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Re-Framing Canadian Art History

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"I DO NOT KNOW WHAT IS ESSENTIAL and what is accessory in a work. And above all I do not know what this thing is, that is neither essential nor accessory, neither proper nor improper, and that Kant calls *parergon*, for example the frame".[1] In order to unravel Kant's search for the "proper object of the pure judgment of taste", Jacques Derrida exposes a point of uncertainty in the philosopher's *Critique of the Faculty of Judgment* (1790). When Kant uses the term *parergon*, or "by-work", he refers to those adjuncts (such as the frames around paintings, colonnades of buildings or drapery on statues) that separate what properly belongs to a work from what remains outside of it. Derrida shows, however, that these putative margins function as more than ornamental additions. On the contrary, because they differentiate between the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of a work, these borders not only produce a bounded object of study (namely the work of art), but they are also fundamental to making visible the very concept of "art" and thus every discussion of "art". Derrida capitalizes upon the intermediary status of the *parergon* to break down the binary distinctions between inside and outside, intrinsic and extrinsic, essence and ornament. By destabilizing the classificatory order devised by Kant, Derrida shakes the very foundations of the Western aesthetic tradition. At the same time, when he demonstrates that frames are indispensable in order for the "main subject" of art discourse to appear, Derrida turns our attention toward the constitution, and possible reconstitution, of those margins.

This unsettling conceptual apparatus has been hugely influential — not just in art history, but especially there. Art historians have been concerned for quite some time (as the "new" art history is hardly "new" anymore), not so much with the physical frames that tell us where works of art supposedly begin and end, but rather with the less tangible institutional frames, such as art-historical narratives, the canon of "great" art works and the policies of museums and art galleries. These structures do not simply enhance art works; they both produce and reinforce the very categories of art and non-art. Museums are currently garnering increased attention from historians of visual culture because these spaces construct, rather than merely preserve, the shifting distinctions between "high" and "low" art, "elite" and "popular" culture, educated and uneducated viewer, citizen and foreigner, self and other.[2] The classification, ordering

1 Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago and London, 1987), p. 63.

2 See, for example, Sharon Macdonald and Roger Silverstone, "Rewriting the Museums' Fictions: Taxonomies, Stories and Readers", *Cultural Studies,* 4, 2 (1990), pp. 176-91, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London and New York, 1992), Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London, 1995), Mieke Bal, *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (New York, 1996), Stephen Bann, "Art History and Museums", in Mark A. Cheetham, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey, eds., *The Subjects of Art History: Historical Objects in Contemporary Perspective* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 230-49 and Alan Wallach, *Exhibiting Contradiction: Essays on the Art Museum in the United States* (Boston, 1998).

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and framing of objects in museums (buttressed, of course, by linear narratives and the veneration of "masterpieces") contributes to what Donald Preziosi has called the "factualization" of knowledge.[3] In order to challenge the neutrality of this knowledge production, many art historians, often in overtly political ways, have turned their attention toward what has both traditionally rested on the margins of art-historical discourse and has also been excluded from museums (or at least forgotten in their dusty storage rooms). The artistic creations of women and Native peoples, for example, have frequently been considered more craft than art, more popular than fine, more particular than universal. It has thus been important to insist upon the relevance of these works, not simply to expand the canon, but also to show that the very viability of that canon is dependent upon a series of exclusions.[4] Numerous art historians have, in other words, been looking away from the supposed centre of the art world to its boundaries, and indeed even to the limits of those boundaries — to the framing of the frames. Of course, as Derrida has indicated, attending to these edges is hardly a self-indulgent emphasis on that which merely supplements the "main story". These margins in fact define the centre and can also disrupt or even dislodge it.

The dominant account of the history of art in Canada has long featured the Group of Seven, founded around 1920 by intrepid white male painters from England, Ontario and Québec who deserve our gratitude (or so the story goes) for finally inventing a purely "Canadian" form of visual expression. Although this narrative of rugged innovation has retained its status as a national myth, it has also been substantially reshaped, especially during the past ten years or so.[5] In their documentary film, *By Woman's Hand* (1994), Pepita Ferrari and Erna Buffie focus on three female painters, Prudence Heward, Anne Savage and Sarah Robertson, who were active members of the Beaver Hall Hill Group, an organization of some 19 artists formed in Montréal in 1920.[6] The film shows that these women were not merely imitators of the Group of

3 Donald Preziosi, "Collecting/Museums", in Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, eds., *Critical Terms for Art History* (Chicago and London, 1996), pp. 281-91.

