender on an Anglo-Hispanic Frontier in the American Southwest 1880-1940*, 162-199; Alvar W. Carlson, *The Spanish-American Homeland: Four Centuries in New Mexico’s Rio Arriba* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

with some of the worst weather in northern New Mexican history. Record freezing temperatures and snowfall levels were followed by severe drought and dust storms.¹⁸⁴

The intense weather fluctuations depleted natural resources and damaged crops. Local livestock starved. Additionally, rapid commercial deforestation of local mountain ranges along with re-distribution of important water sources, and massive overstocking and overgrazing, all of which began in the nineteenth century, contributed to various other disasters: vegetation depletion, soil erosion, and the devastation of vital grazing lands.¹⁸⁵

Already stretched beyond their means, Abiqueño people were pushed even further when the U.S. Forest Service implemented regulations on traditionally open lands under the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934--thus overturning the centuries-old ejido system of communal grazing.¹⁸⁶ Once again, and as it had been under Spanish and Mexican rule, Abiqueños answered to a foreign government that restricted traditional lifeways. For centuries northern New Mexican communities like Abiquiu relied on the mountains, woods, and meadows for sustenance. There they gathered timber for building and firewood, as well as edible herbs or *quelite* (wild spinach), piñon nuts, osha root and other *remedios* (remedies). These latest regulations inhibited access to these resources

¹⁸⁴ Frances Leon Quintana, *Pobladores: Hispanic Americans of the Ute Frontier*, 1991; Lesley Poling-Kempes, *Valley of Shining Stone: The Story of Abiquiu*; Sarah Deutsch, *No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class, and Gender on an Anglo-Hispanic Frontier in the American Southwest 1880-1940*, 162-199.

¹⁸⁵ While twentieth-century soil erosion and vegetation depletion in New Mexico and Arizona has been heavily attributed to the grazing and stock raising practices of American Indian (specifically the Diné) and Hispanic people, the work of Richard White, William deBuys, and Suzanne Forrest all demonstrate that the issue was far more complex and a result of numerous contributing factors. Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos*, (Lincoln and Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 212-323; William deBuys, *Enchantment and Exploitation: The Life and Hard Times of a New Mexico Mountain Range* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985); Suzanne Forest, *The Preservation of the Village: New Mexico's Hispanics and the New Deal* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1989).

¹⁸⁶ Poling-Kempes, *Valley of Shining Stone: The Story of Abiquiu*; Sarah Deutsch, *No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class, and Gender on an Anglo-Hispanic Frontier in the American Southwest 1880-1940*, 162-199.

and now charged permit fees for their gathering and use. Complicated forms demanded, in writing, detailed descriptions of agricultural activities and needs. These new restrictions were met with resistance. One method of protest involved locals consciously refusing to obtain permits. U.S. Forest rangers were authorized to make arrests.¹⁸⁷

Tension grew between the local population and newcomers.

And, the worst was yet to come. Whether motivated by soil erosion, the spread of dourine (parasites), or both, the Forest Service shot hundreds of animals that were part of Abiquiu's economy, daily life, and community.¹⁸⁸ Abiqueño community member, Floyd Trujillo, recalled locals watching for the approaching government vehicles that headed to the popular grazing areas. Some followed after the cars in an attempt to stop the executions.¹⁸⁹ Lesley Poling-Kempes writes, "Locals remember that more than two hundred wild horses were shot in one day in spring of 1934." According to one local elder, "Bones lay everywhere...the countryside smelled of dead animals. For years...every watering hole was littered with the skeletons of horses."¹⁹⁰ O'Keeffe herself did not, as she put it, "view the bones in terms of death." But perhaps some local people did.

¹⁸⁷ deBuys, *Enchantment and Exploitation: The Life and Hard Times of a New Mexico Mountain Range*; The Chavez Family Papers, includes original grazing permit applications that are printed in English, see Chavez Family Papers, boxes 1-7 (Chicago, Illinois: Edward E. Ayer Manuscript Collection, Newberry Library).

¹⁸⁸ Scholars Marsha Weisiger and William deBuys both assert that the Collier Administration's Livestock Reduction Program did not technically apply to Hispano communities in Northern New Mexico. However, the Soil Conservation Service and the U.S. Forest Service did exercise authority to actively restrict livestock numbers and manage wild horse herds on public ranges. Marsha Weisiger and William deBuys, correspondence with the author, 2012.

¹⁸⁹ Isabelle and Virgil Trujillo and family, Interview with Author, July 2012.

¹⁹⁰ Poling-Kempes, *Valley of Shining Stone: The Story of Abiquiu*, 139-152.

By the late 1930s Abiquiu was surrounded by communities who were struggling with the new U.S. policies. Indian peoples witnessed various degrees of livestock reduction. Pueblo communities experienced livestock “adjustments” under the Soil Conservation Service and the United Pueblos Agency.¹⁹¹ The reduction programs enforced mass sales, large-scale herd “culling,” and livestock removals of “horses, burros, aged steers and goats.” Although the management plans were initially met with resistance, between 1935-1940 government programs half reduced sheep and cattle herds at Isleta, Acoma, and Laguna.¹⁹² However, as historian Marsha Weisiger has shown, it was Diné communities in New Mexico and Arizona, who by far suffered the heaviest and most violent blow with a loss of *thousands* of sheep, goats, and horses.¹⁹³

For the northern New Mexican communities, whose cultures, religions, and very lives were inextricable from the land, the livestock exterminations reached beyond economic value. As late as 1940 a primary source of sustenance came from Pueblo and Hispano people’s individual agricultural operations.¹⁹⁴ Methods such as dry farming and complex irrigation systems had been in place for centuries and had kept the northern New Mexican communities alive both physically and spiritually. The imposed violence was an overt attack on the self-sustaining lifeways, which had always stemmed from an understanding of environmental rhythms, seasonal cycles, and also a deep respect for the

¹⁹¹ Interview with Eastburn R. Smith (Retired Soil Conservation Employee), June 1970, New Mexico’s Digital Collection, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

¹⁹² Sophie Aberle Papers, (box 1, folders 38-44), Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico.

¹⁹³ Marsha Weisiger, *Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country* (Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2009).

¹⁹⁴ Sophie Aberle Papers, (box 1, folders 38-44), Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico.

delicate balance of land, water, plants, animals, and humans. Hispano historian and environmental scholar Juan Estevan Allerano identifies this deep connection and sense of responsibility, which comes from intimately knowing and working the land, as *querencia*, or “the place they love.” He writes:

Querencia... means “affection,” “longing,” or “favorite place.” But it also implies a sense of responsibility to that place, a particular ethic toward the land...It is that which gives us a sense of place, that which anchors us to the land, that which makes us a unique people, for it implies a deeply rooted knowledge of place, and for that reason we respect our place, for it is our home and we don’t want to violate our home in any way. [It is] where someone is raised, the place of one’s memories, of one’s affections, of things one loves and, above all, where one feels safe.¹⁹⁵

Although the initial exhibition of O’Keeffe’s skull and bone images occurred several years prior to the implementation of the livestock reduction programs in New Mexico, her later skull and bone paintings chronologically correlated with the severe weather and more drastic stages of livestock exterminations. In 1936, two years following the Taylor Grazing Act and the executions in Abiquiu, O’Keeffe painted *Horse’s or Mule’s Skull with Turkey Feathers* (Figures 12 and 13) The image depicted an equine cranium with an obvious bullet-hole in the central forehead. This particular animal, O’Keeffe portrayed in several paintings. She thoughtfully paired it with turkey feathers, poinsettias, and the rose colored hills of the northern New Mexican desert. These images accentuated O’Keeffe’s concepts of beauty. However, they were also poignant visual

¹⁹⁵ Juan Estevan Arellano, “Taos: Where Cultures Met Four Hundred Years Ago,” *Grant Makers in the Arts Reader: Ideas and Information on Arts and Culture* Vol. 18 No. 1, Spring 2007

reminders that Abiqueños' "place of memory" and "sense of safety" *had been* violated. In Abiquiu, *querencia* had always carried the significance of time and memory. O'Keeffe's individualized "sense of place," which was defined by modern American aesthetics, elided Abiqueño histories. Her bone paintings aestheticized the violence and loss experienced by American Indian and Hispano communities of northern New Mexico. O'Keeffe would paint various series of the skull and bone images over the next twenty-five years. Given her strong desire to immerse herself into her own "sense of place," there can be no doubt that she knew about the mass executions.

During her time in northern New Mexico, O'Keeffe's connections with well-known artists and politicians, including Charles Collier, (son of Bureau of Indian Affairs Commissioner John Collier), would have afforded her some insight into the problems facing local communities. Certainly, these contacts gave her access to networks of powerful people. In 1943, O'Keeffe employed her own clout when writing a letter to Mary Frazier, wife of a *Life* magazine Associate Editor, George Frazier. In it she expressed her personal "opposition to a flood control project" and dam that would affect the Keres Pueblos along the Rio Grande including the Santo Domingo, San Felipe, and Cochiti communities. O'Keeffe's advocacy incited a six page exposé published in *Life* in November 1943. The article entitled "Dam Threatens Pueblos" included photos of Keres peoples' daily life and emphasized their allegiance to the United States during World War Two.¹⁹⁶ The article drew attention to the Pueblo plight. It also earned praise for the artist who was still living in New York half time. In December of 1943 Chabot wrote to

¹⁹⁶ Lynes and Paden, *Maria Chabot-Georgia O'Keeffe: Correspondence, 1941-1949*, 152-153, n. 90. "Dam Threatens Pueblos," *Life*, November 29, 1943, 104-110.

O’Keeffe: “So, [see what the] *Life* article resulted in! And you’re [to be thanked.]”¹⁹⁷

Perhaps from a non-Pueblo perspective O’Keeffe appeared heroic, however the Keres Pueblos’ efforts to stop major dam construction in their homelands had been ongoing for some time. It was a struggle that would continue for over twenty years. The issue resulted at the Pueblo de Cochiti during the late 1960s with the construction of the eleventh largest earthfill dams in the world and one of the largest human-made recreational lakes ever built.¹⁹⁸

During her time in Abiquiu, the artist earned a reputation for selectively wielding her power and allocating her wealth. Indeed, her gifts to the village need to be examined according to their historical and cultural contexts, as well as their benefit to the people of Abiquiu and O’Keeffe’s own self-interest. The artist financially supported Abiqueño children’s social activities such as a boy’s baseball team called the “Abiquiu Indians” and trips to see movies in Española.¹⁹⁹ A few local children had their college tuition paid by O’Keeffe. One student went on to become an attorney. Another worked for the artist, the Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation, and then the Georgia O’Keeffe Museum for most of her adult life.²⁰⁰ The role of community benefactress suited O’Keeffe’s temperament and her public image. Her social position in Abiquiu brought about a sense of responsibility to the community. It also afforded the artist power and entitlement. However, in some cases

¹⁹⁷ Letter 119, (as printed in) Lynes and Paden, *Maria Chabot-Georgia O’Keeffe: Correspondence, 1941-1949*, 152.

¹⁹⁸ Regis Pecos, “The History of Cochiti Lake from the Pueblo Perspective,” *Natural Resources Journal*, 47 (2007): 639.

¹⁹⁹ Historical Letter, The Pueblo de Abiquiu Library and Cultural Center Archives Collection, Abiquiu, New Mexico.

²⁰⁰ Devon Jackson, “The Wideness and Wonder of It: Touring O’Keeffe’s Abiquiu Home,” *O’Keeffe: The Georgia O’Keeffe Museum Magazine*, (2011): 34-37.

the changes O’Keeffe’s generosity brought about raised complications with local people. For instance, the artist is typically lauded for financially backing a brand new plumbing system for herself and the rest of the village. However, some Abiqueños preferred their traditional acequias and the local spring, affectionately referred to as “*Ojito de Mana Maka*,” as their water sources. Prior to plumbing systems, watering places were often utilized for social gathering. Mana Maka, a natural spring with a wooden walkway built around it, was a pillar of the original village entrance. O’Keeffe’s taste for modern convenience prevailed. Over time Mana Maka was cast aside. As one Abiqueño succinctly put it: “O’Keeffe got her way.” Another community member pointed out “You have to remember, the things she did for the community she also did for herself. Plus she got a tax deduction.”²⁰¹ Although many locals appreciated her good will, the complexities brought on by her settling in Abiquiu are also acknowledged.

In some instances, O’Keeffe’s gifts served to justify her long-term presence in Abiquiu. Unlike other Anglos residing in the pueblo, the artist did not marry into or inherit her Abiquiu property. She did not work for the Catholic Church nor did she partake in an agricultural occupation like other Piedra Lumbre citizens. But if O’Keeffe did use the gifts tactically as a method for seeking legitimacy within the community, her acts of generosity sometimes also came with conditions. In 1983 O’Keeffe partially supported the construction of a new elementary school. Her fifty thousand dollar donation toward the one million dollar plus project came with stipulations that the school

²⁰¹ Conversations with Abiqueño citizens about the Abiquiu Land Grant and the Chavez/O’Keeffe property revealed differing opinions about O’Keeffe’s long-term presence in Abiquiu. (July 2012).

would be built according to her architectural and aesthetic tastes.²⁰² During the school's construction portable building units were brought in to create additional classroom space. When the temporary structures did not meet the adobe color specifications O'Keeffe's long-term assistant Juan Hamilton, then director of the Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation wrote a stern letter to the Chairman of the Española Municipal Schools Board of Education reminding him of O'Keeffe's requirements. Considering his strong reaction, it is possible that Hamilton did not realize how in 1945 O'Keeffe had originally ousted the local elementary school from its intended location at La Tapia. For many years Abiqueño children traveled outside the village to attend classes. Put another way, perhaps O'Keeffe's financial contributions helped to correct some of her earlier social and cultural blunders.

Another example would support this idea. Local resident Napoleon Garcia and his family remember that in 1967 O'Keeffe helped finance the construction of Abiquiu's local community center and gymnasium through donations and a \$10,000 loan. This local building still holds numerous events.²⁰³ According to the Garcia grandchildren O'Keeffe requested that the new gym be named after their grandfather, her longtime neighbor Joe Ferran. Despite their initial clashing over the purchase of La Tapia, Ferran and the artist developed a respectful relationship. Ferran had also become a prominent leader in the community. Perhaps the artist's desire to name the building the "Joe Ferran Community

²⁰² Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation Records, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, Box 13; Robinson, *Georgia O'Keeffe: A Life*, 469-519; Drohojowska-Philp, *Full Bloom: The Art and Life of Georgia O'Keeffe*, 423-509.

²⁰³ Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation Records, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, Box 16.

Center” was in part a reconciliatory gesture to a proud Abiqueño she had slighted years earlier.

In interviews O’Keeffe publicly voiced her personal attachment and sense of entitlement to the Piedre Lumbre lands. Her expressions of ownership were circulated in magazines, on postcards, and other popular tourist items. Most affecting was the artist’s verbal and visual possessiveness of *Tsiping*, Cerro Pedernal, (Pedernal Mountain, Figure 8). In 1977 to *Newsday* Cultural Affairs Specialist, Amei Wallach, O’Keeffe made one of her most celebrated remarks. “It’s my private mountain,” she stated. “God told me if I painted it often enough I could have it.” The Piedre Lumbre’s 9,868-foot flat-topped mountain had always been a vital presence and historical landmark to the local American Indian and Hispano communities. According to Lesley Poling-Kempes, *Tsiping*’s history dates back to “centuries before the time of Christ...[where] artifacts found on the slopes of Pedernal itself have been dated to 7,000 B.C.”²⁰⁴ However, Poling-Kempes also writes,

Earlier claims to Pedernal’s hallowed ground meant little to O’Keeffe. As she stated simply and frequently: “It’s my private mountain...it belongs to me. God told me if I painted it enough, I could have it.”²⁰⁵

Between 1936-1958 O’Keeffe’s symbolic claims to *Tsiping* were documented in over twenty-nine different paintings of the mountain.²⁰⁶ Her Pedernal images depicted the

²⁰⁴ Poling-Kempes, *Valley of Shining Stone: The Story of Abiquiu*, 191-192.

²⁰⁵ Lesley Poling-Kempes, “A Call to Place,” in Barbara Buhler Lynes, Lesley Poling-Kempes, and Frederick Turner, *Georgia O’Keeffe and New Mexico: A Sense of Place*, (Santa Fe: Georgia O’Keeffe Museum and Princeton University Press, 2004), 77-88.

²⁰⁶ Lynes and Paden, *Maria Chabot-Georgia O’Keeffe: Correspondence, 1941-1949*, 15.

flint-covered blue mountain during all seasons from numerous perspectives and under varying shades of light.

So prevailing were the artist's verbal and visual assertions, that between 1979-1984 the National Park and U.S. Forest Services considered the possibility of commemorating Georgia O'Keeffe by renaming Tsiping "O'Keeffe Mountain." Under authorization of the Department of Interior Appropriations Act, the U.S. Department of the Interior's National Park Service prepared a report entitled *Georgia O'Keeffe Home & Studio, New Mexico*. Printed in May 1979, this initial report explored "new areas with potential for inclusion in the National Park system."²⁰⁷ The forty-four-page document included maps, Abiquiu history, poetic quotes from the artist about her life and art, and photographs of O'Keeffe, la Tapia, and the Rio Chama Valley. Also included were environmental descriptions, financial projections, census listings, and information regarding natural resources. Most importantly, the report proposed six options for "preserving, developing, interpreting and managing" La Tapia and O'Keeffe's three-acre property in Abiquiu. For instance, *Alternative 6* of the report evaluated the potential for O'Keeffe's property as a "national historic site." *Alternative 5* proposed possibilities of state ownership and management. Another option, *Alternative 2* entitled: "Community Ownership and Management," suggested that the property be "preserved and managed by either *La Asociacion de Santa Rosa de Lima de Abiquiu*, (a local historic and archeological preservation organization) or the Abiquiu Land Grant Association," or, "by both associations jointly." This

²⁰⁷ Secretary of Interior Communication Transmittal, "Georgia O'Keeffe Home & Studio," 1979. On page 6 of the Department of Interior Report it reads: "The Alternatives Study was initiated in November 1978 immediately following enactment of the Department of Interior's Fiscal 1979 Appropriations Act which authorized the study."

alternative also put forth the establishment of a “Hispanic Cultural Study Center” at La Tapia.

Alternative 2 is particularly arresting since it provided the opportunity for Abiquiu citizens to re-appropriate La Tapia back within the Abiquiu Land Grant boundaries, thereby restoring communal authority over the three acre property. This option recommended the development of a community historical center, library, classrooms, and an art center “for classes in painting, pottery-making, weaving and Spanish furniture-making.” Additionally, this choice suggested honoring *both* O’Keeffe and Abiquiu’s Genizaro history.²⁰⁸ Moreover, *Alternative 2* is particularly notable because of its *removal* from the Department of Interior’s subsequent 1992 report, which involved two key changes.

