ACTS OF SURVIVANCE:

CONTEMPORARY PUEBLO ARTISTS UTILIZING ART AS A LANGUAGE OF RESISTANCE

A THESIS

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Southwest Studies

The Colorado College

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Bachelor of Arts

By

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May/2017

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Senior Capstone Research Project
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Introduction

Originated by Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor, the term survivance expresses sentiments of Indigenous self-determination, imagination, and existence. Survivance exists in a symbiotic relationship with Native presence. The nature of survivance indicates the strength and perseverance of Indigenous peoples whose histories tangle into narratives of domination and colonization. In reaction to this entanglement or rather attempted erasure of Native cultures in America, contemporary Indigenous peoples have taken on the responsibility to accurately represent their individual tribal histories, address the implications of unjust colonization within their communities, and enable healing from generational trauma endured by Native peoples.

These acts of survivance undoubtedly exist in the creative works of contemporary Pueblo artists Rose B. Simpson and Virgil Ortiz. In order to best access and understand the impacts of their artwork, I utilized a creative approach toward researching Native American traditional and contemporary art practices informed by Gregory Cajete's *Native Science*. Rather than objectively observing the art and the artists I encountered during my field research, I fully immersed and involved myself in the inner-workings of the Native American art world such as the art creation process, the display of contemporary and traditional Native artworks, and the eventual dimensions of interpretation of contemporary Native American art.

Through the employment of active listening and utilization of my senses during my research experiences, I came to the understanding that Western society and its ways of knowing the world fail to acknowledge Indigenous experiences, identities, and histories. This is especially true in regards to Indigenous histories, which rarely find their

way into the dominant historical narrative. In order to achieve justice and facilitate healing for Native American communities, non-Native peoples must take on the responsibility to decolonize their Western notions and worldviews.

Therefore, I suggest taking time to look to Indigenous artists, who utilize their art in order to communicate a language of resistance toward domination. In other words their artworks communicate, display, and perpetuate notions of survivance and refuse victimization and erasure. This is clear in a quote from contemporary Santa Clara Pueblo artist Rose B. Simpson discussing her piece titled *Warrior.*

> I am realizing that everything that happened, happens, or will happen to me is my manifestation. Instead of feeling like a victim to my predicament, I actively take the initiative to become aware of it, and have the "tools" to deal with whatever comes my way, mostly because I am paying attention. When I pay close enough attention, I realize that I have what I need to deal with even the scariest and most intimidating of circumstances. These tools are not weapons, they are energy—represented in the piece by objects that have been made with intention, actively energized, and placed with vigilance. (Simpson 2015)

Cleary Rose embodies the aesthetics of survivance in both her creative process and her final works. In this thesis, I argue that in order to respectfully understand Indigenous histories, identities, and experiences requires the decolonization of a Eurocentric worldview. In utilizing their artistic creations as acts of resistance to the dominant Western historic narrative, Pueblo contemporary artists are reshaping, re-telling, and redefining the way we look at their hi*stories*.

Investigations on Relationship and Creation: Decolonizing Framework and Methodology

WHEREAS I did not desire in childhood to be a part of this but desired most of all to be a part. A piece combined with others to make up a whole. Some but not all of something. In Lakota it's hanké, a piece or part of anything.
-LAYLI LONG SOLDIER 2017

The top of the mountain is a metaphor for a place of perspective about where one has been, where on is, and where one may go. The mountaintop gives perspective on the purpose of creation, which always has purpose.
-GREGORY CAJETE 2000

A Decolonized Approach

In crafting my approach toward my senior capstone research I took on the responsibility of providing a decolonized perspective on the subject of Pueblo art, culture, and history. In order to provide such a perspective I based my theoretical framework on the foundations laid out in the wisdom and writings of Indigenous scholars and artists. Contemporary implications of colonization unquestionably exist within the Western academic tradition. In fact the forced implementation of the Western education system onto Native American societies (i.e. The introduction of Native American boarding schools) introduced another tool of the colonizer, with aims to dismantle Native peoples' cultures and traditions. These implications of colonization within the realm of education create a fragmented and distorted view of Indigenous cultures today. The application of a theoretical framework informed by the Western academic tradition toward the analysis of Indigenous cultures only furthers the goals of the colonizer—to omit Indigenous perspectives. For this reason, this thesis utilizes a decolonized framework and approach toward research methodology.

Still, a decolonized approach toward research requires more than a critique of the Western academic tradition itself. In addition it necessitates the task of "decolonial knowledge-making that re-asserts and draws in concepts and meanings from Indigenous knowledge and systems of thought and experience of the colonial" (M. Nakata et al 124 2012). The implementation of a decolonized framework and methodology toward my own research provided access to Indigenous voices regarding notions around an artist's creative process, the display of Native American art in a gallery setting, and the interpretation of contemporary Native American artworks. Through my research and analysis I hope to provide an example of a decolonized framework and approach toward research involving indigenous communities, while also solely referring to an Indigenous perspective to discuss concepts such as artistic creation and relationship to the natural world.

