

Dummies in Loincloths: Redefining Native Exhibitions

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A thesis submitted to The University of the Arts in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

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Abstract

Museums are one of the most trusted sources of information to the American public, and therefore exhibits about Native people are that much more influential in the creation and continuation of stereotypes and misconceptions about Native people in the United States. This paper, will examine the question “How do museums or galleries display/interpret Native cultures and not play into, create or add to stereotypes?” Through reviewing a number of the stereotypes involving Native people, as well as the history of the relationship between the United States government and Native people. We can start to understand the patterns and sources of misinterpretation and begin to explore into the complex relationship that has existed between museums and Native people over the last century, and begin to explain how this information has been interpreted , reinterpreted and evolved and how contemporary Native art can be involved in this new dialogue about Native people. Finally, this thesis looks at how the role of Native people in the interpretation of their own tribes can not only provide a much more rewarding experience to the public who view the exhibitions, but also help to tear down some of the stereotypes that exist about Native people in this country.

Dedication

To all of us who have been asked “Do you live in a tipi?”

Acknowledgement

First, I would like to thank my ancestors and elders for paving the way so that I may write this thesis and apologize to them as well if I have spoken out of turn, I am young and inexperienced.

Second, I could not have done this without the support of my family; My mom for showing me what hard work can accomplish, My dad for the ability to laugh at myself, My sisters for listening to me, My brother for always standing by me, My son for his patience, understanding and sitting quietly through my classes, My fiancé for the late and long nights on the phone. I love you all dearly and would not have made it this far without you!!

Thirdly, this thesis would not have gotten too far it was not for the support and understanding of the thesis committee; Gabrielle Tayac, Karen Kramer Russell and Polly McKenna-Cress. The advisory committee; Jhon Goes In Center, Steven Karr and Jessie Ryker-Crawford and also my fellow classmates in the MEPD program.

Lastly, the Great Spirit for making me Lakota.

Pilamaya!!

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“Sure you can ask me a question?”

-Diane Burns

How do you do?

No, I am not Chinese.

No, not Spanish.

No, I am American Indi—uh, Native American.

No, not from India.

No, not Apache

No, not Navajo.

No, not Sioux.

No, we are not extinct.

Yes, Indian.

Oh?

So that's where you got those high cheekbones.

Your great grandmother, huh?

An Indian Princess, huh?

Hair down to there?

Let me guess. Cherokee?

Oh, so you've had an Indian friend?

That close?

Oh, so you've had an Indian lover?

That tight?

Oh, so you've had an Indian servant?

That much?

Yeah, it was awful what you guys did to us.

It's real decent of you to apologize.

No, I don't know where you can get peyote.

No, I don't know where you can get

Navajo rugs real cheap.

No, I didn't make this. I bought it at

Bloomington.

Thank you. I like your hair too.

I don't know if anyone knows whether or not Cher is really Indian.

No, I didn't make it rain tonight.

Yeah. Uh-huh. Spirituality.

Uh-huh. Yeah. Spirituality. Uh-huh.

Mother Earth.

Yeah. Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Spirituality.

No, I didn't major in archery.

Yeah, a lot of us drink too much.

Some of us can't drink enough.

This ain't no stoic look.

This is my face.

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Introduction

Self-expression should start with wisdom, not the ignorance of others.

-Nancy Mithlo¹

The focus of my thesis and project is the multi-faceted interpretation of Native cultures and particularly the complexity of contemporary Native cultures. For the purposes of this thesis Native people or Indian refers to indigenous persons, peoples whose ancestors have lived in what is now the United States and whose people have experienced genocide and continue to experience degradation. Contemporary Native art consists of anything that at its time was created with the incorporation of a new object not from the people's own creation, but of an adaptation of that object, and stereotype is defined as the reduction of a particular type of people to an oversimplified category. My research will examine Native people within their respective communities – be it on the reservation or in the urban settings – and how stereotypes and misinformation continue to be propagated within the museum genre. My research case study is an exhibition, which includes dioramas, in The Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre, South Dakota owned by the South Dakota State Historical Society (SDSHS).

The current exhibition depicting Native people titled “Oyate Tawicoh’an (The Ways of the People)” at the Cultural Heritage Center attempts to show the history of Lakota people of South Dakota, but all the language in the text panels is speaking in present tense; using a present voice and historical depiction makes for misunderstanding and miscommunication. The text is factually correct, and the artifacts and other visual content are correct as well, but the combination of the two has created a stereotype of how the Lakota people are currently living. I will use this mismatched information and expand upon it through my thesis, redesigning the exhibition and dioramas, and presenting a re-interpretation of the information.



Exhibition case,
Oyate Tawicoh’an (The Ways of the People)

1 Mithlo, “We all have been colonized” p232

Being an enrolled member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe and having grown up in South Dakota and being asked questions such as “Do you live in a tipi?” “Why don’t you have long hair?” “What’s your real name?” from the time I was very young to just this summer, 2008, I have concluded that not everyone knows what it means or even what it is like to be Indigenous to this land. After all the struggles my ancestors have gone through to try and hold on to our culture, my grandparents’ fight to keep what we have, my parents’ struggle to maintain it, I would have hoped in this day and age I would not be asked, “Do you live in a tipi?”

Who is teaching Native people’s history? It is not being taught to the extent it should be in classrooms. James W Loewen addresses this issue in his book *Lies my Teacher told me: Everything your High School History Textbook Got Wrong*, he states “Historically, American Indians have been the most lied-about subset of our population...High school students start below zero because of their textbook, which unapologetically presents Native Americans through white eyes.”² Not only have I experienced this, but also my son, who is in the 6th grade in Philadelphia, Pa has been asked, “Do you live in a tipi?” I would say the majority of the public is getting its information other places and one of these other places is in museums. People enter into a museum wanting to see something great, to have the information be accurate and to be provided a possibility to learn something they did not know before. A in survey done for the book *The Presence of the Past* by Rosenzweig and Thelen, respondents were asked to rank the trustworthiness of sources for information about the past, from a scale of one to ten, one being the least trustworthy and ten being trustworthy. Museums were given the highest average number of 8.4 (79%), as being the most trustworthy in accounting for the past, surpassing personal accounts from relatives, conversations with an eye witness, college history professors, high school teachers, nonfiction books, and movies, television programs.³ So, as explained in this book, people place the most trust in the historical accuracy and integrity of what is presented in a museum setting. Museums need to be very aware of their role as top authority in telling the story of “What is History?” People depend on museums to be as objective, professional, and thorough as possible and to help people understand the world around them.



American Museum of Natural History, 1939

2 Loewen, Lies My Teacher Told Me p93
3 Rosenzweig, Thelen Presences of the Past p21-23

Although museums are indeed changing and those such as the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) have begun to present Native people and their communities in new and more appropriate ways, I think that so much has been left out or left behind. This is where the dilemma shows itself: what is becoming of all the exhibitions that are still out there; are they changing their paradigms or leaving flawed information to exist because of laziness or lack of funds? There are over 18,000 museums in the United States alone; and, granted not all of them have exhibitions on Native people, but a fair number do...so, what has been happening with interpretation in those? Have a great majority of these exhibitions stayed the same and are they still creating misinformation and stereotypes? Leaving misinformation in exhibitions for visitors to view only adds to the stereotypes. If someone were to come upon an exhibition / display about Native people that spoke about them in the present tense and the visual content was historical, giving the impression that this is how this group of people are currently living, would a person know that Native people don't live in tipis? I do not know how to state it better than Nancy Mithlo does when she says, *"This uphill struggle for accurate representation of Native American realities cannot be addressed by only one institution or by only one methodology."*⁴ There have been a few popular methodologies that are used when an exhibition about Native people is created.

One of these I have experienced is one that assumes Native people live in two worlds and they are split somewhere down the middle, trying to live in the Western world as well as maintaining their "traditions". Most Native people I know do not live in two worlds, they live in one and yes they live in the Western world and maintain their heritage, but it is not like Native people stop using all contemporary Western tools and amenities when "maintaining" their heritage. It is maintained while living in the Western world; we all live in one world, making it work for us and our heritage, rather than trying to fit ourselves into the Western world.

