NATIVE DESIGNERS OF HIGH FASHION: EXPRESSING IDENTITY, CREATIVITY, AND TRADITION IN CONTEMPORARY CUSTOMARY CLOTHING DESIGN

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the
GRADUATE INTERDISCIPLINARY PROGRAM IN AMERICAN INDIAN STUDIES
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In the Graduate College
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

2010
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are so many people out there who I’d like to acknowledge in this tiny one-page space: my family, dear friends, professors, advisors, and, of course, the designers. My amazing family means so much to me – they have done everything they could to encourage me throughout my life, sacrificing so much and always supporting my decisions. I would not be typing this dissertation if not for them. I consider my friends to be family – they have been my sisters, brothers, and cousins while I have been away from the Turtle Mountains. They looked out for me, kept me balanced, and offered hugs or jokes when I needed them most. Secondly, I must thank my academic family – those individuals who encouraged me in the classroom, shared their knowledge with me, and advised me throughout my numerous years in school. Finally, importantly, I thank the artists and designers who shared their knowledge and experiences with me.

Now, to name names. I would like to thank my committee – Nancy Parezo, Mary Jo Fox, Jay Stauss, Tom Holm, and Rayna Green. I’d like to thank everyone at the School for Advanced Research: James Brooks, John Kantner, and the wonderful staff who were so helpful during my time there, especially the IARC group (Cynthia, Elysa, Jen, Laura, Sylvanus and Daniel). To all of the Resident Scholars: it was an honor to be in the company of such brilliant individuals. I also want to extend a very special thanks to David and Kathy Chase for their generous support.

Many thanks to the librarians, archivists, directors and curators at the Heard Museum, Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, National Museum of the American Indian, New Mexico Office of the State Historian, Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian, and the Institute of American Indian Arts for helping me find so many rare articles, garments, and images. I’d especially like to thank Shelby Tisdale, Jonathan Batkin, Patsy Phillips, Steve Wall, Ann Filemyr, Tish Agoyo, Dennis Trujillo, Yara Pitchford, Greg and Angie Schaaf, Gomeo Bobelu, Ann Hedlund, Margaret Archuleta, Bob Martin and Luci Tapahonso, and Mercedes Duff. Thanks to the designers – Pilar Agoyo, Dorothy Grant, Patricia Michaels, Virgil Ortiz, Wendy Ponca, Consuelo Pascual, Penny Singer, Margaret Roach Wheeler, Margaret Wood, and many others, for sharing their stories, ideas, and images of their work.

This dissertation was made possible in part by financial assistance from the Ruth Landes Memorial Research Fund, a program of The Reed Foundation, and the New Mexico Office of the State Historian Scholars Program, the Smithsonian Institution, UA Excellence Fellowship in the Humanities and Social Sciences, the American Indian Graduate Center, UA Native American Student Affairs, and the Turtle Mountain tribe.

A huge thanks to my family, friends, and advisors, for guidance, support, and for listening to me talk about my project, which was pretty much all of the time. Special thanks to my friends who provided invaluable insight and helped me along the way: Alisse Ali, Amber-Dawn Bear Robe, Shawna Begay, Melissa Blind, Chris Choi, Ben-Alex Dupris, Sherry Farrell Racette, Samantha Ferguson, John Gibbs, Adam Joaquin Gonzales, Keith Grosbeck, Doug Miles, Bradley Pecore, Ryan Red Corn, Gretchen Schantz, Sarah Sense, Audra Simpson, Kerry Thompson, Mylan Tootoosis, Jennifer Vigil, and Eddie Welch.
DEDICATION

To my amazing family, dear friends, brilliant professors, helpful advisors, and, of course, the talented designers.
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ABSTRACT

American Indian traditional art forms have been reincarnated by contemporary Native designers and placed on human bodies in the form of haute couture. This project examines culture and identity through a historical and sociocultural analysis of contemporary Native American clothing design. This project focuses on the use of clothing design and adornment to promote cultural traditions and maintain a ‘Native’ identity. I equate this communicative use of design with the traditional role of storytelling: it allows Native designers to express, interrogate and subvert notions of Indianness; to create and perpetuate cultural traditions; to enhance aesthetic aspects of dress design; and to build and maintain community.

This project explores the world of Native high fashion, and provides a cultural contextualization and analysis pertaining to identity, creativity, and tradition. I hypothesize that these contemporary designers continue the long practice of incorporating the new with the old, and, in effect, creatively carry on their cultural traditions. Whether they update Native clothing styles of the 1800s, or Indianize contemporary fashion, these designers explore how modern cuts and materials can be blended with traditional cultural design concepts and symbols to create unique, expertly constructed, artistic, and highly valued garments. These artists have taken up new materials to display their traditional art forms in innovative ways to uphold and maintain their unique cultures, and to celebrate their heritage by educating a non-Indian buying public.

Using an interdisciplinary approach, I attempt to gain an insider’s understanding of Native fashion by interviewing principle actors in the industry, by observing and
participating in cultural and trade events, and by researching its history in archived records, stories and garments. The goal of this research is to add to the sparse literature on Native clothing, art, creativity, and identity by providing the only comprehensive critical scholarship on contemporary Native American fashion design.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE WORLD OF NATIVE HIGH FASHION

“[Fashion] represents one of the most basic and compelling of artistic impulses… the art of personal adornment” – Lloyd Kiva New (Native Uprising n.d.).

I. Introduction: General Project Overview and Research Intent

While flipping through Native Peoples magazine one day in 2003, I came across a photographic essay focused on contemporary Native high fashion. I was intrigued with how the designers incorporated elements from their cultures’ traditional art forms and clothing practices into high fashion. Who were these designers? Why did they pursue this form of expression? How did they break into the competitive world of high fashion, and how did they do it on their own culturally specific terms?

The Native American peoples of this continent have long histories of incorporating aesthetic choices into their everyday lives. Native artists continue to create provocative and striking art that derives from diverse sources and manifests in a wealth of forms. Contemporary Native designers continue the practice of combining the new with the old, and, as a result, creatively carry on their cultural traditions. High fashion is a new avenue for artists to explore. My Master’s thesis described the world of Native haute couture and wearable art, by focusing on the lives and artwork of Chickasaw/Choctaw weaver Margaret Roach Wheeler and the Squamish/Kwakiutl designer Pamela Baker. Through their experiences, I identified several key aspects of Native high fashion,
including the communicative power of clothing, its ability to perpetuate aspects of Native cultures, and its use in honoring individuals and in expressing social status and identity.

This dissertation builds upon the findings in my Master’s research and documents the Native fashion movement and the evolution of Native American dress as fashion, and analyzes, discusses, and critiques cultural and social issues associated with this movement. My dissertation traces the history of Native fashion, starting with Lloyd Kiva New (Cherokee), a successful designer in the late 1940s who became one of the founders of the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA), and continues by discussing the wearable art of such designers as Margaret Wood (Navajo/Seminole), Wendy Ponca (Osage), Patricia Michaels (Taos), Pilar Agoyo (San Juan/Cochiti/Santo Domingo), and Virgil Ortiz (Cochiti). My geographical focus is on the U.S., concentrating on designers who are from or work in the American Southwest. I also investigate the role of the Institute of American Indian Arts in the development of Native clothing design instruction, since many Native designers have been affiliated with the Institute in some capacity since its inception in 1962. Questions that arose in my thesis that I expand upon in this project include: What is Native high fashion? Who are the key players? Why is it successful now? How does it present identity and promote cross-cultural education? How does it fit into and interact with American haute couture fashion? And what role does it play in the preservation and creation of cultural traditions?

While working on my thesis, questions of definitions surfaced and these are further explored in my dissertation. How do we define Native high fashion? What is fashion and how does it differ from the idea of clothing? What is a designer? Who is
Native? Does high fashion include Powwow regalia or mass-produced T-shirts? Is there anything considered ‘off-limits’ for Native fashion? Does Native fashion include attire made exclusively for internal use in the maker’s culture as special occasion attire? Can Native American artists collaborate with non-Native designers and produce Native fashion? My definition for fashion is fairly standard: fashion is used with reference to attire, with regard to apparel or personal adornment, and includes the discussion of a particular ‘cut’ or style. But fashion also includes an economic element (Davis 1992), and fashion is used in at least two senses – fashion as a garment to wear, but also as a way to distinguish the act of simply wearing clothing from the act of attempting to influence styles and tastes.

In order to narrow the parameters of my research, I have limited the definition of ‘Native high fashion designers’ to those creative individuals who design original, one-of-a-kind clothing at some time in their career, participate in fashion shows, and sell their garments to tribal members, as well as Native and non-Native clients (who are typically wealthy Native art collectors). These men and women constantly create new clothes for a fashion market – whether it be regional, national, international, or all three. The designers highlighted in this dissertation have established themselves as important artists by consistently participating in these activities over the duration of multiple years. They also share an ideology about clothing that characterizes high fashion designers around the world. High fashion designers see the body as an art form and their creations as wearable art which must be seen in motion.
However, flaws in the lexicon exist. Terms such as authentic, genuine, traditional, and contemporary are all problematic, and I discuss these terms more in-depth in chapter six. However, due to the nature of this topic, and the fact that several primary sources use these terms, this document must also. In general, I use the term *tradition* typically to refer to ‘classical’ garments made in the 1800s before the reservation period which are still seen by tribal members as carrying cultural meaning. Throughout this document, I use the phrase *fashion-forward* when designating clothing, or a person, at the cutting edge of fashion. I used the expression *fashion victim* when discussing a person who slavishly follows trends in clothing fashion. *High fashion* is synonymous with *haute couture* – with *couture* referring to fashionable dressmaking or design, the designers or makers of fashionable clothes, and the clothes made by them. It includes exclusive designs, which are often unique garments created for individual clients. In France, *haute couture* is a label that can only be used by couturiers who meet certain criteria, which includes designing custom-fitted garments for private clients, having a shop with at least fifteen full-time employees, and presenting a collection each season to the Paris press. However, elsewhere, the term is also used to describe high-fashion custom-fitted clothing, and has also been ‘misused’ by the general public to describe ready-to-wear.

Clothing and attire equal costume in the minds of many clothing historians, however it is a dated term in many ways. The use of the term *costume* has fallen out of favor with Native peoples, since it connotes ‘dressing up,’ as if the wearer were an actor or actress representing a character in a play or film, and thus opens possibilities for stereotyping. The designers in this dissertation emphasize the contemporaneity of Native
garments, as opposed to dramatic traditional and stereotyped historic attire. However, in
some instances a primary source has used ‘costume’ to refer to a marked form of attire:
“The mode or fashion of personal attire and dress (including the way of wearing the hair,
style of clothing and personal adornment) belonging to a particular nation, class, or
period” (Oxford English Dictionary 2002). But for the sake of this project, I avoid using
the word when possible, especially since some Native people have protested the use of it
to describe or categorize their clothing; they argue that the use of costume equates with
folk garments and has evolutionary implications of primitive, simple, or premodern
connotations. Throughout this document, I interchangeably use the following terms:
garment, clothing, attire, dress, garb, and other equivalent neutral signifiers. I use the
term design in three main ways. The first is as a noun to refer to the preliminary
conception of an idea that is to be carried into effect by action. This definition of design
connotes purpose, aim, and intention. The second denotation of design is a verb meaning
to create with artistic skill or decorative device and to adorn with a design. I also
exchange it with other words such as symbol or motif when referring to a pattern.

The question of who is Native arises continually in Native art and has legal
implications. It is a thorny and contentious issue as anyone who has attended Indian
Market in Santa Fe well knows. Under the Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990 (P. L. 101-
644), all art products must be advertised truthfully in regards to the heritage and tribal
affiliation of the maker. Under the act, ‘Indian’ is defined as a person who is an enrolled
member of a State or Federally recognized Tribe, or has been certified as an Indian
artisan by a governing body of an Indian Tribe. For the sake of simplicity, I focus on
individuals who self-identify as Native American and are recognized by their tribal communities as members. I use the terms Native American, Indian, and American Indian interchangeably, and whenever possible I reference specific tribes.

Since I have chosen to focus on the United States I will not be able to expand on one of the findings in my thesis, in which I focused on one Canadian First Nations designer and one U.S. Native American designer as case studies. Through my research, I discovered that the Canadian public perceives First Nations designers differently than do Americans. For example, First Nations designers participated in major Canadian fashion week events, and reporters expressed excitement for these designers who they felt would provide that extra something to differentiate Canadian fashion from European fashion. At one event, a reported stated, “A quartet of Canada’s top First Nations fashion designers showed the best the country has to offer at ‘Cultural Reflections’” (Leeming 2005). First Nations designers are celebrated for their unique cultural contribution to the Canadian fashion world and are not considered primarily ethnic artists but national artists. In the U.S., such coverage is significantly less, with one exception: Virgil Ortiz, who has been followed by the press since his 2002 collaboration with Donna Karan. This demarcation reveals that Native designers in America still have much to overcome before they are truly accepted in the elite national market. Also, it is evident that the fashion industry is still unsure about issues of Indian contemporaneity, nostalgia and Americanness, or whether it has the right to include Indianness as an essential component of American fashion.
My work focuses on the Native fashion industry by starting from the ground up and by looking at successful designers and their experiences, goals and values. Through the individuals featured in this project, I analyze how Native American designers continue cultural traditions of customary clothing design and innovation, by updating traditional designs and creatively Indianizing contemporary American fashion styles and silhouettes. The designers reinforce the idea that clothing serves multiple purposes, including symbolism, to signal tribal identity and pride in Indianess. Garments also visualized or served as mnemonic devices for stories and as such were, and sometimes still are, considered important aspects of oral tradition and storytelling, especially since contemporary clothing design incorporates important cultural symbols onto fabric as signifiers. The designers demonstrate the continuation of two other oft-overlooked cultural processes that can be seen as traditions – how Native people, through intricate trade networks, have always incorporated what we now consider the ‘global’ with the ‘local,’ and that Native people have always integrated new materials and ideas into their preexisting cultural frameworks and have established processes for making them unique and culturally meaningful. Continuing this practice, contemporary designers explore how traditional cultural design concepts and symbols can be blended with modern cuts, silhouettes, and materials to create unique, expertly constructed, artistic, and highly valued garments. Haute couture, as created by Native American artists, offers a particularly vivid opportunity for designers and their patrons to express a range of ideas about Native culture and identity. It is my goal to analyze these ideas as expressed by the designers themselves. In short, I let the designers define Native high fashion and identify
the essential and necessary features that distinguish it from mass-produced clothing, costume and high fashion in general.

Another key aspect of this study is to understand the economics of Native fashion, and how this articulates with or differentiates wearable art from other Native art markets.

Native high fashion is sold and seen in a multitude of venues. One of the most exciting of these spaces are the Indian market events held throughout the year where designers sometimes collaborate to stage fashion shows. Designers often have their own booths to display their work, or they work with area galleries, museums, or boutiques to showcase and sell their garments and accessories. Native high fashion is also displayed at cultural events, musical concerts, parties, or during the annual fashion week. The garments are showcased in art galleries, museums, and magazines, and can be bought at boutiques, trunk shows, and powwows, through online stores and by special order.

The average person is usually surprised to hear that Native designers of high fashion exist. In fact, Native people have a long-held tradition of customary clothing design. To clarify this point, throughout the text I refer to the classical styles or traditional practices that inspire each contemporary Native designer. In addition, I also briefly discuss the less-documented Native-made everyday and special event clothing of the early 1900s that has helped bring these remarkable artists to where they are today. The bulk of this study, however, focuses on contemporary clothing design since the 1950s.

Native high fashion has been overlooked by scholars, be they individuals who study Native art, the history of clothing, or fashion critics who discuss style, taste and
predict the next look. Fashion is a unique medium because the transformation of Native symbols into clothing activates the designs, and this turns the artwork into a form of performance art, which can be analyzed as a means of performing or expressing Indianness in a number of situations. Designers incorporate performance into their events, interspersing the regular fashion show format with theatrical acts. These effectively demonstrate the inherent aspect of performance in wearable art. Also, the designs are responsive to manipulation by the wearer. This activation makes clothing a highly effective form of communication. Fashion is a public, yet personal, form of artistic expression, it is a medium for cultural interaction, and it is immediately accessible for instantaneous assessment, as well as reflective visual analysis. Since it is worn by a wide variety of individuals and used in multiple contexts, Native fashion is elastic in meaning, allowing for multiple interpretations. Furthermore, messages imbedded in the designs may offer not only a celebration of Native culture, but also a subtle form of resistance and subversion in the face of the mainstream culture.

Defining the fundamental elements of the aesthetic and social worlds of Native high fashion, and discovering some of the strategies by which Native artists operate successfully within these worlds, sometimes turning the expectations of traditional art to market into wholly new forms, are the intents of this research. Aspects of Native high fashion are explored by an in-depth analysis of the work of key designers. In the process I identify the broad outlines of the subject and lay the theoretical groundwork for the discussion of Native artists’ adaptations to the unpredictable and sometimes fickle world of fashion. An examination the designers’ artwork illustrates the diverse contemporary
artistic intentions of their attire, yet acknowledges the blurred boundaries of contemporary customary clothing design. I document the use of Native designs in fashion, as it appears in dramatically innovative ways from traditional usages. Data collected from interviews with many of these designers is integrated with archival and ethnographic (participant observation) research. Watching and interacting with designers, models, and potential customers in action brings the attire to life, as it was meant to be seen, as art in motion on the human body.

The results of this study are intended to illustrate the opportunities and limitations of Native designers in high fashion in reference to the traditions and cultures of Native peoples. The goal of this research project is to discover how Native American artists of today have taken up new materials to display their traditional art forms in innovative ways that uphold and maintain their unique cultures, while educating non-Native customers, which is a time-honored feature of cross-cultural trade employed by Native artists in capitalist, mercantile, colonial, and precontact situations.

II. Background Information, Literature Review, and Problem Statement

In order to appreciate the complexity of contemporary Native high fashion, some general background information must be presented first. In particular, the concept of fashion as a means of communication is essential if we are to recognize and appreciate the power of clothing in performing and constructing identity. Also, it is important to understand the background of Native clothing, and that a long tradition exists concerning
customary clothing design and of incorporating new elements into preexisting traditional cultural frameworks.

A. Fashion: Communicating Through Clothing

In the past, the audience for haute couture was limited to those select few individuals who were financially and socially able to participate in an expensive and intentionally socially limited art world that visualized social status. Now, increasing numbers of people are becoming conscious followers of fashion due to economic well-being, the democratization of fashion, and the new form of communication that fashion offers. Ever more accessible to the general public due to mass communication, lives are increasingly affected by fashion’s growing importance and symbolic significance. Although contemporary fashion is viewed as a universal phenomenon, variations exist among societies as to its social significance. In general, however, most theorists agree that a ‘need for distinction’ and a ‘need for union’ are preconditions of fashion, because fashion holds the ability to both signal difference and express community (Sellerberg 2001: 5414).

Defined in part by its constant transformation, many theorists attempt to determine the driving force of fashion’s continual change (Sellerberg 2001: 5414). Scholars stress class and social differentiation as the origins of fashion. With this theory, it is assumed that individuals of lower classes strive to appear as members of a socially higher class. In the past, fashion was an easily seen distinguishing characteristic of the elite, and there were laws in many societies that prohibited non-royalty from wearing
certain colors. The choice of clothing style was a means of securing elevated status by
distancing the image of the self from that of the lower classes. The elite had to
continually create new sartorial cues in the form of fashion because the middle class,
especially since the increase of wealth that came with global trade allowed them to
constantly push at the boundaries of ascribed social status. This perceived process led to
Veblen’s theory of “conspicuous consumption.”

Another theory about fashion’s constant change concluded that the ‘inner
dynamic’ inherent in the contradictions that characterize fashion was the force that drove
change. Fashion is paradoxical or ambiguous because, as mentioned before, it can be
used to indicate differentiation, as well as union. It can also signal both creativity and
imitation, and it represents both destruction and construction. Arguably, these many polar
opposites offer a natural stimulus for continual change. In other words, the perceived
inherent contradictory traits of fashion – i.e. the need to both create new designs as well
as reuse older styles – causes change. Other theories about change have been proposed;
one is the ‘spirit of the age’ theory, which identified the stimuli of fashion as growing out
of an expression or reflection of the present time. The populist model recognized
individual consumers as setting their stamp on fashion, and the fashion system model
considered social centers as the source of continual change. These theories are important
to acknowledge because they make the consumer the ultimate source of change,
especially for social groups (like grunge) that want to make visible statements about
society. These ‘statements’ are often age-related, and were first acknowledged in the
1960s when youth became the stimulus for fashion. This turned some of the older
theories on their head. With all these theories, the role of the designers as tastemakers is questioned with regard to the degree with which they are creative interpreters, or “merely passive intermediaries in the commercially vital process of heeding consumers’ wishes and reconciling them with the producers’ requirements” (Sellerberg 2001: 5414).

The idea that fashion involves the destruction of the old and the construction of the new invokes the notion that fashion exists as a break with convention. ‘New’ could be defined as innovative and novel. However, different ideas and items are deemed ‘new’ selectively, varying by individual, social group, culture, age and time, and herein lies the basis of the theory that fashion exists as a cycle and that fashion is not born, but rediscovered and then the old is reinterpreted (Sellerberg 2001: 5414). With this theory we see a recycling of old styles with new twists, a continuous remixing of ideas and themes, and a dynamic interaction between convention and innovation.

Fashion is also theorized as developing from a personal need for a new form of psychological and social expression. In the hunt for self-expression, fashion is used as a mechanism to search for personal identity, to display and strengthen a sense of self, and to express individuality through personality, especially in situations where there are large populations and where people do not know everyone personally. Alternatively, fashion can also be used to mask difference and to avoid conveying individuality – and uniforms make the most of these qualities. Fashion transmits instantaneous visual cues. Dressing the part is important and expected. At a glance, people observe and interpret the signals transmitted through clothing and make judgments about the individual. Thus fashion’s
perceived lack of practicality is reconciled with its symbolic significance (Sellerberg 2001: 5414).

Clothing is a powerful form of expression because of its ability to be culturally and aesthetically innovative and responsive. It is highly visible, accessible, and often viewed as an extension of the self. It is fluid and flexible and can be manipulated to relay different messages, change to various meanings, or allow for multiple interpretations. In *Fashion, Culture, and Identity*, sociologist Fred Davis noted that clothes communicate through signifiers, symbols, visual cues, and codes. Clothing could be interpreted as a language, as a mode of representation, and as a form of communication. Nonetheless, as Barthes has noted in his work on French fashion and its semiotics, some degree of ambiguity exists because interpreting fashion relies heavily upon multiple variables. Therefore, in order to attain some degree of accuracy when deciphering the symbolic meaning of a piece, Davis noted the importance of considerations such as context, the perspective, and ‘undercoding.’ Interpretation of a fashion is dependent upon the environment in which it is worn, as well as factors such as the wearer and his or her body, the occasion, and the location. All play a role in producing situational meaning (Davis 1992: 8). In addition, the knowledge held by the viewer affects the meanings that an individual will derive from certain clothing items. In the absence of established rules or sumptuary laws (such as the chadora in some Arab societies), viewers rely on continuous ‘undercoding’ and interpret anything new with what they are comfortable with and expect, what is culturally habituated, with some previous knowledge and a general sense of fashion discourse. Even then, no definitive rules exist because meanings constantly
change or transform through time. Interpretation, then, does not imply decoding. Instead it refers to the process of understanding and constantly reassessing. Achieving precision and explicitness in ‘translating the language of clothes’ are thus ultimately unobtainable goals. Fashion implies fluidity in meaning.

Through the language of clothing, people communicate a specific but also desired social identity. Davis referred to this social identity as “any aspect of self that can be communicated to others via symbolic means.” He emphasized that while a common awareness of the meaning of a style may be shared within a culture, interpretations and judgments nonetheless will differ from person to person or group to group (Davis 1992). However, the combination of clothing elements, if taken as a whole, could bring to mind essentially the same suggestion for most onlookers because of cultural habituation. Fashion is a language of signs, symbols and iconography that non-verbally communicates meanings about individuals and groups, but these meanings are multi-vocal and subject to continual interpretation and reinterpretation.

Allison Lurie, in her book *The Language of Clothes*, employed a semiotic approach and compared the structure of language to clothing. Semiotics, a theory of the functions of signs and symbols as elements of systems of communication, can be applied to anything that is seen as signifying something. It is used to look beyond the specific texts to the systems of functional distinctions operating within them. Lurie found structural similarities between the vocabulary and grammar of language and the codes of clothing. A language of words, sentences, and paragraphs could be compared to articles of clothing, outfits, and styles. Just as paragraphs are comprised of sentences, fashion
trends are comprised of outfits. Together, words create sentences, just as articles of clothing create outfits. Like languages, different levels of fluency exist, and mastery of the clothing language can range from a limited capacity of expression to the ability to form a variety of ‘sentences’ that express a wide range of meanings. According to Lurie, different accents and dialects exist in fashion as they do in language. These accents and dialects materialize when a person is uniquely expressing oneself in the use of various accessories, or in spin-off trends, and some level of ambiguity continues to exist between the speaker/wearer and the viewer/hearer. In *The Fashion System*, author Roland Barthes also analyzed the relationship between images and text in the making of fashion (1983).

Other theorists discussed the globalization and spread of the idea of fashion, especially haute couture. Art theorist and author Bonnie English chronicled the democratization of fashion in her book *A Cultural History of Fashion in the 20th Century*. She explained how more people now have access to haute couture. The ideas about ‘access’ presented in her book inform much of the theoretical underpinnings of this study.

Fashion change has also been analyzed with regard to time period – as an aspect of different kinds of economies, and by culture. Several theorists have discussed whether fashion is a European invention or is a socio-cultural phenomenon that exists around the world. Barnes and Eicher stated, “Throughout the history of the human race, people have wanted to change the appearance of their bodies. Archaeological evidence and contemporary practices around the world have shown that humans add clothing, paint, or jewelry, and even alter the shape of their body parts” (1992: 1). For example, Anawalt illuminated the position that to the people of Mesoamerica, ‘dress was identity,’ by
analyzing Mesoamerican garments as reflections of historical and cultural styles and meanings (1981), and Bogatyrev investigated the diverse functions of the traditional attire of Moravian Slovakia, in which the form of the garment reflected its particular meaning, which could include spiritual, citizen, age-specific, sexual, secular, and everyday functions (1971). Eicher’s edited book on *Dress and Ethnicity*, is particularly relevant to my study because it investigated the topic of the expression of ethnic identity through dress. The authors discussed contact, and how in some instances clothing was used to mask identity and blend in, and, in other situations, it has been used to express pride in identity and political emphasis. The authors are also careful to note that even within a nation where everyone comes from the same ethnic heritage, thoughts pertaining to ethnic attire vary greatly (1995).

Books and articles written about the development of high fashion in non-Western cultures exist. Victoria L. Rovine’s *Bogolan: Shaping Culture through Cloth in Contemporary Mali* offered an in-depth investigation of the traditional African art form of mud cloth and its incorporation into the tourist market, the international art world, and the world of high fashion. Rovine discussed the existence of this art form in high fashion, which harkened back to its traditional use as clothing. But Bogolan in haute couture appeared in dramatic and innovative new forms and this, Rovine concludes, was the means by which the designers and their clientele expressed perceptions of Malian culture. The theoretical framework Rovine provided is applicable, with some alterations, to the study of Native fashion, in that, as she found, Bogolan and Malian aesthetics in haute couture appeared in dramatic and innovative new forms and this, she believed, was the
means by which the designers and their clientele expressed their varied ideas about traditional Malian culture. Rovine’s research demonstrated how contemporary artists incorporate traditions into the present with various materials (2001).

Several scholars have begun analyzing important issues pertaining to non-Western fashion design, many of which focus on African or Asian fashion systems (Kondo 1997, Loughran 2009, Nagrath 2003, Rovine 2001). These studies discuss how the Indigenous, cultural, ethnic or national fashion systems relate to the West, investigating why they are sometimes “defined as somehow lesser than, somehow Other to and somehow more feminized than [its] perennial Western foil” (Jones and Leshkowich 2003: 5). These authors note an important feature of the contemporary world of high fashion and the use of ethnic or cultural markers: non-Western designers ‘tone down’ their cultural influences, adding ‘touches of culture’ to predominantly-Western clothing styles in order to be more commercially successful. This tactic often leads to greater aesthetic acclaim from the Western perspective as well. Ethnic chic is mediated in cross-cultural situations because the fashion world is a continuous dialogue between consumers, producers and designers.

The designers in this study re-present traditional Native aesthetics to contribute to the persistence of tribal cultural knowledge. Contemporary Native high fashion underscores the concepts of adaptability and persistence, and of personal and community influences in aesthetics. Native high fashion draws from traditional Native concepts of art, clothing, and design, and combines those concepts with new non-Native materials, silhouettes, and individual creativity and innovation. The achievements of a few
contemporary designers have been highlighted in only a few articles and their work is worthy of a more substantive exploration. In fact, no substantial piece of literature offers an in-depth analysis of Indigenous haute couture or of the designers. It was a central purpose of this project to begin to fill this void.

Though many contemporary Native designers are fluent in other forms of art, several use clothing as their primary method of aesthetic expression and communication. These designers use their garments as a vital cultural link from the past to the present, and to express social and cultural identity on three levels: within their home community, the social world of other Native people, and in the haute couture and broader American and global fashion worlds. The designs employed often serve as an extension of identity because the symbols and colors communicate rapidly, offering visual clues to personality, artistic ability, aesthetics, and group affiliation.

**B. Continuity and Change in Native Clothing**

My research focuses on the use of clothing design and adornment to promote and maintain an ethnically and culturally ‘Native’ identity. I equate this communicative use of design with the traditional role of storytelling in that it allows for the transmission of cultural knowledge while also providing a creative means for redressing and coping with the effects of forced and insidious cultural assimilation. For the individual designer, creative agency is a strategy for balancing ingenuity with market demands, as well as a compass for navigating the constraints of tradition that govern the use of sacred and secular – but socially owned and controlled – symbols.
Considerable evidence points to the cultural significance of art in Native American communities. The practice and distribution of Native arts and crafts have strengthened group cohesiveness, often in the face of adversity (Archuleta, et al. 1994, Berlo and Phillips 1998, Kidwell and Velie 2005). Handmade heirlooms have served as offerings in rituals of reciprocity (Densmore 1928, 1929), as a means for expressing and maintaining connectedness with the spirit realm (Berlo 2007), and in the transmission of cultural knowledge to successive generations. For instance, Plains Indian men’s warrior shirts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries contained illustrative pictographs that could be consulted in the telling, remembering, and teaching of tribal history (Horse Capture and Horse Capture 2001: 21). As the authors noted, “the pictographs on robes and shirts served as mnemonic devices within the oral tradition of the Plains tribes. They are a kind of visual language, a language a shirt’s owner could consult to tell the story of his deeds and one we can learn to read as well” (Horse Capture and Horse Capture 2001: 21). Though the pictographs depict individual histories, their visualization and circulation among tribal members contributed to the greater identity and history of the community, thereby facilitating cultural reproduction.

Studies of Indigenous art draw attention to the interplay between custom and fashion in clothing design. Just as cultural stories have been a chief source of aesthetic inspiration, the ‘tradition of innovation’ has shaped the evolution of Native women’s dress (Landes 1938). By this tradition, ingenuity is often represented in a complex mixture of traditional local knowledge fused with materials from far-reaching trade
(Berlo 2007). The product, an amalgamation of cultures and aesthetics, both reaffirms and interrogates social notions of cultural identity.

Native artists and designers continue to interweave creativity, tradition, and identity in new ways, be it the experimental use of photography and new media (Rushing 1999, Lippard 2000, McMaster 1999), or in multicultural motifs that express pan-Indigenous identification (Lippard 2000). A handful of avant-garde artists have consciously applied this sensibility to transgressing other social boundaries, such as traditional restrictions regarding the depiction of religious symbols in which artists adapt and thus secularize the symbols while at the same time emphasizing and highlighting those core symbols that must not be forgotten (Parezo 1983). The evolution of Native art to incorporate new media and motives ultimately reflects the changing roles of its practitioners, who continually adapt to the increasingly global and mobile nature of both the fashion business and their respective communities.

In an article on Native coats, Marshal Becker noted that as the use of tanned animal skin and fur garments declined, accessories, certain designs, and specific colors became important cultural signifiers and indicated cultural identities. These accessories were decorated with designs and colors that were identifiable to individual cultures and were thus internally and cross-culturally significant. The use of cultural symbols would mark the identity of the wearer. Native groups also incorporated the use of color symbolism to allude to many meanings, and colors were also used as identifiers. Becker stated:

> When generic cloth garments slowly replaced leather and fur clothing among many cultures in the Northeast, members of each Native ‘nation’
may have used specific decorative modes to retain and express their unique cultural identity. Through the use of the specific details of dress or costume each native nation may have woven new elements into the fabric of its culture to retain cultural meaning.

(Becker 2005: 763)

In this instance, Native people reinterpreted their culture by applying older core concepts pulled from an existing cultural framework and applied these concepts to new objects. These items reflected the tribe’s core cultural concepts that were symbolized in the colors and designs placed on the accessories worn.

Ribbon shirts are one example of an adapting and enduring Indian garment. Colored silk ribbons were first introduced by French and English traders, and were subsequently adopted into Native traditional practices, including use as decoration for ceremonial offerings. Ribbons were also appliquéd onto clothing, sometimes using a mirror-image design with ribbons of contrasting colors (Paterek 1994: 45). Contemporary Native fashion designer Margaret Wood demonstrated how ribbonwork panels could be applied to various garments, including shirts, dresses, and skirts (Wood 1981: 87). Ribbon shirts for men – where the ribbons are sewn to the yoke – are now quite prevalent and have become a pan-Indian attire, worn with jeans or pants, for men at all types of special social gatherings. As Marsha Bol discussed in her article on Lakota women’s art practices, “Art can operate as a potent force in maintaining a cultural self-image due to its high visibility and yet non-aggressive character” (1985: 50). The incorporation of aesthetic Native attire elements into our daily lives could reaffirm and maintain cultural identity in the midst of tremendous stress, such as the civil unrest of the 1970s. Women’s
aesthetic practices have always supported tribal social systems. “Art,” Bol explained, “was the Lakota woman’s strategy in the battle to resist cultural change” (1985: 50).

Simple celebratory assessments of Native art’s new age, which idolize the beauty of contemporary art, such as one finds in gallery brochures, newspapers and many popular magazines, threaten to obscure the challenging reality of finding success as a ‘Native artist.’ Though designers and artists can now articulate a broader range of cultural identities through fashion (Rovine 2001), those who seek to navigate the global marketplace must maintain a balance between divergent interests: the opposing pulls of self-expression and group representation (Abbott 1994, Dubin 2001), local/tribal and pan-Indigenous identification (Hill 2002, Touchette 2003), and creative control and material success (Berlo and Phillips 1998, Mullins 2001, Phillips and Steiner 1998). This constant maneuvering highlights the importance of an artist’s flexibility, particularly necessary in high fashion, which reveres both classical styles and the flouting of sartorial convention.

The parallels between Native art and traditional Native storytelling allows for new insight into the motives and strategies of artists and fashion designers. Like the Plains Indian artists studied by the Horse Captures, contemporary Native fashion designers employ elements of visual language to speak ‘through’ their work. While many of these statements appear to project a broadened, more flexible sense of Native identity, an examination of artists’ individual narratives informs a more nuanced perspective. In interviews and statements, Native artists incorporate messages of cultural survival and institutional defiance into aesthetic descriptions of their work. Examples include Wendy Ponca’s use of Osage iconography to represent the vitality of contemporary Native
communities, and Virgil Ortiz’s stated aim of inspiring youth to challenge social norms (Ortiz 2009). Messages of cultural persistence and resistance are intrinsic to Native storytelling in much the same way: they serve as counternarratives to “soul theft,” i.e., the effects of forced cultural assimilation (Erdrich 2003). A defiant statement of Native cultures as living cultures underlies the work of many authors, whose stories weave the spiritual with the mundane (Blaeser 1997), and artists, such as Norval Morrisseau, whose paintings focus on traditional belief and wisdom (Morrisseau 1997).

Clothing design is a way of reclaiming the image of ‘Nativeness’ in the public sphere in that it allows individual artists to express what it means to be ‘Native American’ in the twenty-first century. The designers in this study have built successful careers, but have received little attention from scholars, art critics, fashion critics, or the art-world media. One reason for this marginalization may be that their chosen medium blurs the false boundary between high (strictly form) and low (strictly functional socio-culturally) aesthetic sensibilities. Traditional Indian aesthetics and haute couture are not distinct and polar opposites; rather they have much in common. Both high-fashion and traditional Native garments are evaluated on the quality of materials, the uniqueness of design, and the flawlessness of the design’s execution.

C. Special Concerns of Contemporary Native High Fashion

Complicating the effects of Hollywood images and stereotypic self-inscription are the issues of the (mis)appropriation of traditional motifs by non-Natives, and the improper use of traditional designs. It is widely recognized that all artists draw inspiration
from ‘cross-cultural’ influences. In the case of contemporary fashion designers, ‘borrowing inspiration’ is often considered natural and expected. It had been posited that designers must “raid the closets of the world” (Scafidi 2008) in order to sustain originality. Nothing is sacred or off limits. What is troubling for many Native artists – including Native fashion designers – is the co-opting of Native American religious or ceremonial designs. These powerful symbols, according to most Native North American tribal worldviews, have real world ramifications: the misuse of such designs will lead to increased land loss, health problems, poverty, and the loss of spiritual power. For example, in Pueblo worldviews, ceremonial dances ‘keep the world in order’ – the precision of dance movements, of song, and of presentation of the self plays an important role in maintaining the wellbeing of the universe. At these well-attended dances, photographic reproduction is strictly prohibited, since an unauthorized attempt to replicate any part of the dance may actually disrupt order and balance (e.g., Scafidi 2005). For these reasons, Pueblo fashion designers Pilar Agoyo, Patricia Michaels, and Virgil Ortiz never include sacred symbols in their designs (Agoyo 2008, Michaels 2008) whereas non-Native designers, who lack knowledge of cultural nuances, uncaringly or inadvertently may co-opt designs in their quest to depict “Indianness.”.

The unregulated flouting of specific cultural design rules is not merely cause for concern; it is indicative of the aesthetic sensibility that marks Native artists and distinguished them from non-Native designers. Regarding the use, or non-use, of certain subject matter as per community guidelines of taboo, artist Laura Fragua Cota explained, “[J]ust because I am away from the reservation does not give me the right to talk about
whatever I want or show or make whatever I want to make. ….There are certain things that I feel, because I am a part of this community, that I cannot do or I cannot show” (Mithlo 2008: 70). This communal sense of belonging exemplifies the degree to which a Native artist’s identity may be enmeshed with that of their community, and the ease with which an artist can shift between these two senses of self (Abbott 1994, Dubin 2001:67). Moreover, the designers presented in this study have a sense of the impropriety of using sacred symbols, which illuminates a broader discussion on expressing identity and demonstrates why strategies of self-representation aim to go beyond mere critiques of negative images.

The strategies utilized in counterhegemonic Native art are more creative ‘reform’ than ‘revolt.’ Counter-images in this sense are generated from a positive ethnic identity realized through creative acts of self-representation. Navajo painter Emmi Whitehorse has said that her work, which incorporates Navajo philosophy, is driven by her “intention to paint beauty, to protect and insulate myself – to keep sane” (Whitehorse 2007: 70). But Native art is about more than artists doing their own thing; it is thematic, it plays with interesting juxtapositions, and it sheds light upon contemporary and historical movements (Hill 2002). Visual culture has been recognized as a way to conceptualize and appreciate the connection between contemporary Native artists and previous generations (Rushing 1999: 104). Native fashion designers see clothing as an expressive cultural art form; they recognize themselves as ‘important links to the past’ and describe their work as new interpretations of ancient traditions.
In fact, authors in many popular American Indian magazines say that the work of contemporary Native high fashion extends traditional designs and concepts into the contemporary world. One of many examples of this process that will be seen in this book is that of potter-turned-designer, Virgil Ortiz, who inscribes Pueblo pottery motifs onto the human body in the form of high fashion. He combines Cochiti aesthetic traditions with innovative multimedia and situates this work among and between Cochiti traditions and the international art world.

The acknowledgement that there is Native-produced and inspired wearable art is relatively new. Contemporary Indigenous designers are now highlighted in publications such as *American Indian Art Magazine*, the Smithsonian’s *American Indian Magazine*, and *Native Peoples* magazine. A sharp increase in articles published in these popular Native arts and culture publications occurred in the mid-1990s. Unfortunately while acknowledging the existence of Native fashion designers, the coverage was almost always consistently brief. Only since 2005 has the article length increased, which reflects the increase fame of many designers. A brief look at these magazine articles reflects the new status of fashion designers in the contemporary Native American art world in recent years.

In the past, *American Indian Art Magazine*, which began publishing in the 1970s, included essays that discussed Native attire about once or twice per year. Per the instructions of the publisher, authors focused almost entirely on historic, or ‘traditional,’ clothing items that would be of interests to museums or individual collectors. Seminole patchwork, the revival of Northwest Coast weaving styles, and Plains Indian hide shirts
and beaded dresses were the most common topics covered, reflecting the art market and demographic of the readers of this magazine. Evident in every issue of the magazine were advertisements of art for sale. Betty David, Dorothy Grant, and Virginia Yazzie-Ballenger began advertising their high fashion in *American Indian Art Magazine* and in *Native Peoples* magazine in the early 1990s. *Native Peoples*, unlike *American Indian Art Magazine*, included featured articles on Native designers of high fashion beginning in the late 1990s. *Native Peoples* is a newer publication with a focus on the arts, culture and lifeways of Native peoples past and present, and includes many articles written by Native authors. This magazine is more likely to discuss new trends in the Native art world and highlight those individuals who are considered cutting-edge. *American Indian Art Magazine*, who counts researchers and professionals among their targeted readers, focuses only on those individuals who are long established.