The methodology utilized in this project rests upon concepts involving Native American ways of knowing and relating to the world. In my attempt to provide an Indigenous perspective within my research, I curated a decolonized framework by analyzing and utilizing processes of obtaining knowledge found within *Native Science* by Santa Clara Pueblo scholar, Gregory Cajete. Accordingly, the terminology of this section provides language that supports a holistic discourse on the nature of relationship as it relates to an artist's creative process, the display of Native American art, and the interpretation of artistic creations. Although this section does provide a decolonized approach toward research based on Cajete's Native voice and perspective, the terminology used in this section is not intended to speak for all tribes within the U.S territory or generalize their various worldviews.

Over five hundred federally recognized tribes live within the borders of the United States and still more seek federal recognition. Each tribe utilizes various ways of approaching and understanding the world, specific to their geographical and cultural setting. In recognizing this I want to reiterate that the discussion within this section does not attempt to speak on behalf of any Indigenous peoples. Throughout my discussion on concepts of Native Science, the implementation of these concepts into my own research, and reflection on my findings, I attempt to provide a framework that allows access and understanding of an Indigenous perspective on the concepts of relationship to the natural world, artistic creation, and the myriad facets of Native American art.

Native Science

The concept of relationship guides and provides the connecting thread between Native ways of knowing and the surrounding natural world. Santa Clara Pueblo scholar Gregory Cajete discusses how relationship comes to inform a sense of reciprocity and responsibility between an individual and the natural world in his book titled *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence.* The role of science maintains a place within both Western and non-western approaches to making sense of the chaotic world in which people, among other sensate entities, exist within. That being said, the definition of science transforms and takes on myriad manifestations dependent upon the cultural groups that define it. In Cajete's words, the defining qualities of scientific methodology are "culturally relative" (ix 2000). Due to this cultural relativity, the ways in which various societies go about gaining knowledge appear differently. Yet they both aim to achieve the goal of gaining a better understanding of the world.

Just as Western scientific investigation applies to many different disciplines within academia, Native science also feeds into myriad fields of study. Cajete provides insight into the context of Native science when he describes the accomplishments of Native peoples involving their investigations.

> Discoveries like the use of fire, coming to know key ecological relationships and responsibilities to the natural world, having sense of how things began and how things are in the natural order, the domestication of animals and plants through agriculture, the innate affiliation humans have with nature, and understanding the order and cycles of nature are among the first elements of science. (Cajete 13 2000)

Thus from an Indigenous lens, science helps to demonstrate an order of processes and cycles within nature, an explanation for human environment interactions, and the relationships that exist among living things. These elements of Native science require a specific methodology in order to access them. Similar to Western science's process of gathering data for analysis, Native science also utilizes processes or methodologies to observe the phenomena of the natural world and obtain understanding. In an attempt to begin to unpack these processes, it may help to think of them as a Native "scientific method." However, Gregory Cajete defines this method as "the creative process" and this terminology will be used to describe a Native methodology throughout the rest of this thesis.

The methodology of the creative process stems from the concept of creation. Indigenous involvements with ceremony, mythology, storytelling, and art provide insight into Native ways of accessing information and knowledge specifically pertaining to the concept of creation. This methodology often transforms and exists as a fluid process versus a static process. "In appreciation of creation, there is a search for the reason behind anything in which one participates. This is both the natural philosophy and the

creative process as embodied in Native science" (45 2000). The concept of participation, as utilized by Cajete, requires further attention. Cajete best defines participation within the context of Native science in a discourse on the Native physicist observing the world.

> The indigenous 'physicist' not only observes nature but also participates in it with all his or her sensual being. Humans and all other entities of nature experience at their own levels of sensate reality […] As we experience the world, so we are also experienced by the world. Maintaining relationships through continual participation with the natural creative process of nature is the hallmark of Native science (20).

This elucidation on participation provides two major insights into the creative process. First, creative participation involves the utilization of ones own senses in order to enact an understanding with a sensate world. Through the human senses of sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell, an awareness of involvement with the world arises in which humans exist both as a sensing being and as a sensation upon the world. This creative participation with the environment allows the second insight to arise, in which human beings are granted the opportunity to acknowledge one's own impact on and interaction with the surrounding sensuous world. This utilization of the senses allows for a type of conversation between a sensate human and their natural environment. This sensual conversation yields insight into both a sense of relationship and dependence to our sensate world. This second insight on the creative process brings to light the foundation of Native science, in which the process of gaining knowledge and information depends upon ones relationship to the natural world.