There was a belief that Native people would vanish and I will talk more about that later in the thesis, but I would like to touch on this here and say because of this belief exhibitions were



American Indian Magazine,
National Museum of the American Indian

4 Mithlo, "The Sting"

created to display and interpret a people of the past. When Native people did not vanish or become extinct, anthropologists began to use collaboration to help them interpret the objects on display. Collaboration has been described as follows: *“contemporary American museological practice increasingly requires consultation with members of communities who are featured in an exhibit...Curatorial interpretation of a subject is now often shared with members of a group.”*⁵

One of the first accounts of collaboration was said to be as early as the Second World War at the Milwaukee Public Museum. By the 1960’s, according to JoAllyn Archambault, collaboration *“with Native experts on exhibits involving their culture and/or history was a frequently part of the museological process.”*⁶ Archambault also goes on to mention early collaborations between museum and tribal experts. The Lowie Museum of Anthropology on the University of California-Berkeley campus 1962 and the Denver Museum of Natural History went so far as to establish a Native American Advisory Council, who advised on the design, installation of the Crane American Indian Hall. Even with the collaboration none of the Native advisors were recognized as co-curators.⁷

The next step was to then have Native curators; in 1974, Rosita Worl, a Tlingit anthropology graduate student at Harvard, mounted one of the early, more forward thinking Native curated exhibition. The exhibition was about the potlatch and Worl used the collection from the Peabody Museum and borrowed items from different Tlingit families; lined up on one side of a room were the items from the Peabody and on the other side were lined up the items from the families. Two groups of potlatchers facing each other, one a modern potlatcher, the other from the 19th century. Worl explained to Archambault it was a “then and now” exhibition, demonstrating that potlatches continued to be a part of modern tribal life.⁸



Installation view, European Festivals exhibition, English-Speaking Union, Edinburgh Scotland 1966

5 Archambault, “American Indians and American museums” p8
6 Archambault, “American Indians and American museums” p9
7 Archambault, “American Indians and American museums” p9
8 Archambault, “American Indians and American museums” p16-17

There are several of these types of exhibitions, using juxtaposition to demonstrate modern culture; another approach is to use contemporary Native art with the display of historical items to show how traditional arts are carried over into contemporary Native art. The Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico did this in the late 1960s when displaying their students' artwork around the world.⁹ Using these types of methods for exhibiting Native culture is "insistence on the validity of contemporary [Native] life and refusal to be confined to the limits of a mythic past at the expense of current reality."¹⁰

This brings the discussion back to the thesis: How do museums or galleries display/interpret Native cultures and not play into, create or add to stereotypes? To re-interpret this information, should museums simply take what has been done in the museum to date and just add a new voice, that voice being the Native one? Is using a "*different word to convey the same information*" really the answer, making Native people "*mere tokens of ethnic pluralism.*"¹¹ It is the same information, same stereotypes just said in a new way and I do not believe "reinterpreting" is as effective as museums have thought.

9 Gritton, "Cross-Cultural Education Modernist Imperialism" p32-33
10 Archambault, "American Indians and American museums" p19
11 Dubin, *Native America Collected; The Culture of an Art World* p98

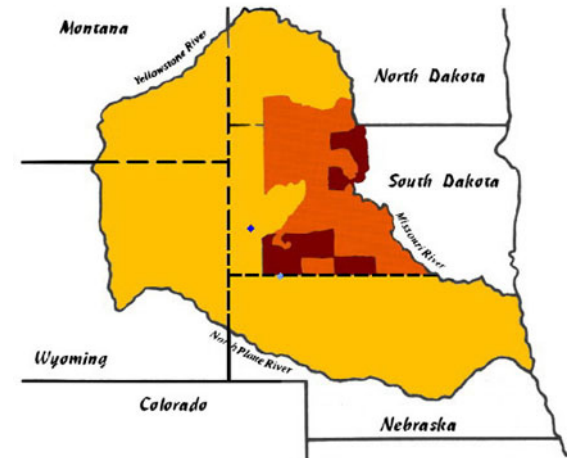
Brief history of the interpretation of Native peoples: Government Relationship

As colonizer, exterminator and finally guardian to the survivors, the US government has always had a special legal relationship with Indian tribes.

-Margaret Dubin¹²

One of the issues with how Native people are exhibited begins with how the United States (US) has viewed Native people from the time of first contact. Native people were and may still (in some aspects) be seen as primitive, unsophisticated, savages and stoic. The US government has always put Native people all into one category, treating all the Native people, despite that they are all different Nations, as one whole people. They treat Native people administratively and overlook the fact Native people define themselves geographically and are very different in how they run their lives.

The US government historically dominated nearly every aspect of tribal life, from the exercise of religion and cultural practices to land tenure and the structure of tribal government. This unique relationship between the US and Native tribes is built upon sovereignty, which gives them the ability to govern themselves, but while the US government recognizes Native Tribes as sovereign nations, the US congress is recognized by the courts as having the right to limit the sovereign powers of tribes.¹³ It can be complicated and has come about in many ways, by creating treaties on a nation-to-nation relationship to the tribal Self-Determination Act, which entitles tribes and intertribal consortia to take over administration of federal programs for the benefit of their members through “self-determination contracts” with the Departments of the Interior and of Health and Human Services.¹⁴



Yellow shows area pre-contact
Orange shows after 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty
Red shows current reservations

12 Dubin, Native America Collected; The Culture of an Art World p27

13 <http://www.airpi.org/pubs/indinsov.html>

14 <http://www.abanet.org/irr/hr/spring06/keohane.html>

Along with being lumped into one people and dominated by the US government, the Bureau of Indian Affairs was established in 1824, to provide services to all Native people of the United States; we were to be and to some extent still are considered wards of the government. Mission statement of the Bureau of Indian Affairs:

...enhance the quality of life, to promote economic opportunity, and to carry out the responsibility to protect and improve the trust assets of American Indians, Indian tribes, and Alaska Natives.

With Native people being considered wards of the government, they were moved and shuffled around the United States as the government saw fit. The moving and shuffling around became the most prominent in 1830 with the Indian Removal Act to move Native people west of the Mississippi River; if they were to remain east of the river they were to become civilized and assimilate in to white culture.¹⁵ The removal west was not new (it began with first contact, voluntary or involuntary) but this act gave the president the power to “negotiate” removals and these removals did not stop when Native people were moved to the west side of the Mississippi River, it continued as white settlers moved farther west.

In 1876 the government decided the Ponca people needed to be removed. These people lived in the area that is now Nebraska and where moved to Indian Territory in what is now Oklahoma. When they arrived in Oklahoma it was too late in the season to plant and rations were low, disease set in and several people died. One of the people who had died was the son of the Chief Standing Bear; his son had asked to be buried in the land where they came from and Standing Bear wanted to honor his request. He and several others made the long trek back up to Nebraska to bury his son. They were arrested, because they did not “belong” in this area any longer. In April 1879, Standing Bear sued for a writ of habeas corpus in U.S. District Court in Omaha, Nebraska. Because Native people at that time were not seen as citizens or human, he had to establish that he was “a person” who was covered under US law. A lawyer in Omaha



Chief Standing Bear

15 <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2959.html>

took his case pro bono. On May 12, 1879 Standing Bear won his case and the judge ruled that “an Indian is a person” and the government had failed to show basis for their imprisonment. He and his small group were released and allowed to stay in Nebraska.¹⁶

That same year Richard Henry Pratt founded Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. He believed that taking a Native out of his or her environment and being placed in a more civilized (white man’s) environment would be better for them. His founding principle of the school was “KILL THE INDIAN, SAVE THE MAN”; again highlighting the popular conception of Native people as less than human. The first students Pratt set out to recruit were from the Sicangu Lakota Oyate (Rosebud Sioux Tribe) and the Oglala Lakota Oyate (Pine Ridge Sioux Tribe); he was instructed to recruit 36 students from each tribe. After speaking with several leaders of the tribes Pratt was able to obtain 82 children from the Sicangu and Oglala people. Some of the children taken went freely, but others were taken against their will. Even with these efforts, Carlisle Indian School closed in 1918, with less than 8% of all the students having graduated.¹⁷

Despite the huge accomplishment of Chief Standing Bear, perhaps because of the failure of Carlisle Indian School, the US government still did not establish Native people as US citizen until 1924. It was not until 1962 when the last state, New Mexico, finally gave the right to vote to Native people.¹⁸ These are just a few examples of the history of how the US views and treats Native People as a whole. With the US government treating Native people as not being able to take care of themselves, and taking these action to “assimilate and civilize” Native people they have given the rest of the US the ability to treat Native people in the same manner.