That Native fashion design is important and becoming more recognized can be seen in recent exhibitions, fashion shows, and symposia that have presented Native designers and Indigenous haute couture, and, in essence, have legitimized the work of these artists for the fashion and art worlds. In 1998, in conjunction with the exhibition “Fashion Pathways: American Indian Wearable Art,” the Denver Art Museum presented “Indian Chic: A Fashion Show and Symposium.” Organized by Nancy Blomberg and Nancy Parezo, “Indian Chic” featured a fashion show of designs by Wendy Ponca (Osage), Margaret Roach Wheeler (Chickasaw/Choctaw), and Dorothy Grant (Haida). “Indian Chic” also included a symposium and Navajo fashion designer Margaret Wood shared her traditional Native clothing styles, Nancy Parezo discussed Frederic H.
Douglas’ Indian Fashion Show, Lloyd Kiva New talked about his own experiences in Native fashion design, Philip J. Deloria discussed various aspects of cultural exchange, and Margaret Blackman presented on the traditional Haida influences in the fashion of Dorothy Grant.

These articles, which were in magazines intended to celebrate Native heritage through the arts, demonstrated how Native high fashion is receiving increasing recognition and acclaim in the Native American art and museum world. The Smithsonian Institution’s *American Indian Magazine* has rarely included stories on Native clothing, other than as supplements to their few temporary exhibits on Plains Indian warrior shirts, the *Identity by Design* exhibit, which focused on Plains and Plateau Indian women’s dresses that were created in the 1800s, and the mislabeled Métis coat. However, in 2003, Maya Dollarhide wrote a three-page article on three Native women designers: Wendy Ponca (Osage), Virginia Yazzie-Ballenger (Navajo), and Margaret Roach Wheeler (Chickasaw/Choctaw). The article, written specifically for *American Indian Magazine* and sponsored by the National Museum of the American Indian, highlighted the influences of the women’s fellowships with NMAI in their design pieces.

The early 2000s witnessed a sudden increase in the media coverage of Native high fashion. Cochiti potter Virgil Ortiz collaborated with New York fashion designer Donna Karan. This high-profile collaboration spurred many magazines and newspapers, such as the *New York Times* and *The Republic*, to publish articles about the Native designer. The articles are brief, but all mention his skill in combining the old with the new, which is a key attribute of fashion (Andrews 2004, Baker 2004, Johnson 2004,
McGuinness 2005, McIntyre 2004, Servin 2003). Ortiz was chosen as the signature artist at the 47th Annual Heard Museum Guild Indian Fair and Market, and to be the Poster Artist for the 85th Annual Southwestern Association for Indian Arts (SWAIA) Santa Fe Indian Market. Being honored at these reputable venues signaled recognition by SWAIA and the Heard Museum of the quality of Ortiz’s work and also that fashion was now recognized as an important art form, and on a par with painting and pottery. It also signaled acknowledgement by the conservative Indian market world of this contemporary method of reinterpreting traditional art forms as authentic expressions of American Indian aesthetic traditions.

*Native Peoples* magazine showcased Native fashion, Indigenous haute couture designers, and Native clothing companies in their article “Native Fashion: From Haute to Just Plain Hot,” (July/August 2003). This photo essay included the garments of sixteen designers and six clothing companies. A total of thirty-four images were packed into just nine pages. As the staff writer expressed, “Native fashion is such a broad subject that we felt a ‘round-up’ approach was best for our first go at it” (N.A. 2003: 33). This article offered a survey of the field of Native fashion. Since Native high fashion was a relatively new topic to these magazines, brief and scattered articles are common, but a noted effort has been made to begin the discussion on this new topic.

*American Indian Magazine* celebrated Taos Pueblo designer Patricia Michaels in their Spring 2005 issue, discussing the diverse ways in which Michaels grounded her contemporary fashion in her cultural heritage. With just eight paragraphs, the article briefly introduced the designer, mentioned her background and studies in design,
discussed her design philosophy, described her style, mentioned her clientele, and alluded to the arduous process of creating high-end fashion. Michaels has received criticism from gallery owners and Indian market-goers because of her use of non-Native fabrics but this was not mentioned in the celebratory article. Nevertheless, her cover-story in the Smithsonian’s *American Indian Magazine* reaffirmed Michaels as an established Native designer worthy of note. To date, however, there has not been a critical assessment of Michaels’ or any other Native fashion designer’s work in the fashion literature.

Native fashion designers increasingly participate in exhibitions, art markets, and fashion shows. Reports on these shows often rely on interviews with participants and provide an outlet for the artists to explain their work. *Changing Hands: Art Without Reservation* 2 (McFadden and Taubman 2005), which focused on art that was considered ‘beyond function,’ spotlighted artwork by Native designers Pam Baker and Margaret Roach Wheeler. To explain Native high fashion, as a relatively new addition to the contemporary Native art world, Baker explained that her work is “contemporary with traditional influences” (McFadden and Taubman 2005: 31). Her high fashion *Chilkat Cape* incorporated design elements from the traditional Chilkat blanket. She described herself as an important link; her elders have influenced her artistic vision, and she in turn passes on cultural traditions, such as the potlatch, to her children, nieces and nephews (McFadden and Taubman 2005: 31). Margaret Roach Wheeler describes her work as “a fusion of past and present” as she literally and figuratively weaves traditional techniques with fine-arts training (2005: 215). She “recognizes clothing as an expressive cultural art form” and describes her work as “a new interpretation of ancient traditions” (2005: 215).
From 2008 to 2010, the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture in Santa Fe, NM, featured two revolutionary exhibits, Native Couture I: A History of Santa Fe Style, and Native Couture II: Innovation and Style – the first was organized by Anita McNeese, and the second by Shelby Tisdale and Valerie Verzuh. These exhibits explored the history of Native fashion from hand-made clothing and accessories of the 1880s that influenced the development of the Santa Fe Style, to today’s contemporary Native couturiers. These exhibits demonstrated how Native designers have influenced American fashion, and how they have also gone past the Santa Fe Style to produce ever-new and exciting garments. This influence of Native art and attire prompts the American public to ponder the origins of a truly unique American style. It also reflects why I have concentrated my efforts on Southwestern Native designers whose creativity is being recognized and celebrated.

In 2009 and 2010, the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian continued its dedication to exhibit Native jewelry and fashion by hosting trunk shows featuring Native designers and jewelers, including Penny Singer, Jennifer Curtis, Pilar Agoyo, and Cody Sanderson (figure 22). Trunk shows, which are temporary displays where artists and designers are present to display their work in a casual and interactive environment, are important ways for fashion designers and jewelers to show their art, to connect with collectors, and establish new clients. These types of events involve less time, energy, and funding than the standard runway fashion show, in which dozens of volunteers, hours of preparation, and large amounts of funding are required, and the trunk shows provide significant sources of income for designers. Because of their intimate nature, they are
also great opportunities for patrons to meet the artists. The Wheelwright provides an important service to designers by offering space where artists can interact with collectors.

New arts organizations have been formed that include fashion in their mission statements and projects. For example, Go Native Arts! is a television series that explores and celebrates Native arts and artists from throughout the Western Hemisphere. Each episode shares stories of tribal artists, offering new information on the process of art-making from a contemporary Indigenous perspective. The Go Native Arts! benefit party in 2009, at the Allan Houser Compound and Sculpture Park outside Santa Fe, presented new fashion designs by Patricia Michaels (Taos Pueblo), Dorothy Grant (Haida), and Penny Singer (Navajo). Another group, the UNRESERVED Alliance, is a new collective based out of New York, and was formed in 2009 by a team of American Indian entrepreneurs and leaders from the international worlds of fashion and art. Dedicated to empowerment, education and sustainability, their goal is to help Native designers and artists establish successful careers in the art and fashion industries, allowing them to incorporate their skills, knowledge, and heritage, and thereby enriching the international world of fashion. They also aim to ensure that Indigenous communities and individuals receive profits and proper credit for their cultural heritage and designs.

The UNRESERVED Alliance announced the establishment of a Designer Collective in 2010. Their inaugural event was a fashion installation during the Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week for the Fall/Winter 2010 collections. The event featured accessory and ready-to-wear designers from various tribal backgrounds at the Bryant Park Hotel Loft in Manhattan. The artists included purse-maker Maya Stewart (Chickasaw/Creek),
fashion designer Patricia Michaels (Taos Pueblo), jewelry-maker Kenneth Johnson (Seminole), mother and son jewelers Dylan and Veronica Poblano (Zuni), and jeweler Maria Samora (Taos).

Although the ‘Indian Style’ or ‘Tribal Trend’ has come into fashion several times in the past five decades with designers such as Ralph Lauren and Anna Sui, it has been represented by Native American designers only a handful of times on a national or international scale, with the most recent being the showings in 2009 and 2010 by Native designers during one of the most important events in the fashion world: the New York Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week. The four major Fashion Weeks – in New York, Milan, London, and Paris – are pinnacle events in the fashion world since they are designed for members of the press to view the best that the designers have to offer from these internationally-recognized fashion centers. In 2009, three designers, Dorothy Grant, Patricia Michaels, and Virgil Ortiz, marked an historical moment – the first time in history that Native designers participated in an event in Manhattan during New York Fashion Week.

However, there is still much for Native fashion designers to accomplish before they are accepted in the non-Native fashion world. In 2009, Grant, Ortiz and Michaels did not show at the elite Bryant Park tents. Instead, they presented their work at Ramscale Penthouse Studio. Physically, Ramscale is located on the outer limits of the fashion week events, on West Street, a few blocks away from Bryant Park. A year later, the event was held at the Bryant Park Hotel Loft, which regularly hosts important events during fashion week. Once again, the Native design collective did not show at the Bryant Park tents,
which serve as fashion central for the week, but the hotel is located across the street and represents a steady movement towards inclusion. These designers are dedicated to building a Native New York Fashion Week and Indianizing America’s fashion center.

Like the Native art movement of one hundred years ago, a number of Native American fashion designers have received notable recognition. Few, however, have had opportunities to control the terms by which Native fashion and attire is represented in American popular culture, especially in the world of high fashion. Nonetheless, the emergence of designer collectives, topical exhibitions in major museums, and other annual Native fashion events promises to ameliorate this situation by putting more Native people in the position of self-representation, especially as it pertains to collaborative projects on a global level.

In many ways, Native haute couture today represents a bridge between past and present, an extension of culture, and a continuity of traditions. The color, fabrics, silhouettes, and symbolic prints brought Native history, tradition, and culture to life on the runways. Native high fashion today meshes traditions and culture with contemporary styles, fabrics, and cuts. It serves as a vital link between past and future and reveals the interplay of custom and innovation. In many ways it can be said that Native high fashion is breathing new life into contemporary Native culture and art.

III. Research Purpose and Significance

One of the foremost goals of this study was to document the development and evolution of the Native high fashion movement. This topic is a timely one, and several of
the main participants of this movement are still alive and available for interviews. I have sought to document and discuss their experiences, their successes and challenges.

Another goal of this study was to analyze the various cultural and social issues associated with this movement. These issues include the appropriation and misappropriation of Native designs, including sacred iconography, in fashion. I also address the Western construct of beauty which champions certain physical characteristics as desirable – and I discuss how Native concepts of beauty correspond or conflict with this construct. A third goal is to return the representation of Indianness in fashion to Native agency, and I attempt to do this by highlighting those designers who are successful. Finally, I sought to discuss this topic from a Native perspective, therefore interviews become important.

No substantive scholarship concerning Native American fashion designers and their work exists; therefore, this project fills that void. Furthermore, those who work in the field of Native art call for more projects that not only offer Native perspectives, but also exemplify the talent, worth, and diversity of Native artists and allow Native people to define themselves and present themselves publicly. Native artists and designers benefit from this work because their work is documented, authenticated and legitimized for the public, and explained and provided with greater meaning. Hopefully, in response, more people will become aware of the significant work done by various Native fashion designers. This book not only documents the Native fashion movement, but analyzes and critiques it, and discusses its contemporary issues from a Native perspective.

Because this compilation includes the artists’ culturally specific ideas concerning their designs, art, and traditions, the narrow understanding of ‘authentic Indian art’ is
challenged and the knowledge pertaining to the possibilities of contemporary Native American art is increased. Native fashion demonstrates another way Native people have found to uphold their cultural traditions while incorporating new media that permits them to work to their fullest potential. The knowledge and unique world-views held by these artists is shared in this book; and, with this information, further knowledge of Native cultures today, as well as the art world of haute couture and American fashion is provided.

Through my research for this book, I have sought to highlight the practical efforts of Native designers to confront issues pertaining to identity, creativity, beauty, and gender. The goal of this research is to examine the assumptions of the sparse literature on Native American studies by providing the only comprehensive piece of critical scholarship on Native high fashion.

**IV. Research Procedures (Methodology)**

Multiple qualitative techniques were employed for this study, including searching both archival and contemporary records, interviewing, and conducting ethnographic research concerning the fashion industry, historic Native attire and symbols, and contemporary Native designers and their garment designs. The historic aspect of the research involved the analysis of documents held by libraries and several museums pertaining to fashion, Native clothing, and fashion shows and exhibitions. I employed an interdisciplinary approach while searching for, compiling and analyzing the resulting data, engaging the analytical techniques of anthropology, art history, sociology, oral history, folklore, education, history, and critical culture studies folded into an American
Indian Studies paradigm. This approach of conducting research using selected techniques by concentrating on relationships and the interaction among various disciplines allowed me to illuminate the connection between high fashion and traditional Native clothing practices where it has previously been overlooked.

Ethno-historical context is essential to an analysis of any ethnographic data (Marshall and Rossman 2006, Bernard 2005). I conducted archival research into the history of the Native fashion movement and the evolution of Native adornment, specifically as it pertained to aesthetics, identity, tradition, and culture. My examination of some cultural symbolism from the artists’ home communities (such as with Wendy Ponca and Virgil Ortiz) provided an initial cultural framework for the research, while museum collections provided historic examples. The collections consulted are held by the National Museum of the American Indian, the National Museum of American History, the Heard Museum, the Institute of American Indian Arts archives, the collections at the School for Advanced Research, the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, and the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian.

In each chapter, I include a review and analysis of the past and present work of these and other designers, the information obtained from newspaper and magazine articles, photographs of the garments or events, artist brochures and pamphlets, video recordings of shows, exhibition catalogues, and event advertisements. A textual analysis of articles, newspapers, and advertisements was conducted.

Context, setting, and the participants’ frames of reference were important to this study (Marshall and Rossman 2006: 53). My research included interviews, since I sought
to identify the limitations and opportunities for Native designers in the fashion industry from their perspective in an attempt to value, reclaim, and foreground Native voices and epistemologies (Denzin, Lincoln, and Smith 2008: 22). This method assumes that people construct their realities through narrating their stories (Marshall and Rossman 2006: 117; Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith 2008). Furthermore, incorporating stories demonstrates an ethical sensitivity to the participants (Marshall and Rossman 2006: 171; Denzin, Lincoln, and Smith 2008). For studies on individuals’ lived experiences, actions cannot be fully understood unless the meanings that they assign to them are discussed; therefore, deeper perspectives were sought. Since quantitative methods may mask or displace stories, various qualitative methods were used (Marshall and Rossman 2006: 54, 115).

Accordingly, I interviewed different actors in the fashion world, such as Native designers, models, art students, and Native-fashion consumers. In the anthropological tradition of gaining an ‘emic’ or insider’s understanding, the interviews were structured by my observations and partly led by the interviewees (Bernard 2005, Marshall and Rossman 2006). My inquiries nonetheless reflected an interest in the following issues: the definition of beauty and different senses of aesthetics, the use of particular Native icons in commercial designs, and claims to property rights for certain symbols.

I conducted informal or semi-structured interviews with as many Native fashion designers as possible, including Pilar Agoyo, Walter Barney, Ben-Alex Dupris, David Gaussoin, Dorothy Grant, Patta Joest, Patricia Michaels, Virgil Ortiz, Consuelo Pascual, Wendy Ponca, Penny Singer, Margaret Roach Wheeler, Margaret Wood, and others. I chose these individuals because of their participation in the fashion world and the
important role they have played in the development of the Native high fashion movement – in other words, these individuals are publicly acknowledged as important participants – but they were also selected because of the southwest regional focus of this study.

Informal interviewing was beneficial not only at the start of my research, but also throughout, to establish rapport and to uncover new topics. Semi-structured interviewing was employed to pursue certain topics, yet to also to provide flexibility to follow new leads (Bernard 2005: 211-212). Information obtained from these interviews is incorporated throughout the chapters. The designers’ conceptualizations of their artwork provide the theoretical filter though which the continuance of Native traditions in aesthetic practices can be understood.

Interviews helped to shed light on discovering what these designers thought about their work, however my research also included ethnographic observation, and I observed the culture of Native high fashion at fashion shows, Indian markets, art fairs, exhibitions, powwows, and other local arts events from 2005 to 2010. I employed participant observation as part of a mixed-method strategy (Denzin, Lincoln, and Smith 2008: 233). Context matters: human actions are significantly influenced by the setting in which they occur, therefore conducting research in those situations is important, and internalized notions of values, traditions, roles, and norms are crucial aspects of an environment (Marshall and Rossman 2006). I employed direct observation, including reactive and nonreactive strategies, at these locations (Bernard 2005: 413). Participant observation in these settings offered invaluable information pertaining to sales and marketing. Participant observation, it is noted, is the foundation of cultural anthropology because
research is conducted ‘where the action is’ in order to collect invaluable data (Denzin, Lincoln, and Smith 2008; Bernard 2005: 342, 384). The interviews and direct observations offered the opportunity to explore, in-depth, the significance and importance of tradition to these contemporary fashion designers and how they incorporated these elements into their art to create successful businesses yet be culturally sensitive.

V. Chapter Overviews

While knowing Native clothing traditions from the 1800s and prior is integral to appreciate the contemporary Native clothing scene (from the 1990s to the present), understanding Native fashion in the early 1900s is also essential. This time frame bridges the gap between the well-documented clothing of the 1800s and the high fashion movement detailed in this project (1945-present).

In the 1940s, artist and anthropologist Frederic H. Douglas created the first Native American fashion show with an assortment of historic ensembles from the Denver Art Museum’s collection. The garments were made between 1830 and 1950, and were “technically perfect, aesthetically pleasing in the maker’s and Anglo-American cultural paradigms, and ‘typical’ yet outstanding” (Parezo 1998: 245). Each piece was consciously selected to exhibit Native American creativity. In a series of academic articles, Nancy J. Parezo has analyzed Douglas’ fashion shows and the subsequent effects of this program on US fashion. Interestingly, the creators of the garments were not emphasized, running counter to most fashion shows that acknowledge and celebrate the designer. In fact, Douglas purposefully omitted the origins of the clothes in order to
highlight their universality and to “promote interracial understanding” (Parezo 1998: 245). Douglas sought to educate his audiences and always narrated each presentation, the interpretations incorporated ethnographic information into the vocabulary of popular fashion show commentary. Douglas’ fashion show model is still recognizable in the Native fashion shows of today. Douglas’ show encouraged an appreciation for the beauty of Native attire, was successful within the U.S. fashion industry, and projected Native clothing design into the world of haute couture.

A. Chapter Two: Lloyd Kiva New, Cherokee Textile Designer

About the time that Douglas’ fashion show was touring America, a Cherokee fashion designer named Lloyd Kiva New, created lines of clothing, handbags, and textiles, and sold them throughout the United States and Europe. An educator, entrepreneur, fashion designer, and fabric artist, New graduated from the Art Institute of Chicago, headed the Southwest Arts Project, and eventually co-founded the Institute of American Indian Arts. Chapter two, Lloyd Kiva New: Native Fashion in the 1940s and 1950s, chronicles the untold story of the fashion produced by Lloyd Kiva New and the beginning of the Native American high fashion movement.

In the 1940s, New opened a fashion studio in Scottsdale, Arizona, with his friend Douglas’ financial help. New’s garments and accessories were crafted from hand-woven Cherokee fabrics, hand-dyed textiles, and leather (The School of the Art Institute of Chicago 2006). Throughout his career, he promoted cultural heritage through the arts. He stated:
For the past 2-300 years, there has been a wiping out of Indian culture. Now, we are looking towards a revival of Indian traditions and of Indian art forms. But we need to realize that nobody lives on an island; we are affected by modern things like technology, just like anyone else. You just can’t make a basket and express everything there is that needs to be expressed about Indian culture. You need to use different forms of expression, like painting, drama, and filmmaking.

(The School of the Art Institute of Chicago 2006)

New believed that Native art was experiencing a renaissance, and in order to support this movement, he advocated for creative freedom of expression in Native arts and emphasized the need for artists to adapt their materials and techniques to changing times. He viewed this practice as a natural phenomenon and necessary aspect in the act of keeping Native arts alive and relevant.

In 1952, New became the first Native American clothing designer to be acknowledged as a noteworthy designer on a national scale when a *Los Angeles Times* article featured his dress with the following caption: “This is going to be an Indian summer. The growing influence of the Southwest is responsible for the American Indian theme rampant in current sportswear. This two-piece dress by Lloyd Kiva, of Scottsdale, Ariz. (a Cherokee Indian himself), illustrates the trend. It’s made of cactus-green and desert-sand wool with hand-woven trim” (Short 1952). As the reporter relayed, popular fashion in the early 1950s was influenced by Native themes and it is relevant to note that a Native designer was spotlighted in discussing this trend. Lloyd Kiva New is celebrated for his role in promoting all Native arts, but I investigate his role in revolutionizing Native customary clothing design in the 1950s.

**B. Chapter Three: Education and Native Clothing Design**
Chapter three, *From Sewing to Traditional Techniques: The Role of Education in Contemporary Native Clothing Design*, analyzes the incorporation of sewing and clothing-making courses into the Indian boarding school curriculum and, later, the Institute of American Indian Arts course offerings. Indian boarding schools opened in the late 1800s to assimilate, acculturate, and Americanize young Native students (Adams 1995, Archuleta et al 2000, Child 1993, Lomawaima 1994). This chapter investigates the ‘dual quality’ of dress: that clothing may mean one thing to the wearer (i.e. the student), and another to the viewer (i.e. the boarding school officials who viewed the uniformed student as fully assimilated). For example, some officials believed that if Native female students looked and dressed like their morally upright American counterparts, it could be assumed that the students could assimilate and become brown versions of white Americans. While the ‘re-clothing’ of American Indian youth was intended to symbolize a controlled cultural transformation, students utilized subversive techniques to preserve their cultural identities, create new cross-cultural worlds for themselves, and incorporate additional practices into their existing cultural frameworks (Deloria 2004, Hyer 1990). Native Americans have long code switched between their Native tongues and English. Students similarly switched back and forth between ‘citizen’ American clothing and traditional Native attire persuading non-Natives that they were simultaneously Native and civilized (Green 2007). This is in many ways an example of how fashion theorists model attire where wearers negotiate their clothing choices to reflect both group belonging and individuality in a range of social and cultural situations.
As several Indian boarding schools closed, a new one with a different vision opened: The Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) in Santa Fe (1962). IAIA attempted to correct and atone for inequities in education resulting from decades of ‘mis-education’ at Indian boarding schools. The clothing design curriculum at IAIA focused on creative expression of the self through textiles and garments. The curriculum encouraged both male and female students from all tribal nations to participate, regardless of tribal affiliation or whether or not the technique was traditionally practiced by the individual student’s community, and in the process overlooked any traditional gender divisions. The focus was on the continued use of traditional techniques combined with contemporary creativity. IAIA was an important place where students could pursue aesthetic studies, without being pressured into assimilationist practice. It was and still is an ideal location for a Native fashion program. Because of its revolutionary arts education philosophy, IAIA has produced the most avant-garde of the contemporary Native fashion designers and was the training ground for many of the men and women discussed in this book.

This chapter draws on the scholarship of K. Tsianina Lomawaima and Teresa L. McCarty (2006), who, in their book, *To Remain an Indian*, propose the idea of ‘safety zones.’ I argue that for various reasons, clothing was viewed as a ‘site’ where school officials believed that dangerously different cultural expressions could be safely domesticated and thus neutralized. Tribal Indian attire was deemed dangerous in the late 1800s because of its perceived connection to identity, culture, and values. I also draw on Gerald Vizenor’s concept of survivance, which, according to him, “is more than survival,
more than endurance or mere response, the stories of survivance are an active presence” (1998: 15). Resistance in the form of active presence is an important concept to understand, especially when discussing the wearing of tribal identity markers on attire.

C. Chapter Four: Wendy Ponca and Design Instruction at the IAIA

Chapter four, *Wendy Ponca and Fashion Design Instruction at IAIA*, spotlights the career of fashion instructor and designer Wendy Ponca (Osage). Ponca taught the clothing design classes at IAIA for a decade, and her teaching and design philosophies are analyzed in this chapter. Building on the previous chapter, I document Ponca’s perceptions of Native high fashion. Her garments and fashion shows deconstructed stereotypes, presented theories of female beauty and power, imparted Osage oral tradition and cosmological beliefs, and championed fashion as art (Ponca 2009). As IAIA’s main fashion instructor, Ponca undoubtedly greatly influenced her students’ work and the contemporary Native fashion world (McGraw 1997).

As a designer, Ponca used innovative new materials for her clothing designs which tell traditional Osage stories. For example, she incorporated Mylar, a synthetic material used on space shuttles, which she conceptualized as connected with the sky and stars. Ponca perceived this as compatible with Osage cosmological beliefs. Traditional Osage stories relate a deep connection that exists between the earth people and the sky world, since the Osage believe that their ancestors came from the sky (Dollardhie 2003). To Ponca, the use of Mylar accentuated the wearer’s relationship with the sky. Ponca also painted tattoos onto her female models’ bodies and adorned their hair with feathers for
photographs and fashion shows. Other designers such as Pilar Agoyo and Virgil Ortiz have recently used similar body adornment in their shows and fashion shoots.

Importantly, Ponca co-founded the Native Influx/Uprising collective of designers, models, and artists, which was the first group of its kind – effectively establishing Santa Fe as the center for haute Native fashion. Furthermore, because of the innovations of this group, the Santa Fe Indian Market added new categories for judging clothing and paved the pathway to create a new market venue for Native clothing designers.

D. Chapters Five and Six: Native Female Fashion Designers

Chapters five and six investigate the emergence of a movement of Native female fashion designers in Indian Country in the 1970s, and their influence on contemporary designers. The first in the two chapter arc, *Native Female Designers: Producing Indian Chic in Indian Country (1970s – 1980s)*, focuses on designers who created garments that were made with the ‘new’ Native woman in mind. These clients took center stage as members of the Indian advocacy groups that formed in the 1960s and 1970s or as speakers and tribal leaders in the 1980s. Their designs were based upon centuries of Native American traditions of creativity in clothing construction, and their work should be viewed as a continuation of the evolution of Native American fashion and decorative work. Some designers reoriented their ability to create ceremonial, dance, or powwow attire to design secularized and sellable couture, continuing the legacy of their ancestors in an acceptable form. It is important to note that in the 1950s many Native people wore popular American trends to express post-war conformity, but they increasingly began
wearing their Indian identity on their sleeves in the 1960s and 1970s. Through this act, they communicated to non-Natives an active presence – that Indians were still alive and thriving.

This new Native woman was active in her community or in urban Indian groups as a speaker and advocate for issues such as adequate health care, improved educational opportunities, and increased alcohol and violence prevention and intervention programs for Native communities. The garments displayed a respect for tribal clothing traditions, but also a trendiness that reflected the contemporary existence of the wearer, who wanted to express her ‘20\textsuperscript{th} Century Indianness’ on her clothing (Indian Arts and Crafts Board 1977, Green 2007, Wood 1981). Several of the designers incorporated Native powwow chic and fashion-forward clothing into their designs. These women participated in fashion events held in busy urban Indian centers or museum openings, or in conjunction with powwows located deep in Indian Country.

I hypothesize that when Native female designers create attire for other Native women, they infuse the garments with their ideals pertaining to identity, gender, the female body, and representation. These concepts revolve around notions of what constitutes beauty, how Indianness should be presented, and how the new Native woman reflects both her traditional background as well as contemporary Indian America. Designers address the past and current state of affairs, all while looking to the future of Native communities. This practice, in turn, sheds light on what the designers and their wearers deem important, valuable, and worth expressing.
Native communities have differing and distinct concepts of ‘beauty’ and what constitutes ‘the beautiful’ in their cultures. The conventional Western mind-body split is an insufficient model to use when thinking of new ways to conceptualize beauty (Adelman and Ruggi 2008: 557). Counter to the Western standard, many of the designers and models I spoke with did not think of beauty as an exclusively physical trait. In their use of words to describe beauty, Native models both countered and reproduced gender stereotypes. On the one hand, the models were determined to view their work in the modeling profession as propagating a good, or ‘beautiful,’ way of life, but they still succumbed to the demands of the modeling industry, conforming to a standardized physical type.

These chapters investigate the ways in which Native designers who are willing to take risks in fashion can question the American cult of youthful beauty and deconstruct the image of the thin and white as desirable (Green 1988, Simpson 2008a). Armed with a new, or traditional, nonessentializing concept of ‘beauty,’ Native designers of high fashion, along with their models, have the potential to destabilize the Western beauty construct, and offer alternative ways for Native Americans, and the broader public, to express beauty. In the process I explored the following topics in these chapters and their relationship to Native fashion: 1) the ways in which Native American concepts of beauty have changed over time; 2) the increase in number of cosmetic surgeries, particularly in the body-conscious United States, where rates are currently the highest in the world; 3) the rise of eating disorders in ethnic communities and lower classes both in the United States and abroad (Adelman and Ruggi 2008: 558); 4) the trope of the ‘silent model’ and
how this expectation conflicts with the image of Native women as leaders, cultural
carriers, storytellers, and creative thinkers (Portman and Herring 2001: 188); 5)  
relationships among ideas of body size, community values, and cultural practices; and 6)  
the possibilities for Native fashion designers to question the current culture of beauty and  
offer alternatives through their designs and their selection of models. These questions are  
not easy to answer, but this document seeks to elevate the discussion.

With two chapters devoted to female designers, questions pertaining to gender  
inevitable arise. The arts have been used to subvert gender norms – obliquely, by  
affording female crafts-sellers financial independence (e.g., Landes 1938, and Wilson &  
Cole 2009); and overtly, by males who perform the ‘women’s work’ of garment design  
and construction (Jacobs, Thomas & Lang 1997), and females whose sources of  
inspiration – visions and dreams – typically lie within the domain of male shamans or  
medicine men (Cole 1997).

The concept of ‘diversity’ in fashion continues to be an issue today. Chapter six,  
Native Female Designers: Ushering in a New Native Chic (1990s – Present), continues  
the discussions presented in chapter five, including the misappropriation of traditional  
Indigenous aesthetics. The topic of producing fashion that is ‘inspired by’ as opposed to  
‘copied from’ is a timely one considering our current global economy and increased  
levels of access and communication. In many ways this is another example of intellectual  
cultural property rights. These chapters also contain a critical analysis of the current  
Tribal Trend, and ‘diversity’ in the fashion industry by discussing, analyzing, and  
critiquing these issues through ‘case studies’ of different designers who include Remonia
E. Chapter Seven: The Pottery and Fashion Designs of Virgil Ortiz

Chapter seven, *Of Clay and Body: The Pottery and Fashion Designs of Virgil Ortiz*, analyzes the fashion spectacles of Virgil Ortiz, a Cochiti potter-turned-fashion designer whose work plays with and interrogates many boundaries, including those of male and female gender norms, underground and mainstream cultures, low and high art categories, and civilized and savage constructs (Batkin 1999, Baker 2004, Clark 2006, King 2000, Ortiz 1995). With his 2002 collaboration with Donna Karan, Ortiz ‘crossed over’ to the mainstream fashion world, and has since become an international success. Through his work, he transfers Cochiti pottery concepts to the fashion world, including Cochiti composition and color theory, the Cochiti tradition of parody and social commentary through performance, and cultural continuity through subversive creativity. Ortiz uses the lens of Cochiti aesthetics to understand, and express to others, the world around him. This chapter chronicles his trajectory, and analyzes his art, garments, and fashion shows and performances.

Virgil Ortiz comes from a well-known family of potters, and his first form of artistic expression was pottery. His family is also known for creating storyteller figures, which appeared in the 1800s in the southwest, and were at first interpreted by Euro-Americans to be of religious origin. Later collectors would discover that these clay figures were actually caricatures of themselves and other non-Native people coming to
the Pueblos – priests, circus performers, and tourists. These figures, essentially Native stereotypes of Euro-Americans, were a form of social commentary, and this aspect of the figures is evident in many of Ortiz’s fashions.

In late 2002, Ortiz collaborated with Donna Karan to create DKNYVO, a new line which features Karan’s cuts and Ortiz’s Pueblo designs, such as the wild spinach, water, clouds, and fertility symbols of the southwest. With this collaboration, Ortiz’s traditional Pueblo art was morphed onto the figures of runway models and transformed into mainstream and standard haute couture. Since this debut as a high fashion designer, Ortiz has been highlighted in several magazines, fashion shows, Indian Markets, and exhibitions. He is celebrated as innovative, one who traverses boundaries, creatively blends media, incorporates the new, and explores all available resources. He is also celebrated for his cultural dimension as not only a fashion designer, but one who has a strong background in Pueblo design. Ortiz’s ‘personal vision’ also plays a key role in his success as a unique and exciting designer. His often kinky and erotic presentations of his fashion are chalked up as being personal flair. Performance plays a key role in his fashion shows, and he collaborates with Native performance artists, such as Quetzal Guerrero, for his shows and exhibitions.

Ortiz’s highly publicized collaboration with Karan projected his work into the highly competitive and rewarding mainstream and demand for his work subsequently increased, landing him a solo exhibition through the Heard Museum, the title of Signature Artist for both the Heard and SWAIA Indian Markets, and a featured slot during Scottsdale Fashion Week. He has earned numerous awards, and has launched several new
collections of clothing. Ortiz’s *Indigene* line critiques high fashion consumerism, celebrates Indianness and expresses Native pride, and opens a dialogue pertaining to issues of resistance and acts of subversion. Ortiz’s most recent line, *Le Sauvage Primitif*, includes elements of erotica and plays on expected stereotypical clothing items, such as leather, fringe, and feathers. Through the use of bold tribal tattoo motifs, feathers, and creative reinterpretations of pottery designs, Ortiz provokes his audiences into wanting more than the typical or stereotyped Indian style. With his use of other elements, such as blindfolds and a secret language, Ortiz adds an additional, if unattainable, metaphorical level of ‘knowing’ and understanding his sometimes subversive work. While other Native designers might update traditional Native attire, Ortiz, on the other hand, remixes traditional Cochiti pottery and puts it on the human form. Ortiz’s ability to aestheticize the native helps explain why he is being accepted by American elite

**F. Chapter Eight: Native High Fashion Today and Tomorrow**

Native high fashion, steadily increasing in the 1990s, is experiencing a boom in the 2000s. Designers work in their own culturally specific terms, and are successful, selling garments, participating in fashion shows and art exhibitions, and winning prestigious awards. Through their garments they preserve old traditions and create new ones. By creatively adapting and updating traditional garments they modernize traditional designs and make them relevant in our contemporary lives. By Indianizing non-Native contemporary fashion, these designers promote pride in Native identity, educate, and allow patrons to express, define, and perform their varying notions of Indianness.
Chapter eight, *Conclusion: Native High Fashion Today and Tomorrow*, contains my conclusions relative to the central research question: What is Native high fashion? I attempt to determine why it is successful now, and how designers work in their own culturally specific terms as well as within the framework of fashion. I provide my conclusions on the role that Native high fashion plays in identity and cross-cultural interactions, in the reproduction and creation of cultural traditions, and in cultural continuity and change by updating and modernizing traditional designs and Indianizing non-Native contemporary fashion. Implications of these data on both the Native and non-Native art and fashion worlds are addressed. I also discuss the future of Native high fashion, which draws on the following: the recent participation of Native designers for the first time in history in the New York Fashion Week, the increased presence of Native fashion in the museum world, the proposed reinstatement of the Institute of American Indian Arts fashion design program, suggestions for future collaborations in fashion, calling to designers such as Anna Sui and Ralph Lauren, who are interested in Native design concepts, to work collaboratively with Native designers, and, finally, the democratization of fashion, and the increased use of ‘low fashion’ and ‘street wear’ in the garments created by young emerging multi-media Native artists/designers suggesting that new ideas in Native fashion are on the horizon.
CHAPTER 2
LLOYD KIVA NEW: NATIVE FASHION IN THE 1940s AND 1950s

“This is going to be an Indian summer. The growing influence of the Southwest is responsible for the American Indian theme rampant in current sportswear. This two-piece dress by Lloyd Kiva, of Scottsdale, Ariz. (a Cherokee Indian himself), illustrates the trend. It’s made of cactus-green and desert-sand wool with hand-woven trim.” – Joan Short (1952)

Though rarely documented, Native American people continued to make traditionally-influenced garments and to create new styles throughout the 1900s. Most books and exhibits on Native clothing focused on the 1800s or prior and rarely included substantial sections on 20th century Native attire. Institutions like the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian collected few garments created after 1900, unless they ordered reproductions. For the most part, museum curators and scholars documented and displayed examples of what we now commonly refer to as ‘traditional’ Indian clothing, which refers to attire created before the reservation period for Plains tribes and the late 1800s for Southwest tribes. These garments are typified by materials and styles usually from the northern Plains or Southwest tribes, such as Pueblo or Navajo. For example, two of the major recent museum exhibitions on Native clothing were the Beauty, Honor, and Tradition exhibit focusing on Plains men’s warrior shirts, and the Identity By Design exhibit focusing on Plains and Plateau women’s dresses. While the
exhibits included contemporary examples, the majority of the garments were from the mid to late 1800s.

In the early 1900s, shifting government policies affected Native clothing practices, one of which was the powerful push towards assimilation through Indian boarding schools. Another was the appreciation and encouragement of ‘safe’ Native American cultural practices by supporting Native arts programs. The interchange of varying dynamics of Native self-perception and how others viewed Native people played out in the presentation and clothing of the self. Throughout the country, Native people continued to create garments that were tribally-influenced, but many of these same people also adopted Euro-American techniques, materials, and sometimes styles, and sewed or bought ‘American’ clothing for everyday wear. Several other factors influenced change in Native clothing: Missionaries taught new ideas of modesty, Indian schools doled out uniforms and taught students how to sew and tailor clothing, agency rations often included blankets and calico material, and ready-to-wear became more accessible in the 1940s.

When the majority of Native women wore calico dresses, artist and anthropologist Frederic H. Douglas created the first Indian Fashion Show in 1942 with an assortment of historic ensembles pulled from the Denver Art Museum’s collection. The purpose of the show was to highlight the beauty, creativity, usefulness, and universality of Native American clothing. The pieces, made between 1830 and 1950, were selected based on technical perfection and how easily they could be incorporated into and viewed positively through Anglo-American cultural, aesthetic, and social paradigms (Parez 1998: 245).
Nancy J. Parezo, in her article, “The Indian Fashion Show,” analyzed Douglas’ fashion show and the subsequent effects of it and hypothesized that although Douglas attempted to erase negative stereotypes, he reinforced romantic Indian princess stereotypes and stereotypes about women. The designers, or creators, of the dresses in Douglas’ show were not emphasized in order to highlight their universality and to “promote interracial understanding” (Parezo 1998: 245). The show promoted an appreciation for the beauty of Native attire, was successful within the American fashion industry, and projected Native clothing design into the world of haute couture.

About the time that Douglas’ fashion show toured the United States, a Cherokee fashion designer named Lloyd Kiva New created lines of clothing, handbags, and textiles, and sold them throughout the U.S. and Europe. An educator, fashion designer, and fabric artist, New graduated from the Art Institute of Chicago, headed the Southwest Indian Arts Project, and eventually co-founded the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe. In late 1945, New opened a fashion studio in Scottsdale, Arizona, with the financial help of Douglas and other interested benefactors. New’s designs were crafted from hand-woven Cherokee fabrics, hand-dyed textiles, and leather (The School of the Art Institute of Chicago 2006). Throughout his career, he promoted cultural heritage through the arts. He stated:

For the past 2-300 years, there has been a wiping out of Indian culture. Now, we are looking towards a revival of Indian traditions and of Indian art forms. But we need to realize that nobody lives on an island; we are affected by modern things like technology, just like anyone else. You just can’t make a basket and express everything there is that needs to be expressed about Indian culture. You need to use different forms of expression, like painting, drama, and filmmaking.
New believed that Native American art was experiencing a renaissance, and in order to promote this movement, he encouraged creative freedom of expression in varying forms and emphasized adopting new means to adapt to changing times. Lloyd Kiva New is celebrated for his role in promoting Native arts, but he is rarely acknowledged for his work in fashion and his role in revolutionizing Native American customary clothing design in the mid-1900s.

I. Lloyd Henri New: Youth and Early Life (1916-1945)

Several important moments in Lloyd Kiva New’s youth and early life influenced his goals and professional career path, and his childhood memories were filled with artistic experimentation. Lloyd Henri New was born on February 18, 1916, in Fairland, Oklahoma, as the youngest of ten children to a Scot-Irish farmer and a Cherokee woman (Fudala 2005). New described his father as a jack of all trades: a farmer, ironsmith, wheelwright, carpenter, doctor, musician, and gardener (Living Treasures 1994: 3). When New was born, his mother, who suffered from an injury, could not care for him along with the duties of running the farm and caring for the other nine children (Living Treasures 1994: 4). Instead, his older sister, Nancy, was his ‘nursemaid’ and raised him.