Creative Participation Methodology

To take these insights on Cajete's creative process out of the theoretical and into a more tangible realm, I will discuss my application of Cajete's creative participation to my

research methodology on Native American artistic creation. My research consists of my participation in a Cahuilla Basketry class held at Idyllwild Arts Academy in the mountains of southern California, followed by my involvement in an internship at the I.D.E.A Space of Colorado College in which I helped to curate a gallery displaying Native American contemporary and traditional artworks. During each of these experiences I involved myself in creative participation as defined by Cajete by utilizing my sensorial experience as a form of data collection. I performed this form of methodology to attempt to learn about relationship, and how it informs an indigenous perspective on artistic creation. My research yielded two revelations on the notion of relationship within the context of Native American art.

I'll begin by describing my first day of class at Idyllwild Arts Academy, in which my teacher Rose Ann Hamilton invited my class on to the Mountain Cahuilla reservation. On this land my classmates and I handpicked the native grasses that have been used to weave traditional Cahuilla baskets from time immemorial. In order to get onto the reservation, Rose drove us along a bumpy dirt road that stretched across the Mount San Jacinto State Park, connecting the town of Idyllwild to the Cahuilla Mountain Reservation. After parking her SUV on a narrow ledge dividing the mountains from the valley, Rose led us to a Yucca plant, whose sword-like leaves stretched at least four feet from the center—the heart of the Yucca. Rose informed us that harvesting this section of Yucca leaves both preserves the plant and allows it to continue to grow for the next flowering cycle. With my own hands I pulled the hearts from Yucca plants and plucked the Juncus and Deer Grass from the ground. In inviting us onto her land and guiding our hands over the grasses used in her practice, Rose also provided her students an

understanding of the way sustainability naturally evolves with the practice of Cahuilla basket weaving. She emphasized our need to only take what we needed for our baskets and nothing more. This ethical stance echoes a similar perspective of Gregory Cajete's discussion on creative participation in that, "The Indigenous experience is evidenced not only through collective cultural expressions of art, story, ritual, and technology, but also through the more subtle and intimate expressions of individual acts of respect, care, words, and feelings that are continually extended to the land and its many beings" (20). In allowing my hands to investigate the practices of the Cahuilla basketry tradition, I examined and experienced along with an artist as she participated with her environment. In doing so I engaged in a relationship that promoted a sense of responsibility and reciprocity between the natural world and myself.

I carried this ecological insight with me into my internship at IDEA Space. During this internship I learned of all the intricacies that played into the curatorial process of an exhibit titled *Corollary Acts.* The goals of this exhibit were to provide a new perspective for how one might define Native American art and challenge the expectations a viewer might bring along with them when approaching Native art. The main exhibition curator Michele McGeough provided a perspective on the resilience of Native American cultures and artists through the juxtaposition of traditional Native American art objects from the Colorado College collection at the Fine Arts Center with the artistic works of Contemporary Native American artists. For example, one pair of traditionally beaded moccasins was placed adjacent to Teri Greeves' piece titled *My Family's Tennis* Shoes, which consisted of two pairs of beaded converse sneakers. The exhibit's wall text provides further insight into the intentions of *Corollary Acts*, "[t]hrough this

combination, the exhibition seeks to demonstrate the continual evolution of artistic expression, and highlight the ways in which artists innovate and adapt new materials to express their own creative visions" (IDEA Space 2016). In providing a visual representation of the transformation between the traditional and the contemporary, McGeough succeeded in creating a conversation between the past and present in which art brings history to life.

During my experience working with curator Michelle McGeough I developed a new insight into the concept of relationship, that of the relationship between the traditional and the contemporary. Indigenous presence and perseverance emitted from both the contemporary and traditional pieces exhibited in *Corollary Acts*. Similar to the means by which traditional Native artistic practices inform the works of contemporary Native artists, a history of Native peoples continually evolves and perforates into the present moment. Michele McGeough brought this notion to my attention in a conversation involving two vital subjects that eventually informed the direction of my Capstone research project—the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 and the concept of survivance developed by Gerald Vizenor.

Notions of Survivance

Survivance is a term coined by the Indigenous scholar Gerald Vizenor. The sentiment behind the term initiates notions of presence of Native peoples rather than notions of absence found within the Western tradition of history. This perspective allotted by Vizenor's concept of Survivance, accurately describes the accomplishments of Michelle McGeough in her exhibition of *Corollary Acts.* Additionally, this example presented by McGeough inspired me to consider how notions of survivance inform an artistic practice. In seeking a correlation between survivance and art I found myself investigating the world of contemporary Pueblo art. More specifically I uncovered what I term as acts of survivance committed by Pueblo contemporary artists to reclaim and retell historic events involving the Pueblo peoples and the Spanish conquistadores.