Carlisle Indian Industrial School

16 <http://www.poncatribene.org/about.php>
17 <http://home.epix.net/~landis/histry.html>
18 http://democrats.senate.gov/dpc/dpc-new.cfm?doc_name=sr-108-2-283

Museum Relationship

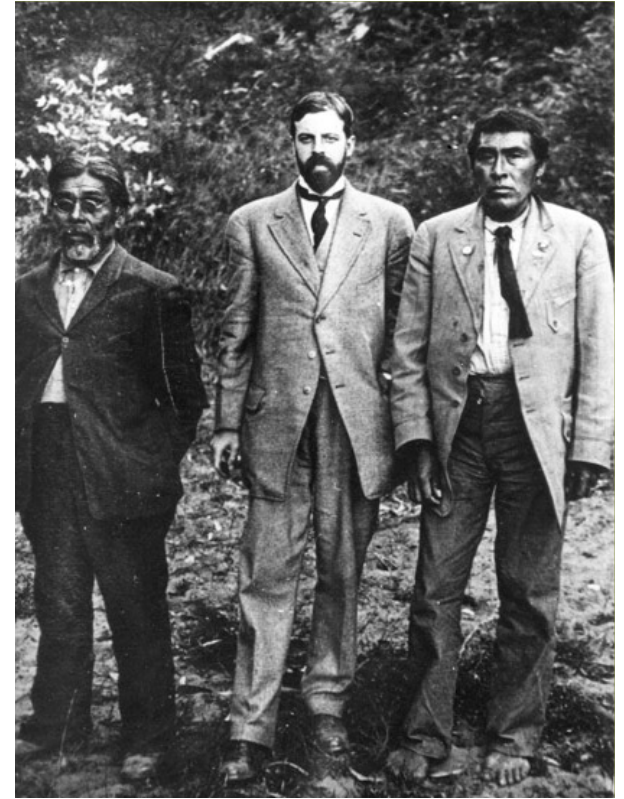
These undoubtedly uncomfortable moments serve to define a new exhibits era that may perhaps best be termed “post collaborative” in nature. Although the parameters of the exhibit method are tried and tested (the historic-contemporary juxtaposition), the process of implementation is overt.

-Nancy Mithlo¹⁹

Between the impacts of diseases, massacres and attempts of assimilation happening over a brief period of time, the US believed Native people would be a dying culture. Anthropologists, from museums and universities would take research trips to visits tribes and collect all they could; people also offered money for objects that could sometimes only be obtained when stolen from a grave. With the thought of Native people being a dying culture everyone tried to collect all they could, perhaps something to remember what they destroyed?

One example of this rush to gather materials from a dying culture is that from 1879 to 1885, 12,609 objects were collected from the Zuni Pueblo for the Smithsonian. The most surprising aspect of this was that at that time, *“the Zuni community consisted of fewer than 2,000 individuals.”* Not only does this highlight the attitudes of the time about Native cultures, but as Mithlo states, it *“also ‘might actually have accelerated the process of acculturation.’”²⁰*

With all that collecting and the thought of Native people going extinct, Native people have been shown in natural history museums along side of dinosaurs and other extinct once living “specimens.” One of the most striking “displays” is the story of Ishi, who was the last member of the Yahi speaking Yana tribe in Northern California. He and his family had gone into hiding after a massacre in 1865, so he had lived most of his life outside western contact. When Ishi was “discovered” in 1911, 46 years later, now an adult, he was taken in to custody by the town sheriff to protect him. He was later taken to the Museum of Anthropology at the University of



(l-r) Batwi, Kroeber and Ishi

19 Mithlo, “Staging Indian” p158
20 Mithlo, “Redman’s Burden” p748-9

California in San Francisco, where he lived as an exhibit / specimen and was hired as a janitor at the insistence of Alfred Kroeber, an American Anthropologist.

In the time before Ishi and after Ishi natural history museums were presenting Native life in dioramas giving the impression Indians were going extinct *“and that they were like so many insect specimens pinned to felt boards.”*²¹ Also the depiction of objects is not always accurate in the way they were displayed as non-functioning “things”. These practices have continued in one form or another through present day exhibitions. For example, an article from the Ashley Harper/ Daily in Michigan in 2004 , reports that a natural history museum has dioramas depicting Native life in its museum and that 5 year old said to his mother “Mom, you never told me Indians were extinct.” These examples show that even though Native cultures have progressed and grown over the last century, museums still are presenting Native cultures in stereotypical ways, and as Dubin states, *“Indians no longer exist in any recognizable form, only traditional cultural characteristics are valuable, and Indians today are primarily for their link to the past. (Statement made by Kathleen Dahl)”*²²

When it comes to museums the same thing has happened: this struggle of Native people to be seen as modern, viable cultures in the larger Western society can be seen in the microcosm of the museum and gallery world. The treatment of Native people and tribal histories in a blanket administrative way was reflected in the way exhibits were planned and shown to the public. For example, most ‘Indian’ exhibits were seen in natural history museums *“as if Indians were not also part of the modern world but belonged only to a vanishing and pre-human time, like fossilized dinosaur eggs or the fangs of a saber-toothed tiger,”*²³ rather than as living, growing cultures. This treatment both grew out of the stereotypes of Native cultures in the larger society and also contributed to the further marginalizing of Native people, as can be seen from the attitudes of researchers and anthropologists.



American Museum of Natural History 1906

21 Dubin, Native America Collected; The Culture of an Art World p96
22 Dubin, Native America Collected; The Culture of an Art World p97
23 Starn, Ishi's Brain: In Search of America's Last “wild” Indian p162

There are some conflicts as to how Native cultures should be interpreted. In the article mentioned above a research scientist from the museum says the dioramas do portray what life was like; despite some conflict with the research scientist the museum decided that the dioramas should change and they are trying to have involvement of the local Native people. This new thinking has clear beginnings and a key push was the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) a law put into effect in 1990. The goals of the act are:

NAGPRA provides a process for museums and Federal agencies to return certain Native American cultural items -- human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony -- to lineal descendants, and culturally affiliated Indian tribes and Native Hawaiian organizations.

NAGPRA provided the groundwork for museums to begin treating tribes, their histories and cultures with the same respect and honor that they would any other group. One institution that made quite a bit of progress, the Denver Art Museum, went through an extensive process following the passing of the NAGPRA law to ensure it complied with the legislation and that it has had Native consultants as part of its advisory board. Through their interaction with delegations from tribes around the country, they were able to repatriate many cultural items as well as gain valuable resources for future projects and add information about other objects in their collections to their files.²⁴ This was a huge step forward in the treatment of Native cultural items, and many museums have followed the Denver Art Museum's lead. However, as Dubin states, *"Ishi's eyes and Ishi's voice are always there lurking in the dark passageways between curatorial intention, visitor experience, and political realities,"*²⁵ and even following the changes that arose following the passage of NAGPRA, museums and galleries still have a long way to go.

24 Conversation with Jhon Goes In Center, 01.12.09

25 Dubin, *Native America Collected; The Culture of an Art World* p99

Reinterpretation of information

The juxtaposition of historic works to new pieces by living artists has become a staple of museum exhibits dealing with Native American material.