In an interview for the New Mexico Living Treasures Oral History Collection, New stated, “I would suppose that my first real interests in life were artistic interests” (Living Treasures 1994: 1). He was inspired by the colors, animals, plants, and landscape that surrounded him growing up on a farm. He explained that he felt ‘instinctively’ that
certain colors complimented each other and looked well together, and he actively pursued experimental aesthetic design and creation. As a child of four or five years, he recalled being fascinated by the colors of the clay strata in the bank of a stream that ran by his home (Living Treasures 1994: 1). He also remembered creating small animals from clay; his mother, who would create line drawings of animals for him, baked these small clay creations in the oven. He felt his mother identified with his interests and supported them in this way. New recalled “the amazing palette of earth colors” in a large arroyo and coal vein by his family farm also, and he wondered, “these are attractive, what can I do with them?” (Living Treasures 1994: 2). From the chalky clays in the arroyo, New created fine pigments that he would mix with water or oil and experimented with ‘painting’ on his bedroom walls. His first paintings, he explained, were large murals inspired by the flowers in his father’s garden (Living Treasures 1994: 3). While his description of himself as an ‘instinctive’ artist may at first seem like he is ascribing to stereotypes about the innate artist creativity of Native people, this self-description may actually be a powerful form of resistance. Native arts scholar Nancy M. Mitho explained, “To be born an artist rejects the power of formal Western art training” (Mithlo 2008: 76). New champions his ‘Indian way’ of ‘learning art’ over European techniques of formal art instruction.

New’s interests seemed to vary from that of his siblings; they could do “whatever life handed them… they could spend the day building a fence or herding cattle.” But New, “hated all that” (Living Treasures 1994: 4). He stated, “I think my mother knew that. That I wasn’t gonna’ make it on the farm,” and when he was eight he moved with
his older sister Nancy to a community ten miles away (Living Treasures 1994: 4). He attended public elementary school there in a suburb of Tulsa, which was an oil rich city at the time. He recalled feeling isolated and alone because only one other Indian family lived in the community, and nothing about Native people was taught in the school curriculum (Living Treasures 1994: 5). New remembered the lesson plans during Thanksgiving, which never explained anything about the Native people other than their role in helping the Pilgrims with food and shelter. From this description, New believed that the Pilgrims “brought the Indians over on the ship to do all this work.” This view was how New identified himself as an Indian person, “That’s where I placed myself, which wasn’t a very good thing” (Living Treasures 1994: 5). By the time he graduated high school in 1933, New was an introvert, timid and bashful (Living Treasures 1994: 7).

His family tolerated his artistic interests, though community friends or neighbors did not understand the relevance, applicability, or practicality of his aesthetic pursuits. New attended a small state college and wanted to pursue art studies, but the options were limited. Furthermore, he knew his community’s perception of the career of art:

When it came to going to college, I didn’t have enough nerve to tell my family that I wanted to study art ’cause they wouldn’t have approved my – art was nothing. I don’t think there was anybody in that little town that had an oil painting in their house. And to say, “My boy’s going away to study art” would have been a joke of the town. An artist, I think, to them was an artist wore a beret, they starved to death in some attic somewhere and he was immoral and he lived a very irresponsible life. I think that was the image that most everybody had of an artist.

(Living Treasures 1994: 8)

Based on these perceptions, New thought art was not a feasible or acceptable career option. To negotiate this situation, he told friends and family that he was going to study
architectural engineering, which would include studio art courses, and the thought of New becoming an engineer appeased others. During his first year at college, however, he discovered that he could enroll in only one art course per semester, and that the course options were limited. His first art course was called ‘Drawing,’ and quickly bored him. He explained, “I wasn’t learning anything because I could draw them exceedingly well. So I was disgusted at that point” (Living Treasures 1994: 9). His second semester art course focused on design, where he learned to create abstract representations of objects (Living Treasures 1994: 9). By the end of his first year at college, frustrated with the limited arts courses, New had made up his mind to never return, and he left college to pursue a rambunctious life of partying. His mother confronted him about his ‘carrying on’ and advised him to go somewhere where he could get the art education he desired. Taking this welcomed, yet unexpected advice, he sent away for art school catalogues.

When it came time to select an art school, New remembered attending the World’s Fair in Chicago after graduating high school in 1933. He felt comfortable applying for and attending the Art Institute in Chicago since it was a place he had already visited. New’s decision to go to college was a relatively unique experience: while Native people did attend college at this time, this was a small percentage and an uncommon practice (Tippeconnic Fox, Lowe, & McClellan 2005). New’s mother and sister had trouble acquiring a loan for New because, as the BIA agent explained, “We’ve loaned money to kids like your brother and first they never pay it back, secondly they never finish out the year… we have had no success collecting the money nor choosing the people in a successful program. And so we just don’t do it anymore” (Living Treasures
1994: 11). Fighting these odds and prejudice, New secured an education loan, and began his first year at the Art Institute of Chicago.

While at the Art Institute, New took advantage of the available art history resources. He stated, “When I got to school there, for the first time, I discovered classic Indian cultures…and suddenly this was something that I had been looking for to justify myself as an Indian person” (Living Treasures 1994: 12). He saw Native aesthetic culture alongside classical Greek art and this discovery of self worth as an Indian person was important to New’s personal development. He also saw Peruvian textiles for the first time. At the Larson Library, New could access hundreds of slides and images of textiles, sculpture, ceramics, architecture, and more. This access to the study of art, he recalled, represented hope and inspiration. He spent his extracurricular time researching and ultimately created lectures on classical Indian culture that he would teach in local Chicago public schools (Living Treasures 1994: 12).

His time in Chicago was not without troubles, however, and New almost left during his third year due to chest pains. He remained anti-social and introverted as he had been in high school, and in Chicago he viewed himself as different and intentionally isolated himself. After talking with an advisor, he realized that his behavior, coupled with being far from home, was unhealthy and he resolved to interact more with others. He explained, “It was just a new source of light” (Living Treasures 1994: 13). He took fine arts courses and in his last year decided to teach in Indian schools. New attended the summer school at the University of New Mexico, and winter classes at the University of Chicago that would count towards a higher education degree. His chest pains
disappeared, and he graduated with his Bachelor of Arts Degree in Education as a top student. He stated, “The sense of pride of identity was essential understanding of why I became an Indian educator. I had a feeling that I had discovered some things through my own experiences that I could translate, transfer to other educational situations for Indian people” (Living Treasures 1994: 13). Through New’s higher education experiences and challenges, he realized he could help other Native people successfully pursue college degrees.

New worked at the Phoenix Indian School for two years. He taught arts courses, and among his students were future renowned artists Charles Loloma (Hopi) and Andrew Van Tsinhajinnie (Navajo). He brought Loloma to San Francisco to paint murals for the Indian Arts and Crafts Board sponsored Indian Art Exhibit at the Golden Gate International Exposition on Treasure Island in 1939, which was conceived by René d’Harnoncourt and directed by Frederic H. Douglas (Struever 2005: 4). New described this exhibit as “a show that I don’t think has ever been equaled” (Gritton 2000: 18). In 1940-41, New took his assistants Loloma and Tsinhajinnie to Fort Sill in Oklahoma to study mural techniques with Norwegian muralist and fresco painter Ollie Nordmark. He also supervised young Native artists in their illustration of bilingual texts for use by Hopis and Navajos (Fudala 2005). In 1942, New left the Phoenix Indian School and, like many other Native people, entered the armed forces to serve in World War II. He enlisted in the U.S. Navy and spent time in the Pacific, seeing action in Okinawa and Iwo Jima (Living Treasures 1994: 14, and Fudala 2005).
II. Creating a Movement in Post-War Scottsdale

After serving in World War II for nearly four years, New returned to the United States and decided to approach Indian art education from a new perspective: that of an artist. He explained, “because I thought what needed to be done, educationally, in Indian Art, was to work on the problem of what is happening to Indian Art” (Living Treasures 1994: 14). New became concerned with the changing aesthetic practices of Native people. He had worked with the Indian Arts and Crafts Board (Hoxie 1996: 51) – he was named to the IACB in 1961 and was the chair from 1971 to 1995 – and shared similar ideals and goals pertaining to the future of Native art. He thought that the increased marketing of Native-made pots, baskets, and other items in the tourist trade, was creating a situation in which the quality of the items was decreasing.

But this was not a new idea. Other individuals, particularly wealthy non-Native arts patrons in the first three decades of the 1900s, had come to the conclusion that Native cultures were valuable, yet ‘vanishing.’ These individuals consistently sought government awareness of the economic and social benefits of Indian aesthetic practices (Meyn 2001: 54). In 1922, the first Indian Fair was born in Santa Fe to promote Native cultures through the arts. Six years later, the Meriam Report asserted that developing the arts “to their fullest potential would increase the income of many Indian families and benefit them in other ways” (Meyn 2001: 36). The Indian Arts and Crafts Board was established in 1935 to meet the suggestions made in the Report, and promote Indian arts as a form of economic development. One way in which these various organizations and projects sought this development was by fostering a movement towards producing
‘quality’ art objects. New wondered, “How do you get back to something that’s quality and really worthwhile and reverse this whole thing?” (Living Treasures 1994: 15). He planned to address this problem by working hands-on as an artist and creating a collective of young artists who would focus on quality rather than cheap reproduction.

With a new plan, he drove out to Scottsdale. New recognized the vehicle of pre-war friends Lew and Mathilde Davis parked outside an old general store, which was being remodeled into Scottsdale’s first arts and crafts center by Tom Darlington. New explained, “They said, ‘We’ve been waiting for you to come back, Lloyd’ and urged me to join them. But I said, ‘You’re all professionals. I wouldn’t even know what to do’” (Fisher 1958: n.p.). New gained experience in studio art in college, and in art education as an instructor at the Phoenix Indian School, but he lacked knowledge in the field of arts retail and wholesale businesses. However, he was inspired by the idea of starting a new art movement, and he traveled to the nearby reservation and found two individuals who were willing to take up the challenge of assisting him with this new business venture. Along with his assistants, who had experience working with leather, New spent the next two months leading up to the opening of the Arizona Craftsmen Center experimenting with leather. He explained, “one day we stumbled onto a good bag...We agreed that this would be our specialty” (Fisher 1958: n.p.). New opened his workshop studio in Scottsdale in December 1945 and began a new mission to create a high-quality Native arts scene.

Scottsdale was founded as a farming community east of Phoenix in 1888. The combination of a variety of factors transformed this desert farm town into a glamorous
resort destination. As travel by cars, train, and planes became increasingly accessible after World War II, visitors found the wide open spaces, the desert’s scenic beauty, and the warm climate appealing, and the newly available air conditioning technology tempered the heat. Even before the war, several wealthy individuals from the Northeast traveled to Scottsdale during the winter months to stay at the resorts, such as the Camelback and Jokake Inns, and to escape the cold, gloomy skies, and ice back East. The resort industry expanded with the opening of the Paradise Inn, the Casa Blanca Inn, and numerous guest ranches between 1944 and 1950 (Fudala 2001: 59). In the late 1940s, the city council, along with other interested individuals, actively sought to create and maintain Scottsdale’s reputation as a resort destination and what they would label the “West’s Most Western Town” (Fudala 2001: 59). A report by the Scottsdale Historic Preservation Commission stated, “By the mid-fifties Scottsdale was a major tourist destination with a glamorous reputation bolstered by its first-rate resorts, well-known artists and downtown shopping district” (2002: 2).

Scottsdale became an arts center for a variety of reasons. Some artists found the landscape and scenery inspiring, others enjoyed the easy-going lifestyle, and the educated Christian residents welcomed artists and other creative individuals into their tight-knit community (Fudala 2003: 1). Although Scottsdale was a small town, the residents valued art and culture and appreciated creative talent of all kinds. In the 1930s, the New Deal’s Works Project Administration had brought artists to the Phoenix area, and the Phoenix Indian School also drew creative Native individuals who remained in the area (Fudala 2003: 2). The artists who had been gathering in Scottsdale since the late 1920s and early
1930s were noted as “one of the first groups to get organized after the war” (Fudala 2001: 59). Scottsdale experienced an economic boom in art retail after the war.

Until the mid-1940s, the Scottsdale retail economy focused on farming, however, beginning in the late 1940s through the 1960s, “art galleries, craft studios, fashion stores, Native American jewelry and art shops and Southwestern gift shops of all kinds opened to attract tourists” (Fudala 2001: 63). The focus shifted from farming to the service industry in the form of specialized retail to provide shops and boutiques where the increasing influx of wealthy visitors could spend their money purchasing expensive items as souvenirs of their vacation to the southwest. The products were specialized to reference the sense of Scottsdale as a special place.

One such arts retail business was opened by real estate entrepreneur, businessman, and arts patron Tom Darlington in December of 1945. Darlington purchased and converted the old Brown’s Mercantile General Store at the corner of Brown and Main Street in downtown Scottsdale into a working arts studio (Fudala 2005: 1 and Fudala 2001: 59). New credited Darlington for making Scottsdale an art center, “He constantly gave us encouragement – and he constantly put up with us when we couldn’t meet the rent” (Fisher 1958: n.p.). Darlington’s support, in the form of capital and flexibility, provided invaluable fuel to the development of the postwar arts scene. In this new arts center, New founded the Lloyd Kiva Art Studios, a shop focusing on leathercraft. New’s first wife, whom he had met in Chicago and married in Oklahoma in 1939, helped as the bookkeeper and business manager. The other initial tenants of the Craftsmen Center were all non-Native, and included woodcarver Phillips “Sandy”
Sanderson, silversmiths Wes and Joyce Segner, and New’s pre-war friends, painter Lew Davis and sculptress Mathilde Schaefer Davis (Fudala 2005: 1).

The Arizona Craftsmen Center was designed as a cultural attraction for upper-class winter visitors. In this type of performative workspace, craftsmen and artists could both create and sell their work, and passersby or patrons could watch artists’ creativity in action (Scottsdale Historic Preservation Commission 2002: 2). These shops enabled the artist products to gain new meaning not available to customers who had no interaction with producers. Art became viewed as much an act of creation as well as a tangible object of beauty, in keeping with most Native concepts. The Center opened in December, and Darlington, using his business and social connections, staged an opening gala. Fudala noted how the visitors enjoyed the experiential nature of the shops: “Customers could order a purse, a bowl or a ring, then watch the crafts person as they customized it” (2003: 3). The Craftsmen had their own brochure, with a page dedicated to each artisan, but they also sought advertisement in local papers. Hotel and resort personnel urged their winter guests to visit the Craftsmen Court, and a niche market was created (Fudala 2003: 5). The Arizona Craftsmen became known as selling some of the “finest Southwestern-inspired arts and crafts” (Fudala 2003: 1), associating their art with a sense of place.

Despite the small population of Scottsdale, which was estimated to be fifteen hundred in 1945 (Fudala 2003: 3), the Craftsmen operated successful businesses. Former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt visited the Craftsmen Center upon a 1946 trip to visit her grown children. She commented about the Craftsmen in her nationally-syndicated “My Day” column, “On the whole, I think this will become a place where one can get truly
American gifts of real value for those who enjoy craftsmanship and original design” (Roosevelt 1946). In post-war America, an intense period of nationalism followed, and the purchasing of ‘truly American’ gifts was viewed as a celebratory form of patriotism. She returned in 1947, commenting in a subsequent “My Day” column story, “To my delight, I found that everything had developed greatly since my previous visit” (Roosevelt 1947). In this year, members of the arts community, such as Wes Segner of the Craftsmen Center, became active members of the City Council. Segner led the way to revive the Chamber of Commerce, and focused on building Scottsdale as tourism hot spot. They created tourist advertisements, created street maps, and began the discussion on paving streets, establishing a fire department, and putting up street signs and streetlights (Fudala 2003: 6). Developing an environment conducive to supporting the arts and building a market for expensive art objects were top priorities for these individuals. The Craftsmen attracted nation-wide media attention and gained a loyal following of patrons (Fudala 2003: 2).

Initially, New’s business focused on experimenting with leather, creating belts, hats, and handbags (figure 1). His purses were inspired by Navajo medicine pouches, but they were reinterpreted and secularized bags. They were the genesis of the Lloyd Kiva leatherworks company. New explained, “And the bag, that’s where my name ‘Lloyd Kiva’ came in – I opened a shop and chose the name Lloyd Kiva as a trade name and went exclusively by that name in the community and all my bank accounts and everything was that way” (Living Treasures 1994: 16). New’s handbags were made from imported hand-processed antelope and kid leathers from England and France. He also
used soft reindeer skins. All of his purses were decorated with “handworked silver or brass pieces in Indian motif” (Lotan 1954: 14). In December 1948, New was featured in *The Desert Magazine*. In an article, author Christine MacKenzie described his studio: “Piles of brilliantly colored, richly pungent leathers lie on tables ready to be cut into the exquisite soft leather hand bags which Lloyd designs” (MacKenzie 1948: 8). New’s bags came in an assortment of colors including dark blue and white.

When his shop first opened, New understood very little about costs, markups, and taxes. Jim Patrick at Valley National Bank offered him advice concerning business, and loaned $2,000 to New as interest in the business (Hendrick n.d.: n.p.). New explained,

> [Jim] asked, “How much are you going to price them at?” I told him that we’d thought of asking $25 a piece. Well, Jim sat down and figured out the actual cost of each bag, which was something I’d never thought of doing. I couldn’t believe it when he said that each of those bags was costing me between $45 and $50 to make. “They’ll either have to sell at $85 or $90 or you’re out of business, Lloyd.”

(Fisher 1958: n.p.)

New was skeptical of this advice, thinking that no one in Scottsdale would pay such a high price for a handbag, which would be the estimated equivalent of $600 in 2008 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2008). His skepticism subsided when, on the opening day, he sold three purses to one customer (Fisher 1958: n.p.). The pricing was so successful that New bought out Patrick’s share in the business in just two years. Later, to cut his costs, since handwork is labor intensive, and to create items more suitable for high fashion, New began combining machine work with handwork. He explained,

> But those first bags were too Western, too hand-made looking, for high fashion. We combined machine work with the handiwork, and now sell the same bags for $30 less apiece. Of course, we’ve created other bags that
sell as high as $200. And we’ve sold some items in this shop for as high as $650! Which means that we’re getting Paris prices, in Scottsdale! (Fisher 1958: n.p.)

New refined the look of the bag to tone down the kitschy Western references and cleaned up the sewing lines with machine work. The machine work also sped up the process so that New and his assistants could create more of the exclusive handbags in less time thus cutting labor costs. New began to understand the art market as a businessman. New never wanted to become a machine himself, however, and handwork thus remained an important element in creating distinctiveness in each piece. The handbags were individually produced, and sometimes designed to match a patron’s style. Since most of the handbags were bought by Easterners vacationing in the Southwest, New astutely created the bags to reflect a distinct look that referenced a place associated with the upper-class elite (MacKenzie 1948: 8). With his new technique of combining machine and handwork, New could bring Paris-like shopping to Scottsdale’s streets.

New recognized that while several talented and skilled Native artists existed, “they often can find no market for their talents and products” (MacKenzie 1948: 8). To help with this situation, New hired three ‘skilled assistants’ or ‘Indian craftsmen’ to help him keep pace with the many orders for his leather purse creations. This apprentice system was very common in the haute couture world. New was the designer, or mastermind behind the creations, while his assistants acted as apprentices and helped execute the designs. The selection and mentoring of Native apprentices was integral to his work, Fudala explained, “They helped him transform traditional cultural designs, objects and materials into contemporary fashions” (Fudala 2005). In a 1947 newspaper
clipping, his three assistants were identified as Mary Kee (Akimel O’odham) and Julia and Randolph Begay (Navajo), though he probably had different assistants throughout the years (Clark 1947: 14). It is unknown if these early apprentices further pursued careers in high fashion. With his new shop and assistants, New could test his Indian art marketing theory; MacKenzie explained, “He developed the theory that Indian arts and crafts could be acceptably fitted into modern living by shunting off some of the traditional shapes, taboos and religious symbols” (MacKenzie 1948: 8). While New probably did not use the word ‘shunting,’ he understood Anglo-American tastes, and incorporated certain elements of Native design motifs and translated them into marketable items. Furthermore, New avoided ‘taboos’ by not using ceremonial or sacred shapes, designs, or symbols.

New’s theory could be applied to more than just handbags. To exemplify this belief, New applied his theory to the Indian exhibits at the Arizona State Fair, for which he was the superintendent for multiple seasons in the late 1940s. Freelance writer Christine MacKenzie noted, “One of the most convincing examples of his efforts to fit Indian crafts to modern life was the exhibit which he arranged at the Arizona state fair” (MacKenzie 1948: 8). For the 1947 exhibit, New worked with a Phoenix furniture store to design a room with modern pieces. MacKenzie explained,

Then, in and around the modern furniture, he fitted Indian craft articles, rugs, hand-woven drapes, silver for the buffet table, wastebaskets of leather, paintings and sculptured pieces. Standing just outside the room was a beautiful mannequin dressed in a black Adrian suit, wearing an Indian silver necklace and bracelet and carrying a Kiva hand bag. (MacKenzie 1948: 8)

New consciously chose elements that were secular, or could be translated into secularized versions. He juxtaposed modern furniture and fashion with Native-inspired accessories
and interior decoration. This idea was not new, however, and the Indian Arts and Crafts Board supported this model since the 1930s. New demonstrated that Native-influenced aestheticized objects were relevant in contemporary society and that these items could be incorporated tastefully.

As New’s handbags became nationally known, they became increasingly desired by upper-class women. The purses were displayed in Harper’s Bazaar, Holiday Magazine, The New Yorker, and Town and Country and were sold by Neiman-Marcus and Elizabeth Arden’s New York shop. In an article written over a decade after the opening of the Arizona Craftsmen Center, New stated, “We had originally intended that every bag should be different. But our customers wouldn’t have it so. One of our earliest styles is still our best seller. And beige remains the most popular color, year after year” (Fisher 1958: n.p.). Many of New’s clients would request duplicates or variations of styles that they saw owned by others. Word of mouth was an important means of ‘advertising,’ and friends of patrons became new clients. This was the classic mechanism by which fashion trends spread and became popular among the elite. New explained, “They would come in and say, ‘I want a bag like the one I saw her carrying’” (Living Treasures 1994: 17). In 1949, the phrase “It’s a Kiva bag,” was coined and printed in local and national newspapers. New sold these handbags for comparatively high prices. In a 1957 article, the reporter stated, “He made ladies’ bags that sold for $150 and $200. No two exactly alike” (Stocker 1957: 4). These prices translate to around $1,100 to $1,500 in 2008 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2008). However, with clients requesting only the standard design of bag, New found himself virtually out of work as a designer.
To cure his restlessness, he began experimenting with fabric. In 1948, New branched out to design coats and jackets, and he expanded into fashion design and fabric silkscreening in the early 1950s (Fudala 2005: 3).

As his client base increased, New created and sold Native-inspired garments out of his Scottsdale boutique. One reporter explained, “[New] saw the possibility of high fashioned clothes based on the native forms and motifs, and not of the ordinary Indian novelty variety” (Lotan 1954:14). The first material New worked with was described by him as follows:

…when I was back home up in the Cherokee country there was a group of ladies hand weaving on Appalachian style looms that they got in this tradition there when they came to Oklahoma, they brought them with them. And they were doing the most fascinating handspun wool yardage, handspun, hand-dyed, hand-woven and it was crude and rough and textured and the dying didn’t take so that you had the pink dye would take in certain parts of the wool and not in other parts of the wool, so you got this wonderful texture.

(Living Treasures 1994: 17)

Compared to the popular commercial tweed, New saw this new material as higher quality and more unique. New’s clients came from colder climates and visited Scottsdale during Arizona’s milder winter months, so wool or tweed would be an appropriate material to create his first fashions. He purchased a few hundred yards, and began cutting out his first fashion designs. He cut the design, and hired a seamstress to line it with silk. The handwork for a coat could be completed within two days, and the final coat could be sold for high prices. New focused on quality material, simple design, and a classic cut that could be worn “year in, year out,” which were the attributes that his clients looked for in their fashion (Living Treasures 1994: 17). With this piece, New incorporated Native-
made material into high fashion and was successful. He designed a variety of garments and hired individuals to complete the beadwork and an Italian tailor who sewed the men’s clothing. For the men’s line, New featured subtle elements, such as special details down the front, and silver buttons. These garments could sell in the hundreds (Living Treasures 1994: 17), while contemporaneous mass-produced men’s all wool suit sold for $30 and a woman’s cotton dress sold for three or four dollars (The People History 2008). An article in *The Arizonian* depicted New and others such as Christine Rae as “Scottsdale Style Setters,” describing them as setting a fashion pace. The author described Kiva’s adaptation of a Navajo shirt for a woman’s suit: “It is made of handwoven Indian tweed, belted with a Ho ho kam ornamented Persian leather belt, and worn with a Sequoyah woolen skirt made by Choctaw and Cherokee Indians. The blouse is chartreuse – the skirt almost a purple” (N.A. 1949: 12). New’s garments drew inspiration from various elements, including other Native tribal aesthetic practices. The garments were often named after these tribes. Borrowing from other Native tribal practices was not an important subject, as it would be later on, perhaps in part because New’s team of apprentices hailed from a variety of Native communities.

Lloyd Kiva New was not the only successful fashion designer. The post-war scene in America provided the necessary elements for a sudden growth in the fashion industry, including increasing availability of materials and a client base craving the luxury they had been deprived of during the war. The first four decades of the 20th century saw the increasing availability of fashion. The mass production of ready-to-wear clothing, available from the 1920s onward, continued to expand during the 1930s and
1940s. Innovative machines allowed department stores to offer the latest clothing designs at affordable prices, and fashion was removed from the elitist world where it had belonged and was now accessible to the average woman (Buxbaum 2005: 56). In 1940, a worldwide rationing of textiles led many countries to develop economic ways of creating clothing (Buxbaum 2005: 52). The thriving war industry, on the other hand, employed female workers, who thus became fashion consumers in a climate of new unexpected prosperity (Buxbaum 2005: 56). After the war, the desire for beauty and glamour was satisfied by the increasing variety and availability of ready-to-wear clothing. This interest in fashion was reinforced and fueled by the proliferation of women’s magazines and mail-order catalogues. Lloyd Kiva New and others capitalized on this desire for luxury in clothing.

In 1947, Christian Dior revolutionized the fashion world with his famous New Look. Dior’s New Look was a drastic departure from the silhouettes dictated by utility and fabric rations of 1940s wartime fashion. Dior’s look, while dramatically different, was not entirely new. Several precursors had appeared before and during the war, but the hourglass silhouette, which required a large amount of material, could only become a popular trend after the war. This image of womanhood was characterized by a close-fitted bust, tucked-in waist, rounded hips, unpadded shoulders, and a tapered or full elongated skirt (Buxbaum 2005: 65). Dior’s liberal use of material, preference for close-weave fabrics, and excessive couture detailing freed fashion from years of restriction (Buxbaum 2005: 63). Several of New’s resort clothing fashions followed this silhouette, such as his version of the poolside cocktail dress, which came into existence around 1947. A decade
later, the cocktail dress was still immensely popular, consisting of a balloon skirt with a matching short jacket or bolero (Buxbaum 2005: 69).

As the 1940s came to a close, New created high-fashion resort clothes, and his handbags became the ‘it’ accessory for upper-class women. New’s business continued to grow in the 1950s. Accessories, which were carefully coordinated even in everyday wear, had enormous fashion status in the 1950s. During this time it was important to match handbags with gloves and footwear in both color and style. Quality leather bags became symbols of luxury and wealth (Buxbaum 2005: 78). New’s business, which recognized the role accessories played as status symbols, created unique handbags that would mark individuals as well-traveled resort-visiting jetsetters who could afford to venture to luxurious destinations and purchase high-quality, hard to obtain ‘souvenirs’.

Though Thorstein Veblen’s *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) has been debated in recent years (see Trigg 2001), his key points in many respects are helpful when understanding New’s clients. Veblen identifies two core ways in which individuals give an indication of their wealth to other members of society: through extensive leisure activities and through lavish expenditure on consumption and services, both of which apply to the individuals in Scottsdale. Travel luggage, and other high-quality leather goods, became symbols of luxury and wealth (Buxbaum 2005: 78), exhibiting both the leisure activity of travel, as well as the expensive ‘high-quality’ object itself.

On May 2, 1950, a fire destroyed the Craftsmen building, with estimated damages of $115,000 (Karie 1950: 1). The fire made front-page news in the local Scottsdale papers; school was dismissed early that day, and the town rallied to subdue the fire and
help New and the other craftsmen salvage what they could. The majority of the tenants’ supplies, inventory, and studio and retail space were destroyed in the fire. Just a few days later, however, the newspaper reported that the Craftsmen planned to stay together and rebuild, and that they had the support from local Scottsdale citizens, demonstrating the desire by the artists and locals to keep such a business running (N.A. 1950: 1). With the help of arts patrons Anne and Fowler McCormick, the Craftsmen tenants built a new center in an undeveloped area north of Scottsdale on the unpaved Fifth Avenue (Fudala 2005: 2, Fudala 2003: 6). They called the new shop Arizona Crafts Center, and it incorporated a color scheme of burnt sienna, apple green, blue green, chartreuse, pink and steel gray suggested by New. On Sunday November 19, New and the other tenants held an open house event for the Arizona Crafts Center, and New continued to sell leather bags, belts, and hand-woven fashions. Winter travelers also helped him in his shop. For example, one newspaper reported that a Mrs. Lonnquist, who was ‘fond of trailer travel,’ assisted at the Kiva shop during the winters (King 1950: 1).

III. Kiva and 1950s Desert Fashion

Scottsdale quickly became a fashion center in the early 1950s. Fudala speculated, “Perhaps due to Kiva’s and Segner’s success in creating wearable art, Southwestern-inspired, handmade fashions and accessories became a hot commodity in Scottsdale” (Fudala 2003: 6). Southwestern chic became a national trend among female celebrities and wealthy women from Hollywood, the upper mid-west, and the east coast (Fudala 2003: 7). Western wear, or cowboy style, gained significant attention in the United States
and worldwide as more and more tourists vacationed in the Southwest. Movies during the 1940s and 1950s were also a motivating force in bringing Western cowboy desert fashion to the national consciousness (Brandt 2004: 169).

Designer stores located on New York’s Fifth Avenue carried the same type of hourglass-silhouetted ‘squaw dress’ that was also popular on Scottsdale’s Fifth Avenue. A report by the Scottsdale Historic Preservation Commission claimed, “Exclusive merchandise outlets in Hollywood and on New York’s Fifth Avenue sold the unusual pieces made by Scottsdale’s artisans” (2002: 2). By 1950, several fashion boutiques opened in Scottsdale; these shops included Christine Rae silkscreen fabrics, Soledad resort wear, Gene Pennington of Gene of the Desert hand-painted sports clothes, Leona Caldwell silkscreen fabrics, and the much sought-after fashion designs of David ‘Jerome’ Field. In 1950, the Phoenix-based Goldwater family opened a Scottsdale Road store, which provided an additional boost to Scottsdale’s fashion scene (Fudala 2003: 7). With several fashion boutiques located in downtown Scottsdale, “trend-setting men and women flocked to shop at the one-of-a-kind couture studios” (Fudala 2001: 63).

In January 1951, Goldwater’s Department Store and Harper’s Bazaar staged an outdoor fashion show in downtown Scottsdale. Harper’s New York models wore ‘Sunset Pink’ fashions down a runway on Main Street that stretched five-hundred feet from Scottsdale Road to Brown Avenue. The clothes in the show were not made by Scottsdale designers, but rather were brought in to be displayed against a Western backdrop. However, through this fashion show and others similar to it, Scottsdale established a reputation as a fashion center (Fudala 2001: 63). The 1951 landmark ‘Sunset Pink’
fashion show was well-attended with spectators sitting and standing several rows back and even on rooftops. The show’s coverage in Harper’s Bazaar magazine displayed the beauty of the desert in the winter, and the trendiness of Scottsdale, to readers all over the country. Fashion shows became a staple of Scottsdale’s winter schedule, and some were even held poolside at Scottsdale’s posh resorts (Fudala 2003: 7).

The fashion show was a popular activity for women’s organizations in the 1950s. Visual culture historian Karal Ann Marling explained, “the fashion show was a highly specialized dramatic form – a ritualized pantomime of shopping, and a play in which audience and performers were equally well costumed” (1994: 37-38). In fact, viewers often participated as models, “as club officers did their turns on the runway, reminding the rest of the spectators that fashion always had the dual aspect of looking and being looked at, performing and appraising” (Marling 1994: 37-38). Marling’s assessment of 1950s charitable fashion events demonstrated the value of displaying subtle expressions of cultural capital as well as showing off more conspicuous forms of wealth. Resort locations, such as Scottsdale and Atlantic City, became prime locations for fashion shows since they offered luxury, comfort, and a beautiful setting (Workman 2004: 151). Atlantic City was also the site chosen for the first Miss America pageant in 1921 (Riverol 1992, Workman 2004).

By this time, New was nationally known for his Indian fashion designs. In 1951, New participated in the Atlantic City International Fashion Show as the only Native American fashion designer and presented his garments and accessories. The Scottsdale Progress newspaper reported, “Lloyd Kiva will be showing his new Indian Beadwork
Dress, one of his two print Cherokee outfits, a Seminole type skirt, and a lovely new designed Greatcoat of handwoven woolen. Several of his bags will be featured” (N.A. 1951: 1). New participated in Atlantic City’s Second Annual Fashion Show in 1952, which awarded him even greater national recognition. While in Atlantic City, the Museum of Modern Art purchased one of his dresses, and he met modern textile design expert Leslie Tillet. He studied with the Tillets and learned fabric printing with fast dye colors which he would later use as a distinctive element in his couture (Lotan 1954: 16). The New York Times mentioned New in its revue of the Atlantic City Show (Mosiman 1952: 10), and in April, New was highlighted in the Los Angeles Times, which reported an “Indian summer” for fashion and that clothing was “going Native.” The article included an image of his two-piece dress, which was described as cactus-green and desert-sand wool with hand-woven trim (Short 1952: H24). The colors of his garments were inspired by and named after various characteristics of the desert (figure 2). These names helped describe the garments pictured in black and white periodicals and added uniqueness and novelty to his couture. In addition, the fact that aspects of the garments were hand-made and not purely constructed by machine added additional luxury to the items.

New was not only a fashion leader, he had also established himself as an expert on Indian art. In August of 1950, SWAIA founder and Native arts spokeswoman Ina Sizer Cassidy wrote a special essay on Native aesthetics and abstract art. She conferred with New and gained his perspective on the matter, and he stated that he believed Native people had a right to self-expression. He explained that Native people should be allowed
to contribute to the U.S. national life as Native people, on their own terms, and in their own diverse manners of expression (1950: 64). He believed that Native people were an integral aspect the life and identity of the United States. This philosophy remained important to him, and in a later article it was elaborated that he believed “modern Indian arts can add a great deal to the culture of our country if the designs are adapted to contemporary forms” (Lotan 1954: 14). In 1953, New wrote *The New Trail: Forever Indian*, which was a book of photographs juxtaposed by short statements. In one such spread, New wrote,

> Now trading is a new game we play with our white neighbors. Many thoughts we borrow from them for our own. They like to look like us and we like to look like them. Many good things have been given to our people, and in return we have shared the richness of our past.  
> (New 1953: 13)

After working for several years in accessories and clothing design, New realized these interesting exchange dynamics between Native people and Anglos, and figured out how to utilize them with unique combinations of Native and non-Native materials and designs.

Throughout the 1950s, New was active in the local community and initiated several special events to draw attention to Scottsdale’s art and fashion industries. Along with the some of the original tenants of the Arizona Craftsmen Center, New was a founding member of the Scottsdale Chamber of Commerce and a board member. He was a member of several other organizations, including the Arizona Fashion Council, the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Valley Country Club, the national Indian organization Arrow, and the Arizona Designer Craftsmen, which was the local chapter of the American Crafts Council (Fudala 2005: 3). By affiliating himself
with these community organizations, New demonstrated his commonalities with the Scottsdale locals, who were mainly Anglo elite and middle-class businessmen, and presented himself as a respectable, distinguished individual with a worthy cultural background. He was an accomplished and successful artisan and definitely not the aforementioned starving artist in a beret. He also worked with the Heard Museum, and by the mid-1950s, he was recognized as being exceptionally talented and experienced in the arts, marketing, business, and education. New also served as a commentator for several fashion shows on Fifth Avenue or poolside at Scottsdale resorts (Fudala 2005: 3).

In 1952, New opened a fabric printing shop, expanding his fashion business to include brilliantly colored hand-screened designs on fine Egyptian and Pima cotton. In this new shop, New created his own original fabrics. He was no longer constrained by the limitations of the Indian wool or tweed ordered from Cherokee Oklahoma. Using cotton, New could construct a variety of contemporary creative designs, and it was a better fit for the warm Arizona climate. In the Scottsdale Craftsmen brochure, New’s shop was described as “probably the first fashion establishment catering exclusively to the high-fashion client” (1952: n.p.). He made cocktail dresses and outfits in limited edition fabrics of his own design. In an article for The Arizonian, New explained he was working on a series of desert-inspired dresses that he hoped would gain as much notoriety as his Kiva bags, and the reporter explained, “Just as the shoulder strap handbags from his studio are patterned after the Navajo medicine man’s pouch of magic, the dresses are said to be informed by Indian tribal costumes in textiles that capture the colors of the desert around us” (Lotan 1954:14).
While his purses were not medicine pouches, they were constructed similarly – albeit vaguely – to the pouches, in the sense that the leather strap was laced through holes at the opening. New’s version was more of a hybrid, combing a modern purse with a Navajo leather pouch, rather than a ‘pouch of magic.’ But these references undoubtedly boosted the sales of this product as he captured the imagination of his clients by feeding off of their expectations of Native American people. New utilized positive stereotypes – of Native people’s ‘deeper meanings’ of objects, such as for medicinal purposes – to promote his handbags and attire, adding significance to a ‘frivolous’ product such as a purse. As Bunten noted, “Participation in the heritage industry can be a powerful catalyst for local cultural reproduction, but it also poses a danger to those aspects of culture that Natives consciously protect from commodification” (2008: 380). New and his assistants avoided ‘danger’ by sharing secularized, or ‘safe,’ versions of cultural objects, and they exercised control over their self-presentation.

In order to maintain the quality and individuality expected of high fashion, New selected a small yardage of fine fabric onto which he printed a unique pattern. To obtain the graphic design, he first drew sketches on to paper then cut them out into stencils. After silkscreening the fabric with the stencils, New used the same dyes to hand-paint additional detailing. The reporter described, “Indian motifs, modified designs from the whimsical desert growth, the color of sunlight and shadow on volcanic rock, and the feminine softness of the cactus blossoms are captured in the tribal costume inspired designs of the dresses” (Lotan 1954:16). New worked with acclaimed Navajo artist Andrew Van Tsinhajinnie, who painted unique fabric designs, and Hopi artists Manfred
Susunkewa, who helped design and silkscreen their quality fabrics, and Charles Loloma, who created the exclusive buttons, clasps, and metal detailing (figure 3) (Pardue 2007: 13). New’s assistants were creative individuals who would later go on to establish themselves as noteworthy artists. For example, in 1960, Pala Mission artist Larry Golsh was hired by New to help Susunkewa make silkscreens and print the fabrics. Golsh worked at the shop for two years (Pardue 2007: 32).

With this uniquely printed fabric, New then created his limited-edition garments, which typically followed the popular silhouettes of the time. One pleated skirt incorporated a gold Pima basket design under-layer, which was sewn to extend slightly lower than the hem (Lotan 1954:16). This under-layering would provide faint yet eye-catching detailing. New’s knack for integrating Native aesthetic design elements onto popular clothing styles established him as a notable designer by the mid-1950s. One reporter remarked, “A true artist, Lloyd sees the possibility of odd accessory touches and combinations for his designs, which is what makes them ‘Kiva’” (Lotan 1954:16). ‘Odd accessory touches,’ such as a trim inspired by Pima basket graphics became the hallmarks of New’s work. The details were subtle enough that non-Native people could proudly wear them without feeling ‘odd’ themselves. One Santa Fe collector had an assortment of Kiva couture, which included a sleeveless mini-dress with blue water design, a blue vest with horse design by Susunkewa and silver buttons by Loloma, a house coat with ruffles and desert-inspired colors, fabric printed by Susunkewa incorporating pottery motifs, and a dress with butterfly designs. Also, a shirtdress with silver Loloma buttons and corn and Ye’i designs was part of the collection. Importantly, there were omissions to this Ye’i
design, thus secularizing the sacred. Because New worked with Native artists who represented a variety of tribal backgrounds, he felt comfortable working in the styles of other tribes, and his garments and handbags reflect this diversity – they draw from many tribal aesthetic traditions.

In the winter of 1954 and 1955, New built the Kiva Craft Center, also known as the Craftsmen Court, which was located on less than an acre of land at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Craftsman Court in Scottsdale. The complex consisted of seven contemporary studio buildings surrounding an open courtyard with grass, benches and water features (Scottsdale Historic Preservation Commission: 2002: 1). Charles and Otellie Loloma (both Hopi), Andrew Van Tsinhajinnie (Navajo), and several other artisans occupied studios and retail shops in the court. In 1956, People and Places magazine focused one of their issues on Scottsdale’s artists and downtown artist studios. The article specifically mentioned Craftsmen Court and Lloyd Kiva New, describing him as of the owner of the most notable shop, which sold “beautiful leather bags and belts, and screen fabrics in bright designs for dresses and shirts” (N.A. 1956: 5). Within ten years, New went from selling one style of leather purses to owning his own artisan complex.