Vizenor boldly considers the Pueblo Revolt to be the first revolution in North America, the second being the American Revolution. He suggests, "the unities of that native revolution, and others since then, are the foundational histories of survivance in this nation" (3). Through the medium of art, certain contemporary Pueblo artists are actively breaking down Western interpretations of the Pueblo Revolt, and in response they offer up space for a new conversation to be had. This conversation allows for the voices of Native peoples to reclaim their histories and empower their peoples. However, before turning to these dynamic actions toward the decolonization of history by Pueblo artists, I offer insight into my own attempt at decolonizing my mind, shaped by my Western academic training in the discipline of history. In doing so I aim to promote the notion that the implementation of decolonization strengthens understandings of history by providing multiple perspectives.

Decolonizing Histories

It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled,
and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures
in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish.
It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths.
For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.
They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game,
but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.
-AUDRE LORDE 1979

From a Western perspective the notions and ideas behind a historical narrative often carry on unchallenged. However, the ways in which we teach history, house many gaps that require further investigation and elaboration. This is especially true in reference to the Western interpretation of the histories of marginalized groups of peoples. In the case of the interpretation of history from both a Western and an indigenous perspective, the power lies with the storytellers and the stories that are more likely to be heard or accepted. This point is echoed by Tricia E. Logan who discusses the erasure that occurs in the dominant western historical narrative, when she says, “History, legacy, agency, and voice propel a group to a dominant space in a nation-state. There [exists] a struggle to determine who and what is worth remembering” (149). The Pueblo Revolt of 1680 exemplifies such an event that raises this exact question of who and what we choose to remember. In looking at alternative ways of interpreting history through a decolonial perspective provided by indigenous scholars, a more holistic understanding of indigenous notions of the past and history are revealed.

Gaps within a historical narrative often exist due to the Western interpretation of history in the Americas, in which certain written histories attempt to conceal the stories of marginalized peoples. The terminology “vanishing Indian” comes out of the U.S

history's dominant narrative, in which American Indians are portrayed as relics of the past and are only discussed in language of the past tense. However according to Michael V. Wilcox, "The past is always created in a politically and historically situated present" (35). This quote from his text, *The Pueblo Revolt and the Mythology of Conquest,* emphasizes a theoretical approach toward history, in which narratives of the past live in constant correspondence and communication with the present day. Although Native peoples undoubtedly exist today, their languages are still spoken, and their cultures persist, a piece of their identity remains in a constant battle with a dominant narrative that refuses to acknowledge their presence.

The colonizers narrative often prevails in a majority of U.S. history books, and as a result, in the collective mind of our mainstream "American" culture. However, in decolonizing these dominating narratives through Indigenous and Native perspective of felt history developed by indigenous scholar Dian Million; another historical perspective illuminates the experiences of indigenous peoples to the Americas. This alternative narrative places agency with Indigenous peoples, and provides them space to reclaim their stories, histories, and present identities.

The dominant narrative achieves a privileged and controlling status and history becomes skewed due to what Edward Said describes as "American attitudes to American 'greatness,' to hierarchies of race, to the perils of other revolutions (the American revolution being considered unique and somehow unrepeatable anywhere else in the world), [which] have remained constant, have dictated, [and] have obscured the realities of empire" (8). On that account, the dangers that arise from a dominating Western narrative, which stem from colonialism and fail to acknowledge the historical approach

of cultural groups that fall outside of the Western tradition, require analysis from a decolonial perspective. The late feminist, womanist, civil rights activist, poet, and scholar Audre Lorde points out the challenges that arise for those that oppose the dominant academic tradition, and she illuminates the necessity that lies within the utilization of decolonial approaches and analysis when she says, "What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? It means that only the most narrow perimeters of change are possible and allowable" (1984). Therefore, a methodology involving a critique of the dominant historic narrative, analysis of the gaps within this narrative, and decolonization of the dominant approach toward history, allow for a more accurate understanding of indigenous historic events. This study focuses on the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, as one such event analyzed through a non-Western lens.

Critiquing the dominant historical narrative requires a basic understanding of its constituent parts. A Western-centric approach toward historical analysis provides a narrative based upon a linear time scale, written documents and archeological reports, and "evidence" tied to historic events privileged by a particular population. Evidence in this context must be based upon the Western notion of scientific knowledge. For example, as opposed to the generational knowledge found within indigenous oral traditions, mythologies, and stories of many indigenous groups, Western knowledge in academic traditions of science, history, etc. often require factual data and objective analysis. These Western approaches aim to answer the questions generated by ongoing Western society in an attempt to better understand the causal sequences leading up to the present moment. This latter aim in Western historic analysis feeds into Patrisia Gonzales'

claim that “the past opens, extends, and expands in the present” (219), meaning that occurrences in the past are never wholly separate from contemporary life, and furthermore remain important pieces of knowledge in understanding the present day. This interconnectedness of the past and present is further supported by Edward Said’s claim that “there is no just way in which the past can be quarantined from the present. Past and present inform each other, each implies the other […] each co-exists with the other” (4). Although these notions support the idea that the past and present inform one another and exist in a cyclical way, American history often disseminates in a linear manner with an emphasis on date memorization over an emphasis on multiple interpretations, and rarely attempts to gain meaning out of the events.