4 Although there are now numerous studies of women artists from all periods and nations, Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (New York, 1981) was an early, groundbreaking work. See also Nanette Salomon, "The Art Historical Canon: Sins of Omission", in Joan E. Hartman and Ellen Messer-Davidow, eds., *(En)Gendering Knowledge* (Knoxville, 1991), pp. 222-36 and, for Canadian content, Maria Tippett, *By a Lady: Celebrating Three Centuries of Art by Canadian Women* (Harmondsworth, 1992). For discussions of Native art, see Diana Nemiroff, "Modernism, Nationalism and Beyond: A Critical History of Exhibitions of First Nations Art", in Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne, eds., *Thinking About Exhibitions* (London and New York, 1996), pp. 411-36, Charlotte Townsend-Gault, "Translation or Perversion? Showing First Nations Art in Canada", *Cultural Studies,* 9, 1 (1995), pp. 91-105 and Moira McLoughlin, *Museums and the Representation of Native Canadians: Negotiating the Borders of Culture* (New York, 1999). See also Janet Catherine Berlo, "Portraits of Dispossession in Plains Indian and Inuit Graphic Arts", *Art Journal,* 49, 2 (Summer 1990), pp.133-41, Diana Nemiroff, Robert Houle and Charlotte Townsend-Gault, eds., *Land, Spirit, Power: First Nations Art at the National Gallery of Canada* (Ottawa, 1992) and the Canadian Museum of Civilization, *In the Shadow of the Sun: Perspectives on Contemporary Native Art* (Hull, 1993). Discussions of gay and lesbian sexuality (if not so much gay male artists themselves) have also been excluded from the canon. See Whitney Davis, ed., *Gay and Lesbian Studies in Art History* (New York and London, 1994) and James M. Saslow, *Pictures and Passions: A History of Homosexuality in the Visual Arts* (New York, 1999).

5 For a recent publication, see Charles C. Hill, *The Group of Seven: Art for a Nation* (Ottawa, 1995).

6 Pepita Ferrari and Erna Buffie, *By Woman's Hand* (National Film Board of Canada, 1994).

Seven (as has sometimes been suggested), but produced distinctive canvases rooted in their own particular historical and social circumstances. In the end, however, the more "domestic" paintings of Heward, Savage and Robertson, which feature images of women and children, still lifes and panoramas of cultivated land, were neglected in favour of a more virile vision of the harsh Canadian wilderness. Heeding the work of these remarkable women reveals just how traditionally "masculine" have been beliefs about the Group of Seven and, by extension, Canadian national identity.

In her discussion of the institutional construction of the Group of Seven, Joyce Zemans analyzes the National Gallery of Canada's programme, begun in the 1920s, of disseminating reproductions of its own works in order to promote both "correct taste" and a sense of national unity.[7] This policy was so successful that by the 1940s hundreds of thousands of images of Canadian art, in particular landscapes by various members of the Group of Seven and its most famous associate, Tom Thomson, found their way into classrooms, libraries and homes throughout Canada and abroad. Largely responsible for producing the notion of what was "Canadian" about Canadian art, the sheer availability of these reproductions also ensured the canonization of the Group of Seven in illustrated textbooks. This conception of Canadian art remains ensconced, according to Anne Whitelaw, in the current installations of the National Gallery, which position the Group of Seven as one of the two culminating moments in the history of Canadian painting (the other celebrates the Painters Eleven and the Automatistes).[8] Painting from Ontario and Québec is thus identified with that which is both uniquely Canadian and part of a modernist tradition that develops towards abstraction. Although works by Emily Carr are included for good measure, those emanating from the East Coast are relegated to the side galleries, as "interesting", even quaint, deviations from the central narrative of progress.

One long-term result of the institutionalized worship of the Group of Seven is that the artistic production of the Atlantic region is just beginning to get its due (and arguably has not yet received it). This situation is being rectified by an increasing number of publications about the work of Atlantic artists such as Mary Pratt, Maud Lewis and John Greer.[9] Also key to the increasing awareness of the growing and diverse creative potential of the Atlantic region is *Arts Atlantic*, a Charlottetown based arts periodical founded in 1977. In its pages one can read about works of all artistic mediums that range in style from realist to abstract, are from areas both anglophone and Acadian, and which, in short, belie any simplistic attempt to classify the whole of Atlantic visual culture. The availability of exhibition venues has, of course, likewise been of vital importance to this re-evaluation of the Atlantic cultural heritage. In fact, Whitelaw suggests that the Marion McCain Gallery of Atlantic Art, a large exhibition space devoted exclusively to Atlantic artists in the Beaverbrook Art Gallery in Fredericton, works to contest the dominant account of Canadian art on offer in Ottawa.[10]

7 Joyce Zemans, "Establishing the Canon", *Journal of Canadian Art History,* 16, 2 (1995), pp. 6-35.
8 Anne Whitelaw, "Museums and the Writing of Canadian Art History", *Association for Canadian Studies Bulletin,* 18 (Summer/Fall 1996), pp. 8-9.
9 See, for example, Tom Smart, *The Art of Mary Pratt: The Substance of Light* (Fredericton, 1995), Lance Woolaver, *The Illuminated Life of Maud Lewis* (Halifax, 1997) and Vanessa Paschakarnis, *John Greer: Black Seeds* (North York, 1997).
10 Whitelaw, "Museums and the Writing of Canadian Art History", p. 9.