New’s designs, which were inspired by local and Native aesthetics, received national and international recognition. One Western Family reporter said, “Designer Lloyd Kiva has effectively combined luxurious fabrics with patterns inspired by Arizona’s native flowers and Indian sand paintings” (Conlon 1958: 13). Combining the finest available materials with design elements drawn from Native aesthetics such as
Navajo sandpaintings was a successful venture for New, and it was well-received by far-flung trendsetters and store owners. In 1957, Miss Arizona Lynn Freyse wore a Kiva creation at the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City, bringing his garments to the beauty pageant world. New’s shop at the time included a limited wholesale business, dealing with stores like Nieman-Marcus in Dallas, Lord and Taylor in New York, Newsetter’s in Denver, and Harzfield’s in Kansas City (Fisher 1958: n.p.). By 1959, New’s business had grown so much that he employed fifteen Native American assistants. These artisans helped New with the “printing of fabrics he designs and uses for women’s dresses, coats, and capes; and men’s coats, shirts, robes” (Lloyd Wright 1959: 3). New focused on designing the clothes, while his assistants helped with the actual sewing of the garments.

Scottsdale proved to be an environment for success for New and others. He explained, “It had the happy combination of an easy way of life, which an artist must have to bloom in, plus a turnover of clientele that could afford the things we were making” (Stocker 1957: 4). Scottsdale provided the time and money necessary to create and sustain an arts business. He further explained, “This town is really a phenomenon. There’s no place else in the United States where fine hand-made things can be turned out in such quantity and a market found for them” (Stocker 1957: 5). Scottsdale’s combination of wealthy patrons, conspicuous consumption, and artists who created fine, hand-made, unique, yet recognizable, products produced a prosperous environment for New and a select few others who established businesses in the post-war years.
New turned his interest in art into a thriving business. Some of his contemporary artists and art critics believed that an artist’s main concern should be that of aesthetic issues and not of financial or business prospects. In discussing the phenomenon of Scottsdale’s arts and crafts industry, one reporter stated, “It’s an outrageous violation of the fine old tradition which decrees that artists be content with producing art for art’s sake, even if they don’t eat regularly. But it’s the thing that made Scottsdale a different kind of town. Indeed, it’s the thing that made Scottsdale” (Stocker 1957: 5). The artisans of Scottsdale balanced their love of art with the marketability of their work. They also discovered and cultivated a market to whom they could sell their goods. In an article for a newspaper, Mrs. Frank Lloyd Wright described New’s work as “original, distinctive, and being so specially handmade, is quite expensive” (Lloyd Wright 1959: 3). The high cost of these items were rationalized with the quality of the garments; she explained, “many a friend of mine has told me, ‘Yes, his clothes are expensive, but they are worth it. You simply cannot wear them out’” (Lloyd Wright 1959: 3). So while the prices were high, the garments were expected to last longer than cheaper clothing, they were worth more, and high-profile clients were testifying to this worth. With this kind of recognition, New’s prices were justified, and he continued his financially successful business. In 1957, New estimated his net worth to be around $300,000 (Stocker 1957: 5).

Some key elements added to New’s success. New firmly believed that Native people were an integral aspect of the life and identity of the United States. In the post-war environment of American national pride, New advocated that there wasn’t much more American than the Native American, and encouraged people to express this on their
clothing. He started off selling handbags, which were high priced yet affordable, and this high price made them tokens that signaled status. New was receptive to his clients, and omitted any elements that deterred them from buying his handbags and garments – one reporter called this “shunting off some of the traditional shapes, taboos and religious symbols” (MacKenzie 1948: 8). While New probably did not use the word ‘shunting’, he understood Anglo-American tastes, and incorporated certain elements of Native design motifs and translated them into marketable items. Furthermore, New avoided ‘taboos’ by not using ceremonial or sacred shapes, designs, or symbols.

It is also relevant to note the importance of regionalism to New’s work, in which American artists and other individuals rejected the city in favor of rural life. New, in essence, was also selling the idea of the ‘Desert Southwest,’ which was closely associated with Native peoples, their cultures and their arts. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, Southwestern chic was a national trend in the 1950s, and upscale stores in New York City sold the same type of ‘squaw dress’ that was popular in Arizona (Parezo and Jones 2009). New participated in this movement, but his identity as a Native person lent his dresses as special authenticity that other non-Native designers did not possess. While on the one hand, this movement championed a distinctive aesthetic that drew off of known Native art practices, later, this association to Native peoples was removed. For example, in recent popular trends, Navajo or Pueblo designs are categorized as ‘Southwestern,’ which, intentionally or not, obscured the connection to people and instead associated the products with a geographic region. This marketing strategy sidestepped issues of appropriation. Alternatively, New reaffirmed that his garments were
connected to a long history drawn from the artistry of distinct Native groups and
individuals.

He created more products for his clients – these included dresses and coats. Clients pleased with his work and artistry could come back to purchase different items. He created limited edition garments that were recognizably ‘Kiva’, but which were each unique so that no two well-to-do women would look exactly alike. He turned his fashion shows into luxurious experiences – they were staged poolside, with cocktails, and he talked about each piece – offering a meaning and history to each of the Native design elements that he incorporated. He tapped the national and international markets through publications and fashion shows. And finally, he employed assistants, who helped him execute his designs.

Lloyd Kiva New played an important role in revolutionizing Native customary clothing design in the mid-1900s. He worked in textile arts, leatherwork, and fashion design with his own boutique and center, and he was active in the development of Scottsdale as an arts center. New’s business prospered when opportunities for Native individuals were limited and bounded. Upper-class Anglo women wore his garments made with Native designs in a time when Native cultures were being smothered out and dissolved into American cities through relocation and termination government policies. He expressed his ideas as to the importance of Native cultures while emceeing fashion shows by resort pools, being interviewed for national articles, hosting art or cultural events, or consulting on Indian art educational programs. Throughout his career as a fashion and accessories designer, New incorporated Native design concepts, including
symbols, materials, silhouettes, cuts, and color palettes, from various tribes, sometimes combining them, to create items that would work within Anglo American paradigms of gender, class, and ethnicity. New acknowledged social limitations and cultural expectations and worked within these frameworks to create new possibilities for Native people.

IV. ‘New’ Directions

After over a decade of success, New still held firm to his original motivations to develop innovative “authentic and practical” outlets for Native talent and skill. To him, this meant supporting the Native people who were creating high-quality aesthetic objects. He explained, “I want to prove that Indians can do better than dime-store stuff” (Stocker 1957: 5). New advocated for a situation in which top-notch Indian arts would be financially supported by a wealthy clientele. To New, high-quality meant the finest available materials, as evidence by his own use of the then-chic Egyptian cloth and soft leathers. To create Indian arts meant using materials, colors, or designs that referred in varying degrees to classical examples of Native American material culture from the 1800s.

New believed that several techniques or practices were being forgotten. He explained, “The old stuff – basket-weaving, pottery and so forth – is on its way out. We have to find a new medium for the Indian craftsmen, or they’ll leave their crafts” (Stocker 1957: 5). New wanted Indian artists to experiment with new ideas to maintain their aesthetic traditions. He believed that, innately, Native people had a unique sense of
aesthetics, and that they had much to share pertaining to color theory, “Many of them are naturally artistic and have a fine color sense” (Stocker 1957: 5). Armed with this natural sense of creativity, New challenged the young generations of artists to seek new media to maintain aesthetic practices. He stated, “My ambition is to introduce fashion design as a new, contemporary medium of expression for the Indian people” (Stocker 1957: 5). In the 1970s, the Indian Arts and Crafts Board, undoubtedly influenced by New, promoted Native fashion in Indian Country as a form of economic development.

New believed that change in Native cultures would be demonstrated in their material culture. He stated, “forms were invented, pursued, in accordance with tribal needs” (Living Treasures 1994: 19). If a tribe’s needs changed, so would its cultural forms. He believed that all cultures adapt to contemporary situations and that change is an inherent aspect of culture. He explained, “All cultures evolve and when they evolve they leave behind and create new things and go on” (Living Treasures 1994: 19). New believed that attempts to stop change actually threatened the future of a people. He stated, “no one is worrying about the movement of a culture, they’re just trying to keep everything like it is and I dare say that is futile in the long. And a disservice to the people that you’re bearing down on” (Living Treasures 1994: 20). To New, a focus on supporting only preservation practices was actually oppressive.

New believed Indian art needed to be thought of differently, and that it could not be viewed as simply needing to look like it did a century ago. He stated, “if there’s going to be an Indian art of the future, it’s going to be different than it was a hundred years ago” (Living Treasures 1994: 20). This understanding of the inherent creativity of Indian art
needed to be recognized in order to release Native people, and their art, from the views that supported the trinketizing of Indian art. New wanted to return dignity to Native aesthetic objects and adornment. He expressed this concern, “I’d much rather see the Indians drive up in a nice-kept truck and make a living not having to sit on the sidewalk every day” (Living Treasures 1994: 20). New needed to develop a client base that would value this movement, and back it financially. To disseminate his philosophy of Indian arts and marketing, New employed skilled Native artisans in his shop to help execute his designs and to work collaboratively on new projects, creating novel and original creations in fashions and leather.

New suggested that artists played a forefront role in building Scottsdale and developing it into the city we know today. He proclaimed, “This is the town that artists built. There’s just no other excuse for Scottsdale” (Stocker 1957: 5). Historical books of Scottsdale chronicle its growth from a farming community that welcomed artists and outsiders, to an arts colony and resort getaway for travelers (Fudala 2001). New and the original tenants of Darlington’s Craftsmen Center were active participants in the community, were members of the Chamber of Commerce, and determined the direction of its growth. One reporter stated, “Scottsdale’s preeminence as a craft center…was planned exactly that way, including the important element of commercial success” (Conlon 1958: 11). A decade after the Craftsmen sought to find a home for their craft, they were acknowledged for creating a productive setting for the creation and sales of art objects.
New, along with Segner, Darlington, and others, were part of a collective of
individuals who nourished Scottsdale’s growth. One reporter explained, “[New] saw the
possibilities, artistic and commercial, and the standards he set for other craftsmen are
those on which Scottsdale’s fame has been built” (Conlon 1958: 11). Scottsdale’s first
artisan shops, the Arizona Craftsmen Center, set the precedent for Scottsdale, and other
shops were modeled after them. For a presentation to the 2003 Arizona History
Convention in Tempe, Scottsdale historian Joan C. Fudala explained,

This post-World War II humble epicenter created a ripple effect
throughout Scottsdale, spawning dozens of working art and craft studios,
art schools, galleries, fashion houses and cultural events. Thanks in large
measure to those guild-like artists and craftspeople, 57 years later the
small farming village of Scottsdale has grown into a city of nearly 230,000
people with a worldwide reputation for its multi-faceted menu of arts and
cultural offerings.

(Fudala 2003: 1)

The effect of these craftsmen on Scottsdale’s character and reputation was felt
immediately in the years after their shops opened, as evidenced by the several local and
national articles written about them, but also in the decades after.

A study by the Scottsdale Preservation Commission investigated over seven
hundred properties related to Scottsdale’s historic development as an ‘Arts Colony and
Tourist Destination,’ and found the Kiva Craft Center to be one of the most influential
and significant to Scottsdale’s growth. New was labeled “a champion of the emerging
Indian crafts movement in postwar Scottsdale and nationwide” (Scottsdale Historic
Preservation Commission 2002: 3). His national and international fame led a movement
that distinguished Scottsdale from other southwest locales as an arts-centered resort
community. According to New’s 1996 narrative vitae, he developed nine acres of
downtown Scottsdale in its early stages, opened Fifth Avenue as a central specialty-shop district, and built a forty-four unit arts and crafts center and mall (New 1996: 2). New played a paramount role in establishing the Native arts movement in Scottsdale, which exists today as one of the most thriving marketing centers of Western and Native art in the United States (New 1996: 2).

As the 1950s came to a close, New refocused his sights back to Indian art education. New was quoted in three separate newspaper articles in the late 1950s about his ideas for a school that would provide new opportunities for Native youth. He stated,

> My next project will be the establishment of some kind of a design laboratory. We’ll teach Indian boys and girls, just out of school, how to make a living with their own native craft-work. I’d like to put the bead work of the Yuma Indians, and the native fabrics of the Navajo, Hopi, and Sioux into high fashion too! (Fisher 1958: n.p.)

New’s ideas for Indian art education would focus on experimentation with new materials and means, such as fashion, and would provide valuable information on marketing and business. One reporter noted, “One of Lloyd Kiva’s contributions to his people is that he has found out how not to be poor” (Hendrick n.d.: n.p.). By seeking advice, teaching himself, and experimenting, New built a successful business, and he wanted to share the knowledge that he gained with other young Native artists. He believed that empowerment could occur through economic development of the arts, especially since they are central to culture. He thought his business, which hired assistants and apprentices, could be the foundation of a school to train Native youth, not only in the technical skills of art creation, but also in the logistical aspects pertaining to business knowledge that would
enable them to “prosper as artists and craftsmen in the competitive markets of the world” (Hendrick n.d.: n.p.). In one article, New mapped out his ideas for the school:

Students will be ‘thoroughly indoctrinated in Indian culture’ during their first year. During the second, they will begin to work under such master craftsmen, say, as Charles Loloma…Business management will be stressed in the third year… Marketing will come the fourth year. (Hendrick n.d.: n.p.)

Business management was critically important to New, since he did not have this type of education when he entered the art world in the mid-1940s. English and arithmetic, along with accounting, taxes, and sales must be introduced to the students. For the final year, marketing would be emphasized, and students would be encouraged to consider clientele, pricing, and location.

Considering a variety of issues pertaining to creativity, culture, education, marketing and sales, and preservation, New, along with others, brainstormed ideas for a new school. He asked, “What can we teach Indian youth in terms of their creativity?” (Living Treasures 1994: 20). Concerned with the rupture of a continuum in Indian culture and creativity, he promoted the idea that a school was needed to experiment with new concepts of Indian art education and to train youth (Living Treasures 1994: 20). He wanted to recruit young Native individuals who exhibited talent, interest, and potential in developing their skills. In 1959 he stated, “We will teach them to use modern materials and modern ways in weaving, silvercrafts, basket work and pottery. And we will have the very finest of designs executed with the finest craftsmanship” (Lloyd Wright 1959: 3). He wanted Native individuals to be active participants in the discussion pertaining to the
perception of beauty, which New believed was “the American Indian’s distinctive gift to the world” (Hendrick n.d.: n.p.).

New was a main participant in the seminal Directions in Indian Art Conference at the University of Arizona in 1959. He delivered the keynote address about the importance of art education in supporting contemporary Native artists and in motivating young individuals to pursue their creative talents in both contemporary and culturally significant ways (Fudala 2005: 4). He was a co-founder and co-director of the three-year experimental summer project known as the Southwest Indian Arts Project. Each summer, he taught and mentored two dozen Native art students, which led to the philosophy and methodology he developed for art instruction at the Institute of American Indian Arts (New 1996: 2, Fudala 2005: 3). As the Institute’s founding Arts Director, New developed the initial arts program. He assumed the Presidency of IAIA in 1967, and during his tenure at the Institute, the high school and post-high school program was upgraded to the Junior College level. He retired from IAIA in 1978 (New 1996: 2), but continued to participate in IAIA events as a supporter and advisor.

V. Conclusion

An academic search of “1950s Native American” will return several books on the topic of Native American representation in the Hollywood film industry. While these books describe the now-epitomous Hollywood Indian – stereotypes of the late 1800s Plains war chief and maiden princess – Indian government policy in the 1950s sought to relocate the contemporary ‘real’ Indians to cities and urban locations far from their home
communities. This policy of relocation, coupled with the policy of termination, is now seen as detrimental to Indian sovereignty, culture, and identity. These two facets of American Indian life – the fantasy and the reality – reflect the world that Lloyd Kiva New lived in. But he, and others like him, refused these options and instead carved new spaces for themselves and future generations. New’s ‘space’ promoted the economic advancement of Native artists and their communities, celebrated Indianness and tribal aesthetics as expressed on their terms, and demonstrated the possibilities for ‘mobile’ Indians – that is, Native people could live in urban locations without sacrificing connections to community. New did not fight the ‘Indian stereotype’ per se, instead, he fought the entire ‘time freeze’ paradigm of which the 1950s Hollywood Indian stereotype was based upon. Again and again he demonstrated that Indians could be ‘Indians’ and could exhibit ‘Indianness’ without being frozen in time, reproducing old or out-dated art forms.

When an article about the Kiva shop was published in The Desert Magazine in 1948, other articles were published in the same issue about Native people, highlighting current Indian realities and public perceptions of Native people. For example, in the ‘desert news’ section, a short paragraph described how two Seri Indian brothers “received their first taste of civilization” when they were brought from their homeland by an ethnographer to visit Tucson for a week. The brothers were introduced to mattresses, milk shakes, and church organs, of which they called masheen – the author translated this Seri word to mean wonderful, beautiful, good, and fine (The Desert Magazine 1948: 32). The article demonstrated how readers in 1948 held on to the naïve noble savage
stereotype. Elsewhere, Interior Secretary Julius Albert Krug was quoted as stating, “The Navajo are not starving. There are too many Navajo on the reservations. We must train them for and get them to take jobs off the reservations” (The Desert Magazine 1948: 32). The policy of relocation was being formed and promoted.

In 1950, the average Anglo-American earned a salary of almost $4,000, yet the average Native American on a reservation earned only $950 (Native American Public Telecommunications 2006). With these dire statistics, the federal government initiated the Urban Indian Relocation Program in 1952, which was designed to entice Native people, who were living in their home communities on the reservations, to move to major urban cities where the jobs and opportunities were plentiful, “To government officials, relocating Indian workers, usually to urban areas, seemed both a promising solution to the reservations’ persistent economic woes and a powerful means of assimilation” (Marks 1999: 294).

New, along with his assistants at the Kiva shop and other Indian artisans in Scottsdale, spoke about the value of their tribes’ cultural contributions to the country at large, promoting the tradition of creativity, and existing somewhere in between, or outside of, the romanticized image of Indians projected upon them and the urbanized working Indian image expected of them. New and other artists produced images of Native American cultures and everyday life, and through this process of image-making, they became cultural brokers. Translating between cultures, like the artists Bill Anthes described in his book, “they found themselves straddling the boundaries of their own
communities and the larger white world. In this new role, they attempted to gain a degree of control over their own representations” (Anthes 2006: 4).

New’s designs played off of and influenced the contemporary fashion scene. In the 1950s, Black Americans found it difficult to break into the fashion world (Smith 1996: 285), however, Lloyd Kiva New was very successful. As Mullen noted, in the early part of the twentieth century, blackness, according to Mary Austin, was something that should be ‘overlooked,’ whereas Indianness (albeit sanctioned varieties of it) was to be highlighted and celebrated. Today, Black designers have a presence at the New York Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week, whereas Native American fashion designers are still trying to get past the red ropes of Bryant Park.

Lloyd Kiva New played an important role in revolutionizing Native customary clothing design in the mid-1900s. He believed that fashion was the oldest form of design and artistic expression for all mankind. He stated, “From tattoos to earrings to clothing, fashion is a fundamental form of expression” (New 1994: 46). Creative expression was paramount to New, who stated, “The freedom to express should not be hindered by ideas that Indians did the best work they could do in 1890” (Pardue 2007: 13).

He was an artisan in textile design, leatherwork, and fashion design with his own boutique, and was active in the development of Scottsdale as an arts center. He was highlighted in several national newspapers and reporters celebrated his aesthetic creations. New’s business prospered when opportunities for Native individuals were limited and bounded. Upper-class Anglo women wore his designs based on Native
motifs, symbols, and designs in a time when Native cultures were being smothered out by relocation and termination government policies.

New expressed his perceptions as to the importance of Native cultures while emceeing fashion shows by resort pools, being interviewed for national articles, hosting art or cultural events, or consulting on Indian art educational programs. During New’s Kiva shop heyday, the ‘Indian’ was seen as an important element to American identity – one aspect that would differentiate America from Europe.

Throughout his career as a fashion and accessories designer, New incorporated Native design concepts, including motifs, materials, silhouettes, cuts, and color palettes, from various tribes, sometimes combining them, to create items that would work within Anglo American paradigms of gender, class, and ethnicity. New acknowledged social limitations and cultural expectations and worked within these frameworks to create new possibilities for Native people. New’s ventures into graphic and textile designs set the stage for Native aesthetics to enter American homes in the form of posh décor. Artists Pop Chalee (Taos), Beatien Yazz (Navajo), Al Momaday (Kiowa), and Tom Two Arrows (Lenape) all created designs for printed fabrics, which were used to make southwestern-style clothing and home décor (Bernstein, Chavez, & McMullen 2006). New opened the door and provide new possibilities for Native people in the creative world of design.
CHAPTER 3
FROM SEWING TO TRADITIONAL TECHNIQUES: THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN CONTEMPORARY NATIVE AMERICAN CLOTHING DESIGN

“Hand weaving, embroidery stitching, wall hanging embroidery, and fashion design are some projects being made in Traditional Techniques.” – Drumbeats (1966)

Instruction in clothing and textiles design was integrated into the curriculum at the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) at its inception. IAIA was established in 1962 on the site of Dorothy Dunn’s Studio School to provide a more systematic approach to modern Indian art education. IAIA has produced a movement of Native artists who continue to define and redefine contemporary Indian art and has made its historical mark. Native American educators assisted in building the curriculum to incorporate Indigenous ways of teaching, and prominent Native artists formed the school’s core faculty. The idea of including clothing design and garment-making at IAIA had its roots not only in the creative and ambitious mind of the Institute’s co-founder Lloyd Kiva New (Cherokee), but also in IAIA’s institutional predecessor, the Santa Fe Indian boarding school. Home economics and sewing classes were essential elements of every boarding school’s curriculum.

This chapter is divided into two parts: the first will discuss the role of Euro-American clothing in the early Indian boarding schools and the second will focus on the
clothing-making courses offered at the Institute of American Indian Arts. While several books have been written about the history of and issues surrounding the Indian boarding schools, few focus on specific aspects of the schools, and none directly discuss in-depth the well-known ‘initiation’ process of cutting a new child’s hair, and replacing their attire with a uniform. This initial experience is often retold as a shocking rite of passage, one that tears the student away from his or her old life and symbolizes that a new life has begun. The first part of this chapter focuses on this experience, and the idea that clothing is connected to identity. This chapter draws on the scholarship of Lomawaima and McCarty (2006), who, in their book, To Remain an Indian, propose the idea of ‘safety zones.’ For various reasons, as I discuss in this chapter, clothing was a site where it was believed dangerously different cultural expressions might be safely domesticated and thus neutralized. Cultural attire was deemed dangerous in the late 1800s because of the power it held as an individual and social connected to individual and cultural identity. I also draw on Vizenor’s concept of survivance. If clothing is to be viewed as a reflection of the self, what happens when you remove ‘Indian attire’ and replace it with Euro-American garments? “Survivance in the sense of native survivance, is more than survival, more than endurance or mere response, the stories of survivance are an active presence” (Vizenor 1998: 15). Resistance in the form of active presence is an important concept to understand, especially when discussing the wearing of Native American tribal identity markers on attire. Through the stories evidenced in scholarship on Indian boarding schools, and through the stories documented in IAIA school newspapers, we can discover how students and instructors, like Angel DeCora, Lloyd Kiva New, Josephine Wapp, and
Sandy Wilson, took an active stance in promoting the presence rather than absence of critical survivance through the medium of symbology in clothing. I define symbology as a system of symbols, of something that stands for or suggests something else by reason of relationship, association, convention, or accidental resemblance. In this case, the elasticity in meanings of clothing utilized in the Indian boarding schools, compared to that in the Institute of American Indian Arts, is investigated. This chapter begins with the Indian Boarding Schools of the late 1800s, and ends with a discussion on the IAIA clothing curriculum in the 1960s and 1970s.

I. Clothing in the Indian Boarding School

Clothing played an important role in the acculturative process of the federal Indian boarding schools during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. School officials commissioned two photographs to be taken upon a student’s arrival, the first in Native attire and then in the school uniform as a means of documenting the start of a unidirectional civilizing process. These images, however, did not tell the entire story of the cross-cultural interactions occurring at boarding schools. In *Education for Extinction*, David Wallace Adams described the before and after pictures of one student:

> In the first instance a student was shown as he arrived, the epitome of the young warrior - painted face, braided hair, decorated with eagle feathers, and beaded buckskins and moccasins. The second photo presented an image altogether different, the archetypal reconstructed Indian - short-cropped hair, black suit, stiff collar, and oversized necktie. (1995: 275)

By reconstructing and re-presenting Indian warriors as individuals outwardly acculturated and therefore assumed to be assimilated into the dominating American culture, these
photographs also served to depict the accomplishments of the schools and convince BIA officials, legislators, and the general public that their tax dollars had been well-spent. Inherent in these images were assumptions that if children were stripped of all Native accoutrements, they could be assimilated into Euro-American society. Thus, school officials viewed uniforms as an imperative aspect of the acculturation and assimilation process much like soldiers’ appearance was altered when they joined the army as a symbol of their new status. Many books and articles have noted the important role of clothing in Indian boarding schools (Adams 1995, Archuleta and Lomawaima 2000, Child 1993, Dussel 2005, LaFlesche 1978, Lesiak 1992, Lomawaima 1994, Qoyawayma 1977, Reyhner and Eder 2004), however, none address the connection between clothing, culture, gender, and identity, the role of uniforms in the assimilation process, and the responses of the students to their required sartorial alterations.

Clothing is closely tied to culture and identity (Becker 2005, Brasser 1985, Cordwell and Schwarz 1979, Craik 1994, Davis 1992, Eicher 1995, Her Many Horses 2007, Horse Capture and Horse Capture 2001, Kapoun 1992, Lurie 1981, McCracken 1988, Rovine 2001). Clothing covers the corporeal self, it frames much of what we see when we view another person, and it holds the capacity to communicate about the self. Clothing, then, is an extension of identity. Clothing can carry messages in a subtle manner and it is elastic in meaning, allowing for multiple interpretations by different populations and individuals within a given community (Rovine 2001), and this is particularly true for the boarding school uniforms. Through an examination of clothing,
we can investigate how Native people found unique ways to uphold and maintain their cultures and individualize themselves to overcome the military style sameness.

Traditional Native clothing communicated and signaled many meanings, including a person’s heritage, personal identity, age, gender, and status (Becker 2005, Brasser 1985, Her Many Horses 2007, Horse Capture and Horse Capture 2001, Jensen and Sargent 1986, Kapoun 1992, LaFlesche 1978). Some clothing revealed tribal affiliation and family heritage through specific designs, crests, or styles. In the Northwest Coast region, for instance, families own rights to certain crest designs and only members of the clan can use the symbol (Hawthorn 1967 and 1979). Selected items or garments were associated with status and demonstrated a person’s prominence. For example, tribal chiefs, such as American Horse, wore top hats presented to them on trips to D.C. (Durkin 2006). Clothing could convey a person’s roles; for example, warriors wore specially designed shirts that signaled them as able protectors in Plains tribes (Horse Capture and Horse Capture 2001: 29). Clothing also indicated relationships; for example, the material or designs expressed relationships with elements from the natural world. Certain garments also signaled stories; storytellers could refer to symbols on their clothing, or to the items themselves in recalling a story (Horse Capture and Horse Capture 2001: 21). These items existed as important aspects of an oral tradition. Clothing also expressed identity; for example, the Métis from Ontario wore trade-cloth coats to display their multicultural ancestry. By examining Native-made coats of the 17th and 18th centuries, Marshall J. Becker discussed both the progressive adoption of new materials by Native people, and the ways in which clothing would still contain elements of Native cultural
persistence and aesthetic preference (Becker 2005). Individuals and groups signaled retention of their specific cultural identities in their clothing.

The American Indian trade blanket, which carried considerable symbolic meaning during the reservation era, was one of the most heavily traded items in the Americas until the 1900s (Kapoun 1992, Jensen and Sargent 1986). The trade blanket has become almost completely recontextualized in terms of Native cultures because, while the blankets were manufactured by non-Natives, they were traded into Native cultures and subsequently ‘recast by its Native American users’ (Kapoun 1992). The trade blanket became highly valued by Native people, and this value is evident today in the ‘gifting’ of blankets in ceremonies across North America. The blanket was a standard of exchange, and it measured wealth and standing. The blankets came in many colors and designs and therefore reflected individuality within the collective identity of being American Indian. These blankets, even during the boarding school era, symbolized an individual’s bond to the older, traditional ways. This is a meaning that has been retained into the 21st century.

“Going back to the blanket” was a phrase used during the boarding school period to refer to those students who, upon leaving the schools, returned to a tribal existence characterized by a repudiation of all that was ‘learned’ at school (Adams 1995, Archuleta and Lomawaima 2000, Child 1993, Lomawaima 1994, Reyhner and Eder 2004). It characterized a situation in which English was left at the school gates and the mother tongue was relearned as the individual re-assimilated to his/her home community. The uniform was stripped, left in a heap, and replaced with contemporary, comfortable, everyday and special occasion tribal attire. From the perspective of all those devoted to
the transformative power of the boarding school experience, “going back to the blanket” was the ultimate form of failure.

For school officials, a return to tribal ways was of great concern and was obsessively policed; therefore, upon arrival at the boarding schools, material culture was confiscated, and then Native language was beaten out of the child. To tribal members, on the other hand, “going back to the blanket” was of great concern, but for different reasons. It symbolized something quite different, yet equally important because the tribe also had something at stake. While mothers, fathers, and elders saw the worth of the children going to school and learning English, they also realized the worth of their children returning. Whether directly identified or not, a child that came back to the blanket symbolized the resilient nature of Native cultures and its people. It also had another meaning. Children were welcomed back when they returned and the blanket was a way to symbolize reintegration into the community. It was a sign of transition. “Going back to the blanket” meant, literally, putting on the blanket, and wrapping oneself within the item that represented traditional Native cultures and epistemologies.

Most Native children arrived at the boarding schools in tribal attire (Adams 1995, LaFlesche 1978, Qoyawayma 1977, Reynher and Eder 2004, Sekaquaptewa 1969). Elk dresses, woven blankets, and buffalo robes were worn by the students photographed upon their arrival at off-reservation boarding schools. After the haircut, a change in dress was the second part of the ‘initiation’ process into the schools. Euro-American notions of hygiene were a grave concern for school officials, based upon their erroneous assumption that Indian clothing was neither clean nor civilized. Therefore all Native garments were
quickly shed and speedily replaced with Euro-American clothing. This is also a ritual of prisons, where it represented the stripping of individuality and individual freedoms. Adams stated, “It made little difference whether students arrived wearing elegant buckskin or threadbare trade blankets; shortly after their arrival, their traditional clothing was exchanged for the standard school uniform” (1995: 103). The stripping of Native attire and the re-imaging of Indian students had begun with the missionary school efforts in the 17th century. School leaders were concerned about ‘properly’ clothing the students according to Christian standards of modesty. Clothing was seen as a means by which Native children would appear ‘white’ in every way except skin color.

General Richard Henry Pratt, with his first group of students, set the model for future Indian boarding schools, especially as it pertained to clothing. Upon arrival, they were undressed and compelled to don military uniforms, which was consistent with the strict military nature of the earlier schools. Pratt believed that if the Indian was removed from his savage environment, he could be saved. The nearest, closest symbolic ‘environment’ to any student was that of clothing. By removing all Native adornment, it was understood, the students would also remove their tribes’ culture and belief systems. The change in appearance was the first step in wiping out all remnants of culture and identity, and led to an eradication of the ‘wild’ in each student. Phenotypical appearance was also thought to be malleable under this model. In the film, In the White Man’s Image, a Fort Marion visitor observed, “The difference is striking... improved intelligence is shown on their faces” (Lesiak 1992). By demonstrating an obvious change in the outward appearance of the students, school officials hoped to signal a change in the students’
inner values and beliefs. Clothing, then, quickly came to symbolize the apparent assimilation and transformation of Native American students for the educators, missionaries, BIA personnel, students, and their families. And this idea quickly spread to the general public.

While large boarding schools attempted to properly clothe students, the school officials’ efforts were sometimes inadequate. Typically, less than three uniforms were allotted per student per year, and the garments were drab military-style uniforms, Victorian house dresses, or crisp white smocks. Despite BIA attempts at standardization, significant variability in the quality of clothing existed among the schools over the years. In general, federal off-reservation boarding schools provided better clothing than the remote reservation schools. Adams speculated that this trend was due to the fact that off-reservation schools showcased the federal government’s work in Indian education, and therefore the appearance of change was of particular importance. In addition, these schools enrolled more students, and offered sewing and tailoring classes to those who were expected to construct uniforms for themselves and their peers (Adams 1995: 104-106). The situation at the remote reservation schools was distinctly different. Clothing quality was poor and the allocations were inconsistent; clothing was often tattered and ill-fitting. Reservation schools received less BIA funding and were staffed with fewer employees. Students, or a school seamstress if available, patched and mended existing garments that were expected to last until new clothing was allotted (Adams 1995: 106). Because of this simple styles of clothing prevailed and rarely changed as fashions changed.
School uniforms served multiple purposes. Boarding schools supplied clothing to the children to clothe and protect their bodies. In addition to providing coverage and protection, the uniforms also created a new image of the Indian body, and it established discipline as a means to manage and control bodies. Not only were new norms of appearance and physical mannerisms expected, but now a new sense of ‘correct’ ways of moving, ‘correct’ physical posture, and ‘correct’ details of dress were imposed as well (Lomawaima 1993).

In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Native American and Black populations were the targets of close surveillance in terms of what they were expected to wear and when to wear it (Dussel 2005). Uniforms were seen as a means of regulating these populations and standardizing their collective identities. Indian boarding school officials could eliminate the student’s sense of tribal identity by normalizing, or Americanizing, their clothing. The uniforms also eliminate individuality and social differentiation; they homogenize students into a homogenous category of malleable “student.” The discussion continues today with advocates of dress codes underscoring the need for uniforms for reasons of safety and security; for example, uniforms suggest order, and some believe that uniforms eliminate gang activity by destroying color association with group affiliation (Garot and Kats 2003, Stanley 1996).

When every student dressed alike, it was easier for school officials to maintain order, and any student out of line could be quickly corrected. In her book, One House, One Heart, One Voice, Sally Hyer explained, “The discipline imposed…helped the small staff control a student body that by 1918 was over four hundred students” (1990: 11).
Uniforms could be used for a disciplinary function that emphasized the close monitoring and control of populations deemed as potentially dangerous (Dussel 2005). When Pratt’s first group of students arrived at Fort Marion, they were immediately dressed in military uniforms. One Fort Marion visitor remark, “They look like soldiers now” (Lesiak 1992). If the Native male body was seen as needing to be controlled to stymie genetic proclivity to violence through a uniform that implied discipline and the subjugation of primitive urges, the Native female body was subject to strict regulation, controlling sexuality was important.

Punishment could be executed through clothing, for example, after begin caught running away, one Jemez woman, who went to school in 1911, said, “Then we were punished. We had to wear a gunnysack for two days… like a shawl” (Hyer 1990: 15). To disobey rules meant the donning of very uncomfortable and itchy attire. As Hyer also explained, “Ridicule of the traditional Indian woman’s shawl reinforced the school’s rejection of Indian values” (1990: 15). Clothing was closely connected with passivity and the forced acceptance of the schools’ Euro-American ideals and rejection of Indian values and rebellion.

Tied with Victorian-era ideas of morality, the dresses made during this time were generally cut from the same pattern in calico or wool fabric spool, giving them a ‘uniform’ homogeneous appearance. The invention of the sewing machine and the introduction of commercial paper patterns influenced the production, standardization, and style of clothing (Nunn 2000). These Victorian dresses covered the entire body with high necklines, long sleeves, and long dress lengths, and hid as much skin as possible. This
coverage served many purposes, such as disguising the difference of skin color and presenting the self as chaste. The dresses also emphasized notions of control by means of tight waist lines and stiff undergarments. If female students looked and dressed like their morally upright American counterparts, it was assumed that they too shared the same values and had become brown versions of white Americans.

White smocks were adopted as uniforms at some schools because they represented the economic, democratic, and hygienic ideals popular around the turn of the 20th century (Dussel 2005). Because of their simple style, smocks were inexpensive. Also, if all children wore the smocks, school officials believed that an environment of equality would be created. Furthermore, uniformity in clothing enforced a sense of anonymity. Wealth differences among the students were stripped away along with their attire. Advocates of uniforms today claim they erase class differences and thus orient the student’s focus on learning (Boutelie 2008, Garot and Kats 2003, Stanley 1996). But class is not the only associations made with clothing; dress indicates many non-class affiliations as well.

New knowledge of ‘social hygiene’ changed the practices of cleanliness and ushered in the idea that “the health of an individual was not only his or her concern” but that of a community (Dussel 2005: 187). Beliefs about hygiene were not restricted to the corporal self, but were also tied to notions of moral cleanliness and racial purity. Thus, the popular attitude that “the struggle against ignorance, sickness and poverty was one and the same” (Dussel 2005: 187) could be addressed by assigning a white smock to all
students, which would protect the dress so it did not need to be washed as often, and
students then learned to keep the smock white through hygiene and laundry classes.

Estelle Reel, the Superintendent of Indian schools from 1898 to 1910, concluded
that previous policies of assimilation had failed but blamed the victim rather than
question the BIA’s faculty policy and strategy. She also assumed that all Native
American people desired assimilation, which was not the case. Her beliefs that Native
people were intellectually and physically inferior expressed themselves in her emphasis
on overly-detailed menial labor in her 1901 Uniform Course of Study (UCS), which
homogenized “content and pedagogy across all federal schools” (Lomawaima 1996: 12).
Reel’s UCS focused intently on detailed training; her comprehension of the importance of
all-around proper sewing techniques has been frequently quoted as an example of the
precise instruction she advocated.

Limited funding and the lessons of financial responsibility provided the economic
rationale that all of the girls’ vocational activities should be vital to the upkeep of the
schools. The girls were expected to sew their own dresses, cloaks, and uniforms as well
as the boy’s clothing in some schools. Brenda Child noted, “In 1904 the superintendent
reported that in one quarter alone, the Flandreau girls made 193 dresses, and assorted
skirts, underwear, and sheets for beds” (1993: 79-80). The ideological rationale of these
sewing classes, on the other hand, upheld the popular beliefs of posture and control, of
outward appearance signaling a transformation to civility, and of training the Native girls
for their new role of American domesticity: “what school officials wanted to do, of
course, was to transform Indian girls into bronze embodiments of Victorian womanhood”
Sewing classes were a staple of the boarding school, especially from 1880-1920. Except for members of the elite classes who could afford seamstresses, all clothing was handmade at this time, and Anglo women learned to sew at home and later in schools as well. Paradoxically, the construction techniques and decorating skills taught in the schools were more basic than the young women would have learned in their Native communities from their relatives.

Alternatively, Reel also encouraged the production of Native arts; this support brought Native women into the schools to conduct lessons in making cultural objects, such as blankets and baskets. Reel supported craft-making as a means to obtain economic self-sufficiency, and Native arts and crafts, such as beadwork and blanket weaving, were added to the school curriculum. In her book, *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900-1940*, Brenda Child noted, “John Collier is usually credited with recognizing the potential value of Native art in revitalizing tribal economies, but boarding schools like Carlisle, Flandreau, and Haskell actually encouraged Indian artistry many years before the 1930s” (1993: 80). For example, in 1906, art and textile classes were introduced into the curriculum at Carlisle under the direction of Winnebago artist Angel De Cora (Archuleta, et al. 2000: 90, Gere 2004).

Student responses and thoughts about the clothing at the boarding schools from the late 1800s to the early 1900s varied greatly. Some student reactions to the clothing were decidedly positive. They were excited about dressing up like white people (Adams 1995: 108). Adams wrote that Mitchell “was glad to exchange his old clothing for the standard school allotment” (1995: 261) since some students wore meager clothing due to
the economic poverty on the reservations. Child highlighted Caroline Rogers, a student of Flandreau in the 1890s, whose school uniform consisted of a “white blouse and blue skirt, with high buttoned shoes and black stockings” (1993: 30). Rogers’ brother acknowledged that his sister “always liked the dress of the white people” (1993: 30). Some students attempted to influence, update, or upgrade the school uniforms. In 1893, at the Albuquerque boarding school, the female students, after comparing their own dresses with the prevailing contemporary popular dress of white girls, requested to be allowed to adorn their school dresses with lace and ruffles. The boarding school superintendent reported that this change had “made a vast difference in the general feeling among the girls, who are much more willing and cheerful” (Adams 1995: 104-106). The students found ways to work within the school system regulations, negotiating their desires with the standards imposed on them, and created innovative ways to adorn or individualize their uniforms.

While some students expressed excitement and appreciation for the basic school garments, others took on the role of dressmaker with enthusiasm as a creative outlet. Polingaysi Qoyawayma stated in her memoir, No Turning Back, that she began sewing at an early age at the boarding school that she attended around the turn of the 20th century. She created her own clothing, and sought commissions to create garments for others (Qoyawayma 1977). In contrast, Helen Sekaquaptewa expressed indifference to the school clothing in her memoir, Me and Mine. She wrote, “Our native clothing was taken away from us and kept in boxes until our people came to take them. We were issued the regular school clothes” (1969: 92). She also wrote that in order to earn spending money,
her hands were never still: she was constantly embroidering, crocheting, or sewing to make items for sale. Sekaquaptewa accepted what she learned at the boarding schools and used this knowledge to her advantage, which was mostly economical, at school and later in life.