Reasons for conducting a Western historical analysis, as discussed by Mahoney and Rueschemeyer, “[are] best considered part of a long-standing intellectual project oriented toward the explanation of substantively important outcomes” (6). This idea is precisely why much of well-known U.S and world history focuses on large historic events such as revolutions, wars, and social movements, and the dates they correspond with. Some attempts at revision of the Western tradition of telling history work to make the process more holistic, especially as interdisciplinary approaches to understanding this history reveal that historical events are not “static occurrences,” and compare similar historical events in an effort to find a thread of commonality (Mahoney 10-11). This approach toward history, while both moving beyond a surface level explanation for historic events, and even aligning with some indigenous perspectives and approaches toward history; still provides a rather narrow scope of understanding when looking at the histories of indigenous peoples to the Americas. Herein lies the reason why

decolonization of the Western construction of history is imperative in order to respectfully discuss indigenous historic events.

The Pueblo Revolt of 1680 is a foundational story within the history of the Southwest, pulling back before the time of contact-period with the Spanish conquistadores. Referred to by many Pueblo peoples, including Cochiti Pueblo artist Virgil Ortiz, as the "first American Revolution," the Pueblo Revolt serves as a significant historical event for the Pueblo peoples of the Southwestern Rio Grande region. History informs identity, and this event in particular informs Pueblo peoples on the experiences of their ancestors, involving active resistance against the colonizers in an effort to preserve their way of life. In other words, this event tells a story of resistance, presence, and survivance. However, this story is rarely told in mainstream history or in what I refer to in this paper as the "dominant narrative" within history. The dominant narrative extends beyond historical analysis and appears in most of Western scholarship's disciplines, in that it often brushes over the histories and experiences of marginalized peoples in most realms of academia. Indigenous activist and scholar, Vine Deloria Jr. describes this phenomenon of hidden histories within the Western tradition:

> We are faced today with a concept of world history that lacks even the most basic appreciation of the experiences of mankind as a whole. Unless other cultures and nations have some important relationship with the nations of Western Europe, they have little or no status in the interpretation of world history (107)

Vine Deloria Jr. dedicated his life's work to developing a resistance towards Western interpretations of Indigenous history. In this quote specifically Deloria describes the importance behind resistant acts toward Western culture's attempt to omit the stories of marginalized peoples. In an effort to similarly decolonize the Western construction of history, I look to Indigenous scholars such as Dian Million, Patrisia Gonzales, Gregory

Cajete, and Vine Deloria Jr., who provide indigenous perspectives and interpretations on historical formation and narrative through their writings and poetry. Each of these scholars touch on specific characteristics of the indigenous experience such as trauma, ceremony, time, and sense of place, in order to provide insight as to why a gap exists in place of an indigenous historical narrative.

Felt History

When looking at the historic event of the Pueblo Revolt through a decolonial lens, Western constructions of history begin to unravel and a more holistic understanding of an indigenous experience, history, and identity comes into focus. In her article on "Felt Theory," Dian Million, a Tanana Athabascan and professor of American Indian studies at the University of Washington, explores how histories become imbedded in the emotional knowledge passed down generationally. In her analysis of Native literature, Million promotes the idea that narrative provides "history that can be *felt* as well as intellectualized," and in doing so, she deconstructs the Western dichotomy which separates the personal from the political (59). The notion that the personal is inherently political exists as a common theme among many feminist, indigenous, and womanist scholars. For example Audre Lorde urges feminist scholars to reach down into the deep personal place within one's self and "touch that terror and loathing of any difference that lives there" (1984). Thus the notion of a felt history which Million provides, does not arise in a textbook, yet rather through experiences, family stories, and emotions associated with present day life—a life constantly affected by a governing nation and the patriarchal institution. A felt history informs an indigenous identity through acknowledging past traumas associated with a history of colonization. Due to the

personal nature of a felt history, the Western-centric realm of academia refuses to recognize it as a valid historical narrative. In looking at aspects of felt history such as internalized oppression, generational trauma, and indigenous resilience, due attention is given to an indigenous historical experience.