Perhaps the most trenchant critique of the central narrative of Canadian art comes, however, from the ongoing reconsideration of First Nations visual culture. An interest in Native culture has always been conspicuous in Canadian art, most obviously in the work of Cornelius Krieghoff, Paul Kane and William G.R. Hind. These images placed Native peoples within a decidedly European framework and often amounted to sentimental reconstructions of a culture already considered "dead".[11] In contrast, more recent reflections upon Native art (both in print and in museums) have begun to recognize Native rights to self-representation and thus also to support a more complex vision of Native culture as both diverse and, without a doubt, still living. To this end, contemporary Native artists are receiving increasing attention, both in the Atlantic region and beyond.[12] For example, the sculptures of Ned A. Bear (Maliseet/Plains Cree), and Charles Doucette (Mi'kmaq) were included in the 1997 Marion McCain Atlantic Art Exhibition, *Theatrum Mundi*, which showed in Fredericton, Halifax and Washington, D.C. During the same year, the Confederation Centre Art Gallery and Museum in Charlottetown mounted a successful exhibition, *Captain Vancouver, 1939 by Charles Comfort: Four Native Perspectives*. Four well-known Native artists (David Neel, Edward Poitras, Joane Cardinal-Schubert and Teresa Marshall) responded to a mural that had hung in the provincial library of the Confederation Centre of the Arts since 1973. Prince Edward Island's Mi'kmaq community had certainly objected to this image of Captain Vancouver, shown as a hero with obedient Native figures kneeling before him. When Comfort's painting was reinstalled in the Art Gallery and Museum, it was simultaneously recontextualized in terms of both the artist's own intentions and the different Native responses to it. The meaning of Captain Vancouver, this exhibition demonstrated, was neither uncontested nor stable.

The remainder of this discussion considers three publications that participate in the ongoing re-framing of Canadian art history, two of them with specific reference to First Nations visual culture. Recent books by Ruth B. Phillips, Judith Ostrowitz and Victoria Dickenson all feature, albeit in quite different ways, subjects not traditionally regarded as "art", including souvenirs, Native dance performances as well as images of birds and plants usually relegated to the realm of natural history. Each author thus pushes up against the standard categories of the Western aesthetic tradition, particularly those relating to authenticity and artistic quality. At the same time, the studies remain committed to the material status of the objects in question. Each scholar examines the historical circulation of objects (or performances) between cultures, the influences of the marketplace upon their classification and the motivations of collectors (or spectators).

It should not be surprising that these authors also pay particular attention to the institutional framing of the objects they study, since each of them either is or has been a museum curator. Ruth Phillips is director of the Museum of Anthropology, as well as

11 See, for example, Gillian Poulter, "Representation as Colonial Rhetoric: The Image of the Native and 'the Habitant' in the Formation of Colonial Identities in Early Nineteenth-Century Lower Canada", *Journal of Canadian Art History,* 16, 1 (1994), pp. 10-29.

12 See, for example, Gerald McMaster, *Edward Poitras: Canada XLVI Biennale di Venezia* (Hull, 1995), W. Jackson Rushing III, ed., *Native American Art in the Twentieth Century* (London and New York, 1999) and Allan J. Ryan, *The Trickster Shift: Humour and Irony in Contemporary Native Art* (Vancouver/Toronto and Seattle, 1999).

professor of Fine Arts and Anthropology, at the University of British Columbia; Victoria Dickenson directs the McCord Museum in Montréal; and Judith Ostrowitz is a former assistant curator at the Brooklyn Museum of Art. These authors are consequently able to bridge the reputed distance between museum workers and art historians, who are sometimes inattentive to the practical limitations within which museum staff must function. Even as these books contribute to the flourishing field of critical museum studies, they also intersect with a number of disciplines, including anthropology, sociology and history, which should attract readers well beyond the field of art history.

Ruth Phillips has long been committed to the re-evaluation of creative works and cultural practices that have traditionally fallen outside the purview of Western art history. She has published a book on the Mende of Sierra Leone, West Africa, in addition to her numerous articles on Native North American art, especially that of the Great Lakes region. In a recent book, *Native North American Art*, Phillips and her co-author Janet Berlo provide a well-illustrated and sophisticated survey of Native art that will no doubt find its way into college and university classrooms.[13] Although the book under review here, *Trading Identities: The Souvenir in Native North American Art from the Northeast, 1700-1900* (Seattle, University of Washington Press and Montréal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998), is clearly informed by Phillips's thorough aesthetic and historical understanding of a range of Native art practices, its seven chapters are not strictly organized according to stylistic, chronological or geographical divisions. Instead, this more thematic study investigates the status and meaning of those Native souvenirs, often labeled "tourist art", that were made and sold in Northeastern North America during the 18th and 19th centuries. Images of these portable objects of trade, including miniature canoes, beaded pin cushions, moosehair-embroidered bags and ash splint wall pockets, adorn almost every page of the book. The author explains that these intricate souvenirs were produced, not only by various Native peoples, including the Iroquois, Huron-Wendat, Ojibwa, Tuscarora, Mi'kmaq, Cree and Maliseet, but also by Ursuline nuns and women of European descent. Although these have been typically considered both inauthentic and impure because of their hybrid origins and close links with the popular demands of the market, Phillips contends that during a dark period in Native history, souvenir trade wares were "in many ways . . . the most authentic representations of the courageous, innovative, and creative adaptation" that Aboriginal peoples made (p. 69).

Phillips argues that Native souvenir products are legitimate objects of study not only expressly because of their hybridity, but also because they were held in high esteem by both their (mostly) Native producers and (mostly) non-Native collectors. In fact, Phillips continues, these objects can be "read" for traces of those Native voices so often silenced in official histories. By employing post-colonial interpretive strategies, Phillips contextualizes the souvenir trade within the imperial structures that organized the relations between empowered and relatively disempowered groups.[14]

13 Ruth B. Phillips, *Representing Woman: Sande Society Masks of the Mende* (Los Angeles, 1995) and Janet C. Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips, *Native North American Art* (Oxford and New York, 1998).