Not all students had such positive feelings about the school uniforms. Adams described a situation in which a Hopi boy relinquished a finer quality of clothing than what he received from the school in return. Adams stated, “[The boy was] separated from a ‘beautiful new blanket with colored stripes’ that his grandfather had specially woven for him in exchange for the standard school issue - in this case, a blue shirt, mustard-colored pants, and heavy shoes”’ (1995: 107). As described earlier, American Indian trade blankets were highly valued by Native people, and they symbolized individuality within the collective identity of being American Indian. However, the Hopi blanket is not generally a trade blanket, but rather traded amongst the Pueblos. In this case, it was the maternal grandfather doing his duty and showing how much he cared for his grandson. When stripped of their garments, some students felt their identity and the love and protection of their families was taken as well. One student expressed, “I felt I was no more Indian, but an imitation of a white man” (Lesiak 1992). Having the items which represented Native identity and their place in the world of supporting relatives seized from them, made some students feel isolated and alienated, no longer themselves, but an unauthentic copy of a white person. These feelings highlighted the problem of putting too much faith in clothing as a method of enforcing change. A student who looked like a white American was not necessarily transformed into the white American his teachers
hoped he had become. The clothing could actually indicate that the individual was caught between two worlds and in an uncomfortable, liminal state.

Non-Native critics of the boarding school system also shared this opinion and decided that, “An Indian in a suit is still an Indian” (Lesiak 1992). Students resented feeling like a generic copy of white people, and they also took offense at the stripping of their individual tribal sartorial identities. Adams wrote, “According to one school official: ‘A school uniform is a great cross to Indian pupils. One Indian never likes to appear like any other’” (1995: 107-108). Considering that Native clothing signaled individual identity and family heritage, community roles, gender and relationships, as well as social status and stories, the new boringly homogeneous clothing was resented for good reason. Native children were now forced to reconcile within themselves the sometimes lower quality and immense discomfort of the allotted clothes upon arrival into the boarding school, as well as the implied and actual loss of individuality and erasure of cultural identity. Those students who did not welcome the change in clothing, especially older students, learned to negotiate clothing styles with teachers. Those who could not negotiate wrote letters home with requests to intercede on their behalf. Still others resisted by simply not wearing certain garments, such as itchy underwear (Adams 1995, Archuleta and Lomawaima 2000, Childs 1993, LaFlesche 1978, Lomawaima 1994, Qoyawayma 1977, Reynher and Eder 2004, Sekaquaptewa 1969).

In the 1920s, changes in the schools became more evident. In particular, the sartorial regimentation and uniformity was loosened and Native cultural elements were incorporated into the curriculum. In 1928, the influential Meriam Report was published,
which rejected the uniform curriculum on the basis that it was not only ineffective, but was actually detrimental to the welfare of Native people; therefore the report suggested that Native people should be allowed to ‘remain an Indian’ if they so choose (Archuleta, et al., 2000: 26, Lomawaima and McCarty 2006: xxiii). School staff increasingly integrated the students’ tribal backgrounds into the curriculum and drew upon the cultural and artistic heritages of the student body (Hyer 1990: 32). Also in the 1920s and 1930s, Native people were requested to assist in curriculum design for the first time. For example, at the Santa Fe Indian School, a Jemez woman remembered teaching the non-Indian head of the crafts department how to make Pueblo-style pants and dresses (Hyer 1990: 42). Students were encouraged to express their Indianness in classes, organizations, and other activities. Clubs, which previously sought to Americanize the students through displays of patriotism, now focused on “presenting and performing Native art, music, dance, and clothing” (Archuleta, et al. 2000: 78). Students switched back and forth between ‘citizen’ American clothing and traditional tribal attire, persuading non-Natives that they were simultaneously Native American and civilized Americans (Green 2007).

In addition to the creation of new clubs during the 1930s and 1940s, princess pageants also grew in prominence. Green and Troutman have noted, “the princesses had to make their own costumes, moving from simple sashes to complete traditional ‘regalia’” (2000: 82). The princess contestants drew on traditional knowledge as it pertained to Native clothing design, and undoubtedly combined it with lessons learned in sewing classes, since home economics continued to be a cornerstone for the girls’ education (Hyer 1990: 40). These experiences had lasting impacts on Native clothing
design in contemporary times, as attested by Otoe designer Remonia Jacobsen, who attended Chilocco Indian School and sold her line of clothing in the 1970s (Jacobsen n.d.), and contemporary Navajo designer Virginia Yazzie-Ballenger, who as a former Indian pageant princess created her own garments for competition (Beyal 1997, Little 1997). Many contemporary Native clothing designers began working with fabrics as young adults, learning basic skills from school sewing classes in combination with informal lessons from their mothers or grandmothers.

For Native students, their attempts to find ways to maintain their cultures were done at the very institutions designed to rid them of Indian distinctiveness. Kidwell and Velie have suggested that boarding schools “served an important role as vehicles for cultural preservation, in the form of resistance to non-Indian authority” (2005: 50). Many Native people adopted some traits of the larger society in order to participate in the Euro-American social forum, yet they did not dissolve into a homogenized American culture and were able to maintain their distinctive Native identities. Rather than simply assimilating, Native people created new cross-cultural worlds for themselves. They incorporated new practices and did so within their existing cultural frameworks to see these things in Indian terms (Deloria 2004). Clothing was seen as a primary, highly visual, tool of the assimilation process. It was used to inflict rapid change, one that was meant to symbolize a controlled cultural transformation. However, many students found ways to participate in the wider social forum while preserving their cultural identities.

After leaving the boarding school, most students returned to their tribal homelands and decided what to do with the knowledge and practices learned at the
schools. Some, like Qoyawayma, chose to retain all that they had learned; these students continued wearing contemporary American clothing, and even encouraged family members to take up these new ways of appearance and all it symbolized. Some students like Sekaquaptewa and Jacobsen, kept the most useful information and incorporated it into, or combined it, with their Native cultures. And countless others ‘returned to the blanket,’ to the traditions they had learned in early childhood, to the languages they were born into, and to the clothing that surrounded them with a Native sense of existence. Whether photographing a Navajo boy stripped of his tribal clothing and remodeled as a paler, tamer, more civilized gentleman, or depicting an Apache girl sitting at a sewing machine, these students’ stories attested to the significance of attire and the adaptive strength of Native American people in the face of profound circumstances.

II. Home Economics and Traditional Techniques Courses at IAIA

As several Indian boarding schools closed, a new one with a new vision opened: The Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe. After decades of failed education policies at older schools, IAIA attempted to correct and atone for inequities in education and lack of opportunity. IAIA opened in 1962 as a coeducational boarding school with an accredited high school program and offered two years of postgraduate work. Enrollment figures were estimated to be around 350 in the 1960s and more than forty-two percent of students who attended through the fourteenth grade transferred to colleges or to advanced art schools. In 1971, two main objectives of the school were to develop pride in Native American identity and to improve the economic status of Native people (Shelton 1971:
Art education was viewed as beneficial in the practical economic sense, but also because it promoted self-worth and self-esteem, enhancing the wellbeing of Native people.

In the beginning years, IAIA offered a variety of courses within the clothing design curriculum that included silk-screening, sewing, and weaving. Lloyd Kiva New (Cherokee) taught the Printed Textiles courses, creating silk wall hangings and hand-dyed cottons. Josephine Wapp (Comanche) was the instructor for a course titled Traditional Techniques, which focused on traditional and modern adaptations of garments and accessories, and Azalea Thorpe (Cherokee) was an instructor in weaving. These course options were integrated into the earliest course catalogues and continued to be popular through the 1960s and 1970s, and they were showcased in a variety of IAIA promotional materials.

IAIA also offered Home Economics courses, and Mayree Malone, a non-native teacher, was the instructor. She had worked previously for twenty-nine years with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, teaching twenty years at the former Santa Fe Indian School, two years at the Phoenix Indian School, and seven years at IAIA (Fife 1969: 5). Similar to the national home economics curriculum, which concentrated on the home as well as the broader social environment, Malone’s courses focused on manners, values, personal grooming, health, and relationships, as well as hosting, cooking, cleaning, and sewing and tailoring. Instruction on how to be a well-rounded adolescent, how to make a good impression, and how to get along well with others was key (Drumbeats 1966d: 1). Lloyd Kiva New felt that these courses were meant to serve as ‘social indoctrination,’ in
particular “to familiarize the young students with the behaviors they may expect to encounter in the outside world after they graduate” (Coates 1967: n.p.). New believed that uncouth behavior could be an unnecessary barrier to success and these courses offered necessary instruction in middle class social skills. Home economics courses were also a means to educate male students about domestic handiness and to provide vocational and economic opportunities for female students. However, in the 1960s and 1970s, a growing movement in American society viewed home economics courses as enforcing outdated gender roles (Heggestad 2005).

In the 1960s, the IAIA home economics courses incorporated gender-specific curricula. Learning to eat with poise in the finest dining rooms was part of the curriculum for boys, and they learned that dinner was not without fashion and style. One student newspaper reporter noted that, “Ties, shirts and coats were in fashion as the five course dinner was served” (Drumbeats 1966e: 1). In Malone’s classes, boys were instructed in the selection and tailoring of men’s clothing. Malone took students on fieldtrips to JC Penny or Goodman’s Men’s Store, and it was not uncommon for male students to model garments and suits for the rest of the class. Malone described the boys as “keeping up on the latest fads.” While on a fieldtrip to Goodman’s, the male students learned that “the young men (14-21) of the country set the styles today.” The store manager explained to the students, “Whatever new fashions come out must meet with their approval or the styles will not succeed” (Drumbeats 1966b: 3). Indeed, fashion historian Jane Mulvagh explained, “1962 to 1968 were crucial years in which the allure and originality of street style challenged, and finally broke, the hegemony of high fashion” (Buxbaum 2005: 86).
In the 1960s, the youth, more than ever before, determined the direction of fashion. This information was relayed to the students of Malone’s home economics courses, and they were expected to play an active role in contemporary American fashion.

For the female students, tips on how to be “attractive, poised and lovable” were taught. In Homemaking II female students studied ‘Individuality in Clothing,’ where they inventoried their wardrobes, reviewed labels from fabrics and ready-made garments, and considered expenditure of money for clothing. This initial module was followed by the planning or listing of garments each girl needed to acquire or make in order to complete her wardrobe. From this list, each student decided which garments she would construct for herself in class (Drumbeats 1966d: 1). Girls learned that “the beginning of beauty is sound nutrition plus exercise.” Discussing the pros and cons of dating were also integrated into the curriculum for females. Students in advanced courses learned that wardrobes must be both attractive and workable. Furthermore, organization, dedication, and hard work in sewing were all required. Unlike earlier classes, students developed and cultivated individuality in their sewing projects. As one school paper reporter noted, “They feel that the dresses they have made are really ‘them.’” Typically, students created two pieces of individualized clothing within the first twelve weeks of school (Drumbeats 1966e: 1).

Along with Malone’s home economics courses, students could also take Josephine Wapp’s Traditional Techniques courses. While Malone’s curriculum focused on American-style domestic and social life, Wapp’s courses focused on the creation of
Native-inspired garments and accessories. In the early IAIA course catalogues, the

Traditional Techniques course was described as follows:

This course is planned to provide knowledge and skills in traditional crafts with opportunities for modern adaptations. Through the making of dance costumes, decorative harness, the weaving of cloth for embroidery, clothing, shawls, wall hangings, through leather and beadwork as well as techniques with shells and feathers the student develops an appreciation of the beauty and skilled craftsmanship that went into the traditional handwork of his people. Continued work beyond the first unit leads to the ability to adapt Indian techniques to contemporary materials, styles and forms and can lead to the professional field of Indian crafts as well as museum work within Indian collections.

(Institute of American Indian Arts, n.d.)

Through experiential learning, students acquired background information and learned how to continue age-old practices and techniques related to a number of tribal traditions. Dance regalia, fiber arts weaving, leather craft, and accessorizing techniques were taught, with a focus on using natural materials. One goal of this class was to increase aesthetic appreciation for Native apparel, as well as to impart a deeper understanding pertaining to the various techniques of creating Native tribal garments and accessories. After the introductory course, students could follow up with another course that allowed more freedom to include contemporary materials, designs, and styles.

Wapp (Comanche), born in 1912, was one of the first teachers of Native arts at IAIA. She attended Haskell Indian School in Lawrence, Kansas. After graduating, she followed her parents’ advice and pursued business though she desired a career in the arts. After realizing that a business profession was not for her, she traveled to Santa Fe with nine other female peers and participated in a teachers’ training in Native Arts and Crafts. After the two year program, she taught at the Chilocco Indian Boarding School in
Oklahoma from 1934 until IAIA opened. At IAIA, she was hired as the Traditional Techniques instructor, and became prolific in finger-weaving, which was a technique practiced by eastern tribes to make accessories such as belts or sashes or to decorate bags or pouches. While this was not a traditional Comanche technique, she nonetheless became recognized for her skill and talents in weaving. Wapp learned many of weaving and garment construction techniques from her maternal grandmother, and she was well-known for her work in the traditional arts. She retired after working forty years as a BIA teacher (Wapp 2001).

An article published in the IAIA student newspaper *Drumbeats* in 1966 explained, “Hand weaving, embroidery stitching, wall hanging embroidery, and fashion design are some projects being made in Traditional Techniques.” Fashion design was recognized as a compatible aspect of Traditional Techniques subject matter. Students wove their own wool or cotton plain fabrics to create dresses, shirts, shawls, or Pueblo kilts. They used their own design patterns, and some students embroidered with yarn or beads (Drumbeats 1966c: 7). Males as well as females enrolled in Wapp’s Traditional Techniques courses, and students worked on beadwork, embroidery, hand-loomed rugs and wall hangings, as well as decorative apparel and moccasins.

In the Traditional Techniques courses, students could translate home economics sewing skills into a tribal cultural realm where they were encouraged to express pride in Native identity through their clothing. Students could major in Traditional Techniques; for example, in 1966 Navajo student Aurelia Mitchell developed new designs for rugs and tapestries based on her Navajo traditions for her Traditional Techniques focus.
Wapp’s courses would continue to be popular through the early 1970s, and male students were equally interested in them (figure 4). For example Sioux student Charles White was photographed in the Traditional Techniques classroom in 1970 for a promotional catalogue (Institute of American Indian Arts 1972: 14). The curriculum encouraged both male and female students from all tribal nations to participate, regardless of tribal affiliation or whether or not the technique was traditionally practiced by the individual student’s community, and regardless of any traditional gender divisions. Instead the focus was on the continued practice of these techniques.

Besides Home Economics and Traditional Techniques, Textile Arts (weaving and silk-screening) were also integral to IAIA’s curriculum from the beginning. According to early IAIA course catalogues, in the introductory Indian Art Survey course, which focused on basic design, students were expected to learn about Native designs through such media as sculpture, printing, silkscreen, weaving, painting, textiles and graphic arts. The seven basic design elements that were taught included rhythm, contrast, balance, variety, dominance, repetition, and harmony. By the late 1960s, the United States Department of the Interior had created a booklet for the Institute of American Indian Arts, devoting four pages to eight images of the Textile Arts program. The pamphlet stated, “The creation and decoration of textiles is pursued through training and experience in a variety of processes – from weaving and knitting to embroidery and screen printing” (n.d.: 44). Lloyd Kiva New taught the Textile Arts courses in the early 1960s, followed by Donna Geis in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Students could also
enroll in Azalea Thorpe’s weaving course. In 1965, Seneca-Onondaga student Cathy Jones was pictured with weaving supplies and looms. She majored in woven textiles, studying under Thorpe (Institute of American Indian Arts 1972: 24).

By 1980, fabric screen printing had expanded so much that it became a separate course rather than a subtopic in the Textile Arts classes. The course description for Fabric Screen Printing stated:

The silk screen will be employed to create a panorama of color and design on fabrics for uses ranging from table cloths to wall hangings. Textile design and decoration have been an integral part of Indian life for centuries. From the picture legends on the tipi to the ornate décor of the ceremonial robes, the Indians of the past found pleasure and pride in the beautification of utilitarian materials. Contemporary adaptations of traditional designs will be applied to the textiles of today. This experimental and exploratory field is open to your imagination.

(Distant Visions 1980a: 6)

The focus of the course was on designing patterns and creating printed fabrics to decorate the home. The course concentrated on interior design, drawing inspiration from ‘tipi décor’ – or the idea that Native people beautified the world around them – and reinforcing the art practice by pointing out the traditional custom of beautifying utilitarian objects. Silkscreened fabric could also be used for fashion design. The Silkscreen course was offered the following summer as well (Distant Visions 1981).

Fashion shows had been conducted by faculty and students since IAIA’s beginning years. Just three years after the opening of the institution, Drumbeats reported that in December of 1965, the female students from the Homemaking II class hosted a ‘style show’ where they modeled their newly-made garments (Drumbeats 1966a: 2). IAIA’s fashion or ‘style’ shows performed out of state for the first time in January of
1968 when the Tucson Woman’s Club Indian Affairs Committee staged a fashion show to take place at the Pioneer Hotel. Ten students, along with two instructors, traveled to Tucson to model garments of the Native southwest (Drumbeats 1968: 3). By 1972, IAIA fashion shows of both traditional and adapted garments were being held periodically in Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and New York. The students and the school were developing a national reputation in regional attire.

By the late 1960s, the interests and needs of the student body were shifting, and fewer students were taking home economics courses, opting instead for courses specializing in garment creation. In May 1968, a photo in Drumbeats pictured home economics instructor Malone showing students how to lay out a pattern in a Clothing I class. However, less than a year later, in December of 1968, Drumbeats announced that the Home Economics Building would now house the Traditional Techniques classes. Malone’s office was moved from the building to Middle Dorm after her courses were omitted from the class schedule. After this displacement, Malone worked with the students in their dorms on extra curricular projects such as party planning and food preparation. The next year, after seven years at IAIA, Malone announced her retirement (Fife 1969: 5). While Home Economics courses were still being viewed by some as providing opportunities for women, albeit conservative and gendered in their outlook, these courses were weaned out of the curriculum at IAIA in the 1960s and 1970s, paralleling the national women’s movement which critiqued home economics as restrictive and gender-bound, hindering opportunities for women (Heggestad 2005).
At the same time dress codes became an issue in schools. The idea that attire affected behavior and performance was not a new one, and schools in the 1950s and 1960s engaged in a campaign to curb juvenile delinquency, promote proper behavior, and create a safe and controlled environment through the institutionalization of dress codes. This campaign translated into prohibiting girls from wearing slacks, and boys from wearing black leather jackets associated with gang activity. School officials believed the presence of questionable garments (along with certain hair styles) led to an unhealthy school atmosphere of disruption, disregard for authority, rebellion, intimidation, and violence. They also advocated that dress codes leveled socioeconomic differentiation since all students would look the same and not participate in fashion competitions (Pedzich 2002).

In 1969, director Lloyd Kiva New outlined a new dress code for IAIA students. Discussing the popular Mod and Hippie trends of the time in the school newspaper, he explained, “Extreme hairstyles and dress which reduce the generally accepted looks will be declared out of bounds. We are not a school for bums” (Jack 1969: 2). Longer hair was allowed, but was required to be kept clean and neat. New was described by the reporter as favoring the popular Mod trend of the 1960s and sporting a clean-cut hairstyle himself (Jack 1969: 2). The Mod style lent itself to uniformity, characterized as monochromatic, unpatterned, black-and-white, sharp, tight, urban, foreign, and mechanized. This new fad was in opposition to the previous generation of ‘Teddy Boys,’ who were comparatively deemed old-fashioned, class-conscious, and intolerant of issues pertaining to race and gender (Buxbaum 2005: 86). New added that guidance counselors
were responsible for bringing ‘hippie looking’ people into the standards of the school, that mini-skirts should not be too short, and that students were expected to dress at a level not to embarrass the school’s standards (Jack 1969: 2). Interestingly, 1969 was also the year that the Supreme Court upheld student rights of expression in the landmark case Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District. New’s motives for the IAIA dress code seemed to be more about appearing presentable to outsiders and making a good impression rather than controlling student self-expression.

In 1970, a new group formed on campus: the Fashion Club. *Drumbeats* reported, “The Fashion club is a group who simply want to have some fun making things to wear for themselves, using their own personal interests and creativity” (Drumbeats 1970a: 1). Instead of focusing on construction methods, as was the case in sewing or home economics courses, the new Fashion Club focused on the design aspects of creating clothing. The idea was conceived by student Jimmy Smith, who learned tailoring on his own and in Wapp’s Traditional Techniques class. Lloyd Kiva New supported the group, and outside sponsor Mary Powell assisted with design and construction. The students created vests, jackets, and leggings, and aspired to create a small collection during the semester and host fashion shows on campus and in downtown Santa Fe (Drumbeats 1970a: 1). In April, the club hosted an Indian fashion show on campus. The presentation was narrated by New, and included traditional and contemporary examples of Native garments, jewelry, and an intermission performance ‘war dance’ demonstrated by three students. This general fashion show format of exhibiting both traditional and contemporary garments mediated at intermission with a cultural performance was
replicated by several designers and fashion collectives in the following years and continues to be a format used for Native American fashion shows.

The event opened with Wapp’s Traditional Techniques students modeling examples of tribal attire from throughout the country. Next, Donna Geis’ Textile students modeled modern clothing that they designed from their printed fabrics. Several later fashion shows used this format of showing traditional garments first, then modernized versions after. This format was common in Frederic Douglas’ Indian Fashion Shows as well, because it demonstrated that traditional attire was still being made, but also suggested a narrative of change toward modernity and adaptation. Skip Holbrook’s metal classes provided jewelry to accessorize the outfits. Two goals of the show were to highlight the complexity and validity of Native fashions and to create an awareness and pride in this aspect of Native cultures (Drumbeats 1970b: 8). Some of the garments pictured in a school paper article included a contemporary Indian shirt, traditional Seminole outfit, contemporary Indian dress, traditional Navajo dress, and a traditional Winnebago outfit with beadwork. Interestingly, the garments labeled as traditional were ascribed a tribe, while the modern or contemporary garments were simply labeled “Indian,” suggesting a pan-Indian influence on fashion at the Institute as well as other Indian boarding schools. As Lomawaima (1994) and other authors have noted, Indian boarding schools, by viewing all tribes as ‘Indian’ and by bringing previously isolated tribes together, inadvertently created a new type of identity – pan-Indianism. At IAIA, individual tribalism was supported, but pride in a broader sense of ‘Indianness’ was also being encouraged.
Various instructors or volunteers sporadically supported sewing clubs throughout the 1970s. In an effort to reach out to students interested in sewing, *Drumbeats* ran a small article in February of 1971, about Carolyn Doi, who managed the sewing center on weekday evenings and weekend afternoons. She explained that all students, even those who had no experience with sewing, were encouraged to visit the center, bring their own material and patterns, and learn how to sew. When the article was published, Doi was in the process of securing financial assistance to purchase fabrics that students could use. In this article, sewing was promoted as the solution to a female student’s problem of needing a new outfit. Designing garments for the self could be accomplished now, regardless of skill level, with the help of Doi and other female instructors volunteering their time (Sheldon 1971: 3). These types of groups were common at this time, since most students only purchased clothing for the beginning of the school year and for special occasion.

Doi and other IAIA faculty and staff played a major role in supporting the individual goals of the students. New explained, “the faculty teaches techniques and the use of various media but…students are free to develop their own individual styles” (Hall 1971: n.p.). Concerning the faculty’s approach, ceramics major Harold Bird (Santo Domingo/Laguna) explained, “They don’t tell you what to do or just how to do it. They give you the basics but they don’t tell you to go this way or that way. If you want to stay traditional, you can – if you want to go contemporary, you can. If you want to do your own thing, it’s fine. You can do it” (Shelton 1971: n.p.). In the first decade of the Institute, faculty members in the arts were predominantly working artists with advanced
degrees, who had studios or workshops apart from the school. Their reasons for teaching were varied, but included: pride in accomplishment, the satisfaction of helping others, being a part of student development and enlightenment, dedication, love of humanity, job security, and creative freedom (Shelton 1971: n.p.). The faculty members’ approach to teaching and tolerance of individual creativity fostered an environment where students could determine the degree to which their art derived from traditional tribal aesthetics.

At IAIA, policies of mandatory cultural assimilation, acculturation, and Americanization, which had been the practice at Indian boarding schools, were discarded in favor of an appreciation of cultural diversity. In a 1971 article titled “A Blending of Cultures,” the author spotlighted not only the unique cultures of IAIA students and faculty, but also the interesting blending of contemporary and traditional elements in the curriculum and student art. The author noted that the students “believe the American diet should have the flavor of many cultures. They reject the bland taste of assimilation” (Shelton 1971: n.p.). During the early 1960s, the popular melting pot philosophy had given way to a more pluralistic understanding of society. The termination and relocation policies of the United States government, which sought to dissolve Indian people into American society, were falling out of favor, and policy trends shifted toward supporting Native American tribal self-determination.

While students and faculty prioritized Indian cultures and values, American popular culture was still an important influence on campus. One reported noted,

They like mod clothes, rock music, the newest dance. Indian boys were wearing their hair long eons before the Beatles. (In fact, Anglo hippies probably got their tonsorial inspiration from Pacific Coast and Southwestern Indians.) Every studio area has a record player. You hear
tribal war chants in the Modern Dance class and Beatle songs in Traditional Techniques.

(Shelton 1971: n.p.)

In these courses, students’ work could also lean towards the more contemporary, through the creation of Mod-inspired jumpers and blouses, beaded tie clasps and Western-style belts, or original and creative rugs, some with traditional tribal motifs (Shelton 1971: n.p.).

In 1972, IAIA launched their ten-year anniversary information catalogue, in which several pages were dedicated to textile courses. The catalogue explained, “Following the ancient Native American textile traditions and experimenting in contemporary techniques, students gain skills in many varieties of weaving and printing of fibers” (Institute of American Indian Arts 1972: 24). At IAIA, as opposed to other art institutions, students could learn and incorporate Native American techniques while learning and experimenting with contemporary techniques. For weaving, the students used both finger looms and floor looms. Traditional Techniques courses were available at both the high school and the college level, and costume art, woven textiles, and the philosophy of Native American life traditions were the most substantive aspects of Wapp’s curriculum. Instead of creating garments with no tribal cultural influence, as would be the case in a home economics course, students were encouraged to extend Native clothing traditions into the contemporary realm and push them in new directions. The students could both modernize and indigenize their designs. As the author explained, “The class work is not an end in itself, but has intrinsic value even beyond self-expression. New fashion designs are created from traditional costume forms” (Institute of
American Indian Arts 1972: 32). Students played an important role in creating new fashions from age-old styles. Students could also take silk-screening courses and bring Native American tribal motifs into the realm of graphic design. In 1970, learning silkscreen techniques was pertinent for students pursuing a comprehensive study in textile design, poster design or other graphics techniques (Institute of American Indian Arts 1972: 25).

In 1972, many varied techniques and skills were learned in the Traditional Techniques courses, including Pueblo embroidery and crocheting, Navajo weaving and dyeing styles, Plains bead working, Woodlands finger weaving, and Native American Church fan-making and beading techniques. The garments and textiles created in classes were exhibited, entered into art competitions, sold at art market events, displayed throughout the campus, kept by the students, or worn by their makers. The catalogue noted that, “The students’ woven and printed fabrics have become exhibition items in many contemporary Indian crafts exhibitions in Europe, Asia, South and Central America and in the United States. It is not unusual that student textile designers create school clothing and items for the IAIA fashion shows” (Institute of American Indian Arts 1972: 24). Within ten years, the school’s textile program had developed an international reputation and IAIA fashion shows were booked throughout the country.

Adventure and outings became associated with clothing construction and fashion design. Students realized that by enrolling in Wapp’s courses, they could travel and see new places just by creating garments and participating in the fashion shows. In the spring of 1972, Wapp and another instructor brought five students to Houston for a show. The
students modeled traditional and contemporary Native clothing. This was also the last showing the Denver Art Museum’s Indian Fashion Show. Wapp borrowed some of the traditional museum attire for the showing (Parezo 2010). The show featured garments designed in Wapp’s classes or donated to IAIA by Native designers. Some of the outfits showcased included a San Juan Pueblo outfit with crocheted leggings and shirt, a Navajo dress with velveteen blouse, two calico skirts, and a wool hand-woven belt; two Seminole dresses; a Potawatomi skirt and blouse; a Kiowa-Apache dress of wool flannel with a silver Concho belt; and a man’s wool shirt from the Quechan tribe which was hand-woven in a contemporary design in the Navajo technique in black with grey and white trim (Pruella 1972: 11). Through these shows Wapp created opportunities for her students to see new places, meet new people, and expand their professional and personal goals.

Wapp’s Traditional Techniques class traveled to New York in December of 1972 to showcase designs created during the fall semester. A student newspaper reporter, Tsethlikai, explained that Wapp’s courses offered students “the opportunity to learn the many ways of working with beads and developing their own designs” (Tsethlikai 1972: 1). The show featured stoles, a Hopi sash, a buckskin bag with rosette and matching necklace and boots, a Woodland bag with floral beadwork on black velveteen, and a Pueblo apron of black and white on red cloth with cross-stitch embroidery (Tsethlikai 1972: 1). The trip to New York City proved to be an once-in-a-lifetime experience. The students were applauded for their designs and asked to participate in a contest to create contemporary Native fashions for the Phillips Fibers Corporation in New York. Two of the purposes of the competition were to promote the company’s fabrics and to provide
opportunities for IAIA students in fashion design. Using Phillips Fiber materials three female students and one male student submitted design sketches. Two students, Denise Ellis, Bonnie Osuna, and Traditional Techniques teaching assistant Imogene Goodshot were selected (figure 5). Ellis created a shirt of print material with ribbon work edging, a pair of pants, and a long wrap-around skirt a style that was common from the Iroquoian to the Osage communities. Osuna designed a floor length dress with a wide Concho belt. Goodshot produced a long cape with frontal patch-work designs. The three winners received a $300 cash prize, and acknowledgement at the National Knitted Outerwear Fashion Show in front of a thousand representatives from the fashion industry (Cajune 1973: 1). Goodshot and Osuna’s designs were pictured in Drumbeats two months later (Drumbeats 1973a: 8).

In the fall of 1972, Sally Porter held sewing night classes (Naganashe 1972: 6). Students produced blouses, a royal blue crushed velvet dress, a brown velvet blazer and pant suit, a pant suit featuring a plaid jacket and solid blue slacks, a pant suit with western style denim shirt, and a beige double-knit pant suit. Porter allowed the students to pursue their own projects and create garments that they wanted to wear; she stated “the girls are very open minded and feel free to express their own ideas” (Naganashe 1972: 6). For the following semester, Porter planned to lead a class in costume design and construction for music, dance and drama students. She also wanted to teach a course in applied home furnishings for both boys and girls consisting of upholstery and drapery making. In addition to these, Porter planned a mini-workshop to demonstrate mending techniques and general wardrobe maintenance for everyone (Naganashe 1972: 6). The
existence of night courses and plans to expand the program suggest a substantive interest by the female students in garment creation. Porter attempted to create courses that would be of interest to male students as well. But it is interesting that these courses were no longer part of the daily class schedule or held in the regular class rooms.

In the fall of 1973, *Drumbeats* featured an article on the Sewing Club of South Dorm, organized by the dorm’s housemother Romancita Sandoval (San Juan). Sandoval learned sewing at the San Juan day school from her fifth grade teacher, Regina Cata, who started an embroidery club (Sandoval 2003) and had since won several awards at SWAIA’s Indian Market for her traditional and adapted garments (Drumbeats 1973b: 16). Sandoval stated, “when I was working for IAIA I did teach sewing there and embroidery. And most of my students were boys instead of girls. And they did some kilts, which they’ve kept you know for themselves, the kilts for dancing in the pueblos” (Sandoval 2003). In the Rio Grande Pueblo communities, it is men who make embroidery patterns for ritual garments. She could make traditional mantas and kilts, as well as Tewa dresses and ribbon shirts, and taught her students how to make these as well.

The fabric for these classes was bought with earned dorm credits, and their sewing room boasted seven sewing machines and two new ironing boards. Some of the clothes that the students designed included a ribbon shirt of red printed material with red, turquoise, and yellow ribbon trim; a western jacket of navy blue gabardine; a western shirt of pink cotton; a beige pant suit top with flower print; and an embroidered Pueblo design on beige fabric for dresser cloths. Sandoval designed several garments along with the students, and donated one shirt to be sold at a community bazaar. The Sewing Club
had a booth at the event, where the students sold their pieces. Sandoval and her assistant insisted, “So girls, if you are just sitting around wondering what to do, come join the sewing club and have a lot of fun” (Drumbeats 1973b: 16). Sewing clubs were places where students could socialize, be creative, and design wearable art. The clubs offered no course credit, but were fueled by an interest to learn the skills to create garments for the self. They provided places where students could spend their free time doing something regarded as positive and productive. The clubs were also social gathering places where students could make new friends or solidify friendships.

From about 1974 to 1976, sewing clubs, clothing classes, and fashion shows were set aside, and the school newspaper covered no stories on the topic. Wapp retired after working forty years for the BIA, and Sandy Wilson (Muscogee Creek) joined the IAIA faculty, assuming Wapp’s Traditional Techniques courses. In 1977, IAIA student-made garments were once again projected onto the national scene. Wilson taught a progressive set of courses that included Decorative Techniques, Weaving and Basketmaking, Traditional and Contemporary Fashion Design, and Traditional Techniques. In Traditional and Contemporary Fashion Design, the curriculum focused on traditional
dress as well as the current fashion trends. The students studied the history of Native clothing and applied this knowledge in creating garments reflecting traditional wear or contemporary designs with traditional elements added. The students studied the history of Native clothing and applied this information when creating garments reflecting traditional wear or contemporary designs with traditional elements added (Montgomery 1977: n.p.).
Extensive department equipment included sewing machines, nine floor looms, four Navajo looms, two table looms, a narrow inkle loom for sashes, frame looms for belts and a bead loom. In an article for *The New Mexican*, IAIA arts director Henry Gobin explained that Wilson’s classes were “designed to expose the student to all facets of bead working and weaving” (Montgomery 1977: n.p.). Most of the beadwork was completed by hand, and the students also worked with feathers, leather, porcupine quills, and bone, which were all provided by the department. If the students wanted to keep the items they made, they had to purchase their own materials. Wilson’s students were both the designers and the models of a new group called Full Moon Fashions (Montgomery 1977: n.p.).

The fashion shows presented by Wilson’s students were intended for wealthy non-Native women, and for cultural awareness programs and education in public schools. In 1977, the new student newspaper, *Newborn*, published an article on a spring style show hosted by Wilson’s Traditional Techniques class for the women’s division of the Chamber of Commerce of Santa Fe (figure 6). One student, Wendy Ponca (Osage), announced the fashions, which included traditional and contemporary garments inspired by the Navajo, Osage, Zuni, Seminole, Delaware, Ponca, Kiowa-Apache, and Pueblo tribal traditions. The women’s club members were “left speechless with admiration,” and the participants expressed interest in hosting a bigger and more colorful event next year, hoping for increased student participation. One student explained, “such events are important in building the image of the IAIA in this community. The fashion show helped the community to know more of the Institute and to accept the students as part of the
community” (Red Owl 1977: 10). The shows were seen as a form of community outreach and cross-cultural education.

Wilson also took her students to present their work for various city and state organizations. In May they spent three days in Colorado Springs where they staged shows at several city schools in conjunction with Cultural Awareness week (Coops 1977: 8). For the following fall semester, Wilson’s Traditional Techniques class organized a fashion show at the Santa Fe Country Club in front of the wives of the mayors and city councilmen from the entire state of New Mexico. Seventeen students participated as models in this event (Coops 1977: 8).

Traditional Techniques began as an introductory course in 1962, and it quickly became one of the most popular classes on campus. Male students were enthusiastic about the course as well, resulting in increased enrollment and increased participation in the fashion shows. The students came from a variety of tribal backgrounds and this diversity was shown in the garments they produced, displayed, and donated to the Institute. Student interest influenced the curriculum towards fashion design in the mid-1960s, and the students also helped create traditional attire, powwow outfits, and contemporary costumes for campus plays and theatre productions. The Traditional Techniques class’s fashion shows increased in popularity and notoriety around 1970, when students received awards in the Southwest and in New York (Montgomery 1977: n.p.). After Josephine Wapp retired, Sandy Wilson breathed new life into the clothing design curriculum. Wilson taught at IAIA for three years before taking a position in
Oklahoma. One of Wilson’s students, Wendy Ponca, soon became a major force in the field of fashion design education for students at IAIA.

III. Conclusion: Indianizing Clothing Courses

Euro-American prejudices and preconceptions about Indian clothing have affected its ‘survival.’ For example, because Native attire was deemed ‘dirty’ at the turn of the 20th century reinforced calls for its eradication in the boarding school environment, and because it was expected to replicate stereotypical forms reinforced the beliefs that it was unchanging. These presumptions continue to affect how individuals perceive the compatibility, or rather incompatibility, of Indian attire with contemporary fashion. If Indian attire cannot change, or adapt to contemporary times, then its use falls into the realm of special occasion wear, heirlooms or specialty costumes. However, as the instructors at IAIA, such as Lloyd Kiva New, Josephine Wapp, and Sandy Wilson demonstrate, high fashion is defined by the use of the finest materials in unique garments made for particular individuals, and this is what Native people did in the past, and throughout out the 1960s and 1970s.

Clothing has always been intricately connected to identity, and boarding school administrators utilized this connection to further their goals of assimilation, or, in the case of IAIA, to further their goals of promoting cultural uniqueness and pride in that identity. Turn-of-the-century administrators believed that if Native American students looked and dressed like their morally upright American counterparts, it was assumed that they would become bronze versions of white Americans. Individuals such as Angel DeCora,
however, demonstrated that Native people moved back and forth between citizen attire and tribal Native American clothing, persuading non-Natives that they were simultaneously Native and civilized. These realities highlight the elasticity of meaning in clothing – for example while school officials saw a uniform as promoting white American culture and values, Native students may instead have viewed it as a form of ‘masquerading.’ Rather than simply assimilating, Native people created new cross-cultural worlds for themselves. They incorporated new practices and did so within their existing cultural frameworks to see these things in Indian terms.

At IAIA, the primary goals of the clothing courses included to increase aesthetic appreciation for Native apparel, to impart a deeper understanding pertaining to the various techniques of creating Native tribal garments and accessories, to highlight the complexity and validity of Native fashions, to create an awareness and pride in this aspect of Native cultures, and to promote cultural awareness through fashion shows as events for community outreach and cross-cultural education.

The curriculum taught at IAIA by New, Wapp, and Wilson encouraged all students to participate, regardless of tribal affiliation or gender. This encouragement is important to note because the focus then was on continuing, or maintaining, tribal aesthetic practices. At a pan-Indian institution, instructors would need to be familiar with a range of techniques, and be able to impart skills to be proficient in these techniques to their students, who came from a mixture of backgrounds. This blending of tribal practices added to a pan-Indian aesthetic in clothing, which promoted the use of natural materials (such as feathers, shells, or leather), the use of known tribal techniques (such as weaving,
beadwork and ribbon work), and the creation of recognizably Indian garments (such as shawls, kilts, or ribbon shirts). Later, a focus on color and design on fabrics through the use of silk screening technology would become a focus. Therefore students were able to Indianize their home décor or everyday wear with Indian tribal motifs or color combinations.

Importantly, however, students were always expected to recognize their current situation – as an Indian person, but also as a member of, and important contributor to, American society. Thus reporters note how students listen to the Beatles in their Traditional Techniques class (or, how they incorporate non-Native influences into their tribal techniques), and how they play tribal war chants in the Modern Dance class (or, how they actively infused Indianness into popular culture). Though Indian attire had long influenced American attire, it was being noticed on a national level, exemplified perhaps by the concurrent hippie movement, for its important contribution to pop culture.
CHAPTER 4

WENDY PONCA: FASHION DESIGN INSTRUCTION AT IAIA

“I didn’t really know what Native American traditions were. I had always loved beading as a young girl – really loved it – but it was many years later that I discovered it was part of my cultural heritage – as a Native American and as a Native American woman. It was a powerful discovery.” – Wendy Ponca in Kladzyk (2000: 116)

Osage artist and fashion designer Wendy Ponca taught the clothing design classes at the Institute of American Indian Arts for a decade. Ponca’s role in Native clothing design education is a subject never-before researched. As the Institute’s main fashion instructor, her design principles, coupled with her teaching philosophy and classroom curriculum, influenced a new generation of clothing designers, and played a major role in shaping the contemporary Native fashion world. Ponca’s clothing and fashion shows deconstruct stereotypes, present theories of female beauty and power, impart Osage oral tradition and cosmological beliefs, and champion fashion as art (Ponca 2009).

Kimberly ‘Wendy’ Ponca, an Osage from Oklahoma, was born in 1960 and attended IAIA from 1976 to 1978 as a high school student. Ponca stated that she was always interested in the making of garments and accessories. As a child she would ask her mom to make her a dress in a certain style. She made her own dress-up clothing, and she strung necklaces using a variety of bead-like items. She figured her constant pursuit
of creativity led her father to ‘send her away to art school,’ and Ponca enrolled in courses at IAIA with the intent to make items of adornment (Ponca 2009).