Written six years after Georgia O’Keeffe’s death, the 1992 draft, entitled *Study of Alternatives Environmental Assessment: Georgia O’Keeffe*, excludes any option for the Abiquiu community as property managers. Additionally, a site expansion was also proposed in order to create a “landscape museum” to be located on “approximately 1,000 acres between US [Highway] 84 and the cliffs northwest of Ghost Ranch.” Ghost Ranch, which lies fifteen miles northwest of Abiquiu, is the site of O’Keeffe’s first New Mexican home in the heart of the Piedre Lumbre. The landscape museum concept suggested construction of designated stops along U.S. 84 where O’Keeffe fans could view the landscape as the artist did. According to this plan, the landscape museum “would provide a contemplative place” on lands currently managed or owned by the U.S. Forest Service and the University of New Mexico, “Where visitors could come and share

²⁰⁸ Secretary of Interior Communication Transmittal, “Georgia O’Keeffe Home & Studio,” 1979, 29-33.

the natural beauty, read poetry, take photographs, paint or sketch...honoring O’Keeffe in their own way.”²⁰⁹ Although this report version offered three “commemorative site alternatives,” all of which supported the landscape museum concept, it did not include any options for Abiqueño community participation. However, a section entitled “Impacts on Local Residents” did refer to local concerns about “the insensitivity of some tourists,” in addition to trespassing and increased traffic in the pueblo. When considering the economic benefit to Abiquiu, this section further stated “[i]ncreased tourism could provide minor economic benefits to local communities.”²¹⁰ It appears that this option focused more on the desires and needs of O’Keeffe fans than the local population.

One might ask, what happened between 1979 and 1992 that prompted the exclusion of Abiqueño involvement in the O’Keeffe commemoration project? One clue is a note at the end of the 1992 report entitled “Appendix C: Other Options.” Included here is a brief summary of a suggestion to “Rename A Local Feature To Commemorate O’Keeffe.” It reads:

*...a suggestion was made to rename the Cerro Pedernal (a prominent landmark that appears in many of O’Keeffe’s New Mexico paintings) after O’Keeffe. Local residents responded with petitions and letters strongly opposing what they saw as a minimization of their traditions and heritage.*²¹¹

The O’Keeffe followers had gone too far. Local responses to the suggestion of renaming Cerro Pedernal were powerful. Citizens protested by circulating a petition. Some wrote

²⁰⁹ “Alternative 2: Honor O’Keeffe In a Landscape Closely Associated With Her,” in “Georgia O’Keeffe Home & Studio,” 1979. 24-28.

²¹⁰ “Socioeconomic Environment: Impact on Local Residents” in “Georgia O’Keeffe Home & Studio,” 1979. 38-39.

²¹¹ “Appendix C: Other Options” in “Georgia O’Keeffe Home & Studio,” 1979. 44-45.

letters speaking out against this proposal.²¹² Perhaps influenced by local perspectives, O’Keeffe herself rejected the idea, which she communicated to her family.²¹³ Even so, following the artist’s death in 1986 the battle for Pedernal raged on. New Mexico Senator Pete Domenici and O’Keeffe followers who the senator described as a “group of art lovers and heirs” pressed the issue.²¹⁴ Despite reports from Domenici’s office that the issue was “sensitive to [the] local population” and the artist’s family’s rejection of the idea, the O’Keeffe fans were persistent. Without Forest Service approval, her devotees built an illegal shrine to worship the artist atop Cerro Pedernal’s summit where the artists’ ashes had been scattered. Locals were outraged by the desecration of this culturally sacred site. Forest officials ordered that the altar be taken down.²¹⁵ In March 1988 an article entitled “O’Keeffe Peak? We Hope Not,” appeared in the History Society of New Mexico’s *La Crónica de Nuevo México*. The article challenged the need (of mostly non-locals) to immortalize the artist by renaming a natural landmark when O’Keeffe was already recognized through her paintings. More local community members banded together to form *Los Vecinos Del Cerro Pedernal* (The Neighbors of Pedernal Mountain). Statements from Los Vecinos affirmed their historical and spiritual connection to the mountain and also critiqued O’Keeffe and her fans:

²¹² United States Department of the Interior/National Park Service, “Study of Alternatives Environmental Assessment” (Denver: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992), 45.

²¹³ Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation Records, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, Box 17, Folder 1.

²¹⁴ See statement of Senator Pete V. Domenici on S. 2750, New Mexico Parks Legislation, at the Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Public lands, National Parks and Forests, September 14, 1988. One Hundredth Congress, Second Session.

²¹⁵ Correspondence of Los Vecinos Del Cerro Pedernal, January 12, 1989.

Long, long, time ago, El Cerro Pedernal provided the resources for us to survive. It gave us flint so that we could have tools. It also provided us with water and land, so that we could farm. The canyon lands that surround its base offered us protection, but more importantly, it gave us a sanctuary, a place of refuge so that we could seek our own god...New Mexicans will select their own history being on display over a single entity who sought fame for her self...In the 1920s a young wealthy painter happened into New Mexico. She sought our state because it offered her an abundance of grand vistas. As time passed, she pursued her talents and increased her wealth...When she saw her end present, she willed her treasure of paintings to another state...This was a betrayal of the first magnitude for the state of New Mexico.²¹⁶

Without a doubt local residents voiced their connection to the mountain as historical and spiritual. Their deep familial and cultural roots to the land did not coincide with O’Keeffe’s (and now her followers’) aesthetic appreciation of the landscape. Like many Abiqueño struggles over land and water, the O’Keeffe commemoration project followed various legal and political twists. For nearly twenty years, its legal course involved several public laws, one determined U.S. senator, and a “group of art lovers and heirs.”²¹⁷ The opposition to renaming Tsiping “O’Keeffe Mountain” was yet another moment in the long history of challenges to preserve Abiqueño lifeways and maintain authority over Abiquiu and the Piedre Lumbre Basin lands. This was a history that began with Spanish occupation and had now endured three national governments, one famous artist and her persistent devotees. Abiqueño efforts eventually proved successful. The

²¹⁶ Petition and correspondence, Los Vecinos del Cerro Pedernal, January 12, 1989.

²¹⁷ See statement of Senator Pete V. Domenici on S. 2750, New Mexico Parks Legislation, at the Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Public lands, National Parks and Forests, September 14, 1988. One Hundredth Congress, Second Session. The various stages of the O’Keeffe commemoration project began around 1979 and ended in 1998 with the designation of la Tapia as a national historic landmark.

renaming of Cerro Pedernal was dropped. However, various other projects commemorating the artist still went on.

In August 1998, also against O’Keeffe’s wishes, La Tapia was officially registered as a national historical landmark.²¹⁸ This tribute was largely due to the fact that an American artist once lived in and painted at the historical hacienda, rather than the Genizaro history connected to the property.²¹⁹ A plaque presentation ceremony in November 1999, which publicly designated the historical landmark was attended by the Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation and Museum directors and staff, National Parks Service representatives, and friends and relatives of Georgia O’Keeffe, including Maria Chabot.²²⁰ Today, La Tapia’s house and gardens are open for guided tours through the Georgia O’Keeffe Museum. For about thirty-five dollars tourists can get a limited tour of the hacienda and view the spaces where many local people spent hours making the artist’s life more comfortable and career successful. Hand-etched into stucco and wood, the initials of staff members, one dating back to 1865, announce Abiqueño connections to the house. Also included on the tour is a peek into the “Indian” or “Ute Room,” the once windowless cell turned dining room.²²¹ A Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation report states that in 1995 La Tapia’s tours annually drew approximately 5,000 visitors. This figure has now

²¹⁸ In 1983, in a letter to Senator Domenici, O’Keeffe “repealed her authorization” to make la Tapia an official historic site. Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation Records, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, Box 17, Folder 1.

²¹⁹ See National Historic Landmark Nomination, “O’Keeffe, Georgia Home and Studio” United States Department of Interior, National Parks Service (1998).

²²⁰ Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation 1994-2000, Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation Annual Report File, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

²²¹ For information on the “Ute Room” see Lesley Poling-Kempes, *Valley of Shining Stone: The Story of Abiquiu*, 70-75; Lynes and Paden, *Maria Chabot-Georgia O’Keeffe: Correspondence, 1941-1949*, 321-322 and 329.

doubled and is four times more than the entire 2010 population of Abiquiu.²²² Currently, the Pueblo de Abiquiu does not receive funding from these tours. However recently, members of the Georgia O’Keeffe Museum staff donated new and used books to the Pueblo de Abiquiu Library and Cultural Center along with a modest monetary donation.²²³ A few locals are hopeful that this gesture marks the advent of a more collaborative relationship between the Abiqueño community and the Georgia O’Keeffe Museum, one that fully acknowledges the Genizaro history of the ancient pueblo and respects the needs and perspectives of its current population; a relationship in which the local people have a voice.

O’Keeffe’s occupation in Abiquiu has been largely portrayed as isolated, uniformly celebratory in nature, and politically neutral. However, the uniformly positive language with which scholars and officials commemorate the artist’s “pioneering spirit, individuality,” or her “connection to the [New Mexican] land” betrays attempts to edit any cultural and racial tensions, not to mention the thorny issue of land appropriation, out of the O’Keeffe art historical narrative. Moreover, formalist attempts to read the artist’s figureless, sometimes bone-littered, landscapes as *empty* have conveniently omitted centuries of Abiqueño peoples’ presence, their histories, and perspectives. Following a rocky beginning to her life in Abiquiu, over time O’Keeffe herself recognized the

²²² During the peak season March-November the O’Keeffe home tours are given five times per day in groups of twelve for nine months. This number does not include private and large group tours, which attract even more tourists. According to Rio Arriba County census information from 2010 the population of greater Abiquiu is 1,144. However, the population within *el Pueblo de Abiquiu* proper, where la Tapia is located is significantly smaller. Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation 1994-2000, Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation Annual Report File, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

²²³ Many Abiqueños have identified a disconnection in the Pueblo’s relationship with “O’Keeffe” following the establishment of the Georgia O’Keeffe Museum. (“O’Keeffe” is the shorthand reference used to identify the artist, her foundation, and now the museum).

significance of Abiqueño people to her life and art. This she acknowledged through monetary donations to the pueblo as well as to individual citizens. However, her gifts have been portrayed as entirely altruistic rather than recognized as part of a mutual exchange between the artist and the local population. This limited understanding of O’Keeffe strictly as a benefactress rather than as a mutual beneficiary has minimized Abiqueño contributions to the artist’s success in northern New Mexico. Standard treatments of the O’Keeffe narrative follow twentieth-century “patronage models,” which uniformly prioritize the role of Anglo artists and art patrons in histories of indigenous art rather than recognizing *their dependence* on local American Indian and Hispano peoples. As this chapter has attempted to demonstrate, this Anglo dependence served any number of goals, ranging from land acquisition to grander notions of American nationalism and modernist formalism.

In 1968, at age eighty-one, O’Keeffe expressed her own respect for Abiqueño lifeways. In an interview for *Life* magazine, the artist communicated her learned understanding of the subtleties of local politics and social positioning. After living in the pueblo for nearly twenty years she stated, “I’m a newcomer to Abiquiu...that’s one of the lower forms of life.”²²⁴ This reflective remark along with her rejection of the proposals to rename Cerro Pedernal or designate La Tapia a national historic site, validate the artist’s ultimate understanding of herself as a long-term visitor or guest to the Genizaro pueblo. This image runs contrary to the isolated “Priestess of the Desert” or the “Desert Sage” persona, mythical personalities that have been widely circulated by standard O’Keeffe narratives.

²²⁴ Sieberling, “Stark Vision of a Pioneer Painter,” 40-53; Lesley Poling-Kempes, *Valley of Shining Stone: The Story of Abiquiu*, 200-203.

About O’Keeffe, Abiqueño accounts are not romantic. Instead, they portray the daily nuances of her time in Abiquiu and bear witness to the ups and downs of the artist’s long-term presence in the pueblo. In other words, Abiqueño people recognized Georgia O’Keeffe as human and treated her as such. After sharing the story of O’Keeffe’s attendance to her 1964 wedding, Abiquiu resident, Alice Garcia affirmed, “She was just like everybody else.”



Figure 7. "...Turns Dead Bones to Live Art." *Life Magazine* February 14, 1938.

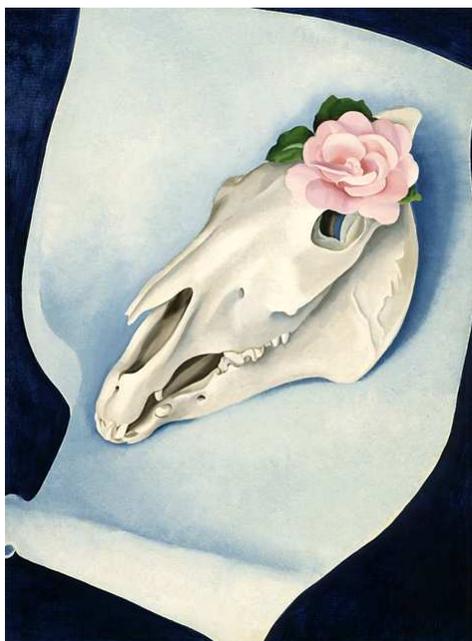


Figure 8. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Horse's Skull With Pink Rose*, 1931. Oil on canvas, 40 x 30. Los Angeles County Museum of Art.



Figure 9. John Loengard, *Life* magazine, March 1968.

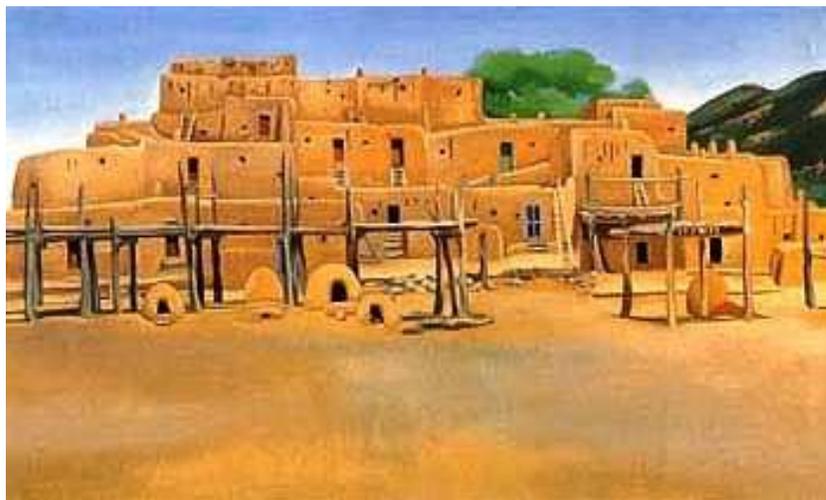


Figure 10. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Taos Pueblo, New Mexico*, 1929/34.
Oil on canvas, 24 x 40. Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art.



Figure 11. Sumner Matteson, *Typical Town in New Mexico, Abiquiu*, 1905. Milwaukee Public Museum.



Figure 12 & 13. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Horse's or Mule's Skull with Turkey Feathers*, 1936. Oil on canvas, 30 x 16. Private Collection; Malcolm Varon, *Horse's Skull*, 2001. Georgia O'Keeffe Museum.



Figure 14. *Tsiping, Cerro Pedernal, or Mt. Pedernal.* Photo by author, 2012

CHAPTER THREE

Atomic Indians: Art, Destruction, and Death

“...[T]he term aesthetic refers to real aspects of lived experience that have a social dimension...Aesthetic experience is bodily, sensory; it is not just abstract and theoretical. Our value systems are rooted in our experience of the world.”

Stephen Leuthold, *Indigenous Aesthetics: Native Art, Media, and Identity* (1998)

“Occupational illnesses, such as lung disease (silicosis) and lead poisoning, have been associated with pottery-making for hundreds of years. Unfortunately, these illnesses and others are still seen in ceramic artists and hobbyists and their families today.”

Monona Rossol, *The Artist’s Complete Health and Safety Guide*, (1994)

American Indian Art and Nuclear Colonialism: A Visual Connection

A twentieth-century photograph very elegantly and directly conveys the highly unexpected but very real connection between Pueblo Indian artists and nuclear colonialism.²²⁵ Taken in 1948, the image is of the Pueblo potter Maria Martinez and the Italian nuclear physicist Enrico Fermi. In this image, the artist and the physicist happily share a smile as they both admire a young Pueblo child who Martinez holds affectionately in her arms. The occasion appears to be a cheerful gathering. In the snapshot, Martinez and Fermi seem friendly and relaxed (Figure 15). A person, half-shadowed in the background and barely visible except for their eyes, watches on. Another woman, whose back is to the camera, gestures with her arm extended. Her body language, her open palm, the relaxed position of her arm, and the tilt of her head all

²²⁵ I am borrowing the terms “radioactive and nuclear colonialism” from the scholars Winona Laduke, Ward Churchill, Danielle Endress, and Myrriah Gomez.

appear to be sociable. She is, it appears, in the midst of introducing two of the greatest minds of the twentieth century.

Beginning in 1944, Martinez and Fermi both lived in a rugged isolated region of northern New Mexico. Highly secluded among the Jemez Mountains, their homes were just twenty miles apart. Given this short distance, it might not seem unlikely that this pair should ever meet. However, the artist and the physicist lived vastly different lives in two highly insular communities. Martinez' home, at San Ildefonso Pueblo, was hundreds of years old. At San Ildefonso many changes had taken place by 1948, even so, life still emphasized balance and community. Days revolved around an agricultural calendar that was punctuated by seasonal ceremonies of prayer, music, and dance. These ceremonies celebrated the continuity of life and the reciprocal relationship between humans and the natural environment.

Just twenty miles uphill, Fermi's "home" was a high-tech atomic laboratory that in 1948 had existed for only five years. On "the hill" the panicked energy of daily living ran according to the frantic schedule of a major international conflict. In this pop-up military complex and makeshift family neighborhood, scientists, technicians, and military personnel--people who were fathers, mothers, husbands and wives—lived their lives according to a national conviction to eradicate evil from the world.²²⁶

As strikingly different as their daily experiences must have been, Martinez and Fermi did share a few similarities. For instance, both were widely recognized for their professional achievements. One might say that they were two "reluctant" celebrities living under the public spotlight. For both the artist and the physicist public life greatly

²²⁶ James W. KUNETKA, *City of Fire: Los Alamos and the Atomic Age 1943-45* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1979). 90-106.

contrasted with the fiercely protected privacy of the two communities where they lived. Both the pueblo and the lab were firmly protective of their community members. Each was a place that went to great lengths to carefully guard secret knowledge. And in both communities outsiders were regarded with caution. Despite these few similarities, the contrast between the artist and the physicist cannot be denied. At the time that the 1948 photograph was taken, Martinez was internationally famous for her artistic creativity. She was widely honored for bringing new life to an ancient tradition. Fermi, on the other hand, was famous for his scientific power to destroy. He became known for developing the “gadget” that would kill thousands.²²⁷ Creation and destruction, a historical meeting of opposites documented visually.