14 Although some scholars define post-colonialism as a distinct historical period, others identify it with a specific set of discursive practices. In any case, post-colonial theory consists of a heterogeneous set of texts, and a good introduction to them is Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London and New York, 1995).

The author demonstrates that inscriptions of both colonial power and Native resistance to it are visible on souvenir goods. On the one hand, Phillips explains, the marketability of souvenirs was based on their success in conveying recognizable concepts of difference. Aboriginal makers had to "reimagine themselves in terms of the conventions of Indianness current among the consumer group, an exercise that profoundly destabilized indigenous concepts of identity" (p. 9). On the other hand, Native peoples found ways to speak of themselves through these dominant categories. One of the most striking (and potentially disturbing) examples that Phillips offers of this phenomenon is the representation of "the drinker" regularly found on souvenirs. While the common image of a Native man or woman raising a bottle to the lips was in keeping with Victorian notions of the degeneracy of Natives, it could also be more positively related, by Natives, to the binge consumption at feast celebrations (pp. 140-1).

In a chapter called "The Collecting and Display of Souvenir Arts: Authenticity and the 'Strictly Commercial'", Phillips contends that souvenir trade goods were ignored by Western historians, art historians and museum curators precisely because they displayed the ability of Native peoples to adapt without assimilating. These objects were excluded from museums in favour of "authentic" pre-contact artefacts in order to preserve a nostalgic vision of the inevitable decline of the "noble savage" in the face of modernity. Thus, even as the modern anthropological museum enshrined the "pre-modern" Native either to deny or to compensate for colonial domination, it also provided part of the justification for taking Native lands and resources. While anthropological museums have long been critiqued for the ways in which they selected and shaped knowledge about the Native "other",[15] Phillips's argument that these institutions also "acted as arenas for complex negotiations of social constructions"(p. 69) explains how a romantic reverence for Natives could be (and often still is) combined with an apparent acceptance of their dispossession. Phillips thus complicates Tony Bennett's description of the 19th-century museum as an instrument of surveillance designed to reform the habits and morals of the subordinate classes,[16] and she also suggests why anthropological museums have remained contested sites of representation. The political goals of such museums now, however, often include pointing to, and putting into question, stereotypical images of Natives (as seen in the recent exhibition at the Confederation Centre Art Gallery and Museum, and also increasingly at the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Hull).[17]

Even as souvenir goods were devalued by ethnologists and rare art collectors

15 There are numerous contemporary critiques of anthropology and anthropological museums. See, for example, Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York, 1983), James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge, MA, 1988), Annie E. Coombes, "Museums and the Formation of National and Cultural Identities", *Oxford Art Journal,* 11, 2 (1988), pp. 57-68, Michael Ames, *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums* (Vancouver, 1991) and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Objects of Ethnography", in Ivan Karp and Stephen D. Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington, DC, 1991), pp. 386-443.

16 Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (New York, 1995).

17 An exhibition called *Reservation* X held at the Canadian Museum of Civilization in 1998, for example, featured the work of seven contemporary Native North American artists, namely Nora Naranjo-Morse, Mateo Romero, Maxx Stevens, Marianne Nicolson, Jolene Rickard, Mary Longman and Shelley Niro. For statements about the mandate of the Canadian Museum of Civilization see

during the 18th and 19th centuries, they were nevertheless respected and admired by private individuals. Phillips contends that "average" collectors of souvenirs, among whom women predominated, were not unlike those experts who collected pre-contact war clubs and displayed them as both trophies of imperial possession and signs of a brush with the exotic. Female consumers shopping at tourist locations such as Niagara Falls tended to favour pillows and bags adorned with floral motifs and even imitated them in their own handiwork (another indication of the cultural exchange between Native peoples and Euro-North Americans). When Victorian women arranged decorated souvenir items in their own homes, they performed a properly domestic and "feminine" role, especially since flowers were linked with notions of "true womanhood". Phillips shows that Victorian conceptions of "femininity", Indians and flowers converged, especially in descriptions of women and Aboriginal peoples as naturally innocent and frail (pp. 188-9). The official denigration of souvenir wares must, the author insists, also be understood in terms of the gendered aesthetic hierarchies that traditionally reduced women's "feminine" needlework to the level of thoughtless manual labour.[18]

By discussing the material sites of both the trade and display of souvenirs, Phillips contributes to the important and growing studies of tourism and its history in North America.[19] Karen Dubinsky, in her book *The Second Greatest Disappointment: Honeymooning and Tourism at Niagara Falls,* has also recently considered the spectacle of race at Niagara Falls.[20] Phillips, however, goes much further by undertaking close visual readings of the material culture itself and by considering how souvenirs were understood and displayed, not only by those who purchased them, but also by those who produced them. Native peoples, Phillips contends, did not enthusiastically adopt "European" floral motifs during the tourist boom of the 19th century merely to oblige Western tastes. On the contrary, by decorating their objects and clothing with flowers, Native peoples could both demonstrate their attainment of a high level of civility and convey a non-threatening, "feminine" identity. At the same time, since flowers occupied an important place in Aboriginal cosmologies, Natives

George F. MacDonald, "Change and Challenge: Museums in the Information Society", in Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer and Stephen D. Lavine, eds., *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture* (Washington, DC, 1992), pp. 158-81 and George F. MacDonald and Stephen Alsford, *A Museum for the Global Village: The Canadian Museum of Civilization* (Hull, 1989). There are numerous publications on the various stereotypes of Natives. See Robert F. Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to Present* (New York, 1978) and Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (Vancouver, 1992).