Ponca was one of the few students who studied under Traditional Techniques instructor Sandy Wilson. Later she recalled greatly enjoying her classes. Students sewed, beaded, and wove small items on a loom. Ponca remembered that Wilson encouraged the exploration of contemporary work, and Ponca created a modern rug as one of her assignments. She also learned techniques in ribbon work and created numerous shirts and shawls (Figures 1 and 2). Ponca enjoyed the classes so much that she spent more time in Wilson’s classes than any other (Ponca 2009). Ponca also participated in the Full Moon Fashion events, taking a leadership role as the announcer (Figure 3). Wilson’s teaching style, assignments, and fashion events all would influence Ponca’s later life when she became an instructor.

After graduating from IAIA, Ponca studied art and weaving in New York and Greece, and attended the Kansas City Art Institute, graduating as a Fibers Major and earning her B.F.A. in 1982. She then returned to Santa Fe, working at the Santa Fe Opera in the costume department. After the Opera season, she joined the IAIA staff as the Traditional Techniques, Fiber Arts and Fashion Design instructor and worked there for ten years until 1993. When Ponca applied for the position, no one was teaching the Traditional Techniques course. She quipped that this was probably the reason why she got the position at the young age of 22 (Ponca 2009). Ponca taught essentially the same coursework as Wilson, adapting it to the changing times gradually over the years. She once stated, “Many people do art for money. Others do art for arts sake. I do art for
history’s sake. I want to preserve my traditional culture, while reflecting the signs of contemporary America” (Ponca 1994). Ponca’s perspective pertaining to the role of art in maintaining cultural practices emerged in her own art as well as in her teaching practices. As the new Traditional Techniques and clothing instructor, Ponca expanded the clothing curriculum at IAIA, increased and improved the student fashion shows, and changed the face of Native fashion forever.

I. Utilizing That Which Surrounds Us: Developing a Native Fashion Curriculum

Following in the footsteps of Josephine Wapp and Sandy Wilson, Ponca became the new IAIA Traditional Techniques and clothing instructor in 1982. In 1987, IAIA’s textile and clothing courses were renamed “Fiber Arts” to conform to other institutions. The name change was necessary for the student’s benefit, because for several years IAIA was the only art institute that offered courses in traditional Native fiber arts techniques, such as weaving and beadwork. Under the title Traditional Techniques, students could not transfer the credits earned from these classes to other institutions. IAIA offered three levels of Fiber Arts courses, each worth three credits, and all categorized as three-dimensional studio art courses. In Fiber Arts I: Beginning, students explored methods of fiber manipulation to create new forms with man-made and natural materials. Dyeing (ikat, batik, and tie) and interweaving (wrapping, knotting, stitching, and looping) techniques were used as a means to express contemporary imagery. For Fiber Arts II: Intermediate, students expanded their knowledge gained in Fiber Arts I, but focused on weaving. In the advanced Fiber Arts III course, students were afforded the opportunity to
specialize their study, including a concentrated investigation of design and its application to the creative product.

Throughout her career, Ponca encouraged her students to develop their strengths, but also to try new techniques. She allowed her students to determine the extent to which their pieces would draw on traditional or contemporary influences. Her teaching philosophy included “to show the students the techniques and medium of the art form. Then tell them the history of the art form and let the students decide how to create from this experience” (Ponca 1994a: 5). Instead of assigning specific projects, Ponca gave her students deadlines for fashion shows, and required that they complete a garment or accessory for the event. She taught both two-dimensional and three-dimensional design, and enjoyed team teaching with other IAIA noted faculty such as Hopi artist Otellie Loloma and Hopi/Choctaw artist Linda Lomahaftewa. Lomahaftewa and Loloma taught from a classical art school approach, while Ponca brought fresh new ideas and techniques. Students would learn a variety of basic art skills and techniques, and then Ponca would lead students through more unconventional assignments to boost creativity and innovation (Ponca 2009). In these courses, the students came from a variety of aesthetic backgrounds, and Ponca challenged them to think in new ways, work with innovative media, and present original expressions of art. She stated, “Art is transformational. Art is a process.”

During Ponca’s tenure at IAIA, courses specifically focusing on fashion design were added to the course catalogues. In the first course, Fashion Design I, the curriculum focused on incorporating contemporary and traditional Native design motifs into fashion.
Her education background was in clothing and textile design, and she combined this knowledge with stimulating art curriculum and Indian culture studies. Ponca explained that her classes “transcend the normal art school curriculum in that, as Indians, we are furthering tradition. As we evolve culturally within a multi-cultured environment, we are doing and creating as we have for hundreds… even thousands… of years; utilizing that which surrounds us symbolically, economically, and fashionably” (Native Uprising n.d.: n.p.). Topics pertaining to garment design, such as production, history, vocabulary, illustrations, and color theory, were introduced to the students through intense instruction. Mandatory participation in periodic fashion shows was required. In Intermediate Fashion Design, students continued their study of fashion design and perfected their techniques. After these two courses, students could enroll in the Special Studies in Fiber Arts course. In Ponca’s Fiber Arts, Traditional Techniques, or Fashion Design courses, she stressed the importance of innovation and individual expression (Diaz 1989). Ponca believed that once the foundational skills and techniques for art creation were learned, new methods could be introduced. As an instructor, she was strict with patternmaking and tailoring. During project critiques, she asked her students to wear their garments, or have a model wear them. Ponca required the garments to be worn inside-out, showing the seams, so that she could critique the item’s structural integrity. She stressed strong construction: the garments should be durable with no loose strings. She taught her students that a strong foundation was necessary for an exceptional garment.

In the 1980s, Ponca founded the Waves of the Earth Fashion Group. In 1983, Waves of the Earth hosted their second fashion show of the year and promoted fashion
design as a feasible money-making career. Ponca was never taught marketing and learned to build her portfolio on her own. Interestingly, she did not teach marketing in her courses, though she stated that it was an important part of being an artist (Ponca 2009). According to the brochure, “The pieces at the show may be bought from the artists or special orders will be taken for pieces of your choice. You may contact the artists at the reception following the fashion show or by writing to the artists c/o Institute of American Indian Arts” (Waves of the Earth Fashion Group 1983). Ponca and her students used the fashion shows as opportunities to display and sell their work. Sales were a primary form of the events. Fashion shows hosted by Waves of the Earth Fashion Group were much larger than those hosted by IAIA groups in the past. For example, one show featured over thirty-eight different garments, only four of which were from the permanent collection, meaning that the students crafted over thirty pieces for the event. The collection was created by at least fourteen different designers, and modeled by nearly two dozen students. Eight designers modeled their own creations, suggesting that they created the items with their own clothing preferences in mind. So while the sales of the garments were incorporated into the show, the designs were not entirely market driven.

When planning fashion shows, Ponca borrowed items such as clothes and accessories from IAIA’s permanent collection to include in the events. These pieces were used to compliment the student’s work and to create a comprehensive intertribal presentation. The garments and accessories she selected in 1987 from the IAIA permanent collection were a Seminole man’s shirt, Navajo blanket dress, blue wool Plains dress, purple cotton Apache camp dress, Navajo moccasins, high-top moccasins,
women’s bone breast plate, brass concho belt, Navajo style belts, eagle feather fan, friendship shawl, Apache basket, and several beaded items, including belts, a choker, cape, and a medallion. These items were probably included in the shows in order to offset the number of contemporary pieces that the students created and to present a balanced show. These items would also create a sense of continuity and help establish authenticity for viewers. One hurdle for Native designers in terms of audience is that the viewers often refer to Native stereotypes to determine if something is “really Indian.” Native designers would have to overcome this stereotyping process if they wanted to sell their work to a broad non-Native audience.

Throughout the 1980s, Ponca and her students hosted an hour-long fashion show every year during the IAIA Arts Festival, which highlighted the work of graduating students. The 1986 fashion show was titled, “Expressing Traditional and Contemporary Native American Clothing.” Held outside, the events featured garment designs created by graduating IAIA students, which were modeled by students as well. At these shows, the students also sold some of their work. The Student Art Sales Exhibits included paintings, pottery, jewelry, beadwork, prints, and clothing. For the Institute’s 25th Silver Anniversary in 1987, the fashion show was moved to the IAIA Museum. Rosemary Diaz (Santa Clara Pueblo), who majored in creative writing and fashion design, and Tammy Rahr (Cayuga), who was focusing on traditional techniques, were two of the students highlighted in the fashion show. Rahr is now a recognized bead artist, and Diaz frequently submits articles on Native fashion for magazine publications.
These fashion shows were important components of the curriculum, and they provided students with unique, invaluable experience in fashion show preparation integral to professional development. For example, design students Patricia Michaels (Taos Pueblo), Pilar Agoyo (San Juan/Cochiti/Santo Domingo), and Terren Otis (Yakima/Nez Perce/African American) participated in the 1989 IAIA Arts Festival (Gonzales 1989), and a year later, Agoyo and Otis traveled to Cincinnati for a fashion show of their work. They hoped to bring greater interest to an art form not commonly seen, and to increase awareness of the diversity and vitality of American Indian culture. Otis’ designs for both men and women were described as classic-looking, and Agoyo’s apparel, primarily for women, was described as contemporary and fun (Crocker 1990: B-3). Some of the garments were also available for sale at the Cincinnati event.

II. Ponca, the Designer

Ponca preferred displaying her work through fashion shows rather than gallery installations. At fashion shows, she could control the presentation of her work, and the movement of wearable art was highlighted. She also avoided galleries because she perceived them as preferring stereotypical forms. For example, when she brought in an Osage wearing blanket to a gallery on Santa Fe’s famed Canyon Road, she was turned away. She stated, “They only wanted to buy it if it’s one-hundred years old” (Knoll 1988: 40). Though this blanket can be deemed a rarity because despite the history, the Osage people are still alive and still making these artforms, the gallery owner was looking for a certain type of blanket. Another gallery owner asked her, “I like your work, but do you
have anything that looks really Indian?” (Knoll 1988: 40). Through her fashion and events, Ponca hoped to change such stifling, pre-conceived ideas about Native American design (Lynn 1990: 14). Like Lloyd Kiva New before her, Ponca acknowledged stereotypes and sought to overcome and eradicate them by offering new ideas about Native American creativity. About stereotypes, Ponca stated, “We’ve done a lot to change that in Santa Fe” (Ponca 2009). With fashion runways as new venues, Ponca felt less pressure to reproduce expected ‘Indian’ forms. In addition to not wanting to compromise her creativity and vision, Ponca believed that clothing was created to be displayed on a person and not a hanger. She insisted, “You’ve never seen a sexy mannequin have you?” (Knoll 1989: 41). She explained her philosophy, “Designs created by the students should be worn on people rather than hung in display cases” (Singer 1985: 37). With the catwalk as her gallery space, Ponca could display her artwork the way she believed it was meant to be displayed – on the human body and in motion.

Ponca’s skilled and cutting edge work, though unwanted by the galleries, won prizes and recognition at juried competitions. Between 1982 and 1987, she won first place ribbons every year in contemporary clothing and weaving at the SWAIA Indian Market. One *Santa Fe Magazine* reporter noted, “The contemporary work of fashion designers like [Marcus] Amerman and Wendy Ponca essentially forced the market to create a category for contemporary, Indian-designed clothing to complement the traditional clothing category it had previously occupied” (McGraw 1997: 37). Ponca, Amerman, and others continued the legacy of Lloyd Kiva New; their work opened up new possibilities for clothing designers. Ponca also won two second place ribbons, and
was awarded ‘Most Creative Design In Any Category’ in 1987. The clothing
competitions, open to any Indian Market exhibitors, drew between 75 and 125 entrants in
the late 1980s. Ponca was spotlighted in the *Santa Fe New Mexican Indian Market
Magazine* and the *Santa Fe Reporter* in August 1988. However, after seven years at
Indian Market, she decided to suspend participation, and instead focused on hosting a
non-SWAIA-affiliated Indian Market weekend show with other designers in order to
open new venues and to create garments without needing to consider Indian Market rules.

Ponca was labeled an Osage avant-garde, but she was also described by art critics
as perpetuating the legacy of the Osage traditional figure Spider Woman, who, according
to tribal stories, taught weaving to The People. Ponca became known for creating
garments in unique combinations, such as using age-old Osage design motifs and
combining them with contemporary materials or symbols. For example, she designed
appliqué Osage blankets featuring Harley Davidson motorcycles, hand grenades, or
watermelon cut from colorful silk (Figures 4, 5, and 6). She also recreated old blankets or
garments, replacing horse symbols with iconic jet planes of taffeta trimmed with
sparkling antique trade beads. In 1988, she explained to a reporter, “I’m tired of acting
like America’s stereotypical Indian. I am Indian. When I do art, it’s Indian art. It doesn’t
have to have a buffalo with a longhaired woman looking up at the stars. I’m tired of that
kind of stuff” (Knoll 1988: 40). Other artists shared her sentiment, and some of them
confronted the stereotypes head-on while others quietly moved away, refusing to be
pigeon-holed (Abbott 1994). To create art, Ponca drew on her experiences as a
contemporary Osage person. This is evident in her juxtaposition of the time-honored with
the novel. Her garment collection can be described as both a reflection and a redefinition of a culture. For example, she transformed a fancy dance outfit into a gold lame dress with a bustle in the back, and she has hand-painted symbols of designs from pot shards onto muslin blouses (Lynn 1990: 11).

Ponca considers herself an artist, and believes all of her work, including her fashion, accessories, and wall-hangings, are pieces of art. She calls her clothing “Osage clothing,” and does not refer to it as traditional or contemporary (Ponca 2009). Even though she is influenced by more than just Indian influences, like Japanese patterns, she states, “Everything I make is Indian” (Ponca 2009). Yet of all her garments, she feels that her buckskin and handwoven items have been the most financially successful (see Figure 9) (Ponca 2009). The dresses and coats she has made from her own finely woven material have been the top sellers. Since 2000, she has not pursued the couture market. She continues to design in Fairfax, Oklahoma, but now her clients are mainly family members (Ponca 2009). She made three traditional Osage men’s outfits in 2008 for her husband Anthony, and her sons Bobby Zane and Carl Thomas (See Figure 7). This artistic and economic decision is at its heart social and reflects Ponca’s stage in life. As Osage artist Anita Fields explained at the key note address for the Native American Art Studies Association Conference in 2009, grandmothers told the youth to keep their dance outfits the same, and Ponca continues this practice by producing regalia for her sons and daughter. But Ponca is also able to maintain key elements of her Osage traditions by representing them and expressing them through new materials, rendering them compatible
with contemporary society and its fashion tastes. In Ponca’s work tradition and modernity are not antithetical.

Ponca drew on many contrasts to create her pieces and appreciated the tension and synergistic energy created by using opposites. In the 1980s and 1990s, her traditional-contemporary collage designs incorporated an eclectic variety of materials, including buckskin, otter hide, trade cloth, antlers, abalone shell, and elk teeth, but also pool-table felt, screws, bolts, spoons, and dice. She also frequently used complementary colors in her clothing designs because they “make the body electric” (Knoll 1989: 41). As opposites on the color chart, the contrasting colors stand out and cause the eye to reverberate. Designers use complimentary colors to create vibrancy and energy in their pieces. Her designs were sensual as satins and silk created smooth, cool textures. Ponca made mini-dresses of hand-tanned buckskin and flowing evening gowns of hand-dyed and screenprinted silks and lames. She created one garment using natural linen and silk, trimming it with otter hide and glass beads. As an instructor at a pan-Indian institution, Ponca needed to be well-versed in a variety of techniques. Ponca also borrowed freely from other Native tribal aesthetics. For example, she has beaded some of her garments with floral patterns borrowed from the Eastern Woodlands tribes. However she generally incorporates Osage aesthetic elements and design styles. She stated, “I want to make art that’s a sign of the times, but I do it to carry on the traditions and techniques of my tribe, like finger-weaving. I want to make art that’s history” (Santa Fe Reporter 1988: 46). In addition to garments, Ponca has also created blankets, collages, wall-hangings, and accessories.
As a designer, Ponca used innovative new materials in her fashions to tell traditional Osage stories as well as see the entire body as her canvas. In the late 1990s, she became known for her use of Mylar, which was a synthetic, silver, reflective material used on space shuttles. Ponca was notified about a company out of Georgia that was giving away raw material for only the price of shipping. Ponca ordered rolls of paper for the art classes, and a roll of Mylar for her fashion courses. Ponca experimented with the Mylar and discovered that it draped well on mannequins (Ponca 2009). She appreciated the idea of using a material that was connected with the sky and stars, especially since traditional Osage stories described the people’s connection with the sky world. In fact, the Osage people believe that their ancestors came from the sky (Dollarhide 2003). To Ponca, the use of Mylar accentuated that relationship with the sky. With this material, sound also became important, because when the body moved while wearing Mylar, it created a sound like taffeta.

III. Ponca’s Fashion and Body Art: Reading the Fashioned Body

Ponca also used body paint on her models, and feathers in her models’ hair, for photographs and fashion shows (see Figure 8). In most Native communities, the idea of adornment has included not only garments and jewelry, but also the practice of tattooing or painting the body. Through the use of colors and designs on different specific parts of the body, tattooing could express or maintain connectedness with the spirit realm, communicate cultural knowledge or tribal history, or convey beauty, shedding light on what a particular tribal group deems beautiful. As Joseph and George Horse Capture
demonstrated in their book *Beauty, Honor, and Tradition*, Plains Indian men’s warrior shirts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries contained illustrative pictographs that could be consulted in the telling, remembering, and teaching of tribal history (2001: 21). Though the pictographs may depict individual histories, their circulation and adornment among tribal members contributed to the greater identity and history of the community, thereby facilitating cultural reproduction. In a similar fashion, tattoo and body art could also serve as mnemonic references and play an important role in the transmission of cultural knowledge to successive generations. Either permanently or temporarily applied this form of decorating the self has a long history in human cultures.

While the markings used by Ponca were not permanent tattoos, they were designs drawn on the human form as body art, and were captured in photographs as permanent images. These marks derive from several influences including personal creativity, tribal aesthetics, pan-Indigenous imagery, and subcultural connections, as well as general mass popular culture sensibilities. Tattoo theorists maintain that body decoration is a type of language or code, and can be read differently according to context. A body art and tattoo design is meant to interact with its context, since the ‘canvas’ is a body which moves around. One Polynesian tattoo artist explained, “All those royal people had a separate language, a distinctive one that was used when they met. But not only was there a distinctive language, but there was a distinctive style of clothing. They wore art—body art, weapons. So you see ta-tatau is a language, a language that was worn by people” (Utanga and Mangos 2006: 327).
The stylings of Wendy Ponca also relayed a language and can be viewed as rebellious fashion statements as well as powerful performances of Indianness. Some of her creations extended from the traditional Osage practice of tattooing, but, as she noted in a recent interview, she was also motivated by the broader contemporary popular culture movement of body painting. She began incorporating body and tattoo art into her fashion presentations in the early 1990s when body painting became a trendy American subcultural art form. Fashion and tattoo historians note that fashion models hit the runways wearing fake and real tattoos as well as tattoo-decorated sleeves and stockings (Mifflin 1997: 156). Airbrushed bodies were conceived of as another form of wearable art (Ponca 2009). Ponca took advantage of the power of these tattoo symbols to express varied notions of identity.

Tattooing was practiced historically and probably in pre-contact periods as well by the Osages, and both men and women embraced tattooing as a form of body decoration. Scholars note that the Osages tattooed themselves as a way to express social status, they had gender-specific tattoos, and the women were the ones who were most heavily adorned. The more tattoos a person had, the higher his or her social position. Ponca utilized the Osage spider and snake symbols in her photoshoots, and they were applied for their decorative and aesthetic value, but they were also used symbolically to mark identity and to reference traditional Osage cosmology. Her use of this type of adornment brought the Osage tradition of tattooing onto the contemporary scene, and informed this trend with a cultural history.
Spider iconography has a long history in Native North America. The symbol appeared on Mississippian material culture where it was one of the few symbols specifically associated with women. It also appeared as an important character in the cultures of the Southeastern tribes such as the Cherokee, Osage, and Creek. The Osage custom of tattooing spiders on women’s hands continued until the turn of the century, but by 1960 there were few women who were still tattooed in this way (Franke 1999: 6-7). Ponca revived the use of the spider in both her fashion and body art by inscribing it on her garments and on her body. She utilized this symbol as an aesthetic design element, but also to refer to her role embodying Spider Woman, who taught weaving to the Osages.

Ponca also used a snake design in her work. The Osage share a special relationship with the snake, and some scholars suggest that the Osages’ name for themselves, Wah-zah-zhe, highlights this connection: Alice Fletcher and Francis La Flesche explained that Wah-zah-zhe was, “an old term said to refer to the snake after shedding [its] old skin and again in full power” (1992: 42). Here the Osages perceived a direct link between themselves and the freshly emerged, powerful snake. Ponca has painted snake or serpent representations on models’ skin, sometimes wrapping it around the body, and other times drawing it across the back. In this way, Ponca suggests that the self has shed its old skin – perhaps the second skin of clothing, or perhaps the colonized or assimilated self – and has reclaimed the body as well as a powerful sense of Osage identity. The serpent also resonates in popular fashion and tattoo cultures as a sign of sexual power and subversion. As one fashion theorist explained, this image is used to,
“affect a striking beauty that is ageless in its tone and alarmingly contemporary in its ferocity” (Bolton 2004: 149). Ponca combines these aspects to impart a symbolic relationship that reveals a timeless, yet contemporary, potent connection to Osage identity.

One of her fashion photoshoots (Figure 11), which included floral and ribbonwork motifs drawn on the back of a woman, illustrates the association between certain design patterns and Indian identity. It also reveals the relationship that Native people have with these symbols, which throughout time have signaled tribal affiliation to outsiders. Anthropologist Mary Douglas stated, “body marks…indicate social membership through the metaphor of the human body as a space where we think about and constitute the body politic” (Douglas 1966 qtd in Turner 1999). Ponca paints the floral and ribbonwork designs on a woman’s back, symbolizing her role in carrying on art forms, and the stories and connections they reference, for future generations. The fact that the designs are inscribed on the body conveys their intimacy and significance.

In addition to projecting an Osage identity, Ponca also exhibits her ‘American’ identity with the inclusion of the American flag loosely draped around the model. Lloyd Kiva New advocated that there was not much more American than the Native American, and encouraged people to express this patriotic association on their clothing. Ponca promoted this belief nearly 50 years later and, along with her collective of Native designers and models, appropriated flag iconography, and integrated it into their fashion shows, proclaiming “In God and Goddess We Trust.” Today the reverse also occurs, and the most patriotic of our American fashion designers refer to the Indian to confirm the
authenticity of their ‘American’ clothing collections. In using the flag, Ponca also alludes to a time when Native people incorporated their cultural practices into U.S. holidays, such as Independence Day, as a way to continue their then-outlawed dances and ceremonial life. This image captures the moment when the guise of the flag is dropped and the ceremonial self is revealed.

As discussed earlier, Ponca used Mylar in her dress designs. The inclusion of Mylar with body art in this instance also highlights the aspect of movement and performance related to fashion and tattoo art. Clothing designers and tattooists must possess an extensive understanding of how the body moves in order to successfully execute their desired designs. Mylar shimmers and rustles when it moves, thus calling to mind both the sparkling stars of the sky world as well as the appearance and sound of the movement of the water world – both of which are important to Osage cosmology. The body art offers complimentary design elements.

The merging of body art and Mylar also involves balance and graphic detailing. Since the Mylar dresses focused on form, the body art could add to the design aspect of the overall look. Also, as Ponca explained, she used body paint and feathers because of the strength that they bestow on the wearer. Ponca stated that the body art and feathers, “changes you on the inside, your intellect, being. It’s a powerful thing, it changes you emotionally” (Ponca 2009). This way of thinking directly related to her philosophy concerning garments and adornment: what you wear should convey identity, confidence and a tribally-informed sense of beauty.
Tattoo and body art are intricately associated with gender. While some cultural groups, such as the Osage people, tattooed the women more than the men, our contemporary perception of tattoo work is male-centric, and we associate it with the masculine (Mifflin 1997: 156). With the recent popularization of tattooing, however, women are increasingly reclaiming this form of body decoration. According to American tattoo artist Suzanne Fauser, “younger women are much more interested in being warriors. It’s [about] showing their strength and their personal power” (Mifflin 1997: 136). This statement resonates with Ponca’s work, as she and her models express their power through the practice of body art.

Tattoo and body art offer alternative definitions of beauty. While some early explorers expressed distaste of tribal body markings, they nonetheless noted that these markings were deemed ‘beautiful’ by their wearers and community of origin. Depending on the community, tattoos allowed men, women, or both to make their bodies more attractive and thus increase their erogenous power (Balvay 2008: 2). Tattoos also did important social work; they marked age, gender, religious initiations, affiliation, and social status. Today, tattoos are increasingly viewed in this light. One tattoo historian stated, “along with their personal significance, women’s tattoos have real world ramifications to the extent that they defy conventional standards of feminine beauty and force the recognition of new, largely self-certified ones” (Mifflin 1997: 117).

Other designers have followed Ponca’s aesthetic success in this area. Pilar Agoyo and Virgil Ortiz have recently used similar feathers and body paint in their shows and fashion shoots. About Ortiz’s fashion, Ponca stated, “I think it looks great. It looks
fabulous” (Ponca 2009). While Wendy Ponca’s use of tattoo body art drew more directly from Osage traditions by tattooing women and using adapted traditional symbols, Ortiz’s seems to build upon a fusion of Cochiti aesthetics, popular tattoo culture, and a global sense of tribal tattoos. The pan-Indigenousness of his body art suggests his desire for a connection on a global level.

Body adornment is an outward expression of the inner being, since it is located on the skin, or that which stands between the self and others (Mifflin 1997: 178). Therefore body decoration can be viewed as declarations of cultural pride, as well as an attempt to establish a connection with the past, or one’s heritage and cultural practices. Since tattoo and body art are perceived to be such old art forms, their application may be an attempt to put on a cultural skin (Mifflin 1997: 136, Brain 1979). Several tribal traditions exist that define the process of tattooing as expressing an entry into being. From this perspective, inscribing the body marked entrance into a community, signified acceptance into a nation, linked existence to an ancestral heritage (Balvay 2008: 7), and visually integrated and transformed a person into a member of a tribal community. The markings made them physically traceable as a member (Mifflin 2009: 79).

Tattoos and body art offer Native designers such as Wendy Ponca and Virgil Ortiz a means to resist American homogenization through style. It interrupts the process of sartorial normalization, or assimilation, in a way that opposes the silent majority in fashion and challenges the myth of consensus, unity, and cohesion (Hedibige qtd in Mifflin 1997: 167). Body markings could beautify the body while offering spiritual protection and exclaiming the wearer’s uniqueness (Utanga and Mangos 2006: 316).
Contemporary Euro-American tattoo theorists suggest that with the mainstreaming of tattoo, and through the processes of secularization and de-traditionalization, tattooing and body art have become ‘superficial marks’ of the fashion system (Turner 1999: 49, Broome 2006: 345). However, these marks are not only patterns on the flesh, they are also messages that present tribal philosophies, global influences, and personal aesthetics. Ponca demonstrated that the popularity of tattoo and body art could offer Native people a means to revive traditional practices and open a road for expressing personal identity and group affiliation for future generations.

IV. Native Uprising

One of Ponca’s most exciting ventures included the co-founding of a collective of designers, artists and models. The group was first known as Native Influx, then later renamed Native Uprising. They were the first known all-Native fashion clothing design cooperative effort of its kind. It was similar to Full Moon Fashions, but instead of students, it was comprised of alumni of IAIA’s Fiber Arts department. Ponca founded Native Influx in the mid-1980s with designers Marcus Amerman (Choctaw), Patricia Michaels (Taos), and models Rosemary Diaz (Santa Clara), Carol Sandoval, Char Romero, and Jackie Kee (tribal affiliations unknown). They created the group in an effort to profit from their shows; they wanted the models and designers who participated to be paid on a par with other members of the fashion industry since they were gaining more exposure at this time. Ponca stated the group supported budding Native artists, designers, and models, and she thought they should not have to perform or create for free anymore.
Ponca and the others wanted to “make a living off of their art,” and they were able to accomplish this in a variety of ways. Sometimes the fashion show venue would charge admission, and Native Uprising would receive a portion. At other times the group would draw up a contract with an institution or organization. If the show was for a fundraiser, the group would be given a portion of the funds raised. If it was for a museum-sponsored event, the group would write up the contract and charge a designer fee. The designers also sold their garments at these events. Some dresses were sold “right off of the model,” other purchases were commissioned alterations of the pieces in the show.

Fashion shows are intricate performances. The group focused on producing exciting fashion shows, sometimes creating huge painted backdrops or props borrowed from the IAIA collection (see Figure 10). This practice of using items such as sculptures from the IAIA collection stopped when the museum instituted new policies regulating the display of IAIA collection objects. Several people, usually over a dozen, participated in these events creating shows with much to offer. The powwow club also participated, as models to show off their dance regalia, and as dancers for intermission demonstration performances. When asked if she ever felt confined by the Santa Fe market or the Santa Fe Style, she stated, “No. We were the hottest ticket in town.” People wanted to see what new ideas these Indian designers had for fashion (Ponca 2009).

Throughout Native fashion history, powwow fashion has played a design role, since it has both inspired and been inspired by Native fashion designers. Lloyd Kiva New stated, “Some of the most beautiful Indian arts of today are found in the costume developments going on at powwows” (New 1994: 45). The powwow world has its own
fashion cycles, with dancers either buying, commissioning, or designing new outfits yearly (Her Many Horses 2007). For example, one champion fancy shawl dancer debuted her outfits at the annual Gathering of Nations powwow in Albuquerque at the end of April. The designers of these garments are cognizant of what new materials or ideas they can incorporate while at the same time maintaining tradition. Several Native fashion designers, such as Wendy Ponca, have created powwow or dance attire, which they consider a specialty market since certain rules exist pertaining to the attire.

The collective explained, “We try to express a continuity of Indian culture, elegantly displayed through contemporary creations” (Knoll 1988: 42). About the significance of this group, one reporter stated, “The Santa Fe area has long been the fashion trend-setter for the Southwest and now is fast becoming the heart of Indian fashion as well” (Gonzales 1989). The Native Uprising fashion shows featured traditional, contemporary, and cutting edge clothing, jewelry, and accessories designed, produced, and modeled by over twenty individuals. Representing various tribal backgrounds, the collective viewed themselves as a continuation of an age-old tradition of personal adornment. Native Uprising was dedicated to the development of a full-fledged contemporary costume and fashion design movement that would enable future IAIA graduates to assume leadership roles in the field, which in their eyes was exercised by their ancestors thousands of years ago. According to Lloyd Kiva New, who supported the group, fashion “represents one of the most basic and compelling of artistic impulses… the art of personal adornment” (Native Uprising n.d.).
Some of the designers highlighted in the shows included Pilar Agoyo (San Juan/Santo Domingo/Cochiti), Chris Brown (Navajo), Celeste Connor (Apache), Maynard Lavadour (Cayuse-Nez Perce), Fran Loretto (Jemez), Patricia Michaels (Taos), Terren Otis (Yakama/Nez Perce), David Palucci (Navajo), LaVerne Pinnecoose (Navajo), and Elizabeth Rydman (non-Native). Lloyd Kiva New served as an advisor, Wendy Ponca coordinated the fashion designs, and Marcus Amerman directed the stage setting.

The designers were influenced by a wide variety of seemingly disparate inspirations, creating a diverse show of clothing. Agoyo participated as both designer and model, and introduced her contemporary one-of-a-kind creations inspired by her research of 1800’s Native American attire. Chris Brown, a self-proclaimed urban Indian, incorporated California beach and nightlife culture in his designs. Connor learned beadworking, leatherscraft and painting from her grandmother and sewing from her mother and aunt. Lavadour created is garments from hand-tanned hides, beads, animal teeth, claws, and bones. Michaels was influenced by the famous Santa Fe opera, becoming a fan of music, staging, and costuming. She believed that it was not only possible, but also necessary, for Native people to blend day-to-day contemporary lifestyle with traditional ceremonies and spirituality of Pueblo and reservation life. She expressed this belief in her fashion creations by utilizing traditional Indian symbolism in the fabrics she screenprinted and shaped into contemporary garments. Like Michaels, Otis was also influenced by the theatre and was inspired by the possibilities for extravagance in fashion and design. Palucci, on the other hand, explained, “All of my design elements are accents of my own relationship to my environment… I strive to harmoniously reflect my personal
knowledge of cultural aesthetics in genuine garments – comfortable, natural looking, utilitarian designs.” Pinnecoose combined contemporary design elements with traditional Navajo rug patterns in her jewelry, and Rydman, who studied fashion at IAIA, and focused on replicating the beauty of the Southwest in her garments (Native Uprising n.d.). Amerman emceed the event, and at one presentation in Omaha, he wore a suit with beaded lapels, made of two smoked elk hides and two smoked buckskins. He joked, “It smells up the room wherever you go, like, ‘is there a campfire, is something burning?’” He beaded the pant legs, jacket arms and lapels, and his tie with F-14 jets. This ensemble reflected the values of the group – the buckskin represented the very old, the beads symbolized new traditions, and the jets signified the future and the contemporary Native world.

Each fashion show was divided into sections. Perhaps in an attempt to ‘start at the beginning,’ the Native Uprising fashion show program began with a section titled, ‘Traditional Indians.” The group explained,

Archeologists have traced Native American fashion design – the creation of items for personal adornment – as far back as 4000 B.C. These age old traditions, passed down from generation to generation, retain the integrity of their ancestors in design, technique and spirituality. Generally worn today, strictly, for tribal ceremonies and celebrations; many of the costumes shown here are being worn by their owners/designers and are representative of several nations…

(Native Uprising n.d.)

This opening section set the framework for the rest of event, demonstrating that their contemporary fashion designs were a continuation of the past and that Native clothing aesthetics be both timeless, or classic, as well as fashion-forward and trendy. The items in this collection may have been family heirlooms and were for special occasion use and not
everyday wear. This section of the show was accompanied with narration, and Amerman explained each piece. The group may have cited archaeologists in an attempt to legitimize, or explain the existence of, Native fashion to audience members. The designs, they stated, were and continue to be passed down, and the designers in this show perpetuate that tradition, retaining the quality of the work of their ancestors. Stating that the traditional ‘before’ was the inspiration source, and contending that their work is the contemporary ‘now,’ the designers authenticated themselves as Native people and their work as real Native fashion.

Against a backdrop of Native artistic tradition, this creative group of IAIA alumni and students presented their contemporary fashions. Group advisor and supporter Josephine Wapp added, “There is great beauty in the items produced by our forefathers. Young Indians in transition between two cultures should be led to appreciate the beauty and skilled craftsmanship that went into the traditional clothing of their peoples and out of their appreciation develop a desire to preserve this heritage.” Through the study and remaking of Native attire, cultural heritage could be preserved. One Native Uprising booklet included quotes by fashion designers Bill Blass and Gustave Tassell, who stated, “We must support the young people who understand the importance of keeping the past alive and passing it on to the next generation. What richer and deeper past does this country have than its Indian culture?” The introductory section also served the purpose of educating the audience about past practices of adornment and creativity, as well as about the diversity of Native tribes.
In 1993, at an event at the Omaha Casino, the traditional part of the fashion show focused on Omaha garments. The first model wore a traditional Iroquois woman’s outfit made of purple calico and wool decorated with Czechoslovakian beads and sterling silver made by Tammy Rahr (Cayuga). The cradleboard she carried had been featured in a Smithsonian exhibition. Rahr wore a second dress of red calico and Pendleton wool with satin appliqué, cut-glass beads and silver. Omaha model Charlene Morris wore a pink, turquoise, and Santa Fe blue ribbon design with fringe and cowry shell decoration. She carried a matching beaded purse, earrings and embroidered blanket. The third model wore an Osage buckskin dress with high-top plains style moccasins. Ponca wore a broadcloth blanket decorated by fifty states worth of Franklin mint spoons fastened along the bottom. Playing off the idea that fashion was both aesthetic and utilitarian, Amerman quipped, “It’s not just fashion, you can eat with eat also.” This section also featured two Omaha cloth dresses with satin ribbon work, an Omaha buckskin dress, and accessories passed down and made by Omaha community members. Drum beats, Native singing and flute music played in the background. After this section, Amerman introduced three young powwow Grass dancers, who performed to one song. Amerman offered introductory narration about the history, purpose, and description of the Grass dance as they demonstrated the dance moves (Native Uprising 1993).

The next section of the show was labeled, “Neo-Traditional Indians.” The program explained, “Utilizing traditional beading, tanning, weaving, and ribbonwork techniques and traditional fabrics, this collection of very contemporary clothing is exemplary Native American in its design approach” (Native Uprising n.d.). This
collection of garments included beadwork designs by Marcus Amerman and Maynard Lavadour, Pendleton coats by Elizabeth Rydman and Wendy Ponca, and other designs by Celeste Connor, Patricia Michaels, and Fran Loretto. Amerman no longer narrated, but instead joined the other models while the latest dancehall music hits filled the speakers.

The ‘new’ traditional section opened with Amerman and Agoyo, who emerged onto the stage to the song “Step It Up” by the English electronica group Stereo MC’s. Agoyo wore a high-slit white leather dress as Amerman modeled his hide suit. There was no narration, only music, and the models danced back and forth on the L-shaped runway.

Next, three women modeled short-sleeved tanned leather tops with jeans to the song “My Lovin’ (You’re Never Gonna Get It)” by the popular Grammy nominated female R&B group En Vogue. Women’s wear, including two slimly tailored buckskin dresses and a short brown leather skirt, and menswear, including a tanned leather shirt with fringe and a Hudson Bay long jacket, were among the garments modeled. Pendleton blanket fabric was used to make long jackets and vests for men, and for women, off-the-shoulder dresses and jackets, along with short shirts. Several other Native designers continue to use Pendleton material when designing contemporary garments. The female models also wore Native-inspired outfits made with new fabrics such as lamé and taffeta. Velvet was used for blouses and broomstick skirts.

Women in the audience expressed their appreciation for the male models with whistles and hoots; and they became more vocal whenever the male models were topless (Native Uprising 1993). As discussed in a later chapter on the designs of Virgil Ortiz, in these environments the models both receive and return the gazes of their audiences. This
interplay is highlighted in the cases of the auto-exoticization of male models who may also seek to increase their erogenous power through their participation in these fashion events (Balvay 2008, Bolton 2004, Brain 1979, Franke 1999, Utanga and Mangos 2006). While the models may distract attention from the clothing, they undoubtedly enhance the other aspects of presentation and experience.

The show then paused with the “Art Is War Interlude,” featuring a performance piece by Marcus Amerman. He stated,

Art is war. Selling art is hunting… one does it to survive. Showing art in a gallery is stealing ponies… it amasses material wealth and prestige. Being chosen to show art in a museum and penetrating the attention of the media are the honors won in battle, counting coup, elimination of an enemy. (Native Uprising n.d.)

Garbed in jeans and a black leather jacket with no shirt, Amerman performed a routine to the Stereo MC’s 1992 hit song, “Connected.” With a small metal shield attached to his left arm and a coup stick lined with small dangling feathers in his right hand, Amerman posed while the song warned, “If you make sure you’re connected, the writing’s on the wall, but if your mind’s neglected, stumble you might fall,” perhaps referring to the importance of Native Americans staying connected to their tribal heritage. Amerman ‘hunted’ across the stage, and with dramatic stabbing gestures he lifted his stick to reveal a wad of money attached to the end. He stated,

I would not enter into war simply because I am skilled at or take pleasure in battle. I would not create art because I think I am necessarily any good at it or enjoy it. I create art because I have to. It is through art that I acquire freedom. When I am free to express the wonders, horrors and overall richness of the reality I perceive, I communicate. (Native Uprising n.d.)
Amerman views his role as an artist to be a modern-day version of a warrior; it is through art-making that he is able to provide for himself and his family or community. His new battles are waged, not on the battlefield, but on the stage where he is able to communicate and engage in direct social commentary on topics ranging from tourism to smallpox and genocide. Amerman conceptualizes freedom of expression and communication as the signal of victory in this war.

Amerman has also been influenced by Edward Curtis’s photographs as models for his own fashion. He has stated, “I wanted to look like them, and moreover, I wanted to be like them, full of love and virtue, and confident in the value of their people, their religion, and their way of life” (Sweet and Berry 2001: 48). Several Native designers look to the past to gain inspiration for future garments, a common practice in the fashion industry. Amerman, however, also sees the photographs from an artist’s perspective, he explained, “To me, Curtis’s Indians dressed and lived in the height of fashion and design. They looked both literally and figuratively ‘dressed to kill’” (Sweet and Berry 2001: 47-48).

Amerman’s interlude provided the models and designers with preparation time for the next sections. The show continued with the “Indian Summer” section highlighting then-cutting-edge lycra spandex beach and dance wear for summer days and party nights designed by Chris Brown. The garments were modeled to upbeat percussion music. The first set of three outfits featured matching tops and bottoms in trendy fluorescent orange and fuchsia colors. Next, the “Contemporary Indians” collection was showcased, presenting globally Indigenous ‘daytime into cocktail’ creations by seven different designers: Celeste Connor, Terren Otis, David Palucci, Marcus Amerman, Wendy Ponca,
Patricia Michaels, and Elizabeth Rydman. The garments were accessorized with jewelry designed by Denise Wallace and LaVerne Pinnecoose. The next portion of the show was Marcus Amerman’s “Indians of the Night” collection, mixing old and new, Indian and non-Indian. Outfits featured in these two sections included a black mermaid dress, a quilted black and white cropped jacket, a breastplate shirt, and a long strapless body-fitting velvet evening dress. The garments were consistent with the trends and cuts popular at that time and models wore sunglasses and sported the latest fashionable hairstyles (Native Uprising 1993).