Art and Destruction

By the late 1940s, Maria Martinez (*Poh ve ka*) was internationally recognized for her hand coiled black-on-black pottery: a hybrid style that, according to twentieth-century art histories innovatively combined ancient southwest pottery-making techniques with streamlined modern aesthetics. Martinez, along with her husband Julian, was known as an artistic revivalist as well as an aesthetic innovator. Her artistic career, and her professional engagement with Western art markets and venues, took off during the first decade of the twentieth century and lasted until her death in 1980. Early in her career, around 1910, Martinez was selling individual pots for approximately two dollars. By

²²⁷ “Gadget” was the Los Alamos Laboratory “euphemism” for the atomic bomb. Tom Zoellner, *Uranium: War, Energy, And The Rock That Shaped The World* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2009) 43-68.

2005, however, pieces of her work would be appraised at over fifty thousand dollars.²²⁸

Throughout her life Martinez had consistently encountered non-Indian influences. As a child, the artist attended Saint Catherine's Indian boarding school in Santa Fe, New Mexico. As an adult, she traveled extensively promoting, exhibiting, and selling her art. However, despite her fame and exposure to the people and world outside her community, for nearly a century, Martinez lived permanently in northern New Mexico among her extended family and community members at *Po-woh-ge-oweenge*, San Ildefonso Pueblo. Her home.²²⁹

Northern New Mexico was not a permanent home for Enrico Fermi. The 1938 Nobel Peace Prize winner emigrated, along with his family, to the United States escaping the anti-Semitic laws of Italy's fascist powers. Once in the U.S., Fermi taught at Columbia University in New York and then at the University of Chicago. In Chicago, in December 1942, Fermi led the creation of the first self-sustaining nuclear reactor known as "Chicago Pile 1."²³⁰ Fermi's work in Chicago was revolutionary to the advancement of nuclear power. It demonstrated, beyond theory, the possibilities of this energy source and that nuclear power was a force that could be controlled. In 1944, Fermi brought his fission-knowledge to the Manhattan Project. He joined the scientists, technicians, and U.S. military personnel, an elite team of international intellectuals, who made up the nuclear power development branch known as Project Y. Up a steep canyon road, just

²²⁸ Alice Marriott, *Maria: The Potter of San Ildefonso* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1948) 175-181; "Simply the Best," *Antiques Roadshow*, Season 14 #1419 aired January 3, 2005, PBS; *The Antiques Roadshow Archive*, <http://www.pbs.org>, viewed January 30, 2013.

²²⁹ Marriott, *Maria: The Potter of San Ildefonso*, xi-119

²³⁰ "The Nobel Prize in Physics, 1938: Enrico Fermi," Nobelprize. Org. accessed March 18, 2013, http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/physics/laureates/1938/fermi-bio.html

miles above San Ildefonso Pueblo, this intensely secretive military laboratory was stationed on top of an ancient mesa at Los Alamos, New Mexico.²³¹

At Los Alamos, Fermi, along with his colleagues, spent several frantic years producing “Little Boy” and “Fat Man,” the world’s first nuclear weapons that were detonated at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan. On the mornings of August 6 and August 9, 1945 thousands of Japanese citizens were killed in the massive flash of light, heat, and fire. From “Bock’s Car,” the B-29 bomber plane that released the second bomb, the quiet ticking flicker of a home movie camera captured the only moving pictures of the giant mushroom cloud explosion.²³² Below, the incinerated shadow-images of victims’ bodies were “photographically” flared onto walls, steps, and the sides of buildings.

Three years later, the meeting between Martinez and Fermi would also be marked by a flash of light, a friendly moment of social connection photographically burned onto paper. However, even before their 1948 meeting, fire, chemicals, and dust had already permanently fused a connection between the artist, the physicist, and their communities, within the physical spaces that they had once shared as neighbors. In 1954, six years after their meeting, the “father of the atomic bomb,” would succumb to stomach cancer, a result of his own long-term exposure to, and possible ingestion of, radioactive materials. In fact, like Fermi, the lives of several of his academic and professional colleagues would also be cut short by radiation sickness and various types of cancers. But they would not be the only ones.

²³¹ Kunetka, *City of Fire: Los Alamos and the Atomic Age, 1943-45*, ix-28.

²³² Kunetka, *City of Fire: Los Alamos and the Atomic Age, 1943-45*, 174-189.

Art and Death, Art and Life

Between 1943 and 1952 the Los Alamos Laboratory “handled large amounts of plutonium as part of the Manhattan Project.”²³³ Following World War II, Los Alamos expanded their scientific research into chemistry, metallurgy, and various physics programs. During this time period, and for an unknown amount of time afterward, the lab practiced non-regulated disposal of radioactive by-product and toxic waste into “deeply bored pits” and open canyons surrounding Los Alamos. These pits and canyons included land areas and ground water sources directly “adjacent to land belonging to the Native American community and Pueblo of San Ildefonso.”²³⁴ Whether by accident, or as a method to be rid of these burdensome materials, local people remember these pits around the Lab ablaze, open burnings that then released the poisons into the air.²³⁵ Over the years, in various liquid, solid, and airborne forms, numerous contaminants were released into the surrounding ecosystem of the northern Rio Grande flowage. They included: plutonium, uranium, tritium, barium, and radioactive lanthanum, among others. These heavy metal toxins, carcinogenic chemicals, and organic solvents seeped into the ground, flowed down streams, and blew into the air. They can now all be found in the local water, air, soils, clay, sand, grasses, rocks, woods, and plants, and in local animal populations

²³³ William L.Graf, *Plutonium and the Rio Grande: Environmental Change and Contamination in the Nuclear Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) 3-31.

²³⁴ Hector Hinojosa, ed. Group CIC-1, “Elk and Deer Study, Material Disposal Area G, Technical Area 54: Source Document,” (Los Alamos National Laboratory, 1999).

²³⁵ Kathy Sanchez (*Wan Povi*), Tewa Women United, Conversation with Author, at San Ildefonso Pueblo, July, 2012.

and their waste (elk, deer, cattle).²³⁶ All of these local and natural materials, had always been used for sustenance, shelter, energy (heat), and for making Pueblo Indian art.

The subject of art materials and art material hazards is only minimally explored in art historical and other academic discourses. Beyond art studio walls or intellectual debates about aesthetic form, innovation, or authenticity, the topic of art materials is, for the most part, not registered. However, this is a subject that is of particular relevance to contemporary American Indian artists, their families, and the communities where they live and work. This is a timely issue, one that deserves more critical attention and public consideration particularly in light of historical, current, and ongoing colonization processes. These processes involve natural resource appropriation and environmental contamination, and more specifically, a national history of non-regulated disposal of radioactive by-product and hazardous waste on or near American Indian lands.²³⁷

The long-term results of these ecologically destructive practices have been steadily gaining public attention. For example, illnesses caused by mid twentieth-century uranium mining methods and the abandonment of radioactive materials within Diné (Navajo) lands in Arizona, Utah, and New Mexico are now becoming more widely known. This recognition has been achieved through the ongoing efforts of the Diné community and other American Indian and non-Indian activists. Their push for legal and environmental

²³⁶ Thomas Widener, et al., “Los Alamos Historical Document Retrieval and Assessment,” (Center for Disease Control and the National Center for Environmental Health, 2009); Hinojosa, ed. Group CIC-1, “Elk and Deer Study, Material Disposal Area G, Technical Area 54: Source Document.”

²³⁷ Winona LaDuke, “Nuclear Waste: Dumping on the Indians” in *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life*, (Cambridge: South End Press, 1999) 97-114; William L. Graf, *Plutonium and the Rio Grande: Environmental Change and Contamination in the Nuclear Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Robert D. Bullard, “The Assault on Fence-Line Communities,” and Beverly Wright, “Living and Dying in Louisiana’s “Cancer Alley,”” in *The Quest for Environmental Justice: Human Rights and the Politics of Pollution*, ed. Robert D. Bullard (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2005) 85-107.

justice has forced the recognition of the chronic health effects that have been caused by radiation exposure.²³⁸

In northern New Mexico, Pueblo Indian communities along the Rio Grande River have also taken up legal and political action. The goals there are multiple and long-term. They include the restoration of the natural environment, legal compensation for damages already inflicted, and the long-term monitoring and stewardship of the local air, land, and water sources surrounding their homes.²³⁹ These natural resources were consistently contaminated by the waste disposal practices of the Los Alamos Laboratory during the mid-late twentieth century. Today's Pueblo Indian activists, many of whom are women and artists, include the grandchildren, great grandchildren, and extended family members of the San Ildefonso potter Maria Martinez²⁴⁰

Like the previous chapters, this section will focus further on fine art production in New Mexico during the twentieth century. More specifically, this section will center on the mid-late twentieth century (1940s-1980s), when awareness about the numerous health hazards associated with the fine art industry were first gaining national attention. This

²³⁸ Judy Pasternak, *Yellow Dirt: An American Story of A Poisoned Land and A People Betrayed* (New York: Free Press, 2010); Tom Zoellner, *Uranium: War, Energy, And The Rock That Shaped The World* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2009). In 1990 the Radiation Exposure and Compensation Act provided financial compensation to uranium miners, "downwinders," or people who either lived or worked downwind from nuclear test sites, and former employees of "atmospheric weapons tests." However, this federal legislation has been criticized due to regional and cultural limitations and has undergone numerous amendments. See: Tori Baliff, "Beyond Compensation: Inadequacies of the Radiation Exposure Act (RECA), University of Utah, 2008.

²³⁹ National Research Council of the National Academies, *Plans and Practices for Groundwater Protection at the Los Alamos National Laboratory* (Washington D.C., The National Academies Press, 2007).

²⁴⁰ In 2006 and 2007 environmental activist groups from New Mexico including: Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety (CCNS), Tewa Women United (TWU), Rio Grande Restoration, and the New Mexico Acequia Association (NMAA), among others, filed an intent for legal suit against the Regents of the University of California, the Department of Energy, and the Los Alamos National Laboratory corporate Management for violations of the Clean Water Act. "Communities for Clean Water Fact Sheets," Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety (CCNS), accessed January 10, 2013. www.nuclearreactive.org.

was also a time period when American Indian communities throughout the Southwest were experiencing the first noticeable waves of chronic illnesses that were caused by nuclear testing fallout, unmonitored uranium mining and milling methods, and the abandonment of radioactive and toxic waste on and near Native homelands.

These twentieth-century American industries, art-making and nuclear energy development, are two nationally subsidized industrial enterprises that, typically, have not been regarded as relative to each other. However, the specific health hazards associated with these industries, as well as their long-term effects on American Indian environments, health, and economies are basic similarities that these national projects have in common. This chapter will explore the historical and material connections between these two sources of toxin exposure and the long-term effects on the wellbeing and physical health of American Indian artists and communities.

One of the biggest challenges with confronting the hazards of art-making is that it runs counter to established mindsets, which emphasize popular predilections for “creativity” and the individual “artist-genius.” However, it must be understood that making art is an *industrial* occupation. Making art involves physical labor, long work shifts, and exposure to many material and chemical hazards. Art is a profession that is regulated according to federal law and safety restrictions. Every artist must deal with the particular health risks caused by the very physical nature of their occupation and their daily exposure to health hazards. For *all artists*, interacting with these professional dangers is inevitable. It is not a question of *if* artists are exposed it is a question of how much, how frequently, and for how long. This is a mathematical equation of toxicity level

over duration of exposure (dose x time).²⁴¹ In public art institutions including colleges and universities, museums, and some professional art studios, exposure rates, by law, require monitoring according to federal and state regulations. In these settings the physical dangers of making art are *managed but not eliminated* and all artists are still exposed. However, artists who live on or near industrial waste sites face an increased health hazard. This danger can be attributed to the similar chemical make-up between industrial waste products and specific art materials. These are substances, which can, over time, build up in the human body. The chemical “kinship” between industrial waste products and art material toxins is an elemental affiliation, a molecular connection between toxic substances and heavy metals that are now located in the natural environment and that have been historically utilized in art studios.

The potentiality for this type of chemical interaction within the human body will be explored in this chapter. This is a physical reaction that is not uncommon. However, according to industrial chemical experts it is a health alarm that is regularly dismissed or goes unnoticed because of the wide range of side effects that are caused by toxin exposure. These side effects can vary between intense bouts of sickness (acute) to more subtle or vague symptoms of long-term illnesses (chronic). According to industrial hygienists Monona Rossol and Michael McCann, reactions to this is chemical interaction can be brought on by either short or long-term exposure to hazardous substances of similar chemical make-up. This type of “double-exposure,” is a cumulative effect, one

²⁴¹ I have greatly simplified this equation, which is far more complex and applies individually to each art material and situation. For more specific information on art material hazards and toxin levels and exposure rates see: Rossol, *Artists Complete Health and Safety Guide*, 21-301.

that can exponentially increase the chances for chronic health issues with potentially devastating results.²⁴²

According to Rossol and McCann, illnesses and their symptoms resultant from exposure to heavy and toxic metals such as mercury, uranium, and plutonium, all materials that have been synthetically produced and are now present in the natural environment, can be aggravated and intensified by contact with similar metals such as lead, cadmium, or cobalt, metals contained in pigments, paints, glass, and other art mediums. According to Rossol, this chemical admixture, a process called “additive exposure,” occurs when “one chemical compounds or adds to the toxic effects of another.”²⁴³ In other words, the double-exposure to toxins in the natural environment and then similar hazards at work has the potential to blend and react within the human body. This chemical interaction produces a potent result, a type of lethal cocktail that can either cause an acute reaction, similar to a poison overdose, or a gradual accumulation that is slowly absorbed into blood, bone, and human tissue thereby leading to birth defects, organ damage, and various types of cancer.²⁴⁴

During the 1970s-1980s newly ratified federal legislation, including the U.S. Department of Labor’s Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSH Act) of 1970 alerted the American public to the many chemical, material, and environmental dangers present within multiple work places including art studios. Although political activism and legal regulations regarding occupational hazards had been enforced since the nineteenth

²⁴² Michael McCann, *Health Hazards Manual For Artists*, Fourth Edition (New York: Lyons and Burford Publishers, 1994); Monona Rossol, *Artists Complete Health and Safety Guide*, Second Edition (New York, Alworth Press and American Council for the Arts).

²⁴³ Rossol, *Artists Complete Health and Safety Guide*, 21-28.

²⁴⁴ Jeanne Mager Stellman, *Women’s Work, Women’s Health: Myths and Realities* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977); Rossol, *Artists Complete Health and Safety Guide*.

century, for the first time the OSH Act addressed *workers' rights to full disclosure* of information regarding the dangerous conditions in which they worked. This information included detailed reports about the hazardous materials and potentially deadly chemicals that employees were regularly handling.²⁴⁵ Also, safety regulations set by the newly established Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) now extended *beyond* factories, mines, and chemical plants. Occupations previously regarded as safe were now under investigation. For instance, hazards within the health care and food service industries, public education, clerical and domestic work, all employment sources dominated by women and people of color, were officially documented and, by law, this information was publicly disseminated. Throughout the next decade, the reclassification of numerous work materials as dangerous, the amendment of consumer protection laws, and the publication of epidemiological statistics that included data compiled by the National Cancer Institute in 1981, all alerted art professionals to the multiple health risks that they faced while making art.²⁴⁶

Between the 1960s-1980s, direct connections were identified between art studio practices that exposed artists to material and chemical hazards and the frequency of health problems among practicing and retired artists. These health issues included depression, mood swings, sleeplessness, anxiety, and respiratory illnesses.²⁴⁷ Also, during this period, further correlations were scientifically identified between art-making

²⁴⁵ "Reflections on OSHA's History" (United States Department of Labor: January 2009). *Right to Know* is currently enforced by multiple state and federal agencies for more information see: *Right to Know*, as implemented by OSHA and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Accessed January, 2013. www.osha.gov and www.epa.gov

²⁴⁶ Ben A. Franklin, "Paint Use Is Linked to Artist's Cancer," *New York Times*, May 17, 1981, accessed March 28, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/1981/05/17/us/paint-use-is-linked-to-artist-s-cancer.html>

²⁴⁷ McCann, *Health Hazards Manual For Artists*; Monona Rossol, *Artists Complete Health and Safety Guide*.

methods, toxin exposure, and long-term chronic diseases. These far more serious illnesses, some of which have a latency period from ten on up to forty years, included heart, liver, and kidney disease, and various types of cancer.²⁴⁸ Victims of radiation and toxic chemical exposure have also suffered many of these same illnesses.

In 1981, the National Cancer Institute investigated the causes of artist's deaths between 1940-1969. The grim but enlightening results evidenced that male artists exhibited a pattern for heart disease and numerous types of cancer including "leukemia, brain cancer, kidney bladder, colon, and rectum." Deceased women artists demonstrated a significantly higher rate for "rectal, breast, and lung cancer."²⁴⁹ Through these results, and also medical data from other related studies, it was soon clearly understood that connections between art and health were issues of life and death.²⁵⁰

To better understand the potential affects of toxin exposure both within the natural environment and in art studios on a more personal level, this chapter will reflect on the life and professional techniques of the Santa Clara Pueblo painter Helen Hardin, (*Tsa sah wee eh*). Hardin is regarded as one of the most talented and technically innovative Tewa painters of the twentieth century. Executed entirely by hand, her paintings and prints are compositions of complex layering and excruciatingly beautiful detail that have been honored and exhibited internationally (Figure 16).

Born in May 1943, Hardin spent a considerable amount of her early childhood at *Kha'p'oo Owinge* (Santa Clara Pueblo). A Tewa Pueblo, Santa Clara is located

²⁴⁸ Rossol, *Artists Complete Health and Safety Guide*, 21-28.

²⁴⁹ McCann, *Health Hazards Manual For Artists*, 3-7.