-Nancy Mithlo²⁶

Museums and galleries have gone through another more recent trend in the development of exhibitions about Native people, that of collaboration. Through this process, the curator works directly with tribal representatives to put together the narrative of an exhibition as well as to make the choices of which objects to use. Generally though, these collaborations are simply regurgitations of the original ideas behind the dioramas and “Indian and Nature” exhibits, meaning that the exhibits are still just a *“reexamination of stereotypes, ideologies and philosophies of the oppressors,”*²⁷ which in the long run is more of a step back than forward. That process is inherently flawed because *the museum enterprise, built upon a colonial heritage that demanded control of Native people, now has need of Native informants to both correctly identify objects and serve as negotiators between two parties with vested interests. It would logically appear to be the responsibility of the museums that originally collected the artifacts to lead the effort to make the situation right.*²⁸

In order to move beyond this unsound system, museums need to stop trying to make what needs to be said about Native people fit into the “norm” of museums. The same museum communities who have fostered these stereotypes that hinder Native people have created these institutions. Native people need to create their own processes and procedures for doing exhibitions, not based on what is being done now; it has to be what Native people believe to be the best, they need to stop trying to re-create information. It is funny, this has always been my thought to re-interpret, even my title for the thesis is to redefine Native exhibitions, but it is more about making our own voice more prominent and not collaborating with the museum. No one



Exhibition from the
Institute of American Indian Arts 2006

26 Mithlo, “Staging Indian” p157
27 Mithlo, “We all have been colonized” p231
28 Mithlo, “Redman’s Burden” p757

is going to be able to tell our story better than we are. In other words, *it is certainly not a sin to be celebratory, to proclaim the worth of one's community, but to do so in the pattern modeled by others only demonstrates how much further we need to travel to reclaim our own unique histories.*²⁹

This is where Native people are, defining the need to merge the “primitive Indian” with the contemporary one, honestly looking at who Native people are. There is need to stop talking about living in two worlds and displaying in two worlds. As a Native person I know that my life is one, everything I do is connected to the next thing I do, and I know that this is how native people lived and live. Everything you do is connected to the next and maybe this is how we should approach exhibiting ourselves. Linking the past with the present, this whole idea of living in two worlds adds to the stereotypes and misinformation being portrayed to the public, or as Dubin says, This is not so much “*living in two worlds,*” as *so many critics describe it, but the integration of different, chronologically simultaneous modes of existence into a single, routinized lifestyle.*³⁰ The dilemma of museums exhibit Native people in natural history settings while still speaking in the present tense as if Native people today live in tipis or we all still live off the land is something that can only be explained by Native people telling their own stories without the fragmentation of the Western world.



American Indian College Fund Ad

29 Mithlo, “IAIA Rocks the Sixties” p68
30 Dubin, Native America Collected; The Culture of an Art World p70

Contemporary Native Art Relationship

Where objects have a been expected to remain pure, people have been expected to assimilate

-Margaret Dubin³¹

The multi-faceted interpretation of the Native cultures and particularly the complexity of contemporary Native peoples have been very difficult for museums and galleries to grapple with and successfully present to the public. Each Native culture has its own worldview, creation story, history, development in the modern world, and relationship with the world around them. These unique situations of each tribe have lead to many misunderstandings in museum exhibitions when expectations and stereotypes about “the Indians” got in the way of the true stories about different Native communities. As Alfred Young Man wrote, *“It would not be stretching credulity by much to say that graduates of most, if not all, universities in North America and Europe still harbor a child’s awareness and feelings on North American Indians, their art, and metaphysics, if they have an awareness at all.”*³² While these graduates are the ones who museums delegate to curate exhibitions about Native people, they tend to ignore the many facets of the lives of Native communities that are so interrelated and that help to explain the unique situations of all Native people in this country.

The treatment of Native people in these natural history museums’ dioramas inadvertently has added to the struggle of Contemporary Native people, particularly artists, to move beyond the stereotype of Native people being a dead or frozen in time culture. Even when a person had been sent through the process of “assimilation”, according to what the government believed was right, artists were still told to stay within an “Indian” theme. One of these artists, Angel De Cora, was taken from her home to the east coast to learn the “white way”. After her completion of high school she went to Smith College and then went on to Drexel Institute to study art; her art instructor told her to stick to an “Indian” theme, being that would be the subject she would be

31 Dubin, Native America Collected; The Culture of an Art World p27

32 As Quoted by Mithlo, “The Sting”

best at. She did and was published in Harper's magazine in 1899. There are many of these stories, gallery owners telling contemporary Native artists their art isn't "INDIAN enough!" Native artists are always faced with this, trying to prove how "Indian" they and their works are. Keith Brave Heart, Native artist, is quoted to say he "...often asks himself if the consumer is purchasing the Indian or the work of art". It is difficult for Native artists to thrive when they are being stuck in this stereotype that has been created by Hollywood, sports team logos, museums and Native people themselves to name just a few.

I would purpose a wider interpretation of Native people and their rich cultures within a contemporary setting, and to address the boxes that continue to be arbitrarily constructed around them – those stereotypically-driven constructions which limit contemporary Native artists to be thought of as "Native" only as they create Indian-themed art or crafts. Native people and artists of today are inherently contemporary (whether they are producing pottery through age-old techniques or appropriating acrylics and canvas) as much as they are inherently "Native," regardless of outside ideologies concerning the 'authenticity' or the "Indian-ness" of their art. This is, and has always been a problematic subject. It is true that historically Native artists have based their artistic contexts upon their cultural knowledge and traditional symbols and iconography, but it is always the long hair, feathers and sunsets that are expected.

Conclusion

In an era where Native Americans are still among the nation's poorest, least educated, and most exploited peoples, yet another task is given-to take up the cause of archaeology for educating the "foreign scholars."

-Nancy Mithlo³³

As was mentioned earlier, museums are held to a high standard by the public for accuracy and integrity in their exhibitions, and museums need to understand that they need to break out of the confines of stereotypes surrounding Native issues in order to meet those high expectations. Those ideals generally have not been fulfilled by museums in their treatment of Native history, material culture, and contemporary cultures. Because of this and because the public relies upon museums' interpretation of topics, many stereotypes have been fostered about Native people. These including "living in two worlds," the idea that Native artists can only work in "Indian" themes, and that Native people of today are primitive and savage.

Both Native people and the general public need these issues to be addressed in the development of exhibits on topics surrounding Native history, art, and culture. Native communities are the most knowledgeable about themselves, and they need to have the primary voice in the telling of their stories in order to break through stereotypes and misconceptions and to empower themselves as individual cultures and viable communities. Also, by telling their own stories in their own ways, they will begin to break down some social barriers and misunderstandings by starting people on the road to true understanding of under-represented cultures.

Museums will find their programming and exhibitions greatly improved through these techniques and this innovative interaction between Native cultures and their institutions. Their relationships with local communities will be strengthened as understandings between communities grow and the accuracy and integrity of their exhibits increase.

33 Mithlo Red Man's Burden p756

Project Development

Exhibition Location

South Dakota State Historical Society's Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre, South Dakota

The South Dakota Experience Part I: Oyate Tawicoh'an (The Ways of the People)

<http://www.sdhistory.org/mus/museum.htm>

Mission for the current exhibition at the institution

This exhibit focuses on the importance of kinship obligations, which determine an individual's place in the tribe and the universe, and the values of courage, wisdom, generosity, and fortitude as prescriptions for daily living.

Mission for new exhibition

The mission of the exhibition is to introduce visitors to the complex lives of contemporary Lakota people by giving the visitor several points of views using the teaching methods of Lakota people that you can learn all things (i.e.; science, history, math, spirituality, art, ecology, etc) from one object.

Goals

- To moving away from the question "Do you live in a tipi?" and closer to the examination of the realities of Lakota people's lives in today's world.
- Facilitate increased understanding of contemporary Lakota life, world view and visual expression through the understanding of the Lakota
- Revitalize the dialogue between the museum, the local tribe and visitors
- Using several complex "points of views" from Lakota people to tell the story of each object.