A felt history feeds into understandings of internalized oppression of those whose stories are invalidated by dominant culture. This internalized oppression is evidenced through present day social ills such as alcohol abuse, sexual assault, homicide, and suicide found in Native communities, which indicate that colonialism still exists in the present day. Once internalized, oppression works into the make up of personal identity, allowing colonization to continue a mission of assimilation and devastation through the colonized. These societal traumas transform into internalized oppression due to what Lisa M. Poupart describes as invalidation of "Indian grief and pain" by the "dominant culture" (89). Much of historical trauma faced by Native peoples rarely finds itself acknowledged or spoken about because it emerges through personal experience and emotion. This subjective method of understanding history exists contrary to that of Western society's, which strictly adheres to objective historical analysis often found in written documentation by anthropologists, sociologists, and historians. Thus many historical narratives perpetuate the goals of colonization by only referencing the colonizers tongue through documentation, and allowing hidden injustices to proceed without due recognition.

Felt theory also plays into what Native and indigenous peoples understand as generational trauma among Native groups. Historical counter narratives manifest through methods of telling such as poetry and art, in order to re-examine and re-tell an indigenous

history from an indigenous perspective and also to acknowledge the emotional, physical, and spiritual traumas associated with internalized oppression. Alternative avenues for telling these stories place the agency of storytelling with indigenous peoples. In “Two Poems,” Million describes the concept of generational trauma:

> looking past
> this young woman,
> through the old women
> through thousand year eyes,
> the silent cold
> in me remembering
> faces
> thinking
> how can I distinguish these
> ghosts (45)

By including both the characters of a young woman and an old woman along with “thousand year eyes,” Million alludes to the idea that contemporary Native peoples consider the experiences of their elders and ancestors their own. It also lends into the notion of multiple generations viewing and remembering the past collectively. This supports a component of generational and historical trauma as something that is experienced over long periods of time, as it permeates throughout the generations. Million asks how she might “distinguish these ghosts,” lending more insight into the ambiguous nature of felt history and the historical trauma faced by present day Native and First Nations peoples. Indigenous peoples face the inevitable confrontation with their ancestors traumatic histories of violence and colonial genocide inflicted upon them, in ways both recognized by the general public, and ways less amplified and more disparaged by a racist Westernized society.

Also in her poem, Million lists three “mysteries” that she rests her trust upon—that of the past, the land, and the resilience of Native peoples.

> I believe
> these three mysteries: the past,
> to complete myself. the land,
> to contain the past, the way
> we turn ourselves
> into cars, and legends, and
> sharp looking chameleon to
> blend with the desert (45).

Sense of place and connection to the land play into the Millions concept of felt history; in that the land serves as a place of return. Here, I feel it is important to give attention to this last metaphor presented by Million of “sharp looking chameleons” blending into the landscape because it touches on the concept of survivance. A term coined by Native scholar Gerald Vizenor, survivance is defined as, “a Native way of knowing that signifies a sustaining, living, tribal presence now and in the future” (Madsen xiv). Acknowledging this concept in reference to Million’s poem speaks to the ongoing and active resistance exemplified by Native peoples in historic events such as the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, as well as in the lives, art, activism, and presence of contemporary Native peoples today. This resistance and resilience demonstrated by Native peoples unveils the necessary healing work at play, particularly after they have suffered from the long lasting effects of colonization. Lisa M. Poupart, in her article titled “The Familiar Face of Genocide: Internalized Oppression among American Indians,” describes that in order to enable restoration in Native communities “we must recognize our past and present traumas and grieve our losses on a new path of healing” (98). In acknowledging these felt histories, traumas, and internalized oppressions, more long overdue understanding of the indigenous historical experience ensues. In taking time to hear these integral aspects of the contemporary indigenous experience, we set forth on a path toward the decolonization of history.

Art as Survivance

Contemporary Pueblo artists Rose B. Simpson and Virgil Ortiz utilize their art as a means of redefining Indigenous histories. Their artistic creation intertwines with a process of reclamation involving Pueblo history, identity, and traditional art forms. Similar to Gerald Vizenor's discussion on the aesthetics of survivance, the artworks by Simpson and Ortiz promote an Indigenous narrative, a narrative that rejects "dominance, detractions, obtrusions, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy, and the legacy of victimry" (Vizenor 1). Rather their works act as sources of empowerment by educating about contemporary Pueblo culture. Specifically, the artworks discussed in this thesis provide a visual reinterpretation of a history between the Pueblo peoples and their Spanish colonizers. In digging up and tilling a historically rooted narrative of colonization through their artistic process, Simpson and Ortiz display acts of survivance and gratitude toward their Pueblo history and culture.