²⁵⁰ Torsten Skov, et al., "Risk for Cancer of the Pharynx and Oral Cavity Among Male Painters in the Nordic Countries" *Archives for Environmental Health* 48 (1993): 176-180. Rhoda Sherbell, "Endangered Species: The Artist" *Art Journal* 34 (1975): 314-315.

approximately sixteen miles from Los Alamos National Laboratory. The environmental damage inflicted upon this community is now public knowledge. Since the 1990s Santa Clara, along with other Pueblo and Hispano communities of northern New Mexico, has been consistently pressing for full disclosure of the laboratory's waste disposal and nuclear production practices. Its citizens have also worked toward the restoration and long-term monitoring of the local environment.²⁵¹

Hardin's artistic career began with her first award-winning painting at age six and then lasted her entire lifetime. In June 1984, at age forty-one Hardin died from breast, lung, and bone cancer. According to biographer Kate Nelson, throughout her life the artist also periodically suffered bouts of anxiety, depression, emotional swings, and exhaustion, all physical and emotional side affects of toxic and hazardous material exposure.²⁵² This chapter will examine Hardin's studio techniques in context with the nascent years of the popularized twentieth-century art practices of acrylic painting and photochemical etching. Although, during the time when Hardin was most prolific (1960s-1980s), there was some awareness about the potential health hazards of the mediums she was working with, regulations and labeling requirements of toxic and hazardous ingredients in art supplies were not yet established.

Prior to the 1988 amendment of the Federal Hazardous Substances Act of 1960 and also the Labeling of Hazardous Art Material Act of 1988, many professional artists regularly and unknowingly worked with materials and mediums that negatively impacted

²⁵¹ Joseph Masco, "Mutant Ecologies: Radioactive Life in Post-Cold War New Mexico," *Cultural Anthropology* 19 (2004): 517-550.

²⁵² Kate Nelson, *Helen Hardin Tsa Sah Wee Eh: A Straight Line Curved* (Little Standing Spruce Publishing, 2012) 124-125, 141-142.

their health.²⁵³ They inadvertently used their art materials in ways that increased the danger-exposure to their bodies. Helen Hardin was one of these artists. However, Hardin's story also introduces the additional complication of environmental toxin exposure: an issue that quite possibly increased her susceptibility for developing a rare and aggressive type of cancer.²⁵⁴

Reflecting on Hardin's life, her professional techniques, and her premature death, is important not for the purpose of creating a poster child for safe art practices or environmental toxin exposure, but for better understanding how specific communities, namely women and artists of color, have been detrimentally affected by what I identify as "creative caste systems": in other words, stratified systems of value that are structured according to Western aesthetic tastes and material standards. These are established hierarchies that influence public attitudes about the importance of an artist and their artwork. Consider, for instance, that the monetary value of an artwork is often determined according to the art medium. Art created with more time consuming, physically demanding, and more hazardous materials such as a bronze sculpture, an oil painting, or a lithographic print, tend to demand a higher market price than, for example, pottery, textiles, or baskets. These concepts of "quality" and value have been historically imposed upon, and later adopted by, many artists from culturally and economically marginalized communities. They are hierarchical methods of standardization that have fueled ongoing debates about quality. These discussions include the "art vs. craft" debate, which is both a gendered and racialized argument, and also the "traditional vs. non-traditional" contest,

²⁵³ Federal Hazardous Substances Act (Public Law 86-213). Consumer Product Safety Commission: cpsc.gov. Accessed January, 7, 2012.

²⁵⁴ Nelson, *Helen Hardin Tsa Sah Wee Eh: A Straight Line Curved*, 251.

another debate that is rooted in concepts of race. Although, to some, such discussions might seem passé or dated, art scholar Nancy Marie Mithlo has demonstrated that these are issues that are still very relevant for American Indian artists. In her 2008 *“Our Indian Princess” Subverting the Stereotype*, Mithlo’s interviews with American Indian women artists illustrate how these standards reach beyond theoretical discussions of gender and identity politics or aesthetic taste. These are literal extensions of economic and legal systems that directly affect an artist’s daily living. For example, within twentieth-century Western art systems the certification of authenticity is a requisite that is both aesthetically and *legally* particular to American Indian artists and their art. This obligation of “proof” of an artist’s race and tribal affiliation was first legally enacted according to the Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1935.²⁵⁵ It was a legal measure originally implemented to “promote the economic welfare” of American Indian artists. However, this is a legalized art standard that has had implications beyond economics.

The life and art of Helen Hardin, including her relationship with her mother, the famous “Studio” painter Pablita Velarde, demonstrates the relevance of this legal regulation to artists’ daily lives and their physical health. For artists of economically and environmentally marginalized communities, the pressure to create “authentic” art that satisfies dominant aesthetic tastes and material standards can also mean utilizing art-making methods in environments that are ill-suited for managing toxin exposure. This was the case for both Hardin and Velarde. For many years, in order to financially support themselves and their families, both artists worked extensive hours in their homes.

Although this strategy is not uncommon, it is dangerous. Over time, producing art in non-

²⁵⁵ The Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1935 was amended in 1990 and in 2000 and placed certification authority under the discretion of individual Indian Nations. Amended versions of this law are still enforced today.

regulated studio environments introduces material toxins to living quarters, thereby increasing the duration of toxin exposure and raising the potential for long-term damage to the body. Also, the preferred art-making methods of Hardin and Velarde, acrylic painting, “earth painting,” and also Velarde’s pigment processing techniques, which involved hand-crushing rocks and minerals she found in local environments throughout New Mexico, consistently exposed both artists’ bodies to airborne and chemical hazards.

Beyond Identity Politics

Examinations of the numerous health issues associated with art-making practices should be elemental to any discussions about American Indian art, art production, and aesthetics. At this time, critical conversations about American Indian art must now reach beyond the standardized debates of identity politics and their emphasis on the exclusionary tactics of mainstream art historical canons.²⁵⁶

As demonstrated in the first two chapters, since the early twentieth century, American Indian artists have not only strategically negotiated, they have also *actively shaped* Western art markets, American artists’ careers, and mainstream art movements. In *Native Moderns: American Indian Painting, 1940-1960*, Bill Anthes demonstrates the influence of Native artists and art upon American modernism and the creation of the American modern identity. Non-Indian artists such as Jackson Pollock, Pablo Picasso, or Barnett Newman, are all high profile twentieth-century artists whose careers were

²⁵⁶ The recent work of anthropologist/art historian Nancy Marie Mithlo does reach beyond identity politics to offer more pragmatic information about American Indian women artists and the practicalities of art making including economic issues, gender issues, and also raising a family. However, Mithlo still frames her work according to visual stereotypes and issues of representation. See Nancy Marie Mithlo, “*Our Indian Princess*” *Subverting the Stereotype* (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2008).

directly influenced by Indigenous art and aesthetics.²⁵⁷ Also, as demonstrated in chapter two, Native communities both directly influenced and actively participated in bolstering the careers of some of American art history's most celebrated artists. Undoubtedly, Georgia O'Keeffe's life and career in northern New Mexico would not have had the opportunity to thrive as it did without the aid and support of the local American Indian and Hispano people of Abiquiu. In addition to these major contributions, numerous American Indian artists have also ingeniously and beautifully integrated "Western" formal elements and art-making techniques into American Indian art practices and genres. While doing so, they also steadfastly maintained a definitive sense of cultural and aesthetic integrity. Native art historian Jolene Rickard has identified American Indian artists and communities' conscious maintenance of their own artistic values and communal responsibilities as *visual sovereignty*. Following Rickard's theory:

Visual Sovereignty is an active form of creative expression that remains vigilant of one's responsibility to distinct cultural principles. This concept draws upon multiple sources of Native scholarship including legal, political, historical, cultural, and fine art disciplines and is rooted in larger discussions of American Indian sovereignty.²⁵⁸

The acknowledgement of art and art-making as an active and valuable expression of American Indian sovereignty and as a key influence on American art and aesthetics, then, most certainly, should address how making art according to Western production standards, specifically during the twentieth century, *exposed* American Indian artists, their families, and their communities to hazardous and toxic materials. I believe that this

²⁵⁷ Bill Anthes, *Native Moderns: American Indian Painting, 1940-1960* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) 59-88.

²⁵⁸ Jolene Rickard, "Sovereignty: A Line In The Sand" in *Strong Hearts: Native American Visions and Voices* (New York: Aperture, 1995) 51-54; Jolene Rickard, "Indigenous and Iroquoian Art As Knowledge, (PhD diss., State University of New York at Buffalo, 1996).

is a reality that is imperative to Native art discourses, American Indian Studies, and Indigenous Studies more generally.

As demonstrated in chapter one, since the early twentieth century American Indian art production within capitalist markets rapidly evolved into an essential economic resource. As many Native art historians have demonstrated, this economic shift was particularly dramatic in the Southwest, where tourism and art production very rapidly and dramatically replaced, competed with, and also complemented subsistence farming as a main economic mainstay for Pueblo Indian communities. This economic “success” was greatly emphasized by the twentieth-century patronage models. However, as even the twentieth-century Pueblo art patrons would argue, art-making was, and *had always been*, more than just a means for Native peoples’ engagement with Western capitalist systems. Long before interventions from Euro-American benefactors, American Indian communities utilized art-making and other forms of creative expressions as methods for communal connection and cultural renewal. As Stephen Leuthold, as well as other Native art historians have shown, within American Indian communities art had always been an important material, as well as conceptual, method for sustaining and revitalizing specific cultural and aesthetic values.²⁵⁹ However, throughout the twentieth century under capitalist economic systems, the style and manner of Native creative expressions underwent dramatic material and aesthetic shifts. These shifts both influenced and were influenced by *additional* purposes that were now behind Native art production. Individual art items were no longer created strictly for the purposes of ceremony, daily use, gifts, or trade. These items now also became commercial commodities, and in certain milieus, a

²⁵⁹ Stephen Leuthold, *Indigenous Aesthetics: Native Art Media and Identity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998).

means of “Americanizing” their artists. In order to meet the demands and tastes of a growing art and tourist markets, new materials and more “mass production” techniques were introduced.

The adoption of non-local materials and art-making methods certainly brought about new modes of creative expression. However the *meaning* behind these expressions did not necessarily change. In fact, art historians Aaron Frye and Sasha Scott have explored the ways that Pueblo painters further expressed specific cultural perspectives and meanings utilizing new methods and materials.²⁶⁰ Tonita Peña’s watercolor paintings are an excellent example of this type of shift. In Peña’s work, although the materials and method of formal expression *were new*, her connection to Cochiti Pueblo communal and aesthetic values was not broken. Through her work and her story we know that her commitment and her sense of responsibility to her community remained. Likewise, Alice Marriott and Margaret Jacobs have also shown that this was the case with Maria Martinez who clearly distinguished between pottery she made for personal and communal use and her black-on black ware, which she identified as “the kind that white people like.”²⁶¹

In her analysis of Southeastern Cherokee baskets, Sarah H. Hill states that studying changes in art materials and methods is particularly fascinating because this tangible “evidence” reveals variations in cultural and political conditions, economies, and landscapes.²⁶² Material analyses offer valuable information about the occupational

²⁶⁰ Aaron Frye, “Local Knowledge & Art Historical Methodology: A New Perspective on Awa Tsireh & the San Ildefonso Easel Painting Movement,” *Hemisphere* (University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 46-61.

²⁶¹ Marriott, *Maria: The Potter of San Ildefonso*: Margaret D. Jacobs, “Shaping a New Way: White Women and the Movement to Promote Pueblo Indian Arts and Crafts, 1900-1935,” *Journal of the Southwest* 40, 1998: 187-215.

²⁶² Sarah H. Hill, introduction to *Weaving New Worlds: Southeastern Cherokee Women and Their Basketry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997) xv-xxii.

activity of a person or a community. The introduction of new materials can either increase or decrease the amount of labor required to complete an artwork. Understanding these shifts within Pueblo Indian art production during the twentieth century is important for more critical and complete examinations of this art history. Consider for example, that in 1971, art historian JJ Brody critically examined the highly romanticized twentieth-century patronage model. In his study Brody emphasized the inherently paternalistic and racist attitudes behind this art movement and the uneven power structure of this benefactor-beneficiary relationship. Material analyses reveal further contradictions within this art movement. While historically touted as a program that revitalized and preserved American Indian art traditions and promoted American Indian economic self-sufficiency, these were goals were achieved according to *Euro-American* aesthetic tastes, methods of promotion, material preferences *and* American Indian labor. When these material or physical shifts are considered in light of the progressive inaccessibility of local art materials due to the Euro-American encroachment into Pueblo territories, Euro-Americans' control over and apportioning of non-local art materials (remember Tonita Peña had to make repeated requests for her supplies and she was charged for them), and finally the destruction and toxication of American Indian lands, the patronage programs of this period come across as privately and publicly subsidized colonization projects. American Indians were encouraged to make art, but according to Euro-American regulations. These regulations would be legalized during the first half of the twentieth century.

The growing reliance upon art and art production as an important economic resource for American Indian communities raised awareness about the political, legal,

and economic issues that plagued art markets and the art making industry. Federal legislation, such as the Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1935 addressed these concerns. In retrospect, this act along with the establishment of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board under the Department of the U.S. Interior, may be viewed as an illustration of the particular economic, racial, and cultural tensions that were prevalent within the American Indian art industry and art production more generally. The Indian Arts and Crafts Act legalized measures of verifying authenticity (stated as “genuineness and quality” in section 2), as well as “standards and regulations” for American Indian aesthetic production. These regulations were implemented as methods for advancing the *economic welfare* of American Indian artists. These newly institutionalized restrictions were enforced via approved trademarks of “genuineness, quality, and standards.” The administration and allotment of these trademarks was key to this federal legislation and to enforcing the legal qualifications of race, tribal identity, and making art.

The influence of Euro-American aesthetic tastes and material preferences upon the creation of American Indian art, ironically, both restricted and opened up modes of American Indian creative expressions. New materials brought about new forms of aesthetic articulations. Again, material shifts reveal these fluctuations and also introduce host of contradictions and complexities. One new contradiction that developed during the twentieth century was the paradoxical creative-destructive power that art-making now involved. The introduction of this work to capitalist systems brought about an intense commoditization of Native material culture, which was now produced at an increased pace. Ironically, although the “mass” production of this art was originally enacted in order to “preserve” American Indian cultures, the adoption of Western art methods and

materials brought about the potential to endanger the health and lives of Native artists.

An Occupational Hazard

By the mid-late twentieth century, art professionals would become increasingly aware of the numerous health hazards associated with making art. At this time, American Indians, women, and other artists from economically and culturally marginalized communities had steadily become more active within the art-making industry. Undoubtedly, the capitalist-driven art and tourist markets influenced this activity increase. Also, American Indian boarding schools, during the first half of the century, had officially made art training an essential component of their educational curriculum. Between the 1930s-1960s Indian boarding school art programs such as Dorothy Dunn's famous "Studio" at the Santa Fe Indian School churned out generations of trained artists. Programs like The Studio also spurred the organization of more specialized art training projects during the early 1960s such as The Southwest Indian Arts Project that intentionally recruited American Indian youth and "aimed to decipher what kind of art training would best help young Native artists."²⁶³ These short-term training workshops were funded by public institutions such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs and private philanthropic sources such as the Rockefeller Foundation and were taught by American Indian artists, some of who had been trained in the Indian boarding school art system. These specialized American Indian art programs, which "aimed at revitalizing Indian culture," were the precursor for the establishment of the Institute of American Indian Arts

²⁶³ Nelson, *Helen Hardin Tsa Sah Wee Eh: A Straight Line Curved*, 42.

(IAIA) in Santa Fe, New Mexico, which opened its doors in 1962.²⁶⁴ At IAIA American Indian students were trained in art multiple art mediums that included sculpture, painting, and textile and clothing design courses.

Outside fine art institutions however, making art also took on another purpose. Communally organized art projects, movements, and exhibitions, all became vital components of the civil rights movements from this era. Art was now a vehicle for protest and political activism. The American Indian Movement, the Chicano Civil Rights Movement, Second Wave Feminism: these are key political movements from this period that utilized art and art making to build communal connection, express alternative ideologies, and challenge established power structures. These political movements demonstrated an ongoing engagement with art making and, beyond capitalist markets, the value of this industry to marginalized communities.

In 1960 the Federal Hazardous Substances Act (FHSA) provided the public with safety information, via labeling, of chemical and material dangers present in everyday household products. These dangers ranged in labeling and levels from “irritant” to “corrosive” to “toxic.”²⁶⁵ It was not long before information regarding similar chemical and material hazards present within numerous occupations would also become public knowledge. For the first time artists from various backgrounds and professional levels began to realize that their bodies had been consistently exposed to a host of hazards and toxins through their chosen profession. In 1970, the OSH Act raised public awareness and anxieties about the physical dangers present within the art-making industry. OSH Act

²⁶⁴ Nelson, *Helen Hardin Tsa Sah Wee Eh: A Straight Line Curved*, 41-42; “Fritz Scholder: Indian Not Indian,” Biography, National Museum of the American Indian Smithsonian Institution exhibition website, accessed May 1, 2013, <http://nmai.si.edu/exhibitions>

²⁶⁵ The Federal Hazardous Substances Act (Public Law 86-613), Section 2 “Definitions.”

and then the 1988 amendment of the Federal Hazardous Substances Act (FHSA) validated public concerns. Safety regulations were legally established for public educational and art institutions across the nation. However, federal legislation was just one step toward managing what was a swift but quietly evolving health epidemic. Although legal intervention at this time did help to raise awareness and slow down the problem, it did not eliminate it.

Art Dangers and the Law

During the 1970s-1990s, art studio and classroom inventories revealed that private as well as public art studios were crammed with many of the same hazardous and toxic substances that are also utilized in heavy industry. Additionally, many creative mediums including paints, inks, metals, glass, and clays were also analyzed and determined as dangerous to artists' long-term health. These art mediums, along with their modifiers, solvents, and glazes, all materials regularly utilized by artists on a daily basis, contained heavy metals, lead, caustics, and other cancer causing carcinogens.²⁶⁶

Shockingly for many artists, creative materials typically believed “natural and safe,” and which contained little-to-no chemical toxins, were also determined hazardous in their modified forms. For example, clay, which contains *silica* (silicon dioxide), or tiny glass-like mineral fragments, was identified as safe for handling in its wet flexible form. However, in its dried powdery stage the clay and silica dust that coated studio tables, floors, shelves, and floated in the air, entered into artists' nasal and bronchial airways and lungs. This dust was also unintentionally ingested orally when artists drank or ate in their workspaces during their long hours of studio work. The long-term build-up of silica, tiny

²⁶⁶ Rossol, *Artists Complete Health and Safety Guide*, 21-301.

but hard insoluble minerals, in the lungs, developed into a medical condition identified as *silicosis* (pulmonary fibrosis), which caused permanent internal scarring. Industrial Hygienists Monona Rossol and Michael McCann state that this permanent condition is “comparable to miner’s black lung” and is directly linked to the development of lung cancer.²⁶⁷

Implementing the Osh Act and the new safety regulations in art studios proved a particular challenge. Educating artists and the public about the dangers of art-making processes and materials was especially difficult. Artists’ historically relaxed attitudes about their materials and their processes, and also their established work habits, were hard to break. Throughout their professional training processes, artists had often developed strong attachments to their preferred mediums, which they handled for extended periods of time without any physical protection. Also, rather than viewing art-making as industrial work, romanticized notions about the individual creative-genius and artists’ dedication to their work went hand in hand with denial about the dangers of this occupation. As one professional artist put it about her love of oil paints, “By the 1990s everyone knew that the most beautiful colors were also the most dangerous, but you just put that out of your mind. The creative process mattered most. You just kept working.”²⁶⁸ In addition to this denial, artists often smoked and drank alcohol while working. According to Rossol and McCann, cigarette smoke and alcohol, which have a similar chemical make-up as some solvents and other hazardous chemicals, raised the potential

²⁶⁷ Rossol, *Artists Complete Health and Safety Guide*, 156-57; McCann, *Health Hazards Manual For Artists*, 12-15.