Audience

Multi-generational groups interested in the history and the current lives of Native people, both Native and non-Native, with a special interest in Lakota Culture.



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Exhibition Space

The exhibition area is located in the permanent gallery space of the Museum of the South Dakota State Historical Society, which consist of three gallery spaces including the exhibition area that will be used. This gallery space to be used is 3001 sq ft in a space of 11707 sq ft.

Tone and Voice

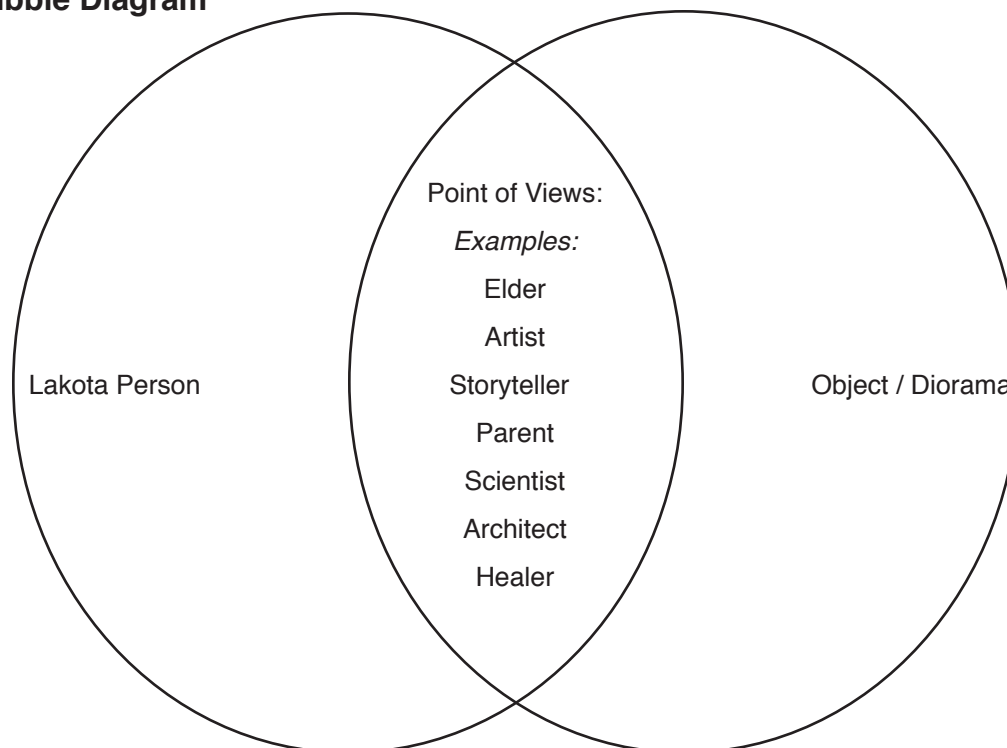
Several Native voices

- Each object will have several “points of view” voices, telling the story of and point of view of the individual who is interpreting the object. The tone will change with each person and point of view being told.

Collection

Collection of historical items from the South Dakota Historical Society Cultural Heritage Center, and to be chosen by the individual telling the their point of view.

Bubble Diagram



Exhibition Approach

My project is to take an exhibition / display (specifically about the Lakota culture) and presented a re-interpretation that does not play into, create or add to the stereotypes. The project will approach the exhibition, the way a Lakota person approaches life, using this to interpret the objects in the exhibition. In the Lakota culture, everything in a person's life is interrelated and concepts like "religion" and "art" and "artifact" do not really have unique roles in life. For example, there is no direct translation for the word "art" in the Lakota language, just concepts that mean "bringing out the beauty" of something or understanding the growth and movement of life and the beauty around us.

There are several virtues Lakota people strive for in life and the existing exhibition in the space I have chosen highlights some of these virtues, but I feel the exhibition does not incorporate the totality of how the virtues relate to Lakota life. These virtues addressed by the current exhibition (kinship, courage, fortitude, wisdom and generosity) are certainly all related to the Lakota culture. However there are a few that have been overlooked and will be addressed in the new exhibition. Part of the new exhibition would be to incorporate all virtues that describe the Lakota culture and way of life. It has been previously mentioned that Lakota cultures approached life in a holistic way where everything is connected to the next and a person can learn an almost unending amount of information from one thing or object. Part of learning this way of life comes from story telling and also lessons being taught from everyday situations. There is not a struggle or achievement a person faces each day that a lesson or virtue could not be taught or learned through traditional methods and everyday objects.

To demonstrate this, I will be taking objects, such as a pair of Lakota moccasins and looking at them through others' points of view. Essentially, each piece of the installation would be answering questions like "How would a contemporary Lakota artist explain the art in the moccasins?" "What materials would an Ecologist find the most interesting in moccasins?" "What story would be told by a Lakota Historian?" Also, I will be using technology to allow the visitor to learn through the spoken word and demonstrations rather than relying on the written word to transmit concepts and meaning. These techniques echo very strongly the teaching methods that have been used by generations of Lakota people to transmit knowledge and understanding from one generation to the next.

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By using all Lakota professionals and Lakota people who look at their areas of expertise in a more holistic way, and having them answer these questions, the visitor can begin to learn the Lakota culture as a whole. I also feel that avoiding the written word as much as possible will allow the visitor to learn orally and conceptually to begin understanding the Lakota way of looking at the world. Some of the technology that would support this would be to utilize video and audio components. I believe giving visitors the opportunity to listen and learn together.

Visitor Engagement

While some parallels between Native people and other minorities could be drawn that might make Native histories easier for visitors to connect to in a museum setting, I contend that Native peoples' histories and cultures are unique and should not be treated in the same way. This is because unlike the other minorities in this country, most Native people had no desire to assimilate or acculturate into the dominant Western society. Rather, Native people generally strove to maintain their unique identities and still today resist being acculturated and dropped into the so-called "melting pot" of the United States.

That being said, I believe that we are different yet share many of the same underlying humanity. It is the differences between us that make us all so special, and those differences should be embraced. I am a mother, wife, daughter, sister and friend as are many women in the world, but that fact that I am Lakota can make those roles and my relationship to my culture a little different. As a Lakota woman and curator, in this exhibition I will help visitors to see similarities and create a bond with who Lakota people are, but at the same I will help them to appreciate who Lakota people are and how our cultural identities make us distinctive.

All people have roles in the world, be it a mother, father, healer, or educator, but regardless of race, ethnicity or religion those roles can be understood by all people in some form. Although those roles maybe similar, it's the differences within each race, ethnicity and religion that makes them unique and so wonderful to learn about. In the exhibition I will create an environment that would foster this understanding by walking visitors through the world view that helps formulate who Lakota people are and how we interact with the different aspects of our lives.