Both Rose Simpson and Virgil Ortiz utilize a historical narrative of conflict to inform their work, which stems from a time of Spanish attempts at colonization. Rose, a ceramicist, sculptor, musician, and auto mechanic from Santa Clara Pueblo, allows her work to touch on her personal history of growing up on a reservation near Española, NM (the low-rider capital of the world), and a broader cultural history involving a relationship between her ancestors and the Spanish conquistadores. Rose describes the present state of a relationship between Santa Clara Pueblo and Española in that "there still lies this sort of underlying misunderstanding between the cultures" (Broken Boxes). This tumultuous relationship between the two cultures undoubtedly exists due to the present day

societal ills associated with the abusive relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. However, Rose offers another perspective into this history and relationship of these two cultural groups through her own passion for auto-mechanics and appreciation of Española's low-rider culture. Each of these aspects of Rose's personal aesthetic pathway combined with her respect for traditional Santa Clara pottery, inspired her to create *Maria,* an El Camino painted in the traditional Tewa black-on-black pottery design and named after Maria Martinez of San Ildefonso Pueblo (Simpson). This wholly unique El Camino serves as a vessel of empowerment in her craft and design for both the Santa Clara Pueblo community and the Española lowrider community. Rose describes the feedback she received about *Maria* from both cultural groups at a Cinco de Mayo car shows in Española.

> [People deeply involved in Española car culture] were caught by the fact that this is an El Camino […] it is like the flagship of Hispanic car culture […] And then there's these Pueblo kids who are like, 'Oh you named this car after my grandmother Maria Martinez. Lets go cruise! And so all of a sudden in this little context of this valley we have this point where these cultures are sort of coming together in this one car. (Broken Boxes)

In creating this powerful art object, Rose provided a space for conversation to occur and relationship to be redefined. While touching on a brutal history shared between Española and Santa Clara Pueblo, Rose still maintained and displayed her deep-seated respect and appreciation for both cultures.

Much of Rose's art revolves around that of the figure and concepts of interrelationships, and for this reason *Maria* transforms from a hotrod to a vessel of empowerment for the Santa Clara and Española populations. In one of her more figurative works titled *Alter*, Simpson investigates the question, "…how do we express the feeling or the intuitive space that everything we do and every action and

interaction we have in life is a sacred space?" (Broken Boxes). In this questioning, Rose goes beyond that of the tangible and investigates the essence within interconnection and relationship that lends to a sacred moment. This sacred moment seems to present itself within the context of her work *Maria* as Rose intentionally implements two strong signifiers of each culture into her design, and combines them without confining these signifiers to elements of time and tradition. In doing so, Rose allows for a reinterpretation of the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer. In actively participating in both the cultures of Santa Clara Pueblo pottery design and Española low-rider car culture, Rose took on an understanding of her relationship to each of these cultural pockets within the Española valley and created a sacred space for each to dwell in.

Virgil Ortiz, a prolific artist from Cochiti Pueblo, utilizes his understanding of a specific historic event in taking on the responsibility to share the story of the Pueblo Revolt of 1680. Born into a family of potters in Cochiti Pueblo, Virgil quickly involved himself in traditional Cochiti pottery work. During his childhood Virgil began to innovate beyond the traditional designs initially passed down to him. This experimentation into his own unique style eventually caught the eye of his mother's collector, who invited Virgil and his parents to Albuquerque to view his collection. Virgil describes the moment they arrived to the collection. "All our mouths dropped because all of the pieces I was creating at that time looked exactly like those pieces from the 1880s" (Red Clay Rambler). The pieces he is referring to are figurative works that acted as social commentary on the entrance of Western civilization into the Cochiti Pueblo community during the 1880s (Red Clay Rambler). During this

visit to the collection, Virgil and his parents came to the conclusion that the clay had chosen him. Reflecting on that moment Virgil states, “Once I felt that and seen it I already knew that that’s what my life was gonna be dedicated to, was to revive those pieces [from the 1880s] and educate the world about it” (Red Clay Rambler).

This ambition to educate carried through to Virgil’s exhibit titled *Revolt 1680/2180.* This exhibit revolves around Ortiz’s life goal to tell the story of the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, which he feels is often left untouched and unheard in both the schools and in his own Pueblo community. Ortiz describes the importance that lies behind his need to share the story of the revolt.

> The whole story of the first American Revolution has not been acknowledged, has been swept under the carpet. All the high schools, they don’t teach about it, they don’t tell it in the history books […] So I wanted to make sure to give life back to [the traditional Cochiti Pueblo pottery works] and let everybody know that were still here and thriving and carrying on our ceremonies and really pushing the artwork. (Red Clay Rambler)

In his extremely successful attempts to share the story of the Pueblo Revolt, Virgil reimagines the revolt occurring simultaneously in the years 1680 and 2180. In placing this sci-fi spin onto the narrative, Virgil disrupts Western interpretations of the event by challenging Western notions of linear time. By utilizing a more cyclical view of time within his narrative, Ortiz allows for a Native interpretation and understanding of the historic event to be heard. In addition, at each new showing of his exhibit, Virgil always releases one of his 19 characters created for a feature film movie script he wrote about the revolt. Here the characters signify each of the nineteen Pueblos, but they take on different titles such as the *Aeronauts*, the *Blind Archers*, and *Translator* (Albuquerque Museum). Through providing a visual reinterpretation of this historic event in a fashion somewhat reminiscent of *Star*

Wars (his favorite movie series as a child), Virgil aims to engage with the youth in his Cochiti pueblo community. In doing so, he hopes to inspire and empower his community to reclaim their histories, identities, and cultural values.

