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Supplement II Abstract in English:

The New Tribe: Critical Perspectives and Practices in Aboriginal Contemporary Art

Since World War II, the resurgence in Canada of aboriginal people's artistic practice has contributed to their greater self-definition, which has had an impact both nationally and internationally. By this means, aboriginal people have achieved economic, social, political and cultural recognition. In particular, the cultural practices of artists have become critical in articulating identity, with incisive works and methods mediating their position in a complex and contradictory world. These artists are all complex individuals who have developed within highly charged social, historical and political frameworks. They crisscross ancestral boundaries. They are a new tribe working and enjoying life, through an intercultural perspective from the margins.

These emerging artists, with their critique of modernity, are a phenomenon of a period that runs parallel with the post-modern. Their artistic practices can be characterized as "post-reservation." Modernity's universalizing assumptions—bureaucratization, rationalization, socialization, and compartmentalization—were embodied in federal government colonial policies imposed on aboriginal peoples. During the reservation period, from the late eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century, certain cultural expressions flourished while others suffered a gradual decline because of disuse or displacement. In the late nineteenth century, some ceremonies, like the Sun Dance and the Potlatch, were effectively outlawed. The post-reservation or post-war period, however, marked an era of aboriginal people's resistance and liberation from a system of government control. As a consequence, aboriginal peoples across the country regained rights and freedoms denied to them since the mid-nineteenth century.

Aboriginal artists' entry into the contemporary art world in the 1960s introduced them to the culturally foreign discursive practices of modernism and post-modernism. Modernism, they soon realized, meant an exclusive belief in the purity of art and the disappearance of the artist's (cultural) identity; these were both important tenets promoted at a time when the new aboriginal artist was beginning to affirm his or her "aboriginal" identity. To be a modernist meant being progressive and liberated from traditional practices and the demands of everyday life. Such practitioners were not conservers of culture. Modernism expounded

a belief in art's autonomy and separation. Post-modernism, on the other hand, offered strategies of "resistance," "articulation," and "empowerment." Post-modernists sought to connect art with social and political issues, and critiqued modernism's universalizing metanarratives, arguing instead for the viability of local narratives. They objected to the hierarchical positioning of Western art over other world traditions, asserting that Western art is in effect another other in a theatre of others.

The aboriginal artists' new subject position became an engagement around and in-between multiple spatialities—reserve/urban, centre/periphery, museum/gallery—shifting control over cultural, social, political and artistic space. The Métis artist, Edward Poitras, once envisioned this group of unconnected, marginalized, and displaced individuals as a "new tribe," which I propose here as a concept to describe this new cultural subject.

As this dissertation is grounded in an interdisciplinary framework, I will integrate art and art history, anthropology, and literary, post-colonial, and post-structural theory, to interpret the idea of identity as mediated in the works and practices of aboriginal contemporary artists. Specifically, I will focus on the work of several artists, mostly in Canada, as key articulations: "work" is used here to mean both practice and key pieces within the artist's body of work. For me, practice signifies the "articulation" of living and working within the field of art, while the key pieces denote the objects produced and "living" within this shifting field.

In Part I, several perspectives lay the groundwork. Chapter 2 provides an historical background to aboriginal identity in Canada, and to a lesser extent in the United States, by examining the way this identity is constituted—politically, legally, and symbolically—then, how it is politicized by various aboriginal groups. Chapter 3 presents an historical background since World War II, as necessary to understanding the discursive spaces within which the new tribe of aboriginal contemporary artists is constituted. Chapter 4 establishes these artists as mobile subjects, who frequently cross, experience, interrogate, and negotiate spaces of "resistance," at the same time articulating a self-identity. In Part II, we see the new tribe becoming more critical and strategic. Thus, Chapter 5 examines both the idea of the "museum object" and the "space of the ethnographic museum" and how activist artists bring these concepts to bear on their practice. Chapter 6 then focuses on another group of artists who use language in their works, not so much as signifiers but as aboriginal concepts where language is key to articulation. The final chapter concludes with the members of the new tribe shifting their focus back on to the communities from which they originate, and draw inspiration.