²⁶⁸ Internationally recognized artist, Rebecca Crowell, conversation with the author, December, 2012.

for a chemical reaction with art materials and substances that were already inadvertently absorbed in the body, thereby creating a cumulative effect or overdose. McCann states:

“Many substances have a narcotic effect and cause depression of the central nervous system. Symptoms include intoxication, loss of coordination, dizziness, headaches, nausea, and in severe exposures blackout and even death. I have seen several instances of artists being in car accidents or being arrested for drunken driving after working with organic solvents that are strong central-nervous-system depressants.”²⁶⁹

Professional artists also often lived, slept, ate, and even raised their families where they worked. This not only put their own bodies at risk, it also endangered the health and lives of their families. In both men and women hazardous chemicals can affect sexual drive and fertility. For men, lowered sperm production and also sperm mutation are linked with exposure to *mutagens* and *teratogens*. These chemicals, which are found in heavy metals, grain alcohol, pigments, dyes, and solvents, can also cause fetal mutations and birth defects. For women, menstrual disorders, low fertility rates, miscarriages, and stillbirths are also connected with chemical exposure. The dangers that young children were exposed to in art studio spaces were also brought to public awareness as more material safety information was publicly released.²⁷⁰

Colleges and professional studios began monitoring toxin levels, frequency and exposure amounts confronted by their students and artists. Complete overhauls of art classrooms and workspaces were carried out nationwide. More costly safety measures were also taken. These preventative steps included either updating or installing ventilation and exhaust systems, spray booths, and respiratory equipment since the most serious dangers that artists faced were airborne. Inhalation of airborne and invisible

²⁶⁹ McCann, *Health Hazards Manual For Artists*, 16-17.

²⁷⁰ Rossol, *Artists Complete Health and Safety Guide*, 21-28; McCann, *Health Hazards Manual For Artists*, 17-19.

toxins, vapors, and fumes was the most frequent means of poisoning and chemical overdose. Accidental ingestion and skin contact were also common. Legally regulated systems for safe storage, toxin disposal, and labeling of dangerous art materials were also implemented. Restrictions were enforced on artists to properly cover their bodies when handling hazardous materials. Eating, drinking, drinking alcohol, and smoking in art studios was also eliminated. Training programs specific to artists and safe studio practices were also introduced. A host of literature and information that clearly explained studio hazards was made available to artists at all levels. Massive informational manuals called Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS), which listed in great technical detail the chemical make-up of art materials, were required by law to be placed in all public classrooms and professional studios. Artists further took a political stance.

In testimonies at federal and state legislative hearings, artists pushed for mandatory and also regulated labeling by manufacturers of art materials containing dangerous and toxic substances. Label warnings were to alert artists about the hazards of chemical exposure and also the potential for chronic illnesses and birth defects.²⁷¹ In 1988, the Federal Hazardous Substances Act of 1960 was amended. Section 23 of this act required specified labeling of:

“any substance marketed or represented by the producer or repackager as suitable for use in any phase of the creation of any work of visual or graphic art of any medium [that is linked with] chronic adverse health affects.”²⁷²

According to this amendment, manufacturers were also now required to “submit [to the Consumer Products Safety Commission] detailed product formulations and the criteria

²⁷¹ McCann, *Health Hazards Manual For Artists*, 3-19.

²⁷² See Section 23 of the Federal Hazardous Substances Act (Public Law 86-213). Consumer Product Safety Commission: cpsc.gov. Accessed January, 7, 2012.

used to determine whether the art material or its ingredients have the potential for producing chronic adverse health effects.”²⁷³ These newly enforced federal guidelines and regulations were implemented for manufacturers as well as in art studios. Educational and professional studios now had the legal responsibility of informing students and employees.

These laws, however, concentrated on educational and professional settings that dealt directly with the public. Frighteningly, this meant that many artists who were trained or practiced in their homes, private living spaces, or private studios may or may not have had knowledge or experience dealing with toxic and hazardous substances. Beyond product labeling, which was dependent upon manufacturers’ compliance with the newly implemented laws, access to the new environmental and safety regulations, and also the technology designed to protect art professionals, could potentially be greatly compromised or even non-existent for independently trained artists.

Although it is important for all artists to treat their occupational hazards seriously, not all share equally the same educational, economic, or professional opportunities or experiences. There are artists who are trained at colleges, universities, or independent art schools. By law they are required to learn about the dangers of their jobs. However, other artists are self-taught, or maybe learned aesthetics and material techniques outside of institutionalized settings where their professional training may or may not have involved learning about the technicalities of health hazards. Some artists work in technically upgraded studios where environmental and occupational dangers are consistently managed according to health code. Others work at home on their kitchen tables, in their

²⁷³ See Section 23 of the Federal Hazardous Substances Act (Public Law 86-213).

basements, garages, or in private studios where “ventilation” might mean a blowing fan or an open window.

Helen’s Story

In 2003, The Museum of Contemporary Native Arts in Santa Fe posthumously honored Helen Hardin, her work, and her contribution to American Indian art by dedicating a gallery in her name.²⁷⁴ Nearly twenty years after her passing Helen Hardin was once again in the public spotlight. During her life Hardin’s creative talent and physical beauty had continuously created a media stir.

During the 1970s and early 1980s the artist was featured in popular magazine articles and film documentaries, which focused on New Mexican tourism, fashion, and American Indian art.²⁷⁵ In these magazine layouts Hardin modeled stylish clothing along with Indian jewelry while she posed upon the ancient Puye cliffs surrounding the Tewa lands of northern New Mexico. In 1975 Hardin was also the subject of an edition of a six-part series *American Indian Artists*, a documentary that was made for public television.²⁷⁶ The camera and the crew fell for Hardin. As biographer Kate Nelson puts it “The result mesmerized viewers.”

In the film Hardin is featured wandering among the Puye Cliff dwellings of her Tewa ancestors. She is then alternately shown working in her studio while listening to records of American Indian drumming and chanting. She only stops working to flip the

²⁷⁴ Helen Hardin, Artist Biography, Golden Dawn Gallery website. Accessed January 7, 2013. www.goldendawngallery.com; Helen Hardin Gallery, Museum of Contemporary Native Arts. Accessed January 7, 2013. www.iaia.edu.

²⁷⁵ Nelson, *Helen Hardin Tsa Sah Wee Eh: A Straight Line Curved*. Jay Scott, *Changing Woman: The Life and Art of Helen Hardin* (Northland Publishing, 1989).

²⁷⁶ Nelson, *Helen Hardin Tsa Sah Wee Eh: A Straight Line Curved*, 182-186.

record on the player. Then as she works again, in a voice over, Hardin shares her art-making experiences while taking classes in high school or watching her mother grind her paint pigments. She expresses pride about not having any direct affiliation with any specific art training program or any American Indian art teacher. In her narration, Hardin bases the success of her work on her individual experiences as a Tewa artist, a mother, and her familial and artistic connections to the Santa Clara Pueblo Community.²⁷⁷ In her magazine and television interviews the artist spoke about her work, Tewa history, her personal connection to the land, and her Indian identity. These media sources helped make Hardin was an art celebrity. However not everyone praised her work.

As her career peaked during the mid-late twentieth century, communal anxieties abound Hardin's images, which consistently focused on Hardin's personal interpretations of the Tewa community's religiously taboo katsina masks and figures. According to Kate Nelson, these paintings drew opposition from Santa Clara community members in part because of the artist's subject choices, but also because Hardin was not an enrolled member of the Santa Clara community. Due to tribal politics and enrollment restrictions of that time, Santa Clara did not allow enrollment of biracial children of non-Indian fathers. Hardin's father, Herbert Hardin, was white, her mother, the painter Pablita Velarde, was a member of the Santa Clara Pueblo. The sensational circumstances of the artist's life--her intense relationship with her mother, her professional rivalry with the

²⁷⁷ "Helen Hardin: Santa Clara Painter," *American Indian Artists*, KAET TV, Arizona State University, Corporation for Public Broadcasting, 1976.

highly popular Luiseño painter Fritz Scholder, her vacillating emotional and physical health, and then her early death at age forty-one--all generated much public attention.²⁷⁸

One particular aspect of Helen Hardin's life and career that did not draw as much public focus was the artist's very specific painting techniques. This is not unusual. Despite the public attention that artists might receive about their work or their personal lives, art audiences are not typically concerned with the detailed technicalities of an artist's work process. Instead, it is the overall aesthetic quality of the finished product or the conceptual message of an art piece that grabs public attention. However, exploring an artist's working methods and their material choices can reveal much about their work and can offer insight into an artist's life on a more intimate level.

During the making of the 1975 *American Indian Artists* documentary, Helen Hardin opened up to the film's producers. She allowed them into her studio. There, in what could be considered one of her most personal spaces, the artist shared her special application method for creating the beautifully textured, intensely detailed layers of acrylic paint that she was so well known for. There, in front of the film crew Helen demonstrated applying acrylic paints using her oral atomizer:

The footage of her applying the spatter is telling. The low-tech contraption that produced so much fine art consisted simply of a cap with a siphon that she screwed onto a small jar holding watery acrylic paint. The siphon drew the paint up to a metal straw that Helen held to her lips and gently blew through.²⁷⁹

Throughout her entire career Hardin had used this low-tech method, basically an angled metal straw attached to a small glass jar, to create layer upon layer of acrylic paint along

²⁷⁸ Nelson, *Helen Hardin Tsa Sah Wee Eh: A Straight Line Curved*; Scott, *Changing Woman: The Life and Art of Helen Hardin*.

²⁷⁹ Nelson, *Helen Hardin Tsa Sah Wee Eh: A Straight Line Curved*, 185-186.

with more layers of varnish or lacquer. Over the years, with every painting she completed, upon her many layers of paint upon varnish, upon paint, upon varnish, the artist would also painstakingly render *even more* layers of delicate lines, spheres, symbols and figures that took days, weeks, and sometimes months to perfect. According to art scholar Mary Stokrocki, in some of her paintings the artist had applied over twenty layers of paint, varnish, and ink washes.²⁸⁰ Hardin achieved these images, which have been described as having a “jewel-like” quality, through her perfected application technique using her favorite metallic paints, varnish, and lacquers. The results of this methodological process won the artist numerous awards and public accolades.

According to Nelson, people who knew Hardin and had witnessed her work routine not only noticed the artist’s otherworldly meditative mental state that she took on as she worked, they also noticed her obsessive attention to detail. After a visit with Hardin, as one friend put it:

She spent a lot of time painting. We went out and about while she was working and she was painting the whole time we were there. What really struck me during that visit was how she practically had her face in the painting as she did all those details.²⁸¹

For years it seemed that the more she painted the more awards and public recognition the artist won. Nelson states:

To keep pace with her schedule, Helen had long downed potfuls of coffee. Now she began taking the “mother’s little helper” of the era, Valium. She worked long hours and ate lightly. Her discomfort around crowds increased.²⁸²

²⁸⁰ Mary Stokrocki, “Helen Hardin: Native American Artist,” *School Arts Magazine*, April 1995.

²⁸¹ Nelson, *Helen Hardin Tsa Sah Wee Eh: A Straight Line Curved*, 190.

²⁸² Nelson, *Helen Hardin Tsa Sah Wee Eh: A Straight Line Curved*, 141.

Certainly Hardin's nervous energy and her mental and physical exhaustion were all exacerbated by a frantic work schedule and her self-medicating. However there are other factors revealed here that suggest the possibility that something more complicated was occurring within the artist's physical chemistry. The artist's choice of materials, her love of acrylic, metallic paints, and lacquer, her application methods, and her intense work routine: all these details reveal much about the hazards that Hardin's body was exposed to during long hours, on a daily basis, throughout the course of her career. A closer look at Hardin's material choices and her techniques will further this point.

During the time period that Hardin first began working exclusively with acrylic paints (1960s) this art medium was not yet chemically refined. Acrylics from the early-mid twentieth century are not the same paints that artists know today. In fact, several generations of acrylics have gradually increased this medium's safety level. Today these paints range in toxicity levels depending on the pigment concentration. Although certain grades of these paints are identified as "non-toxic," according to Rossol, the labeling of this term is ambiguous and relies upon short-term toxicity-level testing. As Rossol puts it "these tests are so inadequate that they would permit asbestos to be labeled non-toxic because two week tests are too short for cancer to develop."²⁸³

Acrylic paints are a mixture of thermoplastic (acrylic) resin and polyvinyl acetate (PVAC), or plastics processed into a liquid form. During the mid twentieth century these paints were in high demand because of their physical durability, bright pigments, low cost, and rapid drying time. Other well-known twentieth-century artists known for their

²⁸³ Rossol, *Artists Complete Health and Safety Guide*, 42-43.

use of acrylics included Helen Frankenthaler, Andy Warhol, and Robert Motherwell.²⁸⁴

Hardin became an avid user of one of the earlier forms of acrylic paints known as Hyplar.

According to an advertising description of these paints:

Hyplar colors are artists' quality pigments uniformly dispersed in an aqueous acrylic polymer emulsion. In more comprehensible, everyday terms, this means that the binding vehicle consists of droplets of a synthetic plastic resin suspended in water. As the water evaporates, the droplets of resin combine to form a crystal clear film imparting exceptional luminosity and brilliance to the colors. The tough, durable film is also highly adhesive, water resistant and flexible.²⁸⁵

The material history of these paints states that the chemical formula for Hyplar was first introduced in 1962 and then “perfected in 1966.” This was a time when Kate Nelson notes that Hardin was in the market for a new art medium and painting technique that would set her apart from her mother’s work.²⁸⁶

While acrylic paints are not officially considered “toxic,” mostly because they are water-based and do not require chemical solvents for clean-up, acrylics can contain harmful ingredients in their pigments and other additives used as stabilizers and preservatives. These paints are also considered hazardous when they are airborne in a mist or vaporized form, when they are in their drying state, or when they are in a dust form, and can be inhaled or ingested. According to Rossol and McCann sprayed mists and vapors are one of the top ways that art material toxins enter the body. In other words, brushing or sponging acrylics is the appropriate application method; *spraying is not*.

Also, during the drying stage, which involves a process of evaporation, acrylics release

²⁸⁴ Gregory Conley “A Brief history of Acrylic Paint,” accessed February 24, 2013, www.watercolorpainting.com/acrylics

²⁸⁵ “Hyplar Acrylic Polymer Color for Artists,” advertisement accessed March 31, 2013, http://www.nethoppr.cnc.net/html/hyplar_paint.html

²⁸⁶ “Material Name: Hyplar,” Museum of Fine Arts Boston: Material Record, accessed February 24, 2013, <http://cameo.mfa.org>; Nelson, *Helen Hardin Tsa Sah Wee Eh: A Straight Line Curved*, 120-123.

ammonia and formaldehyde, two chemicals known to cause respiratory difficulties, allergies, and cancer.²⁸⁷ Using an atomizer, Hardin was consistently working with acrylics while they were in one of their most dangerous form--mist. Additionally, the consistent use of an oral atomizer presented the long-term opportunity for Hardin to inhale and ingest of these paints.

Hardin also had a love of varnish. Varnish is a chemical mixture of resin, solvents, and oils that harden to a slick clear surface when dry. Hardin regularly finished her paintings with a layer of varnish, which she felt enhanced the colors of her work and gave it a finished appearance. Many artists do this. This clear hardened layer also adds a protective coating that prevents chipping or scratching of paintings and other artworks. A hardened layer of varnish also allows for easier transport. This material however, is considered seriously hazardous in both its liquid and vapor form. This is because varnish is solvent rich. The presence of chemical solvents in this material allows for the break down of the tacky resin and allows for easier application. Resin is the thick sticky substance that hardens when dry and creates the glossy finish. Both solvents and resins are considered hazardous. However, solvents are especially harmful to the eyes, respiratory tract, and internal organs. Also, solvents can affect the brain and nervous system. According to Rossol and McCann, symptoms of solvent poisoning include dizziness, irritability, headaches, and fatigue. Artists who have suffered solvent poisoning can appear “drunk.” Rossol also states that years of this type of poisoning can cause depression and insomnia. Helen Hardin suffered both these health conditions. Also, intoxication caused by solvents is especially concerning for artists who drink or take

²⁸⁷ Current Material Safety Data Sheets on examples of Grumbacher’s “Academy Acrylic Colors” line of acrylic paints including Yellow Cadmium Light and Dioxazine Purple both label ammonia on the ingredients list. See: <http://www.grumbacherart.com/products>

sedatives like Valium since these chemical depressants have a similar chemical make-up to alcohol. McCann states that artists who regularly work with these chemicals have been stopped for drunk driving and, in some cases, misdiagnosed with psychological disorders. Moreover, many solvents have been shown to cause cancer in animals and humans.²⁸⁸

In 1980, and at the urging of an art dealer and friend who encouraged her to make work at a faster more efficient pace, Helen Hardin took on printmaking. She experimented with copper plate etching techniques, including sugar lifts and aqua-tint methods. Her new medium required the use of other hazardous materials and chemicals including acids, powdered rosin, and even more solvents. However, Hardin loved the precise detail she could achieve working on Mylar and metal plates. In a 1980 photo taken at the graphic studio where she and other American Indian artists including Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, John Nieto, and Kevin Red Star, made prints, Helen Hardin posed for the camera wearing a respirator mask (Figure 17). The image is telling and, strangely, foreshadows events to come. Also, the presence of a respirator in the printmaking studio clearly demonstrates the growing awareness, at that time, of the very serious chemical and airborne dangers present in art studio spaces. According to Helen Hardin's daughter Margarete Bagshaw, by 1980 Hardin did have awareness of the dangers she faced. However, like many professional artists, her personal drive for making art helped her to put any worries out of her mind.²⁸⁹

It was at this time while she was exploring her new medium that the artist was diagnosed with cancer. Over the course of the next several years Hardin would undergo

²⁸⁸ Rossol, *Artists Complete Health and Safety Guide*, 83-99; McCann, *Health Hazards Manual For Artists*, 16-17; Jay Scott, *Changing Woman: The Life and Art of Helen Hardin* (Flagstaff: Northland Publishing, 1989).