The show ended with the “All-American Indians” section. The pamphlet read, “In a tribute to Old Glory ‘In God and Goddess We Trust,’” the finale featured a pallet of red, white, and blue (see Figure 11). Garments included a halter top of vertical red and white stripes, a short blue dress and over-sized coat, a strapless red one-piece dress, beaded denims by Wendy Ponca, stars and stripes ribbon dress by Pilar Agoyo, a beaded bra, striped shorts by Patricia Michaels, and a wool evening dress beaded in stars and stripes by Marcus Amerman. Agoyo wore a blue cropped jacket embellished with white stars and long red and white fringe hanging from the underside of the sleeves. Upon conclusion of the event, all of the contributing designers came out on stage wearing the traditional clothing of their respective tribes, reflecting the beginning of their show. The IAIA President at the time, Kathryn Tijerina, stated, “Over the past three decades, we have learned that American Indian and Alaska Native designers share a fresh and unique vision of fashion today” (Native Uprising n.d.). Tijerina paid homage to Lloyd Kiva New
and referred to the beginning of IAIA’s fashion curriculum. This marked the height of the IAIA fashion program.

V. The 1990s: Native Fashion Expands while Native Fashion Curriculum Declines

The early 1990s were a time of expansion for the fashion curriculum at IAIA, and in 1991, Fashion and Fiber Arts became two separate categories in the IAIA course catalogue. The IAIA promotional brochure highlighted Fashion Design, Fiber Arts, and Traditional Clothing as top courses. By 1990, Ponca was at the height of her career as a fashion designer, and her student, the designer and model Rosemary Diaz, was managing her new store Ponca Design (Lynn 1990: 11). Diaz explained that Ponca used only the highest quality materials, and hand-created every piece herself from design inception to finishing touches.

However, this momentum did not last long, and Ponca left IAIA in 1993 due to family obligations. Pearl Sunrise (Navajo), who focused on weaving, subsequently joined the faculty as the new professor of Fashion Design and Fiber Arts. She continued Ponca’s legacy of fashion shows at IAIA events throughout 1994 and 1995. For example, for the Museum Founders’ Luncheon, she hosted a thirty-minute fashion show, and during the IAIA’s 1995 Winter Moon Arts Festival, a fashion show featured hand-painted jackets by IAIA alumni and contemporary and traditional garments by IAIA students and alumni. Despite these efforts, a shift in course offerings occurred, and by the mid-1990s, IAIA emphasized photography, performance, and theatre. In the IAIA 1995-1997 catalog, no clothing courses were listed. The IAIA-affiliated fashion shows during this time were
smaller events held in conjunction with benefit art sales and exhibitions that included textile pieces, jewelry, and beadwork. Within two years of Ponca’s leaving, the fashion program at IAIA disappeared.

Ponca returned to IAIA in August 1997 for “Native Nouveau: Contemporary and Traditional Fashions by Native Designers,” an elaborate fashion show for IAIA’s 35th anniversary. The event featured eleven designers, including three from Siberia, and was hosted by Rick Hill (Tuscarora) and Wendy Ponca, who by this time had produced more than forty fashion shows (Institute of American Indian Arts 1997). It included performances of a Raven Dance, King Island song and dance, and the IAIA alumni drum group, who sang intertribal songs. Collector Jeri Ah-Be-Hill (Kiowa) explained,

> It is extremely important to me, as an Indian woman, that I let people know we are from different Nations. That our cultures, religions, languages, and clothing are different; one tribe from another. Because of this important issue I started a collection of Indian women’s clothing years ago.

(Institute of American Indian Arts 1997)

Through clothing, diversity could be exhibited and celebrated. Education, especially pertaining to the richness and diversity of past and present Native sartorial practices, was a central aspect of this event. The designers included Jerry Ingram (Choctaw), hat-maker Fran Loretto (Jemez), Penny Singer (Navajo), Pilar Agoyo (San Juan/Cochiti/Santo Domingo), collage artist Alex Jacobs (Akwesasne Mohawk), Deborah and Isaac Tait (Nisga’a), Margaret Roach Wheeler (Chickasaw/Choctaw), and Siberian artists Lyubov Samar, Maria Pritichina, and Nina Khodjer. The show consisted of a widespread assortment of garments, including Ingram’s replicas of traditional outfits and Jacobs’ recycled contemporary wearable art. As the program explained:
Native Nouveau demonstrates the continuing heritages of Native peoples. Traditional and contemporary native cultures are linked through wearable art. Historically, clothing, symbols and designs were an important way for indigenous people to communicate about their tribe, accomplishments and rank. Then, as today, clothing makes a statement about individuality and social standing. Contemporary artists have many techniques and materials from which to choose. Creators of traditional wearable art use the techniques and patterns that have been in existence for generations. In contrast, creators of contemporary wearable art push beyond tradition and produce innovative pieces by using different techniques and sometimes unusual materials.

(Institute of American Indian Arts 1997)

Through the continued wearing of symbols and materials, Native people demonstrate their connection to the past, which communicates and celebrates identity. The show proffered equal respect and acknowledgement for both contemporary and traditional designs.

Outside of IAIA, Ponca continued to be featured in events and publications in the late 1990s, as Native high fashion was gaining momentum on the national scene. In 1998, The Denver Art Museum hosted a fashion show titled Indian Chic: An American Indian Fashion Show with Ponca and two other designers (discussed in the following chapters). For Indian Chic, Ponca chose to feature a procession of her Mylar dress. She was also featured in Indian Market Magazine in an article on beadwork.

Because the IAIA Fashion Program waned, the fashion shows at IAIA turned from a student focus to a focus on alumni designers. In March 2000, Ponca directed two IAIA fashion shows, titled “Culture Embodied” and “Culture Embodied II,” which were touted as being “of historical significance, beauty and style.” The first show, in Albuquerque, was funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and included performances by Hawaiian dancers. Marcus Amerman, Tammy Rahr, Pilar Agoyo, Terren Otis, Patricia
Michaels, Jerry Ingram, Lalla Williams, Wendy Ponca, and Laverne Pinnecoose were all on the designer roster for the event. Undoubtedly meant to encourage continued financial support by W.K. Kellogg Foundation, IAIA presented itself and its students in glowing terms, boasting the achievements of IAIA and the talents of its students. The pamphlet stated that, “The IAIA alumni designers create from their rich background and professional capabilities as recipients of an exemplary education. Revolving in a world of cultural chaos, these artists represent the stability of style from a history of form and function” (Institute of American Indian Arts 2000a). By encouraging development of the background experience and knowledge that students bring coupled with the unique education provided by IAIA, these students could achieve much and retain valuable cultural knowledge.

The second fashion show, “Culture Embodied II,” featuring IAIA alumni, students, and renowned Native designers, was held in Santa Fe during the busy Indian Market weekend and focused its efforts on sales. The program included concerts by the Mud Ponies and the George Howard Road House Hounds. Ponca’s former students and collaborators participated in the event, including Alex Jacobs, Kenneth T. White II, Jerry Ingram, Pilar Agoyo, and Terren Otis. Phone numbers and contact information for each designer was provided to facilitate sales. Clearly a crowd favorite, Ponca once again showed her Mylar dresses with tattoo and body paint.

After the success of the Culture Embodied shows, the IAIA course catalogues included Traditional Arts: Fiber Arts I and II, Traditional Beadwork I, and Traditional Clothing I, which were introductory courses in pattern-making, construction, and
decoration of traditional garments. IAIA faculty tried to regenerate interest in fashion design, but was unsuccessful in maintaining the program. In the 40-year *State of the Arts at IAIA* report in 2002, Working Goal #5 described the desire to re-establish the Fiber and Fashion Program. As of early 2010, IAIA was on still working reinstating the fashion program.

At an IAIA student focus group held to gauge interest in a Fashion Design minor at IAIA on April 28, 2009, students who attended voiced their support for the return of a Fashion Program. They explained that they believed a Fashion Program would add variety to course offerings, increase student enrollment, and expand and add to other programs. However, above all else, they believed IAIA, as an arts institution, should teach classes in clothing design because fashion is art and is a valid form of creative expression. Because IAIA currently does not offer fashion courses, students enroll in Fashion Design courses offered at the local Santa Fe Community College. While learning American fashion is important, many students desire to learn about clothing construction from a different perspective. IAIA, as it has in the past, can provide its students with this opportunity to learn about tribal traditional and non-Native contemporary clothing techniques, and the opportunity to experiment with the creation of clothing from the contemporary Native perspective.

In 2004, IAIA hosted *The Power of Fashion*. Publicized as a show of power, this Sixth Annual IAIA Contemporary Native American Art Show and Sale included an evening opening reception and fashion show at the IAIA Museum in August during Indian Market. Tickets to the event ranged from twenty-five to fifty dollars, with
proceeds benefiting IAIA’s program needs. Lloyd Kiva New’s wife Aysen New was a guest speaker at the event. At the event, she held up a popular fashion magazine: Ralph Lauren’s latest clothing line featured Navajo-inspired turquoise embellishments. Aysen New recalled how her husband advocated fashion design as a way of promoting positive careers for Native people. He was concerned that designers like Lauren would capitalize on selling replicas of borrowed authenticity, especially while Native designers went unrecognized.

When asked what Wendy Ponca thought of non-Native designers creating “Indian Style” clothing, she stated that the ‘tribal trend’ comes and goes – Native designers should be able to profit from the current Native fashion trend, but she explained that in order to do that, it is necessary to go to New York or Paris and make connections to get Native fashion recognized on those global platforms. Native designers must step up to be recognized. The *Power of Fashion* show featured Kathy Whitman, Patricia Michaels, Pilar Agoyo, Marcus Amerman, and jewelry makers Dylan Pablano, Cody Sanderson, Connie Tsosie Gaussoin, Wayne Nez Gaussoin, and David Gaussoin. Though Ponca was not present, her legacy was evident since her students were the primary participants. The event also spotlighted vintage designs by Lloyd Kiva New, including a string-strapped sundress from the 1950s modeled by Louise Stewart who inherited it from her mother. Amerman presented a black cocktail dress with colored polka dots inspired by the small-pox infested blankets, which inspired one reporter to state, “You’ll be the life of the party in this genocidal little number” (Haywood 2004). Since controversy is an accepted aspect
of fashion, designers like Amerman, Ponca, New, and others have the freedom to call attention to such issues through their work.

VI. Conclusion

IAIA continues to be an influential art institute, and along with the various fashion designers associated with IAIA such as Lloyd Kiva New and Wendy Ponca, it played a legitimizing and authoritative role in the development of the current Native high fashion movement. As the Institute’s main fashion instructor for a decade, Ponca played a central role in the development of Native high fashion. She remembers Lloyd Kiva New as a mentor and friend. She stated that New believed that fashion, or decorating the human body, was the oldest form of design for all mankind, and for IAIA to not have a clothing design program undermined the idea of it as a premier art institution. This sentiment is especially true considering so many past alumni view clothing as an important way in which many people visually recognize Native cultures and differentiate between the tribes. New and Ponca transferred traditional designs to new media, and through their stories we can learn how Native artists have worked, both successfully and unsuccessfully, to become established in the fashion design industry, and how individuals artists have negotiated creativity and conservation of tradition simultaneously in their work for an arena that is based on rapid cyclical change and fads.

Ponca taught a combination of what she had learned from Wapp and Wilson, and also created innovative new curricula. She recognized the important aspect of movement to the unique medium of fashion, and she incorporated performance into her shows and
made Native fashion an event. She co-founded a collective of designers and models, which fueled a movement that made Santa Fe a recognized center for Native couture. Fashion shows were a central important component to her work, and through them she nourished a love for fashion in Santa Fe. She not only celebrated innovation, but relayed its importance through her teachings, fashion events, and media articles. Wendy Ponca emphasized connections to the past, and her work emphasized the excitement that can be drawn from producing innovative reincarnations of traditional garments or stories.
CHAPTER 5

NATIVE FEMALE DESIGNERS:

PRODUCING INDIAN CHIC IN INDIAN COUNTRY (1970s – 1980s)

“Many, but by no means all, Native American design traditions were perpetuated by women and this continued to be the case in the twentieth century. During the last hundred years women have produced many works of outstanding beauty and utility, with basketry, pottery, and textiles among the most significant.” – Kladzyk (2000: 101)

In the 1970s, a growing market of Native female clients fueled a movement of fashion design which was created by Native women. These patrons were active in their communities or in urban Indian groups as advocates for issues including adequate health care and education, and increased alcohol and violence prevention and intervention programs. They wrote articles in local and national publications, spoke at conferences, and were political advisors for the states or U.S. government. Similar to how members of the Society of American Indians in the early 1900s wore cultural attire while lobbying for their tribes in Washington, D.C., (i.e., Angel DeCora and Gertrude Simmons Bonnin, who wore their buckskin dresses while addressing the Friends of the Indians), these new clients expressed their unique identities and connection to Indianness through their clothing.

In her article about the avant-garde aesthetic practices of Carlisle instructor Angel DeCora (Winnebago), Anne Ruggles Gere noted how DeCora “simultaneously engaged
with and reformulated white constructions of the ‘authentic’ Indian’ (2004: 651). DeCora accomplished this task by employing the discursive strategies described by Gerald Vizenor as survivance: “Survivance in the sense of native survivance, is more than survival, more than endurance or mere response, the stories of survivance are an active presence” (1998: 15). Resistance in the form of active presence is an important concept to understand, especially when discussing the wearing of Native American tribal identity markers on attire. Through the wearing of these garments, female Native leaders demonstrated to others that Native American peoples were still alive and they educated others about the vitality of tribal cultures.

Perhaps continuing the legacy of artists such as DeCora, the designers discussed in this chapter also utilized ‘white-dominated approaches’ – in this case the idea of fashion and the fashion show – and transformed them for their own use but also to provide new avenues for future generations (Gere 2004: 649). The designers’ creative reinterpretations of Indian attire assisted Native American cultural resistance and survival, or survivance, and led to a reshaping of the category of Euro-American fashion, which continues to look to Native attire for inspiration. These women, whether or not they were recognized by the general American public as doing such, influenced several mainstream fashion designers and fashion outlets (Meredith 2009). In addition to influencing the direction of American fashion, they also promoted the ‘sovereign’ status of Indian bodies – both as human beings and as political bodies. They claimed ownership of ‘Indianness,’ and asserted their authority as knowledgeable individuals, worthy of being heard. Gere explained, “Presence is key here because whites so frequently attribute
‘authenticity’ to stereotypes they themselves have created, leaving no space for the presence of actual living persons who represent tribal languages and cultures” (2004: 651). DeCora and her contemporaries, as well as the women discussed in this chapter, fought to regain this space.

Gere explained that DeCora and others, when speaking publicly, often wore Native American buckskin and beaded regalia to present themselves as ‘real’ Indians. Since their audience embraced stereotypes as authentic representations, “this led educated Indians like DeCora to perform or mime back to whites the stereotypes they had created” (Gere 2004: 652). Through their active presence, they engaged with stereotypes in order to dismantle them. For some Native people, wearing Indian-inspired clothing or jewelry provided a means of affirming and remaining connected to their culture. As Gere explained, “The dislocations of reservation life and pressures toward assimilation made many aspects of traditional life impossible, but art provided continuity” (2004: 657).

Native American clothing designers, including powwow regalia-makers and twenty-first-century Native owned t-shirt companies, negotiated the social experiences of Native people in popular culture with their communal desire to retain a sense of tribal heritage.

Like the Native American art movement of one hundred years ago, a number of Native fashion designers have received notable recognition. Few, however, have had opportunities to control the terms by which Native fashion and attire is represented in American popular culture and mainstream media, especially in the world of high fashion. Nonetheless, the emergence of designer collectives, topical museum exhibitions, and other annual Native fashion events promises to ameliorate this situation by putting more
Native people in the position of self-representation, especially as it pertains to collaborative projects on a global level. As Marsha Bol discussed in her article on Lakota women’s art practices, “Art can operate as a potent force in maintaining a cultural self-image due to its high visibility and yet non-aggressive character” (1985: 50). The incorporation of aesthetic Native elements into daily lives through clothing also holds the potential to reaffirm and maintain cultural identity in the midst of tremendous stress, such as the civil unrest of the 1970s. Women’s aesthetic practices have always supported tribal social systems. Bol stated, “Art was the Lakota woman’s strategy in the battle to resist cultural change” (1985: 50).

Native American clothing designers such as Jewel Gilham (Blackfeet), Remonia Jacobsen (Otoe/Iowa), Margaret Wood (Navajo/Seminole), and others created fashionable garments in the 1970s when the Indian Style was popular. American designer Giorgio Sant’Angelo’s clothing line, “Natives of the Americas,” was sought after and landed on the cover of Look Magazine’s October 1970 issue. Since this style was fashionable, it would have been not only socially suitable but also chic for both Native and non-Native people to wear the designs created by Jacobsen or Gilham, which undoubtedly added to their success as designers. The Indian Style and the Natural Style of the 1970s was characterized by loose-fitting and gender-blurring garments, long hair, and nude makeup. This fashion movement, which favored hand-made and ethnic garments, is conceptualized as a reaction to the constricting, proper attire of the 1950s and the synthetic throwaway fashion of the 1960s. While American consumers sought to acquire their clothing from novel sources, such as consignment stores, they ultimately
referred to the stereotyped American Indian as inspiration for their eco-aware Natural Look (Welters 2008).

Designers in the 1980s, such as Luanne Belcourt (Chippewa-Cree), Myrtle Raining Bird (Chippewa-Cree), and Marjorie Bear Don’t Walk (Chippewa/Salish) continued this movement and produced garments with a new client in mind: the growing market of professional Native females emerging in the public policy sphere. Some reoriented their ability to create ceremonial, dance, or powwow attire to design secularized and sellable couture. These women also continued the legacy of their ancestors and the ‘tradition of innovation’ that shaped the evolution of Native women’s dress (Landes 1938). While significant, this small client base and their female designers could not sustain the movement, and this first wave dwindled and faded in the late 1980s. Only a few notable designers such as Margaret Roach Wheeler (Choctaw/Chickasaw) and Margaret Wood (Navajo/Seminole) continued creating garments, perhaps because they adapted their styles to the changing tastes of fashion consumers and had a devoted non-Native client base, but also perhaps because they found other outlets for their creativity, such as quilt-making and theatre arts (figures 14 and 15).

A new group of Native female designers emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This next wave included diverse designers such as Betty David (Spokane), Dorothy Grant (Haida), and Wendy Ponca (Osage). Two of Ponca’s students comprised the edgy and fashion-forward sector of this wave. Patricia Michaels (Taos) produced garments that were avant-garde wearable art, and Pilar Agoyo (San Juan/Cochiti/Santo Domingo) pushed the boundaries of Native clothing design to include vinyl and metallic
materials. Michaels’ and Agoyo’s participation in the Santa Fe and Heard Indian Markets, with their ultramodern designs, forced patrons and judges to rethink expectations of Native fashion and clothing. Both women were also professional models. They understood the performative aspect of couture, and Michaels even modeled for Margaret Roach Wheeler, attesting to the tight-knit nature of Native couturiers. These designers used unconventional materials and staged dramatic shows, and with them Native fashion went global, collaborating with designers from Siberia and Africa. They understood and incorporated the important elements of style and performance required of couture. I discuss these designers more in-depth in the following chapter.

I hypothesize that when Native women designers create attire for other Native women, they infuse the garments with their ideals pertaining to identity, gender, and representation. These values revolve around notions of what constitutes beauty, how Indianness should be presented, and how the new Native woman could reflect both her traditional background as well as contemporary Indian America. Designers address the past and current state of affairs, all while looking to the future of Native communities. This practice, in turn, sheds light on what the designers and their wearers deem to be important, valuable, and worth expressing, and they do it with style.

I. One Black Ankle: Diversity (and Diverse Concepts of Beauty) on the Catwalk

The concept of diversity in fashion continues to be an issue today. In the first decade of the 2000s, the fashion style included the Tribal Trend, representing an updated version of the Indian Style of the 1970s and touting influences from Africa and other
Indigenous tribal cultures. However, few African or Indigenous fashion designers or models actively contributed to the trend. With this trend, tribal cultures were celebrated for their incorporation of natural materials, but were subsequently commodified in the forms of beaded jewelry, animal print or reptile skin purses, and feathered and fringed shoes, and were sold to the predominantly white twenty-first-century Boho-chic counterculture. The popular fashion magazine *Harper’s Bazaar*, which features mostly white models, ran a fashion photo spread in their March 2009 issue featuring only the ankle and wrist of one black model (Pimentel 2009). Few Indigenous designers and models are included in the major fashion shows of the year: the fashion week events in Paris, Milan, London, and New York City. Nonetheless, Native American and Indigenous designers and their models have found alternative venues and present their work on the ‘fringes’ of the fashion world. Importantly, at these events they often subvert globalized notions of the fashioned beauty: the thin and pale-skinned young European-looking female (Nagrath 2003).

Native communities have differing and distinct concepts of ‘beauty’ and ‘the beautiful’ in their cultures. In their languages, Native tribal concepts of ‘beauty’ and ‘the beautiful’ may actually be broad ideas when translated to English. For example, Witherspoon’s *Language and Art in the Navajo Universe* (1977) articulated the Navajo belief in *hozho*, a holistic concept of beauty experienced “most poignantly in creating it and in expressing it, not in observing it or preserving it” (1977: 178). Thus the concept of ‘beauty’ in Navajo relates to ideas of process and actions. Differing concepts of beauty have also been addressed by Native American female artists. Navajo painter Emmi
Whitehorse stated, “Applying principles of aesthetics and ethics to create balance or harmony in accordance with Navajo philosophy, I intentionally paint beauty, to protect and insulate myself – to keep sane” (Whitehorse 2007: 70). When thinking of new ways to conceptualize ‘beauty,’ we must avoid the conventional Western mind-body split (Adelman and Ruggi 2008: 557), especially since several of the Native designers discussed in this chapter do not conceive of beauty in this sense and as only a physical trait.

At this point, it is also important to acknowledge the conventional and stereotypical universalized and essentialized notions of beauty, balance, and harmony in the common pan-Indian references to Navajo ways of thinking. While the majority of the designers themselves seem to conceive notions of beauty that derive from their particular tribal epistemologies, Native models on the other hand appear to meld Navajo philosophy and Western constructs of beauty – performing one or the other, or a combination of both, depending upon context.

When Native models discussed concepts of beauty or attractiveness, the labels ‘beautiful’ and ‘beauty’ were generally used, but these terms were utilized in two distinct ways. The first manner was by labeling the receiver as a beautiful person. The models did not directly mark a person physically as beautiful, as in “You are beautiful,” but instead they applied the term to label each other, as in “Hey beautiful.” In this sense, the entire ‘person’ was deemed attractive, not just the physical traits. The other way the label was used was to describe an approach to living life. This second way was stated in parting as a form of well-wishing. For example, one model stated, “Have a safe beautiful week.”
Another used “May you always walk in beauty.” This second statement referenced the traditional Navajo concept of *hózhó*, referring to a way of living a long, healthy, happy and fulfilling life. It comes from the stem *Øzhó*, ‘to be beautiful, peaceful, harmonious’ (Young and Morgan 1980: 459). Another Navajo term, *nizhóní*, relates to a concept of beauty. It relates to good craftsmanship and good design in aesthetic practices, and also “to be pretty, nice, beautiful, good-looking, attractive” since it comes from the stem *Øzhóní*, ‘to be pretty’ (Young and Morgan 1980: 665). While one model was Navajo, the other was Chippewa. Notably, the models also applauded those who sought traditional teachings from their tribal elders.

The models also used the labels ‘hot’ and ‘pretty’ to describe each other. These labels, which derived from mainstream American youth pop culture slang, marked physical beauty, and attributes such as being sexy or attractive, or pleasing to the eye. ‘Amazing’ was also used, which often marked admiration for positive personality traits, such as hard work, in combination with physical attractiveness. In their use of words to describe beauty, these Native models both countered and reproduced gender stereotypes (Metcalfe 2006). On the one hand, the models were determined to view their work in the modeling profession as propagating a good, or beautiful, way of life, but they still succumbed to the demands of the modeling industry, conforming to a standardized physical type. This attempt by the models to combine these value systems was probably due to a desire to both succeed in the model industry by conforming to it, while also wanting to be viewed as a positive role model in their communities.
For all designers and models, engagement with the Western fashion world is necessary, since ‘making it to the top’ entails working on an international level. Since the 1990s, non-Western fashion centers have emerged, yet Paris, Milan, London, and New York remain the most notable. Intrinsic connections within the Western fashion capitals exist, and their influence is felt throughout the industry. Theorists Miriam Adelman and Lenitta Ruggi called attention to the centrality of the West, stating that the models’ vernacular is English-based, and perhaps more importantly, “the standards of appearance that regulate the market are, to a large extent, imported, i.e. imposed by the fashion trends that originate elsewhere” (2008: 562). Therefore, fashion standards that begin in Europe and America disseminate to other points where the model demographic may look different than those at the origination point. The standards remain intact, and physical stereotyping becomes a fundamental element of the model selection process (Adelman and Ruggi 2008: 562).

Concepts of beauty are changing in the United States as well as in Native communities. The U.S. ranks the highest in the world for cosmetic surgery procedures, reflecting a significant and potentially dangerous socio-cultural obsession with appearance (Adelman and Ruggi 2008: 558). While the prevalence of cosmetic surgery among Native Americans can only be estimated, other forms of body alteration, in particular eating disorders, are on the rise, as evidenced by recent studies focusing on ethnic communities (Ellison 2000, Rosen, et al. 2006, Lee 1996). While eating disorders have been theorized as a white middle-class phenomenon, these disorders occur increasingly in ethnic communities and lower classes. Adelman and Ruggi, who
investigate Brazilian notions of beauty, identity, and gender, present an explanation as to why this increase may be occurring:

As Bordo…suggests in relation to the cult of thinness for girls and women who have been socially denied power or control over other aspects of their lives, this seems to be the thing (perhaps the only thing) over which they ‘have control’ and which can guarantee them some social status, value or appreciation (symbolic capital, as it were).

(Adelman and Ruggi 2008: 558)

Whiteness, thinness, and Romanesque features prevail as the reigning indicators of beauty in the fashion model world. Fashion models are considered central players in maintaining and reproducing the contemporary culture of beauty (Adelman and Ruggi 2008: 561). If this statement is true, then is it possible for Native fashion designers to successfully question the current culture of beauty and offer alternatives through their designs and model selection? Can they destabilize the Western beauty construct?

Fashion giant Jean Paul Gaultier stated, “There is not only one idea of beauty. There are different kinds of beauty. That is exactly what I try to show in my collections. There are people coming from other places that don’t have a Greek look but can be beautiful” (Altman 1994). In this statement, Gaultier noted that other ideas of beauty exist, but nonetheless he marked the ‘Greek look’ as the standard against which beauty is measured. In this way, ‘beauty’ is perceived as an innate characteristic and a biological truth; it is something people are born with rather than a social construction (Adelman and Ruggi 2008: 566).

One final point made by Adelman and Ruggi is that models are expected to be silent; they explained “not much is actually required of a model in terms of creativity or initiative” (2008: 565). This assertion is countered by what Tarrell Awe Agahe Portman
and Roger D. Herring state are the traditional roles of Native women: “In addition to leadership roles in many Native American Indian nations and tribes, women were responsible for keeping the oral traditions alive and passing them on to the future generations” (2001: 188). Herein lies what would appear to be an inherent contradiction for Native participants: the silent model, or walking ‘hanger,’ versus the leader or cultural carrier and creative thinker. Armed with a traditional concept of ‘beauty,’ Native designers of high fashion, along with their models, have the potential to destroy this perceived incompatibility.

II. 1960s: The Indian Arts and Crafts Board Funds Native Fashion

While the story told in this chapter begins in the 1970s, several precursors led to the development of this Native fashion movement and it is important to note that Native women have always played a central role in producing various forms of fashionable clothing for members of their communities. By the 1960s, Native women were making garments for the Indian Arts and Crafts Board (IABC), a federal agency established in the 1930s to promote the economic development of Native peoples through the arts. After federal policies shifted from termination and relocation programs toward economic development programs on reservations, the IACB increasingly supported the production of Indian-made garments, which married the aesthetic concepts of design with the utilitarian concepts of function. Several of these garments were subsequently collected by the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution Cultural Resources Center. The following is a short list of several items collected in the 1960s by NMAI: a
Winnebago skirt (1961), a stole made by Pueblo artist Lorencita Bird (1962), a Seminole peasant blouse (1964), an turquoise blue and orange outfit made by Juanita Lee (1964), a dress made by Choctaw clothier Rosie Lee Stene (1965), a vest made by Cherokee artist Roxie Stamper (1965), Mary Morel Red Eagle’s Osage wedding outfit (1966), a Seneca skirt and leggings (1968), and a Potawatomi stroud skirt (1968).

This collection of attire derived from a variety of tribes, from the Southwest to the Plains, Great Lakes, and Southeast regions, and all the garments combined traditional clothing design motifs and styles with contemporary materials and cuts. The designers exhibited knowledge of traditional designs and respect for contemporary creativity. Juanita Lee’s dress, for example, is a one-piece turquoise outfit patterned after the then-trendy A-line straight silhouette, bordered with orange embroidery thread and Pueblo kilt designs. The dress was accessorized with a matching scarf and ‘basket’ purse. The combination of a trendy silhouette, with Pueblo embroidery designs and bright vivid colors, relayed a modern Southwest style.

This ensemble could have been designed with the new Native woman in mind – one participating in the youth clubs or Native advocacy groups forming in the late 1950s and 1960s, such as the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), the American Indian Movement (AIM), or the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC). Each group infused Indianness into their wardrobe, which was also informed by corresponding American fashion. For example, NCAI’s political look included suits and headdresses, which referenced their roles as leaders in both ‘Indian’ and ‘American’ terms. AIM’s rebel fashion featured bold red headbands and vests emblazoned with Indian design
motifs. Ribbon shirts also became popular, and men and women alike grew their hair long and some even dyed it black. They wore markers on their bodies that would clearly identify them as Native American while bringing Indian rights issues to the attention of the federal government and American public. Native people were joined by non-Natives who also wanted to identify themselves with the American Indian cause. In the late 1960s, the Indian style had seeped into popular fashion: people in the San Francisco Haight-Ashbury district wore serapes, headbands, and moccasins, exhibiting their identification with Indigenous cultures (Hall 1968: 5). There are several references to this phenomenon, which is reiterating itself currently. Long straight hair was also in vogue and symbolized a rejection of high maintenance and costly hair styles.

III. 1970s Indian Style in Indian Country

Located far from the hot fashion centers of New York City and Los Angeles, a movement of Native women fashion designers living in Indian Country developed in the 1970s. Jewel Gilham (Blackfeet) and Remonia Jacobsen (Otoe/Iowa) were just two of these women who designed chic ‘Contemporary Indian Fashion’ from their home communities in Montana, Oklahoma, and Colorado. They created custom-made contemporary garments featuring Native American tribal motifs as well as traditional styles and accessories for use on special occasions. For one designer, the trendy go-go boots and disco miniskirt served as inspiration for a mini buckskin dress, for another, white vinyl became a new alternative to leather. They also drew inspiration from powwow fashion and undoubtedly added to it. Gilham and Jacobsen were promoted by
the Indian Arts and Crafts Board, which created brochures for their garments, while other
designers crafted their own pamphlets for mailing to potential clients or handing out at
powwows or conferences to a primarily Native market.

Jewel Salois Gilham (Blackfeet) was born in 1931 in Browning, Montana, and
was educated in the Browning public school system. She learned sewing when she was
young, and taught herself creative design in fashion. By the age of 30, she had become
more serious about clothing design, and her first fashion show was held during the
Like others at this time, Gilham’s targeted client base included Native female advocates
and conference participants. Within five years of her first fashion show, she displayed her
‘Contemporary Indian Fashions’ at events in Idaho, Arizona, Montana, and Washington.
In 1977, she was purported to be “one of the most outstanding fashion designers among
the Northern Plains Indian tribes today” (Indian Arts and Crafts Board 1977: 2).

About her work, she stated,

My work has brought me a satisfaction and fulfillment that is surpassed
only by the pleasure I feel that it brings to other people that view it. When
I create an original and know that no one else will ever have one exactly
like it probably gives me the ultimate in satisfaction. It’s something that I
know only I can do. My fashions are contemporary but my designs are
original Indian designs from tribes all over the United States.

(Indian Arts and Crafts Board 1977: 1)

Gilham focused on constructing unique contemporary garments with modern silhouettes
and materials infused with Native American aesthetic designs. She created polyester
dresses with appliqué designs, ribbon shirts, and men’s vests, one of which had a peace
pipe design, attesting to her responsiveness to include popular culture imagery in her
work. In the summer of 1977, a fashion exhibit of her designs was held at the Museum of the Plains Indian and Crafts Center in Browning, Montana, and supported by the Indian Arts and Crafts Board.

Gilham refused offers to commercialize her garments through mass production. Instead, she wanted her fashion work to be a hobby rather than a “time consuming and demanding job which would not allow any free time for her home and family” (Indian Arts and Crafts Board 1977: 1). With ten children and eight grandchildren by the time she was 46, Gilham’s family was a central component of her life. About her work and her family, she explained, “The fashion shows are a part of my work, and have been very successful with the help and cooperation of my family, who enjoy it as much as I do. I would never have been able to do it without them” (Indian Arts and Crafts Board 1977: 1). Gilham was able to include her relatives in her shows, and balance her home life with her career.

As Nancy J. Parezo pointed out in her book on Navajo sandpainting, new economic opportunities that allowed individuals to remain in their home communities have tended to be readily accepted as legitimate job options for numerous reasons (1983: 7, 146). Several of the Native female designers shared Gilham’s concern that commercialization of their work might compromise their kin relationships and community obligations. To negotiate this situation, they included family and community members in their work as assistants, consultants, and models. In this way, the designers secured adequate help, which was required of fashion shows, while at the same time fostering a sense of community and achievement, which was a common strategy for
mothers during this time. Other artists of this time period utilized this economic model to redistribute money to family members and balance production and sales, which would allow the artists to live at home with family and obtain income when needed (Parez 1983). As Comanche art historian Nancy M. Mithlo explained,

Native women often express a commitment to cultural expression and continuity in the arts rather than solely economic gain. This value informs their movement in and out of commercial contexts as other economic opportunities arise or as family or community demands shift.

(Mithlo 2008: 52)

This act of balancing career with family, kin, and community responsibilities was an important point for all artists.

Gilham, like the other designers discussed in this chapter, promoted tribal sovereignty and self-determination through their work. As Mithlo stated, “Native women artists create sites of knowledge production; they enact a cultural identity that embraces the communal… This procultural act ensures that Native women and their communities receive continued acknowledgement as sovereign entities” (2008: 11). Native female designers are pro-culture, pro-Indian, and pro-tribal in their production and reproduction of knowledge, and they embrace a communal sense of identity, which reaffirms the status of unique Native nations. The work of these artists and designers interrogates the lines between the individual and the communal and the traditional and the modern, and collapses any perception of a clean division (Mithlo 2008: 33).

Growing up in Oklahoma, Remonia Jacobsen (Otoe/Iowa) attended several public schools as well as the Pawnee and Chilocco Indian Schools. Like Gilham, Jacobsen started sewing at a young age, and defined herself as ‘self-taught,’ improving her skills in
design over the years. One of the main vehicles for Jacobsen’s fashion design self-apprenticeship was to create her daughters’ powwow dance outfits. After moving from Oklahoma to Colorado in the mid-1970s, Jacobsen became increasingly interested in pursuing fashion design as a career and decided to develop her own business. She pursued certificates in small business development and management, and began presenting her work through fashion shows, event lectures, and television programs. For over two years, Jacobsen participated in a television special, on channel KKTV in Colorado Springs, devoted to broadcasting programs on Indian culture (Southern Plains Indian Museum and Crafts Center n.d.: 1). Largely motivated by the desire to share her culture with others for educational purposes, Jacobsen built a successful company and imparted to others the dynamic nature of Indian innovation through her numerous programs and presentations.

Jacobsen was also involved in civic and Indian affairs, participating in a number of community activities. She co-founded one of the area’s Inter-tribal Indian Clubs, and served on a number of advisory councils for alcoholism, affirmative action, human relations, and Native American issues. Jacobsen was active in the powwow scene, and assisted with organizing and hosting the local powwows in Colorado. She noted that female members of her family were bestowed the honor of wearing traditional Kiowa and Jicarilla Apache dresses at tribal events, even though they were Otoe and Iowa. She created these outfits, and thus became well-versed in a variety of different tribal traditional garment-making techniques and styles. She distributed her fashion designs through outlets in New York, Washington, D.C., Oklahoma, Kansas, New Mexico,

About Native fashion, Jacobsen stated,

> Indian fashion is very much alive and real today. Both the Indian person and the non-Indian person are keenly aware of the Indian concepts of simplicity, durability, versatility and beauty shown in the fashion. I try to relay these concepts in the fashions I design. Using a traditional theme, I develop a fashion for today.

(Southern Plains Indian Museum and Crafts Center n.d.: 1)

Her first sentence marked Native fashion as dynamic and authentic. Perhaps responding to the trendy Natural Style of the 1970s, she connected her designs to the then-favorable attributes of being both down-to-earth and back-to-earth (Welters 2008). Jacobsen both played on and challenged the stereotypes of Indians as close to and in touch with nature.

The majority of Jacobsen’s garments were long loose-fitting dresses featuring Sioux, Otoe, Iowa, Seminole, Kiowa, and Pueblo designs, decorative techniques, and silhouettes. She also created a long dress with a halter top and stole embroidered with Otoe and Iowa style ribbonwork, a floor-length skirt and blouse adorned with Seminole appliqué, and a buckskin miniskirt with contemporary Kiowa leggings. She made a wedding dress and bridesmaid’s dress with designs inspired by an old photograph of her grandmother’s wedding, and incorporated traditional Otoe ribbonwork. She also created a floor-length manta-style dress with a thin strip of ribbonwork along the top, and a bikini bathing suit with wrap-around skirt decorated with Seminole-style patchwork (Southern Plains Indian Museum and Crafts Center n.d.: 1). By the late 1970s, Gilham and Jacobsen
demonstrated how Native women could take fashion in new directions, while still retaining their essential identity symbols.

Native American fashion designers in the 1970s were predominantly, if not entirely, women. These designers created appliqué dresses, ribbon shirts, and vests for Native and non-Native men and women. Gilham sold her work at professional conferences, and held community fashion shows that were made possible through the assistance of her family. Jacobsen participated in powwows and worked with advocacy groups. Being active in community organizations, the designers were aware of a new client: the active Native female advocate, which was essentially themselves.

Their garments for women were primarily longer dresses, decorated with creative appliqué designs from various tribal traditions. These designers felt free to use design elements from numerous cultures. Beauty meant wearing garments that were feminine (a dress), yet not too constricting in construction (loose-fitting), and decorated with embellishments that would relay a proud tribal or pan-Indian identity. A miniskirt made of buckskin was also an option for the younger females who wanted to wear a dress featuring the new liberating skirt length, yet would also express their Native American tribal affiliation.

According to fashion professor Linda Welters, the Natural Style that dominated the 1970s was influenced in part by black pride, feminism, and the Indian rights movement (2008: 499). As previously stated, this Natural Style featured hand-made and ethnic garments. American Indian appliqué work and ribbonwork design transferred easily to this trend, which featured styles based upon macramé and quilt patchwork.
Hippies or individuals of the counterculture who identified with or sympathized with the American Indian movement expressed this sentiment on their clothing and wore fringed leather vests, moccasins, beaded headbands, Indian-made silver and turquoise jewelry, and ‘love-bead’ necklaces and chokers (Welters 2008: 499), which have all experienced a renaissance lately.

Gilham and Jacobsen’s work, which would have appeared fashionable since it related to counterculture trends, was popular among Native people because it reaffirmed group solidarity and authenticity. While in the 1950s, Native people wore popular American trends of the time to express post-war American national conformity, and even styled their hair accordingly, they increasingly began wearing their Indian identity on their sleeves in the 1960s and 1970s. Members of Native organizations and clubs expressed their affiliation through clothing, accessories, and hairstyles.

For Native people in urban areas during the 1970s, pan-Indianism was expected to supplant individual tribal senses of identity, knowledge, and connection (Mithlo 2008: 64). It was feared by some that pan-Indianism could lead to a loss of self-determination; however, as Nancy Mithlo explained, it was used variously as a means of locating the self (2008: 65). Pan-Indianism played an important role as a communicative device and a political tool, since it relayed political power in the form of self-representation. This action is evidenced by the proliferation of clothing styles such as the ribbon shirt. However, these pan-Indianized garments did not completely replace a more ‘tribally specific’ sense of attire, and instead, these new forms added to the repertoire.
Several Native American women emerged as key activists, educators, and leaders. For example, Wilma Mankiller, LaDonna Harris, and Rayna Green became spokespersons for their tribes or for Indian people in general, and, through their biographies and writings, they continue to affect the way we think about Native women today. They sought diligently, whether intentionally or not, to erase the stereotypes of Native women that would define them as princesses or drudges. As Rayna Green stated in her seminal 1988 article, “Native women have been neither neglected nor forgotten…but…the level and substance of most passion for them has been selective, stereotyped and damaging” (1988: 1). The historic process of selecting and promoting certain imagery of Native women reflected and served non-Native ideologies and purposes. Cherokee leader, educator, and activist Wilma Mankiller further explained, “The power, strength, and complexity of indigenous women are rarely acknowledged or recognized” (Mankiller 2004: 8). Leaders stood up to present and promote an ideal that reflected certain American Indian values to serve Native communities.