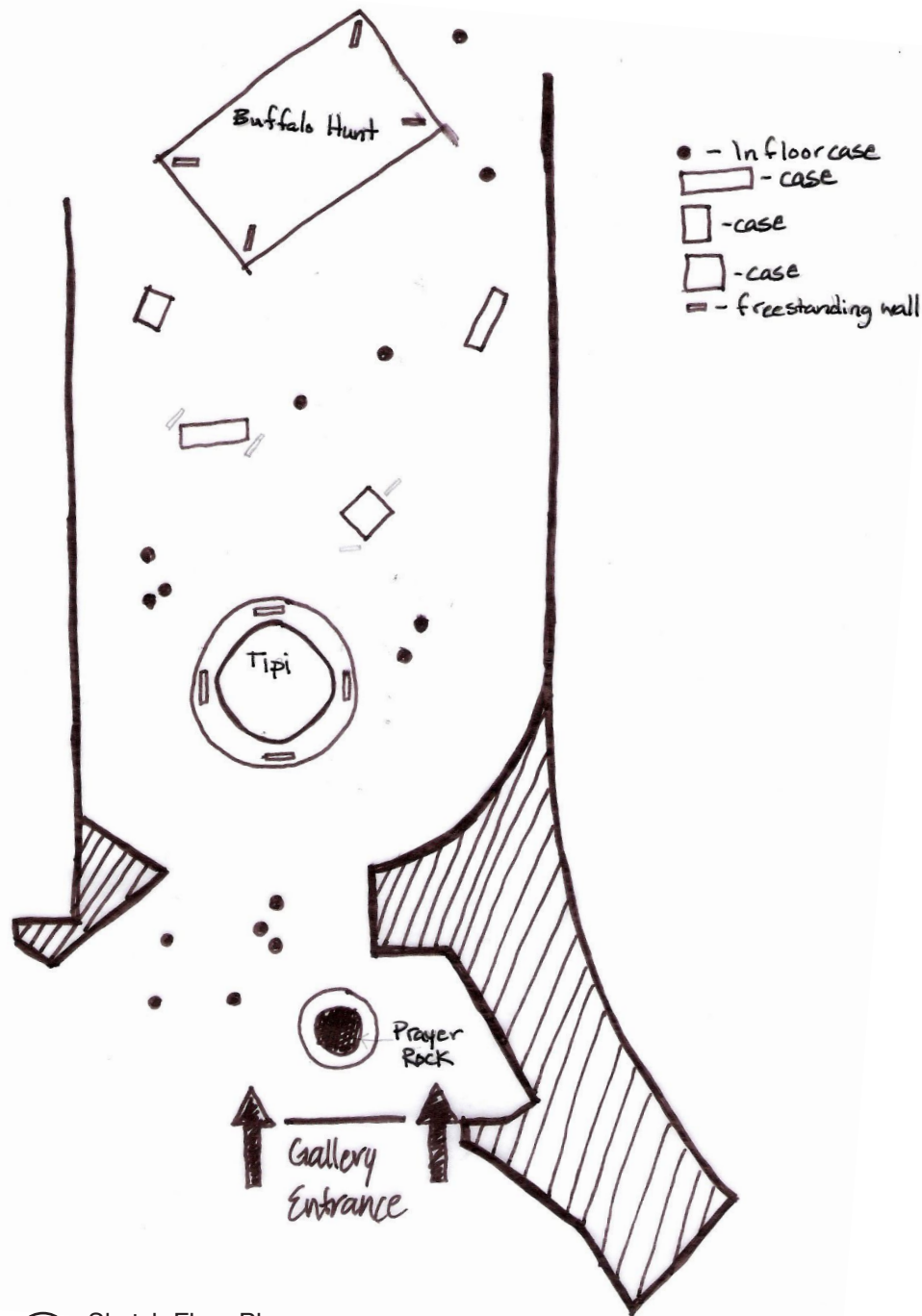
Curatorial Role and Background

My role in this exhibition will be multifaceted, but will be grounded in my identity as a Lakota woman and my training as a curator and exhibit designer. Because I am Lakota, this exhibition model will not be collaboration in the model that I discussed before, I will be translating between the Lakota way of thinking and “museum speak.” When developing an exhibit you need to be aware of how a museum functions or you may not have the impact that you need, and even though there are rules that museums feel they need to follow I have learned the rules and which ones can be bent or broken and can explain that to other museum professionals.

I will be able to reconcile the needs of a Lakota exhibition to break out of the confines of the traditional museum models with the needs of a museum community, such as the treatment of historical objects. Conversely, I understand the requirements of professional museum care and standards and will interpret those rules to the Lakota community and work with them to creatively express the Lakota perspectives while working around those policies.

Collaboration, the use of a non-Native curator and Native informants, work that has been utilized in museum for many years and I have stated before I do not entirely agree with these techniques. Regardless of how many “Native informants” are used and credited, I believe it still is not a “Native” story I believe it to still be what has been taught in history class. The exhibitions and the stories they tell are inherently flawed because they are based upon misconceptions and inaccurate, incomplete histories that seem to be widespread in textbooks and popular culture.

I find it difficult to tell a story or talk about who a people are that I do not myself belong to, and how can it be expected that a non-Native curator could tell the story of a Native people. It is not that they cannot be involved, or that there are not some non-Native professionals who can capture a decent amount of the intricacies of a culture, but it is more that no one can tell the story of a Native culture like someone from that culture because of a lifelong understanding and knowledge.



1 Sketch Floor Plan

Walkthrough

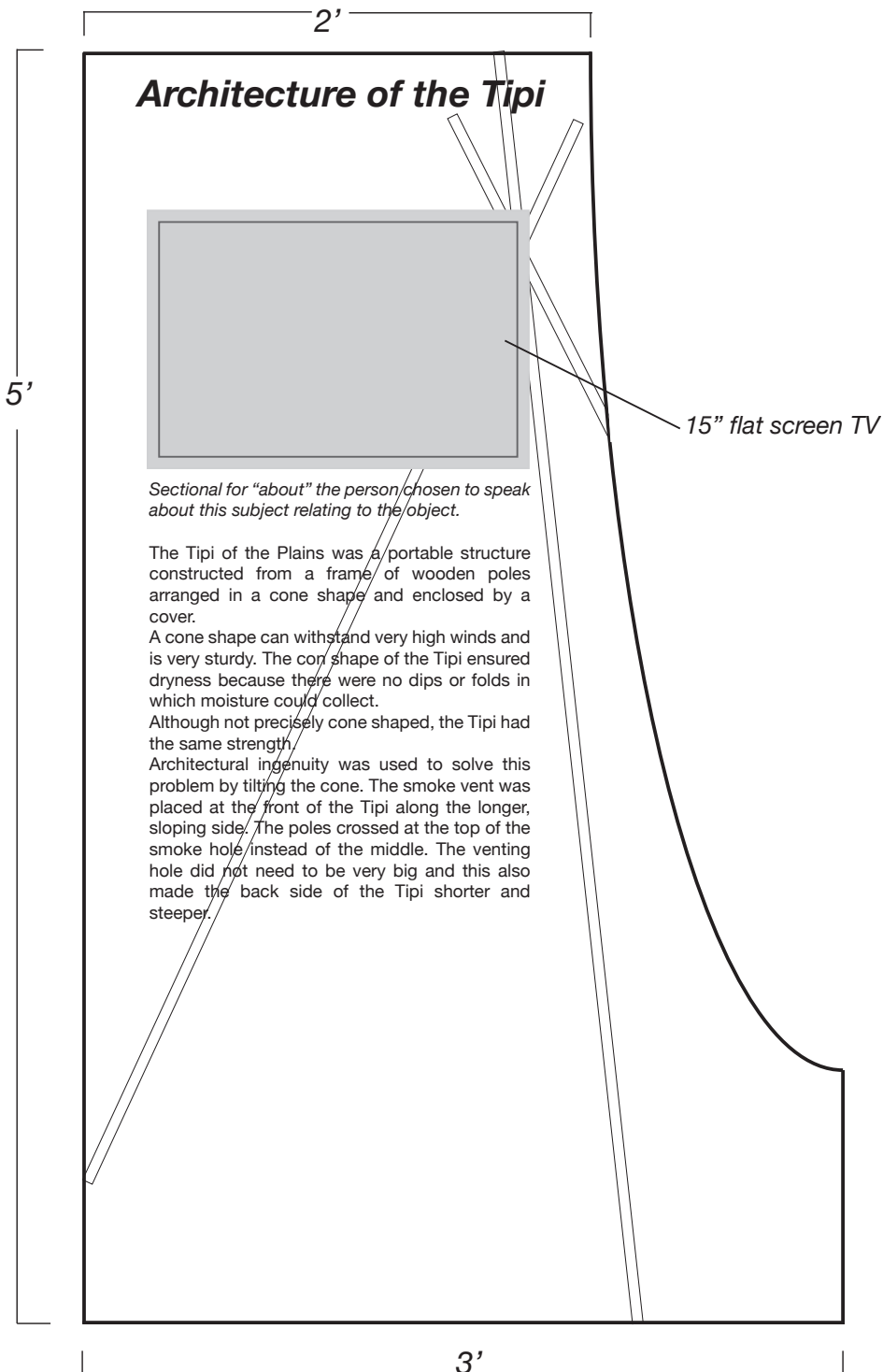
When visitors first enter the “new” exhibitions they will come upon the prayer rock. There will be vinyl on the wall to the right, opening with the story of the Lakota people beginning with the creation of the earth, using the prayer rock to relate that story.