18 For the re-evaluation of women's handiwork and decoration see Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London, 1984) and Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York, 1987). For an introduction to the Canadian context see Joyce Wieland, *True Patriot Love. Véritable amour patriotique* (Ottawa, 1971) and Marie Flemming, *Joyce Wieland* (Toronto, 1987).

19 The touchstone for studies of tourism is still Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York, 1976). See also John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London, 1990) and Jonathan Culler, "The Semiotics of Tourism", in *Framing the Sign: Criticism and its Institutions* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 153-67.

20 Karen Dubinsky, *The Second Greatest Disappointment: Honeymooning and Tourism at Niagara Falls* (Toronto, 1999).

simultaneously incorporated traditional beliefs into their modern lives (pp. 193-5).

In her final chapter, "Changing Discourses: The Critique of the Touristic in Contemporary Art Practice", Phillips discusses the ways in which contemporary Aboriginal artists, such as Norval Morrisseau, Rebecca Belmore, Rebecca Baird, Rick Hill, Jolene Rickard and Shelley Niro, continue both to reconfigure and to resist the stereotype of the Native as touristic producer. Phillips strategically concludes her study with Native voices that speak for themselves because so many of the historical sources that she consulted instead spoke for and about them. She simultaneously avoids appearing as a White woman who would herself claim to speak for Natives, even as this recognition of the continuation of a Native tradition of resistance positions her politically on the side of Natives.[21] By considering Native art of the late 20th century, Phillips in effect refuses to terminate her research with the year 1900. Such an artificial closing date would risk solidifying Native identity in a safely distant past, a standard Western contrivance that the author has already taken some pains to critique.

This brief summary has not even begun to describe the original and elegant interpretations that this book offers. *Trading Identities* constitutes a major contribution to the fields of art history, museum studies, cultural studies, history, anthropology and Native studies. It combines careful archival research, extensive field work (which Phillips undertook with a collaborator, Trudy Nicks) and historically rigorous arguments with close visual analyses of little-studied and generally misunderstood material objects. At the same time, a sophisticated knowledge of contemporary critical theory has been digested into the very fibre of the project. In short, like the finely crafted and complex souvenir arts that Phillips so clearly admires, her book is itself worthy of emulation.

Another recent re-evaluation of Native art, Judith Ostrowitz, *Privileging the Past: Reconstructing History in Northwest Coast Art* (Seattle, University of Washington Press and Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1999), likewise declines to position Native visual culture exclusively within Western aesthetic categories. Instead of focusing on one overlooked type of production, Ostrowitz considers a wide range of Northwest Coast art, including architecture, totem poles, masks, dances and other rituals of display. These varieties of Native art have hardly been ignored; they are, in fact, arguably among the most valued forms of artistic expression in Canada. Nevertheless, Ostrowitz points out, the processes and histories of their construction continue to be generally misinterpreted and undervalued. The material creations of the Haida, Kwakwa̲ka̲'wakw (Kwakiutl), Tlingit, Coast Salish, Tsimshian, Nuu-chah-nulth, Nuxalk (Bella Coola) and other Northwest Coast Native peoples, Ostrowitz explains, tend to replicate earlier works. The sea monster mask made by Kevin Cranmer (Kwakwa̲ka̲'wakw) in 1992, for example, is related to a mask carved a few years earlier by Tony Hunt, Jr., which is in turn based on a very old sea monster mask now in the collections of the Royal British Columbia Museum in Victoria (pp. 114-15). This production of an apparent series of "copies" has been excluded from Western modernist narratives that celebrate those "inventive" individuals who

21 For an excellent discussion of the politics of speaking for and about others see Linda Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others", *Cultural Critique* (Winter 1991-92), pp. 5-32.

managed to break free from the past. Northwest Coast Native art instead accentuates the continuation of tradition, leading it to be associated more with learned manual skills than with authentic, truly innovative, and hence important, modern art.

Ostrowitz finds it ironic that Northwest Coast Native art has even been eliminated from accounts of "post-modern" art. Post-modernism (which in art history typically refers to a particular kind of aesthetic practice and does not allude to all critical theory since 1968) revels in modes of production that undermine modernist celebrations of originality and innovation. For example, artist Sherrie Levine reshot and then signed her own name to a black and white photograph by Edward Weston, a canonized American photographer. Her famed *Photograph after Edward Weston* (1980) is considered a highly successful, self-reflexive deconstruction of the persona of the modern artist.[22] Why then, Ostrowitz wants to know, do the works of Northwest Coast Native artists continue to be so readily denounced as copies and fakes?

With the publication of *Privileging the Past,* Ostrowitz aims to recuperate the copy, albeit on Native not Western terms. She agrees with Edward Bruner that even critiques of simulation and reproduction by Jean Baudrillard, Walter Benjamin and Umberto Eco have been formulated within the standard binary opposition of original and copy and thus ultimately betray a nostalgic longing for the original.[23] Northwest Coast Native art, in contrast, is not as interested in preserving the "original" object (and such a notion of the original is not, Ostrowitz goes on to show, a useful way of thinking about these objects, because even the "originals" preserved in museums are no doubt part of a more distant series). Native peoples of the Northwest Coast have instead been more concerned with both the continual rearticulation of traditional images for contemporary ends and the "legitimately inherited and exclusive right to display some version of an old image, which must still be publicly validated on the Northwest Coast", especially in potlatch ceremonies (p. 116).