²⁸⁹ Margarete Bagshaw, conversation with author, January 14, 2013.

various treatments to stop the cancer invasion in her breast, lungs, and sternum.

According to biographer Jay Scott, about her incurable diagnosis the artist exclaimed:

“Oh My God, I haven’t got all my work done, I’m not ready to die!” I could see one painting after another flashing in front of my eyes. Literally. It was like a slideshow. There I am lying in the hospital bed, with these acrylic visions going through my head.²⁹⁰

It is true that some art materials can inertly be hazardous to an artist’s health.

However, an artist’s methods, their mixing of reactive art materials, or accidental inhalation or ingestion, these are some of the most common ways that artists harm themselves and others while making art. Both her application methods and her choice of materials exposed Hardin’s body, on a long-term basis, to a host of art-related health hazards. Like many professional artists, Helen Hardin’s work habits, both the little habits and the more long-term detrimental patterns, such as working with her face close to the paints, or working with hazardous materials in spaces without adequate ventilation, these became permanent practices that, I believe, had roots in histories far deeper than just personal preference.

A Danger of “Authenticity”

Read any scholarly or popular text on Helen Hardin and inevitably her relationship with her mother, the famous “Studio” painter Pablita Velarde, will come forth. As most of these writings will tell you, theirs was a personal and professional relationship fraught with tensions. One source of their conflict appears to have been caused by the constant pressure to attain and maintain professional success. Clearly, there was a competitive

²⁹⁰ Scott, *Changing Woman: The Life and Art of Helen Hardin*, 143-157.

edge to this mother-daughter relationship. When reading their biographies, it's hard not to pick up on a sense of urgency. It appears to have been a type of race against time, against racial, cultural, and gendered boundaries, against each other, and against themselves. Also, according to these writings, Hardin and Velarde consistently dealt with the stresses of financially supporting themselves and their families along with the ever-present threat of poverty that haunted their lives. There is no doubt that for many years Hardin and her mother struggled both financially and emotionally. Both women were single mothers who dealt with disappointments in love and also a sense of isolation from the Santa Clara Pueblo. According to Nelson and Scott, their struggles were obviously and publicly displayed both in their non-stop artistic drive and also their confrontations with chemical dependency, emotional, and physical abuse.²⁹¹ However, even with all these difficulties, one does not get a sense of victimization about either woman. They were fighters and art was their "weapon." But this was a double-edged sword they were wielding, and the paradoxical creative-destructive power of art-making is clear in their story.

Consider for example the "traditional" pigment processing techniques of Pablita Velarde. Velarde's pigment-making methods involved her collecting of soils, rocks, and clays at various locations around the state of New Mexico. Different soils from different locations gave her the variety of earth tones she needed for her "earth paintings." After collecting, the artist then hand ground these natural materials on a volcanic stone (*mano y metate*) in her home and garage where she regularly worked. After grinding, she then mixed these crushed dusty pigments with glue and water and applied them with brushes

²⁹¹ Nelson, *Helen Hardin Tsa Sah Wee Eh: A Straight Line Curved*; Scott, *Changing Woman: The Life and Art of Helen Hardin*.

to her painting surfaces.²⁹² Quite often the artist painted at her kitchen table and in her home. Velarde's images, quite literally, were "of the earth" and this earth was gathered from the traditional homelands of New Mexico's Indian communities. Ironically, it was Dorothy Dunn the art teacher from Kansas, who introduced this "traditional" technique to Velarde when she was a young student at the Santa Fe Indian School's art "Studio." Dunn's earth painting method is one that engages both issues of authenticity and also a performative element of American Indian fine art production under the Euro-American gaze.

Twentieth-century capitalist markets called for highly romanticized promotional methods for the artwork created by American Indian artists. These promotional methods quite regularly involved the issue of authenticity, which as mentioned earlier, was so pressing an issue, that legal measures were taken up to ensure this qualification for buyers of this art. One method of validating the authenticity of an artwork was to have American Indian artists demonstrate, or perform, making their art in public. This method of art-making/performance is rooted in late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century world fairs and cultural exhibitions that displayed American Indians and other marginalized communities as living exhibitions for audiences. In these performances making art while wearing traditional clothing was a standard mode of displaying American Indians engaged in their "daily activities". During the twentieth century, this method of promotion would continue but, rather than the anthropologically based exhibits of the world's fairs and cultural exhibitions, these art exhibits, which were staged in gallery

²⁹² Shelby J. Tisdale, *Pablita Velarde: In Her Own Words* (Little Standing Spruce Publishing, 2012), 138-140 and 201.

spaces, emphasized American Indian aesthetic lineage and refinement, and, just as importantly, authenticity.

Two photos of Velarde grinding pigments with a stone *metate* while wearing traditional Pueblo dress visually demonstrate this point (Figures 18 and 19). One image is taken in 1957 the other in 1965. Both show the artist in the act of pressing the hand-held stone, the *mano*, against the stone base, the *metate*. The photos appear to be promotional shots taken in a well-decorated living room in front of a fireplace and in a gallery space. In the first image the *metate* and Velarde are impeccably clean. There are no ground powdery pigments anywhere. In the second photo, Velarde appears to be actually grinding stones into pigments that are carefully contained in small glass jars and set on the table next to her. It is obvious that both these images and the pigment grinding “performances” are staged for the benefit of an art audience and for the purpose of proving the aesthetic lineage and traditional technique of Velarde’s work. Pablita’s Pueblo clothing and her accessories, the volcanic stone *mano y metate*, and the act of grinding of the pigments all work together to portray an air of ancient romance both to the scene and to her work.

Pablita Velarde’s biographer Shelby Tisdale, states that throughout their marriage one source of tension between Velarde and her husband Herbert Hardin was her pigment processing methods and the powdery mess of the ground soils, rocks, and clays in their home and garage. At one point Hardin threatened his wife that he would “throw out” her pigment materials because of the collecting debris. Tisdale also points to Velarde’s increased mood swings, depression, and irritability, all symptoms related to toxic material poisoning, which the artist attempted to self-medicate with alcohol. Velarde and Hardin

divorced in 1957. However, Velarde continued making her earth paintings and she continued collecting her rocks.

In Velarde's biography, *Pablita Velarde: In Her Own Words*, Tisdale mentions Velarde's rock collecting throughout the state of New Mexico. Tisdale states: "To prepare her earth pigments, she took trips to many parts of the state, collecting clays and rocks of various colors."²⁹³ The earth colors of Velarde's images include shades of black, brown, tan, white, red, and yellow. According to San Ildefonso artist and nuclear waste activist Kathy Sanchez (*Wan Povi*), red is the color of red iron oxide: the clay is used as a slip for Pueblo pottery. This clay that can be found locally near the Tewa communities. Sanchez, who is the granddaughter of Maria Martinez, states that many San Ildefonso Pueblo potters stopped collecting this specific clay from their traditional sources, which are located around the Los Alamos laboratory due to contamination. Sanchez also identified one *possible* source for the *yellow colored* earth pigments as uranium the radioactive material once used to make atomic bombs. "*Leetso*" (uranium) the same yellow dirt that during the mid-to-late twentieth century poisoned thousands of Diné people when they inadvertently inhaled, handled, or ingested this material. While it is true that perhaps we may never know the exact location of Velarde's rock collecting trips, certainly the possibilities of these material connections and also Helen Hardin's lung and bone cancer, a disease that many Diné people also suffered, are haunting. This thought is one that Hardin's own family members have contemplated when reflecting on the history of twentieth-century toxication of Native lands throughout New Mexico. In fact, Kathy Sanchez stated that some Pueblo artists have used radiation detection devices to determine safe areas for collecting their clay and earth colored pigments.

²⁹³ Shelby J. Tisdale, *Pablita Velarde: In Her Own Words*, 139.

An Informational Gap

Art materials, studio practices, and the health risks involved with art production are subjects that are largely absent from art historical discourses. One explanation for this is the traditional division between scholarly disciplines. The academic fields of art history and art (studio art), two disciplines that both deal with fine art, have consistently been structured as fundamentally distinct. Consider for example, that a theoretical discussion or scholarly analysis about an art installation would typically be presented as academically separate from the actual hands-on material, physical, and technical demands of creating such a work. This is an intellectual division that persists, despite the reality that these two disciplines do conceptually and materially merge in the artwork created and in the bodies of its creators.

Another reason for the absence of these topics from American Indian art historical discourses is due, in part, to the scholarly emphasis of Native art historians on issues such as identity politics, visual and cultural sovereignty, and the lack of American Indian representation within mainstream art historical canons. These are the critical concerns that American Indian artists and art historians regularly grapple with. Additionally, one other explanation for this informational gap, to put it simply, is that beyond studio spaces art-making methods and the daily grit of art production have not, historically, made for academically “sexy” topics. Recently art-making practices within their larger historical milieus have gained an increased scholarly interest. However, the toxication of and long-term health effects on artist’s bodies, specifically artists from marginalized communities where during the twentieth century art-making became a main an economic mainstay, remains a largely unexamined topic.

For some, connections between American Indian art, destruction, and death might seem a stretch or even a taboo subject. However, images of dying Indians, vanishing Indians, and even Indians hell-bent on destroying themselves are not only common within mainstream art histories, they are also a popular visual stereotype and romanticized literary trope that American Indian scholars consistently confront. Consider for instance James Earl Fraser's late nineteenth-century sculpture *End of the Trail*, a piece that both mourned and glorified Westward expansion and aesthetically articulated "vanishing Indian" notions of the Nineteenth century (Figure 20). This sculpture, of a collapsed Native warrior dying upon his horse, conveyed the prevalent belief of the time about dying off Native populations, a belief that was widely accepted as both natural and inevitable. The "vanishing Indian" concept, influenced by Frederick Jackson Turner's "Frontier Thesis" of 1893, both expressed non-Indian anxieties about rapid industrialization processes and also helped justify Euro-American encroachment into American Indian spaces. In fact, as art historians Angela Miller and Wanda Corn have shown throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in the American fine art world, images of dying Indians went hand in hand with romanticized, *but empty* landscape paintings of the American West.²⁹⁴

Within contemporary American Indian art histories visual and conceptual references to "dying Indians" have been both humorously parodied and also utilized as a method for social critique. For example, James Luna's 1991 performance/mixed media work *The End of the Frail* not only satirizes Fraser's iconic sculpture and the vanishing Indian theory it is equally a demonstration of social, historical, and self-critique. In this

²⁹⁴ Angela Miller, *The Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics 1825-1875*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993; Wanda Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

work Luna, a contemporary Luiseño Indian and Mexican-American man, is slumped over a wooden sawhorse, the type that is used to delineate industrial or construction sites, or used for makeshift worktables. In Luna's work it is the *chemical* alcohol that represents the "weapon" of the Indian, rather than the spear of Fraser's dying noble warrior.²⁹⁵ Consistent with the artist's performances, Luna presents his own body to address the toxication of Native peoples as another method of colonization. Although he addresses non-Indians' roles in these processes, Luna also confronts the internalized repercussions of colonization and the self-inflicted destructiveness of, for example, alcoholism, obesity, and the self-perpetuated stereotypes of "lazy" or "drunken" Indians that still haunt Native Peoples today. Luna seems to be asking his American Indian audience members: and how do we make *ourselves* disappear?

The physical destruction of Native lands and bodies has been similarly addressed in the work of Jolene Rickard (Tuscarora), Alan Michelson (Mohawk), and Will Wilson (Diné). Using photography all three artists visually confront, document and engage with environmental and health issues of their home communities caused by imposed industrialization and toxic waste. Each artist articulates their responses to these issues from both larger politicized contexts, as members and descendents of sovereign Indian nations, and more personal experiences related to time, place, and memory.

In several of her photo and installation works, Rickard addresses the contamination and genetic modification of corn, which is both nourishing and sacred to the Tuscarora. A communally cultivated resource utilized for both regenerating and sustaining the Tuscarora community. Using looped video and sound, Michelson focuses on fresh water

²⁹⁵ Jane Blocker, "Failures of Self Seeing: James Luna Remembers Dino," *Performing Arts Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Jan., 2001), 18-32.

contamination caused by urbanization, environmental accidents such as oil spills, and industrial waste tactics that disregard American Indian sovereignty and geographical boundaries. In his *Auto Immune Response Series*, Wilson turns his attention to the geographical boundaries within the four sacred mountains of the *Dinétaah* (Diné homelands) in Arizona, Utah, and New Mexico. There, using panoramic photography, Wilson visually narrates the possibility of survival in a post-apocalyptic Diné world. His panoramic images envelop the isolated figure within the elements of earth, sky, air, and water. The beauty and expanse of the *Dinétaah* are invisibly marked by toxicity, which is only made visible by a respirator mask worn by the lone figure and must now be used to mechanically purify the air (Figure 22). *Auto Immune Response* references the both biological reactions to foreign invasion and the Diné people's ongoing struggle with cancer and other diseases. In this way Wilson's work addresses the poisoning of Diné land and bodies by nuclear colonization and hauntingly echoes the 1980 photo of Helen Hardin as she protected herself from the chemical and airborne toxins of the art-industry.

Art and Systems of Value

Consider, for a moment, that it is quite common within Western art markets for select art items to be valued because they physically bear the mark of important historical or art historical figures. In 2004, for example, the monetary value of a pair of 1930s Maria Martinez black-on-black ware pots was appraised between \$45,000-55,000. This was an estimate based on the representation of the artist's signature, which was distinctly marked on the bottom of each piece.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁶ "Simply the Best," *Antiques Roadshow*, Season 14 #1419 aired January 3, 2005, PBS; *The Antiques Roadshow Archive*, <http://www.pbs.org>, viewed January 30, 2013.

An artist's signature is a tangible marker that directly affects the monetary and cultural worth of an art piece. A signature validates the authenticity of an artwork. It is a form of valuation and identification that is now regularly practiced by many Native artists. However, according to American Indian art historians, signing one's work was an identification method that, during the twentieth century, was appropriated by American Indian artists as they adapted to Western art markets and capitalist economic systems. Within Indian communities, however, the Euro-American purpose of the signature was strategically altered. Native American art historians Janet Berlo and Ruth Phillips state that it was not unheard of for more publicly recognized American Indian artists to sign works produced by other practicing artists of their communities. This was an effective marketing method that helped increase each artwork's market price. In this way, signed works functioned as a means for cooperatively distributing economic wealth among community members. This co-opted practice simultaneously appeased Euro-American desires for authenticity and for select works created by artists of public notoriety.²⁹⁷

Celebrations like this of the individual artist-genius are prevalent within Western art institutions and historical canons. Undoubtedly, American Indian art, its purpose, and production have been influenced by the individual artist-genius concept and some American Indian artists have been recognized according to this model. The long and successful career of San Ildefonso Pueblo potter Maria Martinez is one example of this ideal of artistic success. Ironically however, regarding the representation of artists and art from marginalized communities, the very institutions that pat themselves on the back for inclusiveness and diversity when *they do* represent artists outside the mainstream, also

²⁹⁷ Janet C. Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips, *Native North American Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 37-68.

simultaneously perpetuate the very power structures that vex this mode of recognition. Consider for instance that Native art historian Joyce Szabo states that within mainstream art historical canons it has become standard for individual examples of anonymously made ancient American Indian artworks to metaphorically stand-in for an entire race. Szabo states that even modern-contemporary American Indian artists and their works are regularly understood as uniformly representative of entire genders, races, cultures, and nations, rather than recognized for their independent creative contribution to art.²⁹⁸ This aesthetic and cultural essentialism can catch American Indian artists in what I call the “authenticity snare,” which is an imposed method of assessment that is used to determine the aesthetic and cultural value of an American Indian artist’s work based on an overt presentation of prescribed “Indian-ness” in their work. Again this is an issue that perpetuates ongoing debates such as “traditional vs. non-traditional” and authenticity. As Nancy Marie Mithlo states, these binaric arguments delimit the parameters of creativity, as well as, material and conceptual innovation in spite of long-term practices of material and conceptual innovation in American Indian art production.²⁹⁹ The authenticity snare not only can trap an individual artists’ professional opportunities it can also directly influence the marketability and public reception of artworks.

Within Western art institutions the reactions and interactions of art audiences with an artwork not only can add to its worth, but also have the potential to bestow a certain “life power” upon chosen art pieces. This empowerment, *sense of being*, or what German

²⁹⁸ Joyce Szabo, “Native American Art History: Questions of the Canon,” in *Essays on Native Modernism: Complexity and Contradiction in American Indian Art* (Washington D.C: National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, 2006) 69-78.

²⁹⁹ Mithlo, “*Our Indian Princess*” *Subverting the Stereotype* (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2008).

cultural critic Walter Benjamin refers to as an individual artwork's *aura*, affords select art pieces monetary, cultural, and even spiritual value.³⁰⁰ Consider for example, that every year at major museums, precious art items are symbolically offered to the public in well-publicized exhibitions. Crowds line up to view, from a distance, artworks that are enclosed behind glass, protected by trained security guards, or invisibly veiled by high-tech alarm systems. So beloved are these individual art pieces, that the "personal space" of these works is simply, but elegantly, delineated with velvet-covered ropes as viewers slowly move closely, then pause for a brief moment to gaze at the object of their affection. As I write this, I am remembering a recent conversation I had with an art historian who shared with me incidents at the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum in Santa Fe, New Mexico, when O'Keeffe fans publicly wept or pleaded with security guards when their favorite O'Keeffe paintings were not on exhibit. Although this level of emotional attachment might seem extreme, it is not irregular. During the past sixteen years since the O'Keeffe Museum's opening, pilgrimages to O'Keeffe exhibitions and her private home and studio have grown in size. However, they are still considerably smaller than the annual crowds of eight million who travel internationally just to spend a few moments gazing at Leonardo Da Vinci's *La Joconde*, (*Mona Lisa*) at the Louvre in Paris.³⁰¹

³⁰⁰ In May 2012, I had the opportunity to attend the "Native American Art: The Being of Objects" workshop at the Otsego Institute for Native American Art History at the Fenimore Art Museum in Cooperstown New York. There a lively discussion ensued between top Native American art scholars about the "personhood, power, agency and sacrality" of art items. Also see: Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Production," 1936.