As visitors move to the left they will notice spotlights highlighting twelve-inch circles on the floor and when the visitor approaches they will notice that these circles are not just circles but they are embedded cases that house one pair of moccasins each. The visitor will also hear and see a video on the wall to the left of the prayer rock and moccasin cluster with a Lakota elder continuing the story of the Lakota people, that began with the vinyl on the wall.

Continuing farther into the gallery, the visitor will see a full size tipi, and in key points around the tipi there are free standing walls, each with a video with focused audio and vinyl text on the wall. Each wall will be of a different Lakota person speaking about their point of view about what could be learned from the tipi, be it a story about who would own the tipi and why, or telling about the architecture of the tipi.

The visitor will continue to see the cases embedded in the floors with the moccasins, they are scattered

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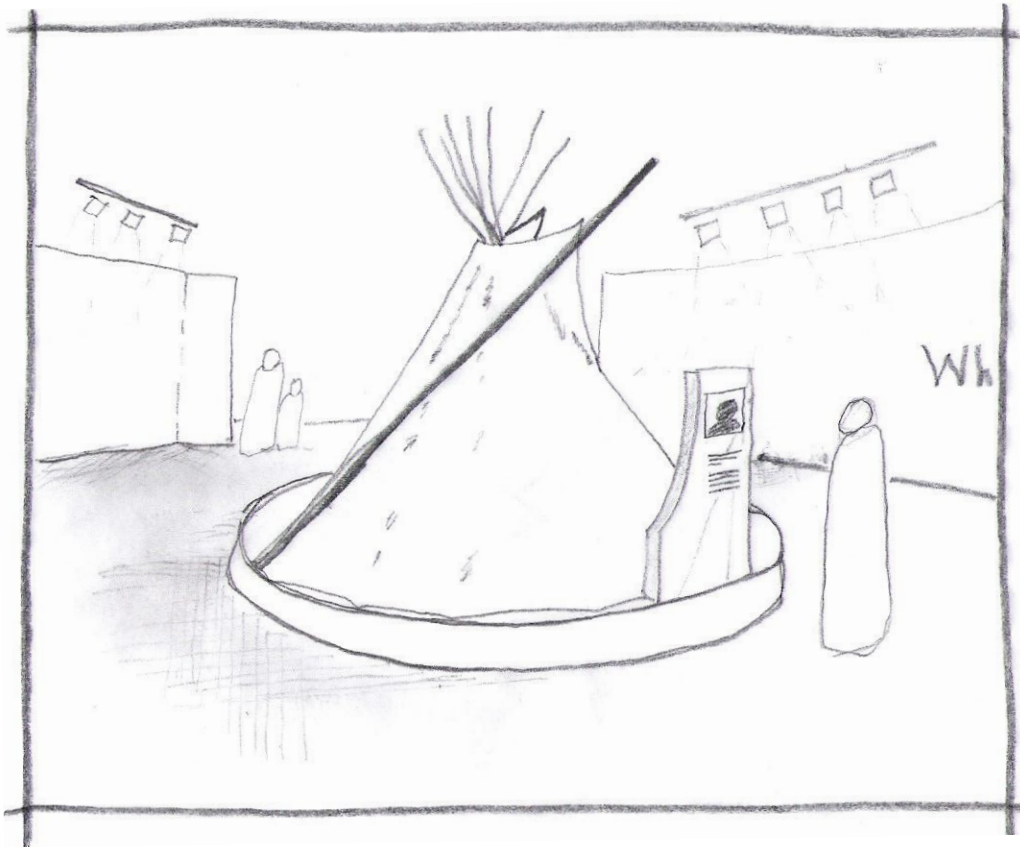
throughout the gallery beginning to end. After viewing the tipi with visitor will come upon several cases that house different objects from the collection, not all the cases randomly placed in the gallery will have free standing wall with them, but several will, and the cases with free standing walls will again have the video of a Lakota person speaking about that object telling one of the many points of view.

As visitors move throughout the gallery they will notice large graphics on the walls and the floor asking questions that maybe they themselves do not feel comfortable asking, examples, "Do Lakota people live in tipis?" "Are all Native people the same?" "What is Lakota culture?" There will also be video with focused audio on the exterior walls of the gallery, answering these questions.

Coming to the end of the gallery shown here the left, visitors will approach a diorama of a buffalo hunt, this diorama will also have the free standing wall around key points of the diorama and again telling the different points of views from the Lakota perspective.

As the visitors exit this gallery they will continue through the rest of the museum telling the history of South Dakota, and also the continuing story of the Lakota people, as their story continues to intertwine the lives of all South Dakotans.

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2 Sketch Drawing of Tipi Diorama

- wood flooring
- directional light highlighting objects and diorama

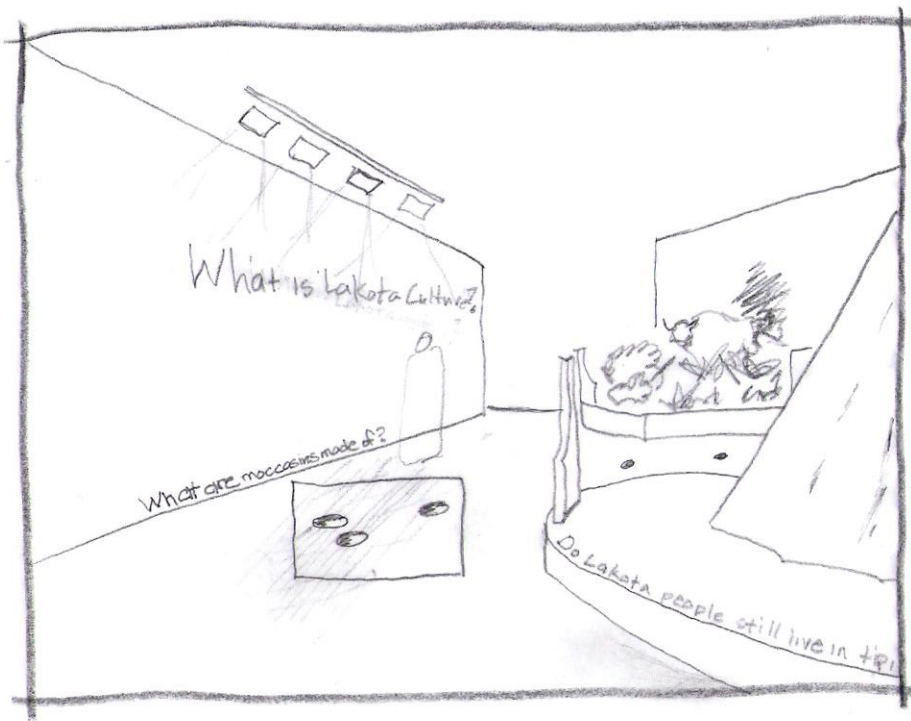
Freestanding wall

As shown in the illustration on the page 31 each wall would be 5 feet tall with the top being 2 feet wide and the bottom being 3 feet wide, the right side beginning at 1 foot high and sloping upwards to the full height of 5 feet.

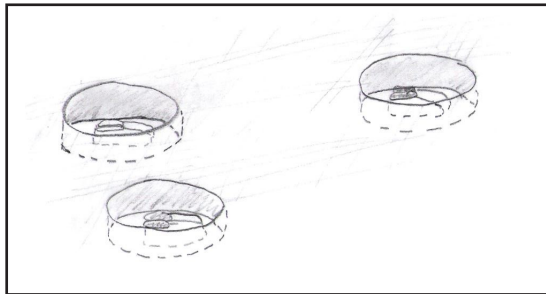
Each wall will have simple yet illustrative graphics pertaining to the object, the wall is relating to. For example on pages 31 and 34 the graphics show a simple outline of a tipi (p31) and of a topographical map (p34), relating to the subject being spoke about.