Ostrowitz's book offers a social history of the replication of Northwest Coast Native art. In a series of case studies, she considers how various material reproductions of Native cultural traditions have been influenced, not only by the political issues facing Natives, but also by the expectations of Western institutions and the marketplace. The first chapter focuses on an important Tlingit site, the Chief Shakes Community House in Wrangell, Alaska. Ostrowitz is concerned to show that this widely recognized architectural establishment is in fact the product of a long history of replication and reconstruction. In the 1830s, Chief Shakes IV relocated to the site in order to display his crest art and thus enhance his reputation, a matter of increasing importance given the proximity of a Russian fort. Even as his ancestors

22 See, for example, Craig Owens, "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism", in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Seattle, 1983), pp. 57-82. Ostrowitz's discussion seems especially pertinent in light of the rather sensationalist recent discussion about whether or not famed Haida sculptor Bill Reid was, at least at the end of his career, a "fraud". See Jane O'Hara, "Trade Secrets", *Maclean's* (18 October 1999), pp. 20-30.

23 Edward M. Bruner, "Abraham Lincoln as Authentic Reproduction: A Critique of Postmodernism", *American Anthropologist,* 96 (June 1994), pp. 397-415; Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations,* trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman (New York, 1983), Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in Hannah Arendt, ed., *Illuminations* (New York, 1968), pp. 217-51 and Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyper Reality: Essays,* trans. William Weaver (San Diego, 1986).

continued to display the imagery associated with the Shakes clan, such as the Brown Bear crest, the house was ultimately abandoned and fell into disrepair. In the 1930s, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), a New Deal employment programme, put both Natives and Whites to work rebuilding the Shakes house. The result in 1940 was, Ostrowitz argues, "actually a distillation of the thoughts of the men who participated in the CCC project, representing their notions of the traditional or 'classic' Tlingit house" (p. 34). These men removed the "original" clapboard siding and windows, and instead created what they considered a more authentic facade. The image of a Brown Bear, in the past located on an interior screen, was slightly altered and applied to the exterior of the house.

Yet another restoration of the Chief Shakes Community House was undertaken in 1984 by the Wrangell Cultural Heritage Committee. This time the aim was to preserve the four interior house posts. An expert carver was hired to duplicate the old Shark posts (which featured shark fins), although without modifying them in any way. This veneration of the house posts, which had come to be considered masterpieces of Tlingit carving, clearly indicates that understandings of the nature of Tlingit visual culture had changed. Ostrowitz describes this series of transformations precisely to reveal how notions of accuracy, along with the identity of the Tlingit and the expectations of an increasingly touristic audience, were altered over time. She neither evaluates the restorations, nor claims that the important Native site is somehow less than authentic. In the end, the author also declines to present a conclusion about the Chief Shakes House. The site will, she is certain, continue to be reconceived.

Ostrowitz examines another reconstruction of Native architecture, this time within an official museum setting, in chapter two, "The Map and the Territory in the Grand Hall at the Canadian Museum of Civilization". Six traditional Northwest Coast houses (representing the Coast Salish, the West Coast people or Nuu-chah-nulth, the Central Coast people or Kwakwaka'wakw, the Nuxalk, the Haida, and the Tsimshian) were manufactured in the expansive Grand Hall of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, primarily in order to contextualize the Museum's impressive collection of late 18th- and 19th-century totem poles. Ostrowitz is eager to point out that although museum officials hired experts and employed Native guides to ensure accuracy in the building materials, proportions, style and colours of the three-dimensional model houses, various distortions were nevertheless produced. Not only were visually engaging houses selected in lieu of truly typical models, but the installation in the Grand Hall displays evidence of ethnic combinations and cultural exchanges that would never occur on the Northwest Coast itself. The Nuxalk house, for example, unites the crests of numerous families to represent a discrete but overwhelmingly uniform Nuxalk identity (pp. 68-9). The Natives have agreed to this pastiche as well as other distortions, Ostrowitz argues, both to publicize their prestigious history and because projecting a more homogeneous identity has become a political necessity (p. 82).

These selective representations and cultural combinations "may not be acceptable 'at home,' on the reserves, but", Ostrowitz fears, "if they continue to appear as a matter of course in the public domain, they may come to be considered standard by both native and non-native audiences" (p. 77). Even as Ostrowitz recognizes that no museum display can be completely accurate, she laments the loss of authentic cultural representation (indeed far more than the Natives themselves seem to). She is especially worried that non-Native visitors to the Canadian Museum of Civilization

will be unaware that changes have been incorporated into the reconstructed Native village: "Most important, there is no indication in the hall itself, for the information of the public, that such liberties have been taken. The museum audience believes that it is engaged with a very close approximation of past practice" (pp. 62-3). With this claim, Ostrowitz depicts the public as rather vulnerable and naive. In any case, the curators of the Canadian Museum of Civilization have taken pains to disrupt the "truth value" of the Great Hall. The interiors of the houses, for example, present a melange of past and present Native culture, and one house even includes a number of mirrors which foreground the presence of visitors, making it impossible for them to remain detached from the objects on display. These deliberately denaturalizing strategies are likely more effective than the didactic panels for which Ostrowitz seems to call. The author even admits that "the credibility of this historical scenario is most abruptly ruptured . . . once the replicated houses are entered" (p. 55), but continues to worry that the average visitor will miss the more subtle alterations of Native identity. It is odd that at this point, after critiquing Baudrillard, Benjamin and Eco, Ostrowitz herself appears to revert to a belief in an original and "untainted" representation of Northwest Coast Natives. This apparent contradiction serves, however, to indicate just how indispensable traditional Western notions of authenticity remain to both the continued practice of art history and the identity of the museum. At the same time, declamations of how the museum inevitably fails to deliver an authentic experience are as old as the modern museum itself, beginning with Quatremère de Quincy's critique of the Louvre Museum at the beginning of the 19th century and recurring until the present day.[24]