³⁰¹ In January 2010 the Louvre reported that it received 8.5 million visitors in 2009 and that ninety percent of the museum's visitors view this sixteenth-century portrait. See: "8.5 million people visited the Louvre in 2009," *The Independent*, January 12, 2010. Accessed January 2, 2013. <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/news>. The Georgia O'Keeffe Museum opened in summer of 1997 and reports 2,225, 000 visitors. Whether or not this is an annual or total figure is not clear. For museum history see: <http://www.okeeffemuseum.org>.

Both personally and publicly, art bears the weight of our historical as well as our emotional projections. But how much do we really know about art and the processes by which these culturally valued items are realized?

Unless one is trained in studio practices, very little is actually understood about the psychological, physical, and material demands behind the creation of a single artwork. As stated earlier, the “how” of making art is not necessarily a hot topic with mainstream art audiences or art historical discourses. We turn away from the day-to-day technicalities and daily grind of the studio. This is a harsh reality that is lost in the impeccable whiteness of gallery spaces and intellectual conversations. In 2001, for instance, painter David Hockney’s *Secret Knowledge: Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of the Old World Masters* explored the use of optics, including mirrors, lenses, and cameras, by painters beginning in the fifteenth century. Although the methodological techniques unveiled by Hockney were fascinating, of equal interest was the public reaction to his investigation. Hockney states:

“Others...were horrified at my suggestions. Their main complaint was that for an artist to use optical aids would be ‘cheating’; that somehow I was attacking the idea of innate artistic genius...The popular conception of an artist is of a heroic individual, like, say, Cezanne or van Gogh, struggling, alone, to represent the world in a new and vivid way.”³⁰²

The negative responses to Hockney’s project not only suggested a public reluctance to acknowledge the *humanness* of artists. They also revealed popular fixations with deeply ingrained notions of the artist-genius. This idealization of the individual artist has led to an omission, an informational gap that has helped to perpetuate an aura of mystery around select art works as well as artists. It has led to the romanticizing of art-making

³⁰² David Hockney, introduction to *Secret Knowledge: Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of the Old World Masters* (New York: Penguin Putnam, 2001), 12-18.

processes and the elision of the material and physical dangers present in art production. In other words, we like our creative geniuses. We prefer to think of art and art production relative to creation not destruction. However, if we were to look more closely at a basket, a ceramic piece, a painting, or a sculpture, we might begin to understand that art, at its most basic level, is highly paradoxical by nature and its presence is realized from two oppositional forces: creation *and* destruction.

Art's mere presence, its physical existence, is made possible through processes involving complex alchemies of hazardous and non-hazardous materials that are gathered, bought, traded, processed, modified, mixed, pounded, fired, (the list goes on). Art simultaneously embodies moments of creation, destruction, and death. Even the most natural, organic, or environmentally low-impact art-making methods involve the breakdown or modification of one material element for the purpose and creation of another. Again, these creative processes, which have brought about economic success and public notoriety for some artists, have simultaneously introduced a host of health risks and chronic diseases. As stated above, these illnesses include: depression, mood swings, respiratory illnesses, heart, liver, and kidney disease, and cancer.³⁰³ Indeed, art is a dangerous career path and *the symptoms* of toxic exposure have long been recognized. However, they have historically been attributed to artists' "eccentric personalities," self-destructive patterns, or extreme lifestyles.

Interconnections between art, destruction, and death are far more commonplace than we might care to admit. As an audience however, we appear more comfortable contemplating these connections while viewing allegorical images of romanticized battle scenes, ritual devotions to wrathful deities, or slayings of mythical monsters.

³⁰³ McCann, *Health Hazards Manual For Artists*.

Seventeenth-century *vanitas* paintings, with their skulls and bones and hourglasses of sand are symbolic reminders of the transience of human life and the inevitability of death. Within modern art histories, tantalizingly juicy tales of eccentric artist-geniuses surrendering their lives *and their bodies* for their work are also darkly appealing. Dramatic accounts of individual artists and the gritty details of their lives and their extreme reputations, often include romanticizing the personal sacrifices artists have made for the sake of their creative processes. This dark fixation, I believe, accounts for, the dramatization of the biographies of Helen Hardin and Pablita Velarde. Personal accounts that have emphasized their interpersonal difficulties and stopped short of any material or chemical factors that damaged their bodies and exacerbated the challenges these artists faced: up to and including an exceptional interest in their “authentic” working methods and the intermixture of environmental and art material toxins in their blood and bones.

Strangely enough as much as we avoid the harsh realities of our dark-art fantasies, we also publicly fixate on them but only within specific contexts. Consider for example our popular fascinations with artist’s damaged bodies. Dutch painter Vincent Van Gogh’s story is a fantastically wretched tale of self-sacrifice. His self-mutilation, the amputation of his ear, was for many years, attributed to a fit of passion. However, recent investigations now offer alternative narratives. One version involves an argument with the painter Paul Gauguin. Another explanation points to long-term exposure and ingestion of art material toxins as a contributor to the artist’s erratic behavior and penchant for self-inflicted bodily harm.³⁰⁴ Commercialized gag gifts of this story include pre-packaged bloodied scraps of the artist’s “ear bandage” along with a “medical ear model” and coffee

³⁰⁴ “Who Really Cut Off Van Gogh’s Ear,” Frank Browning, All Things Considered, National Public Radio, May 10, 2009.

mugs with the artist's portrait and an ear that disappears with temperature changes. Or, how about Mexican artist Frida Kahlo's bold "rejection" of superficial beauty? (Well, that is the Euro-feminist take on her behavior.) Kahlo's "eccentricity," meaning outside the *Euro-American norm*, is visually inferred by art audiences in her repeated painterly renditions of her broken body and famously un-plucked mono-brow. At a 2012 exhibit "Frida and Diego: Passion, Politics, & Painting" at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO), Kahlo fans were offered fabric replicas of the artist's rebellious trademark. Attendees were encouraged to photograph themselves wearing the replica uni-brows and share a piece of the artist's ravaged body. Criticism of this promotional tactic described it as a "gimmick, sexist, and a caricature of the artist's looks."³⁰⁵ Responses from the AGO staff claimed that they thought their promotional ploy as "clever," and "punchy," and commensurable with the artist's self-portraits in which she depicted every facial hair. AGO staff related their fabricated unibrows to Kahlo's facial hair, which they perceived as a "central totem" in her work and Kahlo's own "reclamation" of her "androgynous mystique."³⁰⁶ The Mexican painter suffered numerous and often paralyzing physical ailments along with her own share of tragedies and emotional battles, it seems that suffering and pain became one of this artist's most celebrated "aesthetics". But exactly how far are we as audiences willing to go to honor the materially and chemically battered bodies of artists? Now, I will ask my next question with the utmost respect: How might it be perceived if galleries and museums, in celebration of artist's many creative sacrifices,

³⁰⁵ Sholem Krishtalka, "A Reply to Critics of the Art Gallery of Ontario's Frida Kahlo Unibrow Promotion," *BLOUINARTINFO: International Edition*, November 19, 2012, Accessed April 5, 2013, <http://www.artinfo.com/news/story/841731/a-reply-to-critics-of-the-art-gallery-of-ontarios-frida-kahlo>

³⁰⁶ Sholem Krishtalka, "A Reply to Critics of the Art Gallery of Ontario's Frida Kahlo Unibrow Promotion."

were to hand out to audiences individual silicone breasts at the exhibitions of women artists who suffered breast cancer due to toxin exposure? Obviously this is an extreme question that addresses the contradictory ways that artist's bodies are simultaneously "revered and ravaged" and the expectations about artists sacrificing their health for their art.³⁰⁷

Reflections about deceased artists and their contributions to larger society often include profound statements about artists living eternally "through their work." Through art, the artist "never dies." Certainly, these modes of remembering or honoring are heavily romanticized, but they also say something about how we value the bodies of artists. Such statements also allude to the bottom line. Death and illness have become relative to art both romantically and pragmatically in terms of an artwork's market value. Consider for a moment that the occupational dangers of art-making have not been addressed in the Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1935 or this legislation's 1990 or 2010 amendments.³⁰⁸

It is a strange paradox. On the one hand, within the art-making industry law regulates the authenticity, complicity, and physical labor of "legally marked" Indian bodies. On the other hand these same bodies are not protected from the very industry that has the potential to harm them. In other words, within the art world, death sells. An individual artist's illness or death has the potential to increase their work's market value, or at the very least, make for an intriguing story.

³⁰⁷ The contradiction of simultaneously "revering and ravaging" American Indian bodies via photographs was introduced to me by Dr. Patricia Albers in 2006. I have expanded Dr. Albers' theory to the social value placed on artists' bodies.

³⁰⁸ The IACA amendments of 1990 and 2010 emphasize "truth in advertising" and protection from fraud rather than any art-related health issues.



Figure 15. Maria Martinez and Enrico Fermi, 1948. Harold Agnew, Private Collection.

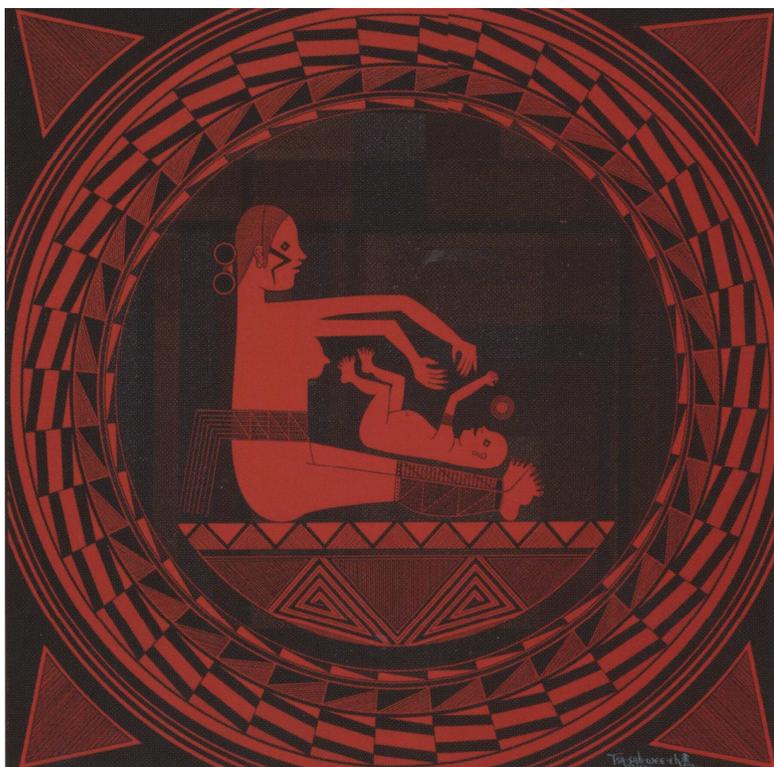


Figure 16. Helen Hardin, *Mimbres Mama*, 1982, acrylic, Private Collection.



Figure 17. Bill Boyson, Helen Hardin at El Cerro Graphics, 1980.



Figures 18 & 19. Pablita Velarde Grinding Earth Pigments 1957 and 1965, Family Collection.



Figure 20. James Earl Fraser, *End of the Trail* c. 1915, Plaster.



Figure 21. Will Wilson, *Auto Immune Response Series*, 2004, Photograph.

CONCLUSION

While writing this text, both the gifts and also the challenges of following an interdisciplinary approach included expanding my fine art and art historical knowledge beyond art studio and classroom spaces. Delving into areas of information that included federal law, historical land grants, and nuclear power production helped to actualize the extent of interconnections between art and daily life, which the realms of law, property rights, and environmental issues directly influence. One aim of this project was to emphasize the realities, as well as the long-term effects, of these interconnections beyond the aesthetic or economic benefits that the twentieth-century American Indian art patrons so heavily stressed. My goal was to prioritize American Indian and Hispano experiences with making art during this period, which was fraught with natural resource disputes and major economic shifts, two key incentives for the economic emphasis on American Indian art production at this time.

Contrary to the romantic “historical distortions” of the art patrons, that JJ Brody initially identified, most American Indian artists did not reap vast amount of monetary benefits or even claim that their art was rooted in ancient aesthetics or “authentic” production techniques that non-Indians helped “revive” and “preserve.”³⁰⁹ In her account of the professional relationships between some white women patrons and Indian women artists, Margaret Jacobs demonstrates that resentments did arise from Pueblo women

³⁰⁹ JJ Brody, *Indian Painters White Patrons*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971); Margaret D. Jacobs, “Shaping a new Way” White Women and the Movement to Promote Pueblo Indian Arts and Crafts, 1900-1935,” *Journal of the Southwest*, Vol. 40 No. 2 (Summer, 1998), 189.

regarding the assumptions and authority that the white patrons assumed.³¹⁰ The presence of such negative emotions on the part of Pueblo women signals a transgression of boundaries. Even if these boundaries were not obvious to the non-Indian art patrons, they did exist. Both Jacobs and Alice Marriott point out that San Ildefonso artist, Maria Martinez clearly differentiated between pottery she and her husband Julian made for themselves and other Pueblo people, and “the kind white people like.”³¹¹ In fact, as Tewa scholar Matthew Martinez points out, Pueblo people intentionally made distinctions between public and private information. He states:

Pueblo people “compartmentalize” aspects of their indigenous identities with regard to what is conveyed to the traveling public and what images and community information remains off limits for public consumption.³¹²

As Martinez’ statement demonstrates, Pueblo approaches to making art for non-Indian consumers were grounded in practical measures that helped to ensure communal and personal survival. Beyond art-making, other pragmatic measures also included maintaining distinct boundaries between public and private information, the continuation of the seasonal ceremonial dances and Pueblo agricultural practices, and vigilantly protecting Pueblo ancestral lands and landscapes. All of these active methods of survivance were visually represented in the Pueblo watercolor paintings. Again and again, these powerful associations with land were repeatedly and tangibly present

³¹⁰ Jacobs, “Shaping a new Way” White Women and the Movement to Promote Pueblo Indian Arts and Crafts, 1900-1935,” 189.

³¹¹ Jacobs, “Shaping a new Way” White Women and the Movement to Promote Pueblo Indian Arts and Crafts, 1900-1935,” 207; Alice Marriott, *Maria: The Potter of San Ildefonso* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1948).

³¹² Martinez, Matthew “Double Take: Tourism & Photography Endeavors Among the Northern Pueblos of the Rio Grande,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2008), 8.

throughout this project. Consistently during my research late-nineteenth-twentieth-century historical documents related to land disputes between Indians, Hispanos, and Whites, dominated the archive.

Just as Pueblo convictions about their communal continuity and their reciprocal relationship with ancestral lands and the local environment were visually presented in the watercolor paintings and the images of the ceremonial dances, so were Euro-American attitudes of entitlement toward the land and natural resources of the Southwest. Although it is true that some Euro-American intellectuals and political activists, including the art patrons, ardently supported the protection of Pueblo lands from permanent settlement of non-Indian squatters, including working class Hispanos and whites, that the Bursum Bill supported, the political enthusiasm of these social elites does raise questions: Did these enthusiasts also guard Pueblo lands against further encroachment from other Euro-American intellectuals and elites? Or, was their activism selective? Did their politics follow a class distinction between people like themselves and the non-Indian working class?

Georgia O'Keeffe's long-term presence in Abiquiu, which began with the questionable purchase of *La Tapia* through the Catholic church in 1945, in contrast with her own political stance against the construction of a dam in 1943, a project that would have greatly affected several Pueblo communities at that time, demonstrates non-Indians' own compartmentalization regarding the political actions they took. Historians, such as Suzanne Forrest, who focus on Hispano experiences of The New Deal era, identify clear distinctions that were made between the political support received by American Indian

and Hispano populations of New Mexico from the non-Indian activists.³¹³ Their activism was not only selective it was also contradictory and in some instances self-serving. Consider for example, why were the non-Indian art patrons and intellectuals, and, for that matter, O’Keeffe, so ardent about protecting Pueblo lands, but less concerned with honoring the Spanish and Mexican land grants of the Hispano communities? Many of these land grants were assured by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 and then later patented under U.S. law. Certainly, professional and personal connections among the art patrons and also romanticized attitudes toward American Indians would have been key factors, but non-Indian desires for the land and natural resources of this region must also be taken into consideration. As O’Keeffe’s long-distance purchase of *La Tapia* demonstrates, with the right connections and the right price, acquiring property on a Spanish land grant was not altogether challenging during the twentieth century. O’Keeffe coveted *La Tapia* and her property at Ghost Ranch for her own artistic aims, which she visually expressed in her work. However, other non-Indians were also eying Southwestern properties for other purposes that did not prioritize the people or the legal histories of this region.

The existence of the Los Alamos Laboratory began in 1942 under the U.S federal powers of eminent domain. This act of land appropriation on the Pajarito Plateau would, over fifty years later, result in a class action settlement with the descendents of Hispano homesteaders of this area.³¹⁴ The long-term physical and environmental damages resultant of the unmonitored toxic disposal practices at Los Alamos have now

³¹³ Suzanne Forrest, *Preservation of the Village: New Mexico’s Hispanics and the New Deal* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1989).

³¹⁴ Malcolm Ebright, *Land Grants and Lawsuits in Northern New Mexico*. Santa Fe: Center for Land Grant Studies, 2008.

permanently affected the Pueblo communities whose lands are adjacent to Los Alamos and also the American Indian, Hispano, and non-Indian populations of northern New Mexico. The results of the toxication of this land and local environment are now present in nearly every aspect of life in this region: everything from the air, to water, to soils, to plants, animals, and humans. Helen Hardin's story demonstrates the connections between nuclear waste and art production, and also the specific challenges American Indian artists, particularly women, have faced while earning a living in the mainstream art world. These chemical and material connections reveal themselves in the bodies and health issues of American Indian artists who live and work in regions damaged by hazardous waste or were exposed to environmental toxins at a young age. This is a health concern that is unique to Native artists who choose art-making as their main economic source, since so much of the nuclear waste produced in the United States is disposed on or near American Indian homelands.³¹⁵ Although all professional artists must be aware of the health risks associated with art-making, American Indian artists must exercise even greater vigilance regarding their own exposure levels, which are increased when living near toxic waste sites. One question that Hardin's story raises concerns the accountability of the U.S. federal government regarding the health of American Indian artists who live on or near these toxic waste sites particularly when both the art-making and the nuclear power industries are two enterprises that were initiated by and still maintained under federal regulations?