There will be a video with focused audio with the Lakota person speaking about their subject or point of view. It is important that there is this video and audio component to reinforce the concept of oral tradition and the Lakota way of life. I do not think that using audio tours or podcast would benefit the visitors here, as it would isolate them. Also, on the freestanding walls there would text of biographical information about the Lakota person speaking and an essay about their subject, for those visitors who would rather read. The use of video also gives the opportunity for the museum to change the point of view as often as possible in order keep the exhibition up to date.

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3 Sketch Drawing of Graphics and Embedded Floor cases
-vinyl lettering on walls and base of platforms



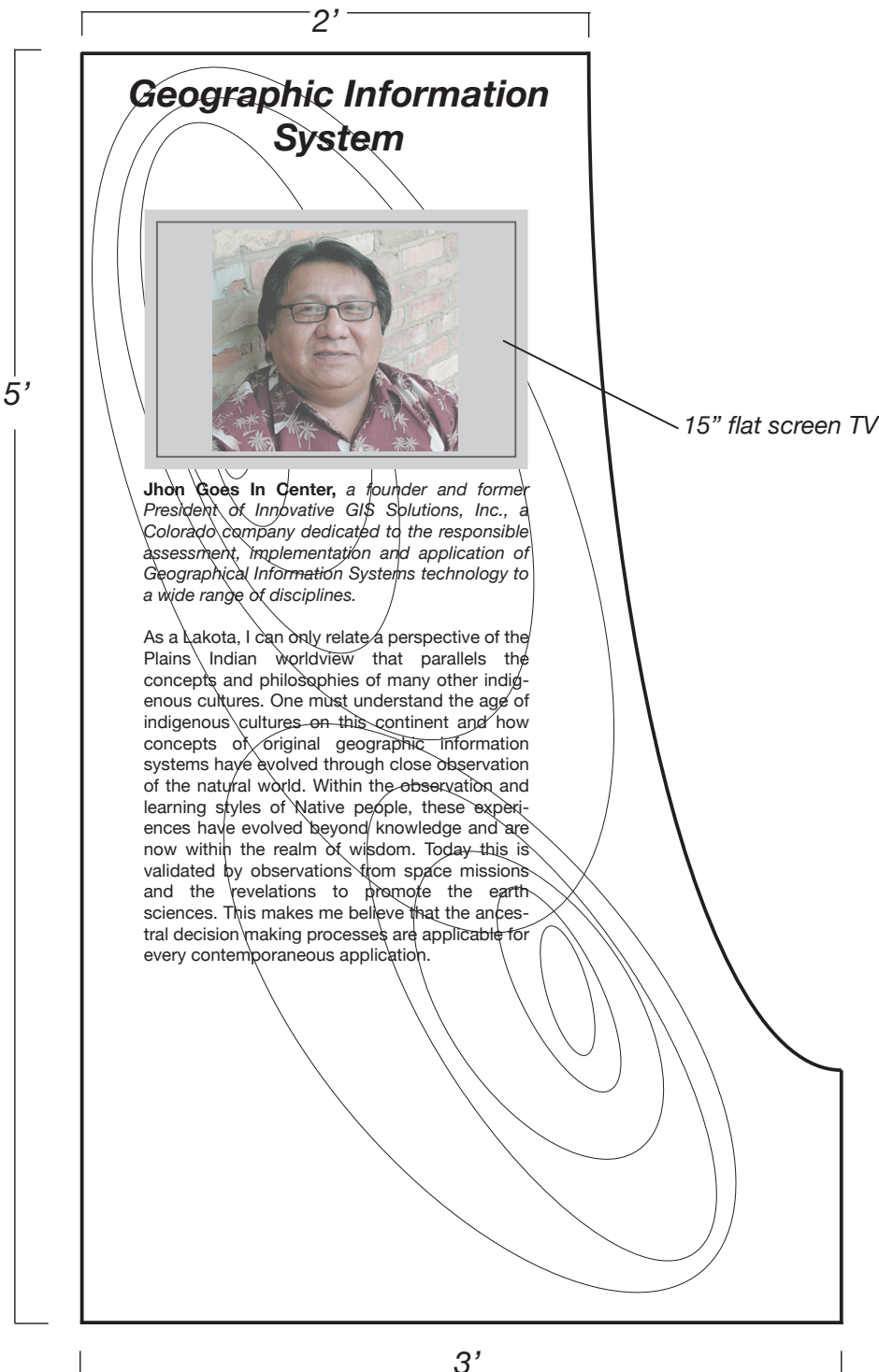
3.1 Sketch Close up of Embedded Floor case

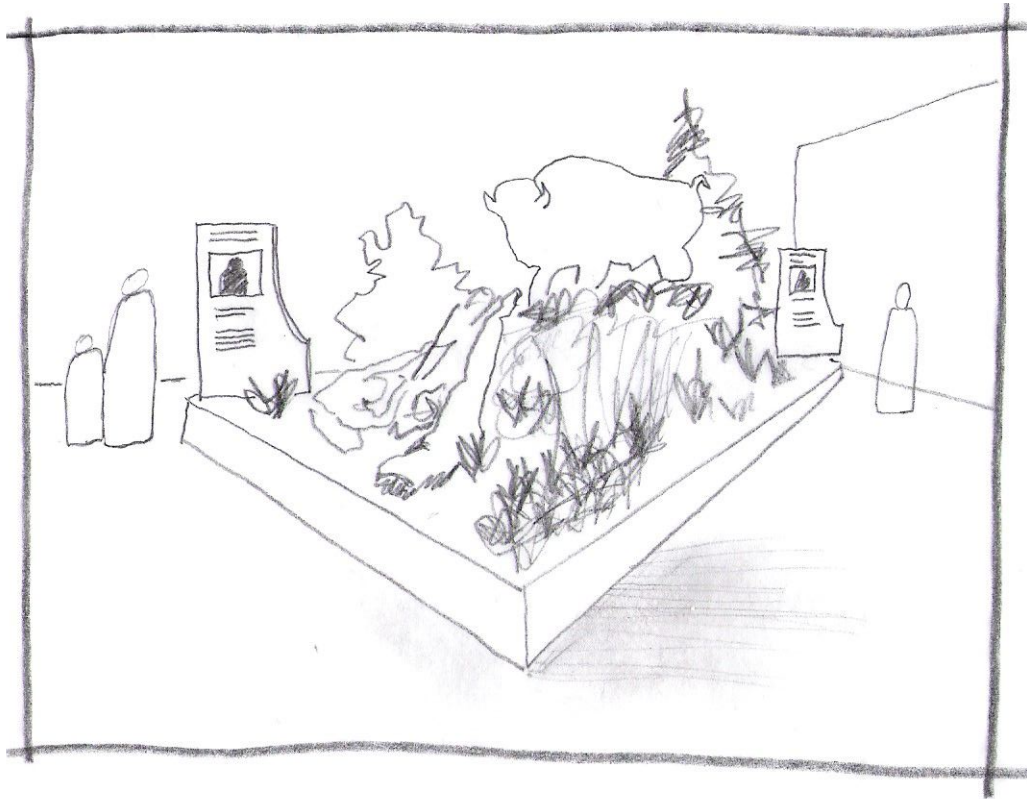
Embedded floor cases

Beginning with the embedded floor cases that will house the moccasins through out the gallery, each will be lit from within the case and lit from above. The above lighting will not be “lighting” the object, as it will be creating a dramatic spotlights for visitors to follow. By using the floor cases, the visitor will be given another point of view of the moccasins.

Wall and floor graphics

Using large graphics posing questions that visitors may not feel comfortable asking on the walls, floors and pedestals may create a dialogue and help visitors to ask more questions and seek answers.





4 Sketch Drawing of Buffalo Hunt Diorama

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