Like Phillips, Ostrowitz ends her book with a discussion of the contemporary practices of Native artists. She notes that a 19th-century rattle from the Clayoquot tribe of the Nuu-chah-nulth people, now featured in both the American Museum of Natural History and a number of art publications, has been reproduced by various sculptors, including Beau Dick (Kwakwaka'wakw). His rattle, made in 1991, was strategically based on this recognized model and may therefore be considered more "authentic" and have an increased market value (pp. 105-7). Ostrowitz thus indicates, as did Phillips, that Natives have managed to adapt to "modern" demands without forfeiting their customs. While less ambitious than Phillips in her approach, Ostrowitz's emphasis on how Natives of the Northwest Coast continually reconstruct history in their visual culture is an important contribution to the fields of art history, anthropology and Native studies.

The final book to be considered here, *Drawn from Life: Science and Art in the Portrayal of the New World* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1998) by Victoria Dickenson, does not concern Native art. Instead, it surveys those images of North American plants, animals and terrain produced by Europeans for a largely European audience from the 16th to the 19th centuries. Dickenson's focus on the tradition of natural history illustration in the northern half of the "New World" is unusual because, as the author points out, even during the 16th century "the cold north did not touch the European imagination in the same manner as the warm and exotic south" (p. 21). This interest in the "difference" of the southern hemisphere has continued, with

24 Didier Maleuvre, *Museum Memories: History, Technology, Art* (Stanford, CA, 1999), esp. pp. 7-112.

modern studies of the colonial encounters in the Indies and South America outnumbering scholarly examinations of European representations of the north.[25] The reproduction in *Drawn from Life* of some 57 early images of "Canada", including maps, prints and watercolours, is therefore very welcome.

Dickenson's particular focus on prints is additionally valuable because these inscriptions are often overlooked as historical documents when they were, in fact, a primary means of exchanging information. Her object-based approach comes partly from the methodology of material history, but it can also be related to what Steven Conn, in his study of 18th- and 19th-century American museums, has called an "epistemology of objects". At least until the early 1900s, artefacts and objects were considered sources of meaning that could "tell stories" when properly arranged in museums.[26] Dickenson seems to retain this belief when she collects overlooked images of the northern "New World" from the archives and orders them in her book. Despite claiming to undertake close visual readings of these specimens of natural history, the author is primarily concerned to offer a chronological account of the changing ways these images were made and used as they both intersected with and were influenced by the developing concern with firsthand observation and visual accuracy.

Chapter one, "Emblematic Animals", begins by considering the "schematic" creatures that appear on a map of North America made in 1546 by Pierre Desceliers. Dickenson follows Wilma George's argument that such feral figures were not decorative but were "diagnostic" additions designed to provide the geography with a visually recognizable identity.[27] Accuracy, Dickenson concludes, was therefore not the goal of these early images of North American animals; they instead acted as visual markers that would be acknowledged by Europeans. It was nevertheless quite difficult for Europeans to represent previously unknown creatures, such as the bison and the opossum, within the pre-existing models. Faced with this insurmountable visual difference, European cartographers were forced to adapt and finally to abandon their pattern-book figures. The new images of the "New World", however, eventually themselves became emblems, albeit emblems of firsthand observation (pp. 34-44). The following chapter, "Naturalism and the Counterfeit of Nature" provides an overview of how, even as more schematic approaches to the representation of nature continued, there was an increasing movement towards naturalism. Dickenson's narrative survey of this development, which foregrounds the 16th-century work of Albrecht Dürer, will sound quite familiar to art historians. Also commonplace is the author's later claim that by the 1750s observation was to be "scientific, measurable, and accurate" (p. 189).

Dickenson's continual references to accuracy convey both the book's most interesting and least interrogated content. Considerations of authenticity lead the

25 Edward Said's *Orientalism* (New York, 1978) remains the starting point for many studies of colonial encounters. There are now numerous accounts of orientalism in visual culture, with fewer studies focused on colonial exchanges in North America. See Zeynep Çelik, "Colonialism, Orientalism, and the Canon", *Art Bulletin,* 78, 2 (June 1996), pp. 202-5.

26 Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876-1926* (Chicago and London,1998), pp. 4-9.