While innovating beyond that of the traditional works they were initially steeped in, Virgil Ortiz and Rose Simpson maintain a strong sense of gratitude for their traditional cultural and artistic roots. Rose explains an element of frustration she feels for the art market surrounding traditional Native art when she says, " The whole context is tragic, its heartbreaking that this is what is happening and that what we have to do to maintain our culture is turn around and sell it back to the colonizers" (Broken Boxes). However, in reflecting on the heartbreaking manipulation that occurred due to the Western commoditization of Native Art, Rose still believes in utilizing those feelings of pain and grief to inspire her to innovate and transform her reality. "I want it to feel sustainable for my heart, and for my mind, and for my soul, and for my body" (Broken Boxes).

Virgil also takes on an understanding of the injustices faced by his people both in the past and presently. However, in his recognition of affliction against his culture by the colonizer, Virgil takes a greater understanding of his relationship to the matter. "I do know that I am just a conduit for everything […] keeping the story alive and the tradition alive is just me keeping my head open to what's out there and my doors are always open" (Red Clay Rambler). Virgil takes on the responsibility to not only teach the traditional Cochiti pottery in the same fashion he was taught, but then also to push others to innovate and attempt to find their own style within the medium in order to keep the tradition and the practices alive and allow for

transformation.

In innovating and personalizing their styles, Rose and Virgil aim to keep these artistic traditions alive in their communities while educating and providing artworks that empower their Pueblos. Encompassing all the artistic works of Ortiz and Simpson exists an underlying sense of responsibility taken on by the artists. Gerald Vizenor involves this notion of responsibility with notions of survivance when he says, “Original, communal responsibility, […] animates the practice and consciousness of survivance, a sense of presence, a responsible presence of natural reason and resistance to absence and victimry” (Vizenor 19). The aesthetics of survivance help to describe the contributions to cultural endurance made by artists such as Rose Simpson and Virgil Ortiz. In the context of Contemporary Pueblo culture, art serves as the language of resistance towards perpetuators of dominance, a language that feeds into a narrative of survivance.

Conclusion: Moving Forward

By steeping myself in notions of survivance and involving myself with Cajete's creative process, I encountered influential Native artists and scholars that helped to shape my exploration into acts of resistance. This thesis illuminates a small sample of the myriad manifestations of resistance that exist within a pan-Indigenous community of persistent creators. Through my investigations on concepts of relationship, creativity, scientific investigation, survivance, and art, I came to the conclusion that in order to achieve a more holistic understanding of aspects of Indigenous art, culture, and history, one must challenge their tendencies to locate meaning through a dominant Euro-centric lens.

Cajete's concept of creative participation informed a research methodology of Native science that allows for a decolonization of the Western mind.

> Concerned with the processes and energies within the universe, [Native science] continually deals in systems of relationships and their application to the life of the community Science cannot divide its application into departments; it is integrated into the whole of life and being and provides a basic schema and basis for action. (Cajete 66).

This holistic approach helped me cultivate a greater understanding of the discursive practices that informed my Western notions of history, art, and culture. In looking to indigenous scholars to challenge the dominant narratives surrounding these concepts, new ways of accessing history and narrative emerged. Art revealed itself as a tool for education, healing, and reclamation for Indigenous artists and their communities.

Santa Clara Pueblo scholar Gregory Cajete and Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor provided insight that fed into the establishment of my decolonized framework and methodology, which I utilized in the investigation of Indigenous culture and ways of

knowing. Dian Million a Tanana Athabascan scholar and Patrisia Gonzales a descendent of Mexican and American tribal ancestry helped to shape and craft my understanding of a decolonized approach toward the study of history specifically. I looked to artists such as Rose Simpson, Virgil Ortiz, and curator Michelle McGeough in search of a more honest understanding of contemporary and traditional Native American art forms. In looking at and listening to these influential Indigenous artists and scholars, I began to challenge my Western perspective. Taking steps such as these toward research and investigation allowed me to tap into greater meaning outside of my academic tradition.

Art provides a language that speaks to and redefines acts of resistance and acts of survivance. The creative process allows for redefinition to occur so that hi*stories* may transform rather than become stagnant. Pueblo contemporary artists Rose B Simpson and Virgil Ortiz address their personal and tribal histories that occurred within the landscape of the Southwest. In doing so, these artists successfully provide their audience an opportunity to challenge their initial perceptions and cultural lens. Each creative endeavor, final work of art, and artistic reflection, nurtures a narrative of survivance.

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