As this dissertation has shown, agriculture, art-making, and nuclear power production are three federally implemented industries that have greatly influenced the

³¹⁵ Winona Laduke, *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life* (Cambridge: South End Press, 1999).

lives of the American Indian and non-Indian peoples in the Rio Grande Valley of northern New Mexico. All three of these industries have direct association with the lands and landscape of this area. Although these enterprises have been historically treated as distinct entities, the stories of Tonita Peña, Georgia O’Keeffe, and Helen Hardin all demonstrate that these industries intersect in the art, lands, bodies, and lives of the people of this region.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Agee, William, ““Helga” and Other Problems,” *The New Criterion*, 1988.
- Anthes, Bill, *Native Moderns: American Indian Painting, 1940-1960*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006.
- Anshuetz, Kurt F., “Soaking It in: Northern Rio Grande Pueblo Lessons of Water Management and Landscape Ecology,” in Laurie Weinstein ed. *Native Peoples of the Southwest Negotiating Land, Water, and Ethnicities*, Westport, Connecticut and London: Bergin and Garvey, 2001.
- Arellano, Juan Estevan, “Taos: Where Cultures Met Four Hundred Years Ago,” *Grant Makers in the Arts Reader: Ideas and Information on Arts and Culture* Vol. 18 No. 1, Spring, 2007.
- Baliff, Tori, “Beyond Compensation: Inadequacies of the Radiation Exposure Act (RECA), University of Utah, 2008.
- Berger, Martin A., *Sight Unseen: Whiteness and American Visual Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.
- Berlo, Janet C., & Ruth B. Phillips, *Native North American Art*, Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Bernstein, Bruce, and W. Jackson Rushing, *Modern by Tradition: American Indian Painting in the Studio Style*, Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1995.
- Blackhawk, Ned, *Violence Over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006.
- Blocker, Jane, “Failures of Self-Seeing: James Luna Remembers Dino,” *Performing Arts Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 1, Jan. 2001.
- Brody, JJ, *Indian Painters & White Patrons*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971.
- Brody, JJ, *Pueblo Indian Painting: Tradition and Modernism in New Mexico, 1900-1930*, Santa Fe: School of American Research, 1997.
- Bry, Doris, and Nicholas Callaway, *Georgia O’Keeffe in the West*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989.
- Buhler Lynes, Barbara, *Georgia O’Keeffe: Catalog Raisonné*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999.

- Buhler Lynes, Barbara and Ann Paden, *Maria Chabot-Georgia O'Keeffe: Correspondence, 1941-1949*. Santa Fe: University of New Mexico Press and Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, 2003.
- Buhler Lynes, Barbara, Lesley Poling-Kempes, and Frederick Turner, *Georgia O'Keeffe and New Mexico: A Sense of Place*. Santa Fe: Georgia O'Keeffe Museum and Princeton University Press, 2004.
- Bullard, Robert D., ed. *The Quest for Environmental Justice: Human Rights and the Politics of Pollution*, San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2005.
- Carlson, Alvar W., *The Spanish-American Homeland: Four Centuries in New Mexico's Rio Arriba*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990.
- Chase, Katherine L., *Indian Painters of the Southwest: The Deep Remembering*, Santa Katherine L. Fe: School of American Research Press, 2002.
- Corn, Wanda "Telling Tales: Georgia O'Keeffe on Georgia O'Keeffe," *American Art* Vol. 23, No. 2, 2009.
- Corn, Wanda, "The Great American Thing," in *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
- Corn, Wanda, "The Sage of Abiquiu," *American Art*, Vol. 20, No. 3, Fall 2006.
- Cosgrove, Denis, and Stephen Daniels, *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- "Dam Threatens Pueblos," *Life*, November 29, 1943.
- deBuys, William, *Enchantment and Exploitation: The Life and Hard Times of a New Mexico Mountain Range*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985.
- Deutsch, Sarah, *No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class, and Gender on an Anglo-Hispanic Frontier in the American Southwest 1880-1940*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Dilworth, Leah, *Imagining Indians in the Southwest: Persistent Visions of a Primitive Past*. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996.
- Drohojowska-Philp, Hunter, *Full Bloom: The Art and Life of Georgia O'Keeffe*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2004.

- Ebright, Malcolm and Rick Hendricks, *The Witches of Abiquiu: The Governor, The Priest, The Genizaro Indians, and The Devil*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006.
- Ebright, Malcolm, *Land Grants and Lawsuits in Northern New Mexico*. Santa Fe: Center for Land Grant Studies, 2008.
- Forrest, Suzanne, *The Preservation of the Village: New Mexico's Hispanics and the New Deal*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1989.
- Fox, Claire F. *The Fence and the River: Culture and Politics at the U.S.- Mexico Border*, University of Minnesota, 1999.
- Fry, Aaron, "Local Knowledge & Art Historical Methodology: A New Perspective On Awa Tsireh & The San Ildefonso Easel Painting Movement" *Hemisphere: Visual Cultures of the Americas*, Vol. 1, 2008
- Fryd, Vivien Green, *Art and the Crisis of Marriage: Edward Hopper and Georgia O'Keeffe*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- Garcia, Napoleón and Ananlinda Dunn, *The Genizaro & The Artist*. Rio Grande Books, 2008.
- "Georgia O'Keeffe Turns Dead Bones To Live Art," *Life Magazine*, February 14, 1938.
- Graf, William L., *Plutonium and the Rio Grande: Environmental Change and Contamination in the Nuclear Age*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Graulich, Melody, "I Became the Colony: Kate Cory's Hopi Photographs" in *Trading Gazes: Euro-American Women Photographers and Native North Americans, 1880-1940*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003.
- Gray, Samuel, *Tonita Pena, 1893-1949*, Avanyu Publishing, 1990.
- Graulich, Melody, "I Became the Colony: Kate Cory's Hopi Photographs" in *Trading Gazes: Euro-American Women Photographers and Native North Americans, 1880-1940*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003.
- Greenough, Sarah, *My Faraway One: Selected Letters of Georgia O'Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011.
- Hill, Sarah H., introduction to *Weaving New Worlds: Southeastern Cherokee Women and Their Basketry*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.
- Hockney, David, introduction to *Secret Knowledge: Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of the Old World Masters*, New York: Penguin Putnam, 2001.

- Hinojosa, Hector, ed. Group CIC-1, "Elk and Deer Study, Material Disposal Area G, Technical Area 54: Source Document," Los Alamos National Laboratory, 1999.
- Hutchinson, Elizabeth, *The Indian Craze: Primitivism, Modernism, and Transculturation in American Art, 1890–1915*. Duke University Press, 2009.
- Jacobs, Margaret D., "Shaping a New Way: White Women and the Movement to Promote Pueblo Indian Arts and Crafts, 1900-1935," *Journal of the Southwest* 40, 1998.
- Jackson, Devon, "The Wideness and Wonder of It: Touring O'Keeffe's Abiquiu Home," *O'Keeffe: The Georgia O'Keeffe Museum Magazine*, 2011.
- Jantzer-White, Marilee, "Tonita Pena, (Quah Ah) Pueblo Painter: Asserting Identity Through Continuity and Change," *American Indian Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 3, University of Nebraska Press.
- Kent, Kate Peck, *Pueblo Indian Textiles: A Living Tradition*, Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1983.
- Kunetka, James W., *City of Fire: Los Alamos and the Atomic Age 1943-45*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1979.
- LaDuke, Winona, "Nuclear Waste: Dumping on the Indians" in *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life*, Cambridge: South End Press, 1999.
- Lamarque, Peter and Crispin Sartwell, *Aesthetics: The Classical Readings*. Blackwell Publishing, 1997.
- Lange, Charles, *Cochiti: A New Mexico Pueblo, Past and Present*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1959.
- Leuthold, Stephen, *Indigenous Aesthetics: Native Art Media and Identity*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998.
- Lewthwaite, Stephanie, "Mediating Art Worlds: The Photography of John S. Candelario" in *New Mexico Historical Review* vol. 87 no. 1 Winter, 2012.
- McCann, Michael, *Health Hazards Manual For Artists*, Fourth Edition, New York: Lyons and Burford Publishers, 1994.
- McLerran, Jennifer, *A New Deal For American Indian Art: Indian Arts and Federal Indian Policy 1933-1943*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2009.

- Marriott, Alice, *Maria: The Potter of San Idefonso*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1948.
- Martinez, Esther, *My Life in San Juan Pueblo: Stories of Esther Martinez*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004.
- Martinez, Matthew “Double Take: Tourism & Photography Endeavors Among the Northern Pueblos of the Rio Grande,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2008.
- Martinez, Matthew, “A Living Exhibition: Labor, Desire, and the Marketing of American Indian Arts and Crafts in Santa Fe,” in F. Richard Sanchez ed. *White Shell Water Place: An Anthology of Native American Reflections on the 400th Anniversary of the Founding of Santa Fe*. Santa Fe: Institute of American Indian Arts, 2010.
- Masco, Joseph, “Mutant Ecologies: Radioactive Life in Post-Cold War New Mexico,” *Cultural Anthropology* 19 (2004).
- Miller, Angela, *The Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics 1825-1875*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993.
- Mithlo, Nancy, “*Our Indian Princess*”: *Subverting the Stereotype*. Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research, 2008.
- Mullin, Molly H., “The Patronage of Difference: Making Indian Art “Art, Not Ethnology”” *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Nov., 1992).
- National Museum of the American Indian Smithsonian Institution, *Essays On Native Modernism: Complexity and Contradiction in American Indian Art*, Washington D.C. and New York: National Museum of the American Indian, 2006.
- Nelson, Kate, *Helen Hardin Tsa Sah Wee Eh: A Straight Line Curved*, Little Standing Spruce Publishing, 2012.
- Ortiz, Alfonso, *The Tewa World: Space, Time, Being, and Becoming in a Pueblo Society*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969.
- Osborne, Brian, “The Iconography of nationhood in Canadian art” in Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels, editors, *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the symbolic representation, design and use of past environments*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- Pecos, Regis, “The History of Cochiti Lake from the Pueblo Perspective,” *Natural Resources Journal*, 47 (2007).

- Pasternak, Judy, *Yellow Dirt: An American Story of A Poisoned Land and A People Betrayed* (New York: Free Press, 2010).
- Penney, David W. and Lisa Roberts, "America's Pueblo Artists: Encounters on the Borderlands" in W. Jackson Rushing III, ed. *Native American Art in the Twentieth Century: Makers, Meanings, Histories*, London and New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Poling-Kempes, Lesley, *Valley of Shining Stone: The Story of Abiquiu*, Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 1997.
- Prince, Hugh, "Art and Agrarian Change, 1710-1815," in Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels, editors, *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the symbolic representation, design and use of past environments*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- Quintana, Frances Leon, *Pobladores: Hispanic Americans of the Ute Frontier*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991.
- Rickard, Jolene K., "Indigenous and Iroquoian Art as Knowledge: In the Shadow of the Eagle," (Ph.D. Dissertation, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1996).
- Rickard, Jolene, "Sovereignty: A Line In The Sand" in *Strong Hearts: Native American Visions and Voices*, New York: Aperture, 1995.
- Rivera, Jose A., *Acequia Culture: Water, Land, & Community in the Southwest*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998.
- Rossol, Monona, *Artists Complete Health and Safety Guide*, Second Edition, New York, Alworth Press and American Council for the Arts.
- Robinson, Roxanna, *Georgia O'Keeffe: A Life*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1990.
- Sando, Joe S., *Pueblo Nations: Eight Centuries of Pueblo Indian History*, Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 1992.
- Sando, Joe S., *Pueblo Profiles: Cultural Identity through Centuries of Change*, Santa Fe, Clear Light Publishers, 1998.
- Scott, Jay, *Changing Woman: The Life and Art of Helen Hardin*, Flagstaff: Northland Publishing, 1989.
- Scully, Vincent, *PUEBLO: Mountain, Dance, Village*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- Sherbell, Rhoda, "Endangered Species: The Artist" *Art Journal* 34 (1975).

- Sieberling, Dorothy, "Stark Vision of a Pioneer Painter," *Life*, March 1, 1968.
- Skov, Torsten, et al., "Risk for Cancer of the Pharynx and Oral Cavity Among Male Painters in the Nordic Countries" *Archives for Environmental Health* 48 (1993).
- Sontag, Susan, *On Photography*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977.
- Stellman, Jeanne Mager, *Women's Work Women's Health Myths and Realities*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1977.
- Stokrocki, Mary, "Helen Hardin: Native American Artist," *School Arts Magazine*, April 1995.
- Joseph H. Suina, "Pueblo Secrecy: Result of Intrusions," *New Mexico Magazine*, January, 1992.
- Sweet, Jill D., *Dances of the Tewa Pueblo Indians: Expressions of New Life*, Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2004.
- Szabo, Joyce, "Native American Art History: Questions of the Canon," in *Essays on Native Modernism: Complexity and Contradiction in American Indian Art*, Washington D.C: National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, 2006.
- Tisdale, Shelby J., *Pablita Velarde: In Her Own Words*. Santa Fe: Little Standing Spruce Publishing, 2012.
- Tomkins, Calvin "The Rose in the Eye Looked Pretty Fine," *The New Yorker*, March 4, 1974.
- Torrez, Robert, *The Southern Ute Agency at Abiquiu and Tierra Amarilla, New Mexico*. Guadalupita, New Mexico, Center For Land Grant Studies, 1994.
- Tryk, Sheila, "O'Keeffe: Her Time, Her Place," *New Mexico Magazine*, May 1986.
- Twitchell, Ralph Emerson, *The Spanish Archives of New Mexico*, vol. one, The Torch Press: 1914.
- Vlasich, James A., *Pueblo Indian Agriculture*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005.
- Ann Middleton Wagner, *Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner, and O'Keeffe*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.
- Wallach, Amei, "Georgia O'Keeffe," *Newsday*, October, 1977.

Weinstein, Laurie, editor, *Native Peoples of the Southwest: Negotiating Land, Water, and Ethnicities*, Bergin and Garvey, 2001.

Weisiger, Marsha, *Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country*. Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2009.

Tisa Wenger, "Land Culture and Sovereignty in the Pueblo Dance Controversy," *Journal of the Southwest*, Vol. 46, No. 2, Summer 2004.

White, Richard, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos*. Lincoln and Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1983.

Widener, Thomas, et al., "Los Alamos Historical Document Retrieval and Assessment," Center for Disease Control and the National Center for Environmental Health, 2009.

Zoellner, Tom, *Uranium: War, Energy, And The Rock That Shaped The World*, New York: Viking Penguin, 2009.

GOVERNMENT AND HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS

Abiquiu Cooperative Livestock Association, Board of Trustees of the Abiquiu Land Grant, "Quitclaim Deed to Georgia O'Keeffe," dated August 25, 1948.

Center for Land Grant Studies, "Abiquiu Genizaro Grant," (Guadalupita, New Mexico, 2005).

Chavez Family Papers, boxes 1-7 (Chicago, Illinois: Edward E. Ayer Manuscript Collection, Newberry Library).

"Communities for Clean Water Fact Sheets," Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety (CCNS), accessed January 10, 2013. www.nuclearreactive.org.

Federal Hazardous Substances Act (Public Law 86-213), Section 23.

Field Offices of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, "Preliminary Inventory of the Pueblo Records" (Washington: National Archives & Records Service, 1980).

Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation 1994-2000, Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation Annual Report File, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Helen Hardin Interviews, American Indian Oral History Collection, Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico

The Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1935 and 1990, U.S. Department of Interior, Indian Arts and Crafts Board

Los Vecinos Del Cerro Pedernal, correspondence and petition, January 12, 1989.

Martinez, Richard C., State of New Mexico Senate Memorial 59, 2007.

National Historic Landmark Nomination, "O'Keeffe, Georgia Home and Studio"
United States Department of Interior, National Parks Service (1998).

National Research Council of the National Academies, *Plans and Practices for Groundwater Protection at the Los Alamos National Laboratory* (Washington D.C. The National Academies Press, 2007).

The Pueblo de Abiquiu Library and Cultural Center Archives Collection, Abiquiu, New Mexico.

Tonita Peña to Lansing Bloom, February 18, 1921, Cochiti, New Mexico, (Edgar L. Hewett papers, Palace of the Governors, New Mexico History Museum, Fray Angelico Chavez History Library) punctuation added by author.

Tonita Peña to Lansing Bloom, February 20, 1921 and March 19, 1921 (Edgar L. Hewett papers, Palace of the Governors, New Mexico History Museum, Fray Angelico Chavez History Library).

Tonita Peña to Lansing Bloom, March 19, 1921, (Edgar L. Hewett papers, Palace of the Governors, New Mexico History Museum, Fray Angelico Chavez History Library).

Tonita Peña to Lansing Bloom, April 8, 1921, (Edgar L. Hewett papers, Palace of the Governors, New Mexico History Museum, Fray Angelico Chavez History Library).

Tonita Peña to Lansing Bloom, May, 1921, Cochiti, New Mexico, (Edgar L. Hewett papers, Palace of the Governors, New Mexico History Museum, Fray Angelico Chavez History Library) punctuation added by author.

Lansing Bloom to Tonita Peña: February 15, 1921, (Edgar L. Hewett papers, Palace of the Governors, New Mexico History Museum, Fray Angelico Chavez History Library).

Lansing Bloom to Tonita Peña: March, 12 and March, 21, 1921, (Edgar L. Hewett papers, Palace of the Governors, New Mexico History Museum, Fray Angelico Chavez History Library).

Secretary of Interior Communication Transmittal, "Georgia O'Keeffe Home & Studio," Department of Interior Report, 1979.

Senator Pete V. Domenici, statement on S. 2750, New Mexico Parks Legislation Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Public lands, National Parks and Forests, September 14, 1988. One Hundredth Congress, Second Session.

Smith, Eastburn R., (Retired Soil Conservation Employee), Interview Transcript, June 1970, New Mexico's Digital Collection, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

Sophie Aberle Papers, (box 1, folders 38-44), Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico.

United States Department of the Interior/National Park Service, "Study of Alternatives Environmental Assessment" (Denver: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992).

U.S. Department of Interior's National Park System Reports of 1979 and 1992.

INTERVIEWS

Wanda Corn, Telephone Interview with Author, December, 2012.

Alice and Seledon Garcia, Interview with Author, July, 2012, Abiquiu, New Mexico.

Napoleon Garcia and Family, Interview with Author, August, 2010, Abiquiu, New Mexico.

Tio Manzanares, Interview with Author, July, 2012, Medanales, New Mexico.

Kathy Sanchez (*Wan Povi*), Tewa Women United, Interview with Author, July, 2012, San Ildefonso Pueblo, New Mexico.

Isabelle and Virgil Trujillo and family, Interview with Author, July 2012, Abiquiu, New Mexico.

DOCUMENTARY FILMS

Georgia O'Keeffe, [VHS] directed by Perry Miller Adato, (1977; WNET).

Without a Tribe: Survival of New Mexico's Ransomed Captives, Executive Producer, Cynthia Gomez, (Pipestone Productions, 2011).

Helen Hardin: Santa Clara Painter, American Indian Artists, KAET TV, Arizona State University, Corporation for Public Broadcasting, 1976.