27 Wilma George, *Animals and Maps* (Berkeley, 1969).

author to investigate the practical side of the production of natural history illustrations. The pages of *Drawn from Life* are filled with detailed descriptions of the material conditions of expeditions and the limitations of the artistic mediums used to represent "truthful" images of birds, plants and animals. Particularly fascinating is a discussion of the working methods of illustrator George Edwards, who never visited the "New World" and had to rely upon the embalmed and decomposing bodies of the bird specimens sent to him (pp. 153-62). Despite such engaging information about the restrictions placed upon the quest for accuracy, the different historical and discipline-specific conceptions of accuracy are not fully explored. Indeed, the term accuracy is often used by Dickenson in a common-sense way to refer to the direct inscription of visual experience, which is rather surprising, given that shifting notions of objectivity are usually of primary concern to scholars interested in the connections between art and science and the traditions of natural history.[28]

Even as Dickenson argues that "it would not . . . be correct to imply that artists learned how to copy nature better with each succeeding generation" (p. 231), this is in effect the progressive narrative that her book offers. Consider her discussion of a series of representations of Niagara Falls (which returns us to earlier reflections on both tourism and the manufacture of a succession of "copies"). An image published in 1697 by the Dutch artist Jan van Vianen under the supervision of Louis Hennepin, who had visited the Falls, obscures, Dickenson notes, both the scale and the horseshoe shape of the natural wonder (pp. 107-9). This rendition nevertheless influenced subsequent images of the Falls, including one by Peter Kalm who wrote about his voyage between 1748 and 1751 to North America. Dickenson comments that "despite Kalm's attempts to introduce a scientific objectivity into his description, the accompanying image is inaccurate and in essence untrue, a schematic representing the *idea* of the falls rather than an accurately observed depiction of them" (pp. 193-4). Accuracy was, however, finally achieved in the 1760s by Thomas Davies, who, because of his training as a topographical artist, produced views of the Falls with their "correct horseshoe configuration" (p. 195). Dickenson does not comment upon the changing understandings of the Falls, or consider, along with Dubinsky and Phillips, the wider context in which they were viewed. Instead, she reverts to the modernist narrative critiqued by Ostrowitz and positions Davies as the individual who broke free from the constraints of historical convention and simply relied on firsthand observation.

To my eyes, namely those of an art historian who specializes in 17th-century French visual culture, Davies's images of Niagara Falls, with trees framing either side of the cascades, appear to be idealized in the fashion of the classical landscapes by Nicolas Poussin. Dickenson, however, still seems to believe in an "innocent eye" (a concept refuted by Ernst Gombrich), even as her account of the development of naturalism sounds remarkably like the "making and matching" model put forward by Gombrich.[29] This esteemed art historian explained the evolution of naturalistic

28 See, for example, Caroline A. Jones and Peter Galison, eds., *Picturing Science/Producing Art* (New York and London, 1998) and N. Jardine, J.A. Secord, and E. C. Spary, eds., *Cultures of Natural History* (Cambridge, 1996).

29 Ernst Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (Washington, DC, 1960). See also the critique of Gombrich by Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (New Haven, 1983).

landscape in the 19th century in terms of artists who continually tested the given schema against the visual evidence and then made adjustments. Dickenson clearly privileges firsthand observation throughout her book and even claims that her own familiarity with the actual plants and animals of Canada gives her an advantage in assessing the early illustrations of northern North America (p. 7). Not only does Dickenson thus overlook the growing literature on the history of vision and visual perception,[30] but she also misses an opportunity for authorial self-reflection. By exploring what Roland Barthes would call in literature "the effect of the real", Dickenson could have asked, along with other historians of natural history, "just what makes naturalism seem so natural?"[31]

In the end, Dickenson's book is useful because it brings to light a number of little-known natural history illustrations and should spark further interest in them. It proceeds, however, more like a chronological catalogue of the images than a careful interpretation of them. Despite a plethora of facts and figures, there is little light shed upon the epistemological role that natural history illustrations played in the invention of "Canada".[32] Another not insignificant problem with Dickenson's study is that she focuses on the tradition of natural history without discussing the representation of Native peoples (even though Native figures appear in a number of the images). A consideration of the ways in which Europeans often associated nature and animals with Native peoples would have linked Dickenson's work with the ongoing concerns of anthropology, post-colonial studies and contemporary art history.

This brief survey has shown that the best art-historical studies are those that strain against the edges of the discipline and call for a reconsideration of the accepted categories. Many past and present publications in art history have reshaped (and in some cases even discarded) the traditional Western definitions of art, the artist, originality, aesthetic value, authenticity, quality, accuracy, decoration, reproduction and the nature of vision itself. Within the Canadian context, reformulations of both "art" and "history" are leading to a different image of "Canada" altogether, and one can only hope that, perhaps by following the admirable model of the Northwest Coast Natives, this reconstruction will be continuous.

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30 For a definition of the field of "visual culture", which increasingly studies the history of vision itself, see Nicholas Mirzoeff, ed., *The Visual Culture Reader* (London and New York, 1998). See also Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA, 1990) and Martin Jay, "Scopic Regimes of Modernity", in Hal Foster, ed., *Vision and Visuality* (Seattle, 1988), pp. 3-28.

31 Roland Barthes, "L'effet de réel", in Gérard Genette and Tzvetan Todorov, eds., *Littérature et réalité* (Paris, 1982), pp. 81-90. For natural history, see David Philip Miller and Peter Hanns Reill, eds., *Visions of Empire* (Cambridge, 1996), Ville Lukkarinen, "The Naturalness of Naturalism Reconsidered", *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift,* LXV (1996), pp. 51-9 and Christopher S. Wood, "'Curious Pictures' and the Art of Description", *Word and Image,* 11, 4 (October-December 1995), pp. 332-52.

32 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York, 1991).