IV. Margaret Wood: Writing the Book on Native Fashion

Other Native women also started their own fashion companies. In the 1970s, Margaret Wood (Navajo/Seminole) was compiling sketches and notes on clothing in the Denver Art Museum that would be the basis for her book, *Native American Fashion: Modern Adaptations of Traditional Designs*. It was published in 1981 when she opened her fashion company in Arizona. Over twenty-five years later, her book’s opening sentence still rings true; she stated, “Although there has recently been widespread interest
in Native American arts and crafts, little attention has been paid to Native American
decorative clothing” (Wood 1981: 5). Wood’s book remains the only one to focus on
Native contemporary fashion. Written from the perspective of a designer, her book
demonstrated, through instructions and images, how traditional Native clothing could be
updated, or, in her words, modernized, to be wearable today. She also demonstrated how
contemporary popular trends could be ‘Indianized’ with tribally-inspired elements such
as symbols, design motifs and materials. While her book’s examples focused on 1970s
popular fashion trends, the principles that she provided could be applied today and into
the future (figure 14).

Wood was born in Parker, Arizona and lived most of her life in Arizona. She was
one of three children and taught herself to sew (Story 1979). As a child growing up on the
Navajo reservation, she sewed little doll dresses, which were versions of the store-bought
doll clothes that she did not have access to (Fauntleroy 1993). Wood’s mother also
sewed, “putting to practical use the sewing skills she learned at the mission school where
she’d been sent as a young girl” (Fauntleroy 1993), and she created quilts and
contemporary versions of Navajo and Seminole clothes for Margaret. Wood followed her
mother’s example and created garments based on styles and design elements of Native
origin from her tribal background.

Wood was not always a clothing designer, though, and obtained her Bachelors
degree in Elementary Education from Arizona State University in Tempe, and her
Master’s degree in Library Science from the University of Denver in the early 1970s. She
worked as a teacher and librarian in Window Rock, Fort Defiance, Tsaile, and Phoenix.
She began designing and making clothing for herself when she was an elementary school teacher on the Navajo Reservation because she could not find clothing that adequately expressed her identity as a Native person. She explained, “I had started (the clothing) business as an outlet for my creativity” (Fauntleroy 1993). As a teacher, she would wear her garments on Fridays along with Native jewelry. She explained, “It was a way of looking Indian and in their minds reinforcing the fact that they were Indian and should be proud” (Fauntleroy 1993). The commonly seen bumper sticker of the time was ‘Indian and Proud,’ which played off of the common Black power slogan, ‘Black and Proud,’ and demonstrated the act of Indianizing and reclaiming identities, as well as the intersections with other forms of American pop culture. Wood made the connection: through what she wore she could express pride in Indian identity and serve as a positive role model. Her garments were inspired by Navajo, Seminole, and other tribal clothing traditions that she read about or researched. These garments informed, or reinforced, students’ knowledge about Native designs and clothing.

Wood’s intentions for her book were threefold: to create contemporary versions of Native clothing designs and styles, to reveal Native women as talented, creative, and innovative, and to encourage Native youth to continue their tribal clothing practices (Wood 1981: 5). For these purposes, her book included cultural information, historical examples from the Denver Art Museum, and instructions on how to create contemporary versions. Wood stated, “I hope that my book and fashions will encourage young Native Americans to participate and preserve the clothing heritage of our peoples” (Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian 1986). She included garments inspired by a variety of
tribal traditions; she researched the designs, symbols, and motifs, and offered options for the reader to create garments that would distinguish the chosen tribes (Weston-Ben 1995:1).

To modernize traditional styles, Wood researched various collections, including the dresses from the Denver Art Museum and those used in Frederic H. Douglas’ Indian Fashion Shows of the 1940s. She incorporated a variety of tribal styles and designs, and spent time researching and visiting other tribes to learn about the history and culture behind the symbols and motifs in order to strengthen the integrity of her book (Fauntleroy 1993). Wood provided a regionalized sweep of cultural diversity, based on culture areas and the work of Douglas for the Denver Art Museum and the Indian Fashion Show (Parezo 1998, 2007). Throughout her book, Wood incorporated images from the Denver Art Museum’s Native garment collection as inspiration for her adaptations. These garments included the Western Apache camp dress, Pueblo kilt, Seminole patchwork blouse and skirt, and Iroquois skirt.

The first section in Wood’s book focused on Navajo clothing styles. She presented background information and a brief history, then provided instructions on how to create a contemporary Navajo blanket dress. She also offered instructions on how to create garments such as a tiered Navajo-style skirt and blouse, which were updated to look chic in the 1970s and 1980s. Other garments in this chapter included a Navajo Wedding Basket pants suit, which Indianized the then-popular pants suit with a two-color stair-step motif that Wood stated could be appliquéd to almost any garment, including ready-made clothing, making it possible for anyone to ‘Indianize’ their wardrobe (1981:}
21). Wood also drew inspiration from contemporary fashion design and effectively Indianized high fashion styles such as Halston’s 1976 shirtwaist dress. By “broomstick-pleating” this dress, Wood created a cotton knee-length Navajo-style skirt. She followed this basic outline for each chapter, offering relevant historical and cultural background information on a particular tribe and its clothing traditions, and then providing instructions on how to create modern versions of these garments or how to use tribal design motifs to Indianize an outfit.

The second and third chapters of the book spotlighted Western Apache and Pueblo clothing styles. She offered instructions to make a Western Apache camp dress, which is an Indian version of the Victorian “Mother Hubbard” dress consisting of a full gathered, cotton skirt and loose blouse of the same material with ribbonwork on the blouse and repeating horizontal ribbon bands on the skirt (Paterek 1994: 154). This camp dress was updated by using satin, shortening the length on the top, and slimming the skirt. Wood’s chapter on Pueblo clothing described how to make a manta-style top; a kilt adaptation, which was traditionally male attire; a Pueblo-style shirt and slacks outfit, which was adapted from the Spaniards by the Pueblo males; and a Pueblo-style skirt, which Wood made as a black wool wrap-around skirt pinned with silver conchos. The manta was updated with a tailored fit around the waist, and the wrap-around skirt and pants suit were decorated with Pueblo design motifs and accessorized with a thinner version of the Pueblo rain sash. Wood crossed gender boundaries by using silhouettes of Pueblo men’s attire that would translate to contemporary women’s fashion. Like women
of the past, Wood also demonstrated how tried and true styles could be updated simply by using new fabric or by slightly altering the silhouette.

In the section on Seminole clothing styles, Wood featured patchwork, capes, and military coat-like garments. In many chapters, she noted how the clothes were no longer worn for everyday purposes but were now reserved for special occasions and ceremonies. However, she explained that the garments could be updated with new materials like satin or other shiny fabrics for use as everyday professional or special occasion wear. Her Seminole garments focused on the intricate technique of patchwork, and she offered five sample patchwork patterns and suggestions for finishing the patchwork bands. Then she provided instructions on how to make a Seminole military coat adaptation, a fully-patchworked skirt, as well as a patchwork-trimmed skirt and shirts for those who have less time to devote to sewing intricate patterns.

The fifth chapter focused on Iroquois clothing decoration styles, and after recounting the decline of Iroquois dress, she stated, “With the increase in Native American awareness in the past two decades, however, the Iroquois have been trying to recreate their traditional styles. Today, the costumes worn by the Iroquois at special occasions reflect the old, distinctive styles and decoration” (Wood 1981: 69). Wood suggested that an increased awareness of Native cultures and a greater acceptance of cultural diversity and uniqueness facilitated resurgence in tradition practices. Wood provided instructions on how to create a black wrap-around skirt, on which she added white Iroquoian beaded border decorations, such as lace-like or floral designs. She also demonstrated how a shirt dress or blouse could be embellished with “authentic Iroquois
shirt decorations” in floral motifs (Wood 1981: 73). Wood provided several decoration templates for options and demonstrated that minimal sewing skills were required to Indianize a wardrobe. Skill was not a prerequisite for these garments, just the desire to wear Native American tribal styles and decorative motifs.

Wood focused Great Lakes area clothing styles on ribbon shirts and ribbonwork. It is important to note that Native fashion designers, as evidenced by Wood’s diverse work, tried to become more than pan-Indian or stereotypically-Indian by focusing on styles that came from many tribes. First introduced by the traders, ribbons were quickly adopted into Native American traditional practices, such as decorating objects for ceremonial offering. Ribbons were also appliquéd onto clothing, sometimes using a mirror-image design with ribbons of contrasting colors (Paterek 1994: 45). Wood provided instructions on how to create a ribbon shirt, offering over ten examples of the “myriad of ways in which ribbons can be used to decorate shirts” (Wood 1981: 79). She also demonstrated how ribbonwork panels could be applied to various garments, in this case a caftan, and she provided four different design patterns to use, such as the double-headed arrow pattern (Wood 1981: 87).

Wood stated, “Plains tribal clothing styles have become the dominant image of ‘Indianness’” (Wood 1981: 91). Heavily beaded and fringed with leather, the attractiveness of Plains style was strengthened, she believed, by the highly publicized pan-Indian movement and popularization of the Indian Style in fashion. Chapter seven focused on Plains tribal clothing styles, in particular buckskin and wool dresses. Wood offered instructions on creating a Plains-style fringe-decorated long wool skirt, with a
variety of possible arrangements for suede fringe decoration. She also demonstrated how to create a Plains-style cowry shell outfit and a velveteen dress with a neckline decorated with dentalium shells.

Noting the importance of cedar, Wood began her eighth chapter on Northwest Coast tribal clothing styles by describing the women’s cedar bark skirt, which was made from softened strips of bark. Her instructions for designing a simple modern version of the cedar bark dress called for the use of a coarsely woven fabric such as raw silk in a natural color to replicate the ‘look’ of cedar bark. While Wood’s version was longer than a traditional calf-length cedar dress, she nonetheless secured the dress in the traditional Northwest Coast way, wrapping it under the left arm and securing it over the right shoulder thus sustaining the simple silhouette of the cedar bark dress (Wood 1981: 108-109). Wood also provided directions on how to make a button blanket (Wood 1981: 110). For the blanket decoration, she suggested researching books or museum catalogues for design ideas (Wood 1981: 113), such as the Thunderbird image that she replicated from an 1890 blanket from the Denver Art Museum collection (1981: 107). Wood explained,

Present-day use of designs on button blankets has changed, as these and other products are made for commercial sale. At one time, certain designs, usually representations of animals, were considered family crests and could be used only by members of the family who owned them. With the breakdown in culture and extended family structure, the use of designs is now less stringent. Present-day artists use Northwest-style designs as they choose, selecting them for their artistic appeal.

(Wood 1981: 106)

Due to increased commercialization, she explained, these family crests were no longer considered to be ‘owned’ as they had in the past, and at the time Wood wrote her book,
the use of crests was considered flexible and accessible (1981: 106). Since then, however, Northwest Coast clans have reasserted ownership and use of designs is tribally regulated.

Wood’s final chapter focused on fabrics screen-printed with Native designs. She stated,

> For many years, any mention of ‘Indian design motifs’ brought to mind silhouetted images of teepees, buffalo, thunderbirds, and occasional crisscrossed arrows for many people. Recently, a few enterprising individuals have recognized the wealth of design motifs used for centuries by Native Americans in weaving, basketry, pottery, and beadwork. These people, some of Native American descent, have begun hand-printing cloth with attractive design motifs for sale by the yard.

(Wood 1981: 118)

Similar to Lloyd Kiva New and Wendy Ponca, Wood also confronted stereotypes, especially those which conjured up images of ‘teepees, buffalo, thunderbirds, and arrows.’ She explained that exciting original designs in fabrics were sold throughout the Southwest, and could be ordered through the mail. The majority of the designs were copyrighted, and occasionally, she noted, large companies produced Native design fabrics, in the form of bed sheets or curtains to sell nationwide (Wood 1981: 118). Wood suggested using these fabrics to create garments in simple classic styles and silhouettes, so that the garment could be worn for several years (Wood 1981: 120).

One design, called Rolling Rocks was produced by Dendahl’s, Inc. of Santa Fe. This black and rust color pottery design was printed on natural-color homespun cotton. Another fabric pattern by Maridadi West, Inc. in Fort Collins, Colorado, was derived from a prehistoric pottery motif. Called *Sityatka*, it was an ancestral Hopi style and featured a single elaborate symbol enlarged and painted in brown on neutrally colored homespun cotton (Wood 1981: 120). The incorporation of these designs demonstrated
how Native American pottery motifs easily translated to the world of graphic art. Wood also featured a design fabric by Navajo owned and operated Nizhonie, Inc., of Cortez, Colorado. Their Two Gray Hills design was adapted from the intricate Navajo rug of the same name. It was printed with black ink on a gray polyester and cotton blend fabric (Wood 1981: 120). Unfortunately, by the time the second edition of Wood’s book was published in 1997, each of these companies had gone out of business (Wood 1981: 122). Once again, to reiterate the point made by both Parezo and Mithlo, the fact that these businesses were no longer in operation does not relay an accurate sense of whether or not these ventures were successful, since a commitment to cultural expression and continuity in the arts, rather than only economic gain, informed the movement in and out of commercial contexts as other opportunities arise or community demands shift (Mithlo 2008: 52, Parezo 1983: 7).

While Wood’s garments were modern adaptations, her book also offered insight into the history of Indian fashion. Though her book lent itself to the occasional generalization or stereotype, for example referring to the Apache as “fierce warriors of the Southwest,” the book offered invaluable information on the creation of garments. Perhaps most important, it demonstrated that Native clothing was fashion, in the sense that it was creative in the past, and it continues to be a means of creative expression today. Throughout the book, Wood maintained that clothing was intricately tied to aesthetics. She stated “Some are strikingly simple, others are extremely elaborate, but all are works of art” (Wood 1981: 5). These garments should be viewed as aesthetic creations themselves or as a canvas on which to display unique tribal designs and
embellishments. Like other art forms, wearable art experienced change. Wood pointed out, “Native American clothing design has not been a static art” (1981: 5). Her examples demonstrated a constant evolution in design before and after contact. Her modifications were but a continuation of a long established process (Wood 1981: 5).

The patterns Wood used were those she deemed “classic contemporary dress styles” (Wood 1981: 6) and she chose examples based on the ease with which they could be adapted for contemporary wear (Wood 1981: 6). She stated, “Southwest costumes are generally easier to adapt,” a claim she based on the tribes’ long use of cotton and wool, and their historical isolation in developing unique tribal styles. Another reason for her emphasis on Southwest clothing was because of the rise in popularity of Navajo, Hopi, and Zuni jewelry styles in the 1970s. Wood explained that many individuals who were new to this trend did not know how to properly wear Indian accessories. She used her book to suggest options for attractive ways to wear necklaces, earrings, belts and bracelets. She stated, “I keep the lines simple and make fashions to show off the Indian jewelry” (Story 1979). In this way, however, the clothing becomes the accessory, or backdrop, for jewelry. On the other hand, it was a means to get non-Native people who were already interested in Indian jewelry to become interested in Native clothing designs other than the popular stereotyped styles.

In 1981, after launching her book, she founded Native American Fashions, Inc. in Phoenix, and she spent the early 1980s running her business and creating clothing and fabric art. Wood’s innovative and unique work in the world of Native fashion offers a bridge between traditional clothing practices and contemporary Native fashion design.
Margaret Wood continues to work in the fabric arts, mainly creating quilt art which she sells regularly at the Heard Museum Guild Indian Fair and Market in Phoenix every spring.

V. The 1980s Indian Style in Indian Country Expands

Throughout the 1980s, Native women designers, including Margaret Wood, Margaret Roach Wheeler, and others, displayed independently at many fashion shows and exhibitions throughout the country, and even internationally. The 1980s saw the establishment of several new fashion businesses run by Native women. Jeanette Ferrara (Isleta) established her business in 1982, creating coats and vests made from wool, velvet, and cotton, and Ardina Moore (Quapaw/Osage) launched her clothing company, Buffalo Sun, in Oklahoma in 1983. In Montana, Luanne Belcourt (Chippewa-Cree) and Myrtle Raining Bird (Chippewa-Cree) promoted their company, called Sitting Eagles, based out of Rocky Boy. In 1983, their brochure contained sketches of clothing for men, women, and children.

Belcourt and Raining Bird created a variety of garments that could be tailored to a client’s request. With their work, we see more evidently the collaboration that exists between a designer and a client. Prices depended upon the type of material, size, and amount of detailing requested. They created buckskin vests with beadwork starting at $80, buckskin belts for $40, buckskin blouse and skirt outfits starting at $200, cloth ribbonwork skirt and shirt outfits for $85, ribbon shirts for $20-$100, woolen ponchos with designs for $120, cloth vest and skirt outfits starting at $80, and pants for $30-$80.
They also created belts, beaded buckles, moccasins, and purses, which sold for $30-$120 each (Belcourt and Raining Bird 1983). Their ability to custom tailor their designs, coupled with their higher prices and material choices such as buckskin, suggests their garments were meant for special occasion or for a professional or middle class client base. In addition, the preponderance of female garments suggests that Belcourt and Raining Bird, like many other designers, focused on creating women’s attire.

In 1986, non-Native anthropologist-turned-clothier Helene Hagan opened a boutique in California, selling garments made by twenty-five Lakota seamstresses from Rosebud and Pine Ridge, South Dakota. She sold silk and satin shirts, stoles, vests and dresses designed by Lakota Sioux female designers, and the garments were infused with Lakota tribal designs, in particular those from star quilts. The individual pieces were priced between $65 and $300, depending on the intricacy of the design. Hagan encouraged American designers to look to the symbols and color combinations used by Native people. This sentiment is shared by supporters of the current movement of Native fashion. It is unknown if Hagan charged a fee for selling the garments in California – far from the Rosebud and Pine Ridge reservations. If she was like most merchants, she probably sold the garments for double the price that she gave the producers, and this difference would cover mailing or transportation costs, advertising and wages (Parezo 1983). Like all good traders before her, Hagan promoted the garments as infused with meaning and carrying symbolic power. Parezo explained, “Merchants discovered that Anglo customers would more readily buy Indian art if they emphasized its religious origins and symbolic nature” (1983: 184). Indian art sold for higher prices if it was
deemed ‘spiritual.’ Hagan stated, “They [the garments] each have a meaning…they’re very spiritual” (Leighty 1986: 8M). She marketed the clothing as sacred or religious, which is currently considered taboo by contemporary Native designers. The success of this venture by Hagan is unknown; however, years later, one of the Lakota designers, Geraldine Sherman, was recognized by the state of South Dakota for her achievements in the arts (Testerman 2000).

Margaret Roach Wheeler (Choctaw/Chickasaw) explained that she had always approached her weaving as an artist approaches a canvas. This clothing-as-art perspective was developing in the 1980s and 1990s and forecasted a future of Native designers working in wearable art. In the 1990s, Wheeler focused on creating visionary woven sculptures, effectively combining wearable fabric with fabric art to create a unique form of wearable art (figure 15). Through her work, Wheeler blurred the boundaries between fashion and performance. During this busy decade, Wheeler was spotlighted in numerous museum and gallery exhibitions, one-woman shows, fashion shows, and fashion symposia.

In the late 1980s, Native designers began working collaboratively for exhibits and events. In 1986, the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian in Santa Fe hosted *Talking Threads: Contemporary Native American Fashions*. This exhibit demonstrated the connection between clothing design, storytelling, and cultural reproduction. The honored designers included Margaret Roach Wheeler (Choctaw/Chickasaw), Joyce Begay Foss (Navajo), Loretta Tah-Martin (Apache/Ponca), Michelle Tsosie Naranjo (Santa Clara/Navajo/Laguna/Mission), and Margaret Wood (Navajo/Seminole). Wheeler
stated, “I believe that a person is an art form in themselves and in the way they lead their lives” (Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian 1986). This philosophy expressed itself in her art and garments. Their ability to create a buzz for Native fashion led to more frequent annual fashion shows and museum events. Designers such as Margaret Wood and Margaret Roach Wheeler have been featured in several museum and gallery exhibits, and have served as consultants for a variety of projects as well.

In Oklahoma in 1987, a group of community members and tribal leaders founded the Red Earth American Indian Cultural Festival to showcase Native American dance and art. To open the celebration, a group hosted *Fashion Drums of Red Earth*. The event featured designs by noted New York fashion designer Michael Kors and several emerging and established Oklahoma designers, including garments from the Fife Collection, based in Morris, Oklahoma and created by Creek designer Phyllis Fife. The collection reflected her heritage and drew inspiration from other Southeast tribes. The chairman of the Fashion Drums group declared, “We are presenting a unique showing of fashion which haven’t been seen in Oklahoma before in such a presentation” (Gilmore 1987: 1). Fashion Drums spotlighted Native designers next to recognized American designers to clarify the connection between Native clothing and mainstream fashion.

The luncheon showing of contemporary clothing by Native designers from Oklahoma and other states continued to be staged yearly. In 1991, the annual event opened with a parade of seven prestigious tribal leaders who modeled their dresses. Each served as an officer in her tribe. After this opening, garments for day, evening, sports and special events were modeled. One reporter stated, “We hasten to say that these are not
costumes but are real clothes that can be worn at home, at work, at play, anywhere”
(Gilmore 1991). These garments were inspired by special occasion attire but made
wearable for everyday use by the noted designs. The event was meant to be an elite
experience and a charity fundraiser. Admission was charged and proceeds from ticket
sales benefited Red Earth and other American Indian service programs. The designs were
displayed during a fashion show over an ‘Indian motif’ luncheon with sassafras tea,
nokehicks Indian cookies and a silent auction (Gilmore 1987). Patta LT Joest (Choctaw),
an award-winning designer, participated in the annual event, showing the designs she
created for her fashion business based out of Norman. Margaret Roach Wheeler
(Choctaw/Chickasaw) also participated in the Red Earth fashion show, presenting her
Mahota line, which merged her skills in weaving with her heritage to create finely woven
contemporary garments based in part upon various samples of traditional Native attire.

VI. Indian Fashion as Valid Alternative to Express Beauty

Marjorie Bear Don’t Walk (Chippewa/Salish), owner of Bear Don’t Walk
Originals based out of Montana, created clothing for professional women in the 1980s
using a variety of resources including Vogue sewing patterns. Bear Don’t Walk, a
professional herself, advocated for improved health and educational programs, and
became a main source of designer clothes for her colleagues. Indeed, in the late 1970s,
“career women began to take center stage” (Welters 2008: 507), so the timing was right
for Bear Don’t Walk and her associates with their Indian-influenced professional attire to
be recognized as the new image of Native nations. Bear Don’t Walk’s intricate handwork
and quality materials attracted a high-end client base. Like other Native designers, she was knowledgeable about traditional American Indian appliqué techniques as well as cognizant of the latest trends in American fashion. She combined these two aspects of successful clothing design and translated them into a type of Western high-end couture. Bear Don’t Walk displayed her new garments as trunk shows at conferences. Her client base included friends and colleagues, and promotion of her clothing was accomplished mainly through word of mouth.

Bear Don’t Walk created shirts, tunics, dresses, coats, jackets, and vests, along with accessories such as jewelry, purses, and belts. She embellished her garments with ribbon, beads, bone, hide, appliqué, Indian-head plated or old nickel or dime buttons, and various furs, such as mink, otter, or ermine tails. In her distribution flyer, Bear Don’t Walk noted the difficulty of finding high quality materials in remote locations like Montana, and stated that clients could also send specific fabrics to her if they desired. By knowing her clients’ body measurements and general preferences in fabrics, colors, and dress styles, Bear Don’t Walk could create custom clothing through postal mail correspondence, and she could provide her clients with high-quality apparel regardless of where they lived. Using this commission work strategy, Bear Don’t Walk could expand her client base outside of Montana.

As one of her clients explained, Bear Don’t Walk knew her clientele well:

Margie understands what looks good on Indian women and she wants Indian women to look attractive. It’s nice to let people know who you are by wearing distinctive designs. Indeed, Margie delights in making us all the envy of our peers.

(Green 1988: 11)
Beauty or attractiveness was achieved by tailoring garments to a person’s unique body shape and by displaying personal style as well as individual identity through embellishment. Bear Don’t Walk insisted that beauty could be heightened when the garments worked with the individualized body, so she focused on creating garments with a variety of necklines, sleeve lengths, shirt styles, and bodice fittings. She realized that her clients typically already had a favorite shirt or dress and knew what they preferred to wear. Customers could request versions of these garments, enhanced by Bear Don’t Walk to include elements that would signal the wearer as a professional, classy, and fashionable Native woman.

Bear Don’t Walk created garments that echoed the popular trends of American and Native fashion. She used couture patterns for dresses, coats and shirts, and then Indianized them. In this way, she could make garments that were the very essence of fashionable, in the Western sense, but could also make them unique and Indian. She also made ribbon shirts, ribbon dresses or caftans with stitch work or appliqué, two-piece suits, Pueblo manta-style dresses, vests, and Ralph Lauren-style cowgirl dresses. The Pueblo manta-style dress was a popular theme among Native designers, probably because it translated easily to American fashion trends and silhouettes, especially for classic straight shift styles. Pricing was based upon the labor required, and, in general, beadwork would cost more than simpler appliquéd or stitched ribbonwork because beading required handwork that could not be accomplished with a sewing machine. Shirts started at $40, dresses at $60, suits at $80, and formal dresses at $150. Trained in home economics, she incorporated the aspects of modern clothes, such as popular silhouettes, sewing
techniques, and fabrics, with aspects of Indian designs, such as decorative techniques and natural materials (Green 1988: 10).

In 1988, Rayna Green wrote an article on being a woman, and she candidly addressed differing cultural understandings of fashion and body image. She wrote, “Like my other Cherokee relations, I’m ‘Indian and Round’… But I live in a world populated by thin non-Indians, and where the thin look in fashion and style are all-important” (Green 1988: 9). The she posed the question, “So how does a round person fit into a linear world?” (Green 1988: 9). When the American and European fashion worlds seem to stand in direct conflict with non-white cultural understandings of the self, how does the self reconcile these differences? Thinking about the connections between ideas of body size, values, and culture, Green explained, “In my world… to be fat was to be not only wealthy, but also healthy – a cultural notion that has been challenged elsewhere but that still prevails among rural people in most parts of the world” (Green 1988: 9). Green made an important point: that other perceptions pertaining to size and beauty exist but were being ignored by the fashion industry, which sought a culturally hegemonic ‘look.’ For Green and others, Bear Don’t Walk was a savior of sorts, providing chic attire before other American designers and companies caught on. Green explained, “Proud to see us represent ourselves and our people well, she was in the avant-garde movement to make big women look good and distinctive” (Green 1988: 11).

In a time when the ‘fitness craze’ was at its peak, and Kate Moss’ waif look was about to be ushered in as über chic, trendy styles focused on the skinny. Green explained, “Clothes for my size were awful – flowered print and black dresses more suitable for old
ladies” (Green 1988: 9). As Green’s professional career became more successful, her personal style emerged, and she began wearing Native designers such as Marjorie Bear Don’t Walk and Phyllis Fife. These designers were familiar with the diversity of the female body and recognized that it came in many different shapes, sizes, and colors, and they knew that they could create garments that made their clients feel beautiful.

In the 1980s, as shoppers were pressured to fit into shrinking dress sizes, the topic of eating disorders was debated more openly. While not a new trend, the popularity of thinness in fashion and in the media sent eating disorders to new extremes. Green stated that this trend had not yet hit Indian Country in the late 1980s. She explained,

The likelihood of anorectic Indians is very small. Few are middle-class, and fewer still have adopted the deadly standards that bring on something as perverse and sad as the rejection of food. Famine and danger are still too close to us as a people, no matter what the individual circumstances might be.

(Green 1988: 10)

Two decades later, researchers are discovering that eating disorders occur in all communities, regardless of cultural background or economic standing (Ellison 2000). A study published in 2006 indicated that Native girls and women are now actually at a higher risk of eating disorders than their white affluent middle-class female peers, especially those Native females who are younger, more educated, and align with white middle-class values (Rosen, et al. 2006). Another study cited the ‘globalization of fat phobia’ as a factor that assisted the proliferation of eating disorders in all communities (Lee 1996). Native designers who are willing to take risks in fashion can deconstruct the image of the thin as desirable, and can create new options, or revive older ways, for Native Americans to express beauty.
Green later explained some of the points made in this article were short-sighted, and some things were not foreseen: the ghastly effects of diabetes, the probabilities of eating disorders, and the emergence of a Native middle class. However, she was correct to point out in this article that Native designers wanted to design for Native women as they were, thin or round, dark or light, tall or short.

Virginia Yazzie-Ballenger (Navajo) was another designer who reimagined the concepts of beauty and concepts of the American Indian. Ballenger established her clothing company, Navajo Spirit Southwestern Wear, in 1984, and created both contemporary western wear and traditional Navajo outfits. Ballenger began designing garments while participating in Indian Princess Pageants. Her most popular item, the fluted broomstick skirt and matching velveteen blouse was, according to one author “A fashion staple equal to the classic ‘little black dress’” (Martin 2000). This style of dress required only slight updating in the past decades, and was popular as the regional ‘squaw dress’ and Square Dance dress in the 1950s (Parezo and Jones 2009), as hippie attire in the 1970s, as the glamorized Santa Fe Style in the 1980s, and as part of the Boho-Cowboy trend in the early 2000s. Although Ballenger competed in beauty pageants, which may conjure up images of the objectified female body, she was able to use that platform to develop her sewing skills by creating cultural attire to wear at the competitions to exhibit her identity and pride in her heritage. This sense of pride, combined with knowledge of one’s cultural heritage, would comprise Ballenger’s concept of beauty that fueled the development of her company.
Margaret Roach Wheeler (Choctaw/Chickasaw) also deconstructed hegemonic notions of beauty through her garments. In 1980, Wheeler discovered that she could effectively combine art, sewing, and weaving, and she created her first hand-woven garment, which was something to wear to an art opening. This was the beginning of her line of unique clothing designs, called Mahota Handwovens, and she made shirts, coats, robes, purses, and scarves. She also created woven sculptures. One piece in particular expressed her ideas about beauty. Wheeler designed a hooded blanket robe in honor of her father, Diamond Roach. The piece, titled *Tribute to Diamond*, was woven with white on the outside and brilliant colors on the inside. Wheeler thought of her father as a pillar of strength for her family and community; he was a strong man, but he also possessed an inner beauty. She stated, “The white, gray and black column that is formed when the arms are folded represent a pillar of strength, but when the arms are spread wide a jewel-toned insert front represents all the beauty inside” (Wheeler n.d.). Here Wheeler tied beauty to ideas of strength, leadership, community work, and family relationships, and blurred gender ‘boundaries’ by tying beauty to masculinity.

VII. Conclusion

These innovative designers clothed the new Native woman – taking center stage as members of the Indian advocacy groups that formed in the 1960s and 1970s or as speakers and tribal leaders in the 1980s. Their designs were based upon centuries of Native American traditions of creativity in clothing construction, and their work should be viewed as a continuation of the evolution of Native fashion and decorative work.
Several of these designers also created other textile arts, such as quilts or theatrical attire, or had another full time job, like Bear Don’t Walk, who worked in the health field. When demands for their garments dwindled, they focused on their other artistic talents or jobs (Parezo 1983, Mithlo 2008). For example, Margaret Wood became increasingly interested in quilt-making and textile arts, many of which were inspired by Native clothing traditions. For example, her *Blackfoot Boy’s Shirt Quilt* made in 1983 was adapted from a painted and beaded tanned leather shirt made in 1870 (Wood 1998: 1). Wood continued to develop this style of quilt-making informed by Native-made garments, and in 1998 created the Dress Series. She stated, “For many years I worked as a clothing designer creating fashion inspired by American Indian clothing. My love of the color, texture and design elements on clothing is carried on in my work as a quilt artist” (Wood 1998: 5). The quilts made in this series were inspired by Plains Indian, Crow, and Arapaho dresses.

However, these designers soon discovered that creating fashion as a business venture was a difficult enterprise. Margaret Wood described it as “an exercise in frustration and compromise” (Lukas 1993: 18). One of the challenging aspects of fashion design involved negotiating material and labor costs with producing high quality garments that were priced appropriately. Wood explained, “It is always a matter of making a costume affordable at $200 or less” (Lukas 1993: 18). She learned that in the world of fashion design, she needed to determine a client base and decide on a price range accordingly. Based upon this range, she compromised on the fabric quality and amount of detailing to stay within these limits (Fauntleroy 1993).
While significant, the market for Native fashion at this time was not large enough to sustain a growing movement, and it subsequently faded in the late 1980s. The trends and fads in fashion, such as silhouette styles, were changing at an increasing rate, democratization of fashion was in full swing, and the late 1980s saw the rise of throw-away fashion. The designers, who were creating special occasion attire that was valued as classic heirlooms, faced and confronted many challenges: cost, production, trend forecasting, and expanding their client base. On the production and marketing side of the business, the designers negotiated the high costs of materials and labor with the price range that their clientele would pay. For production, each designer was able to construct a certain number of garments in a set amount of time. Without hiring assistants, their businesses could only expand a certain degree. They sought help from family or friends during busy times, such as when preparing for a fashion show. Some designers were better than others when it came to trend forecasting, and adapted their garments to compliment the broader American fashion aesthetic. Similar to Native art at this time, these designers found their own niche markets to sustain their work. Finally, those designers who extended their client base beyond the local region, and who secured devoted clientele, were able to continue their businesses.

In the 1990s, some of the pioneers of this first wave of Native female designers continued to be featured in a variety of publications, fashion shows, and exhibitions. Patta Joest, Margaret Roach Wheeler, and Margaret Wood are three women who continued to show their work, with Wheeler being the most active and participating in the most shows. Virginia Yazzie-Ballenger (Navajo), whose clothing easily translated to the Santa Fe
Style, maintained her business, probably due to the fact that she was able to establish a regional niche market of both Native and non-Native women. The designers all had other household incomes, which helped with the seasonal nature of these clothing, fashion and art businesses and their inherent fluctuations. These designers have also created new avenues for their communities, and have taken the role of clothing maker to the runway. They were pathbreakers in their own right, and laid the foundation for the current movement of Native couture.
CHAPTER 6
NATIVE FEMALE DESIGNERS:
USHERING IN A NEW NATIVE CHIC (1990s – Present)


A new Native chic emerged in the 1990s with two veins of ‘style’: the first emphasized clean lines and simple silhouettes, and the second featured edgy avant-garde Native couture. Some of these designers appeared in the late 1980s, but they all established their companies in the 1990s or later. The designers who favored clean classic looks included Betty David (Spokane) who set up her coat company in 1994, and Dorothy Grant (Haida) who began designing in 1983 and established her business in 1994. Recently, Penny Singer (Navajo) launched her company and adds to this group of designers. They all focused on outerwear, such as jackets with straight silhouettes.

Designers who favored fashion forward styles of Native couture included Wendy Ponca (Osage) who opened Ponca Design in Santa Fe in 1990, her student Patricia Michaels (Taos Pueblo) who hosted her first solo fashion show in 1994, and Brenda Wahnee (Comanche). Pilar Agoyo (San Juan/Cochiti/Santo Domingo) is another designer of this style, and she opened her first boutique in 2002 with her cousin Virgil Ortiz (Cochiti Pueblo). Emerging female clothing designers such as Tazbah Gaussoin (Picuris/Navajo), Consuelo Pascual (Navajo), and Rose Simpson (Santa Clara), who are
all currently under the age of thirty and still pursuing formal art education degrees, combine these two sectors, and add a third element of streetwear, suggesting that ever-new directions for Native fashion are on the horizon.

As the 1990s progressed, Native fashion design hit the national scene in unprecedented form, and Native female designers, including some new faces, received recognition through articles in local and national publications. For example, in 1990, Native fashion was in the ‘spotlight’ in Cincinnati (Crocker 1990: B-6), and Betty David and Virginia Yazzie-Ballenger began advertising their garments in *Native Peoples* and *American Indian Art* magazines in the early 1990s. IAIA fashion instructor Wendy Ponca consistently made several appearances in publications throughout the 1990s (Ponca 1994a, Ponca 1994b, King 1995, McGraw 1997, Institute of American Indian Arts 1997, Diaz 1998).

A revolutionary fashion show event, hosted by the Denver Art Museum in 1998, featured designers Margaret Roach Wheeler, Dorothy Grant, and Wendy Ponca. Titled *Indian Chic*, the show and accompanying symposium explored how Native artists have always made fashion statements for their tribes and how they continue the rich tradition of adornment in the form of clothing and accessories. Museum curator Nancy Blomberg explained, “The Denver Art Museum was the first to collect Indian clothing as art rather than natural history” (Rocky Mountain News 1998). In fact, while other museums deemed Native attire as functional objects, the Denver Art Museum not only recognized Native garments as art objects but also as fashion. It was the first and only known institution to turn its collection of traditional Native attire into a fashion show. The

In 1941, Douglas pulled several Native American dress outfits from the Denver Art Museum’s collection, placed them on the bodies of runway models, and created the first Native American fashion show. The dresses, made between 1830 and 1950, were “technically perfect, aesthetically pleasing in the maker’s and Anglo-American cultural paradigms, and ‘typical’ yet outstanding” (Parezo 1998: 245). Each garment was consciously selected to confirm Native creativity. The event itself was designed as an educational outreach project, in the form of a performative display, aimed at middle-class Euro-American women to influence how they perceived Native people (Parezo 2007: 6).

One of Douglas’ goals was to “erase negative racial stereotypes that people held about Indians” (Rocky Mountain News 1998), however, as Nancy J. Parezo explained in her article, “The Indian Fashion Show,” Douglas’ shows nonetheless reinforced stereotypes about women. The show promoted an appreciation for the beauty of Native attire and projected Native clothing design into the world of haute couture.

In 1998, Blomberg and Parezo restaged the Indian Fashion Show, with an exhibit, scholarly conference, and a runway show using all Native American models. Parezo explained, “The runway program, although showcasing the vitality of Native American-produced fashion, was intended to emphasize Douglas’ museological point that clothing must be seen in motion on the human body to be understood” (2007: 8). Parezo noted that the Indian Chic fashion show featuring Grant, Ponca, and Wheeler was a success, as the
show was well-attended and the viewer responses were positive (2007). The runway show was also done as a form of economic development to open up the Aspen market. After the event, the designers received several commissions and sold a good deal of their garments (Parezo 2010).

The issues pertaining to how to display clothing, however, was more problematic; lack of motion in static displays continues to be a central concern for designers and clothing makers. As many of the designers purport, their clothing designs are created to be worn and experienced through the act of wearing; however, from a museological perspective, it is through this human use, which is one of the key agents of deterioration, that garments risk durability.

This event demonstrated that a group of women designers out of the Northwest had become known during the 1990s, including Haida fashion designer Dorothy Grant, along with Betty David, Pam Baker (Coast Salish), and Dina One Heart Gilio (Colville). Dorothy Grant was born and raised in Hydaburg, Alaska. In 1983 she began sketching Haida art onto garments. As the idea developed, she was motivated by non-Native designers who incorporated Northwest Coast Native art symbols into their clothing collections. She felt it was a poor representation of a beautiful art form. In 1994, Grant opened her first retail store in Vancouver, called Dorothy Grant, Ltd. She stated, “For the past 20 years I have been researching Haida designs in my local communities, and transforming this knowledge into garments” (Grant 2007). Grant’s strong connection to her cultural heritage and deepened sense of Haida identity is the creative force behind her Feastwear and Dorothy Grant labels. Her vision is to merge art with fashion to forge a
link between ancient tribal custom and modern society through the creation of ‘timeless’ wearable art – or that which utilized classic silhouettes as opposed to trendy styles.

In the Southwest, a new wave of designers who were mostly female emerged from Santa Fe, the mecca for Indian art commerce and Native American fashion. Most of these designers had connections with the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA), either studying under IAIA fashion instructor Wendy Ponca, or focusing on other media such as photography and sculpture. These designers included Patricia Michaels (Taos), Pilar Agoyo (San Juan/Cochiti/Santo Domingo), Penny Singer (Navajo), Consuelo Pascual (Navajo), Rose Bean Simpson (Santa Clara Pueblo), and Tazbah Gaussoin (Picuris/Navajo). Michaels, Agoyo, and Singer have participated in the annual Indian markets hosted by the Heard Museum Guild in Phoenix and the Southwestern Association for Indian Arts in Santa Fe. As juried events, these artists creatively push the boundaries in Native textile categories, recycling and re-presenting age-old techniques, materials, and ideals, infusing them with a distinctively twenty-first century contemporary feel.

I. Patricia Michaels: Wearable Art and Changing Notions of Beauty

Taos artist and fashion designer Patricia Michaels stated that she begins each clothing creation with a ‘blank canvas’ (Michaels 2009). Indeed the majority of her garments are borne out of plain white fabric. She ‘paints’ on this bare cloth, having learned the art of textile design and silkscreening in college at IAIA (figure 16). After
creating her one-of-a-kind printed textiles, Michaels then fashions, or constructs, the
garments.

Michaels’ family is from Taos Pueblo, though she was born in Albuquerque and
raised in Santa Fe. She currently lives and works out of her gallery in Taos. She
explained that her early childhood in Santa Fe deeply influenced her decision to pursue
fashion since she grew up around art. Her mother operated a gallery that sold Native
American pottery, rugs and jewelry, and Michaels frequently visited galleries and became
familiar with paintings by early Taos founders. In addition, when she danced with family
members at local powwows, onlookers often inquired about purchasing her dance regalia;
Michaels explained, “I thought it didn’t make much sense for someone to wear a
buckskin dress or a fancy shawl garment or a feathered bustle” (Billingsley 2006). It was
because of these encounters, she stated, that she conceived of the idea to create clothing.
She stated, “I wanted to address design in a modern style that wasn’t so intrusive into our
culture” (Billingsley 2006). Here, she began thinking of ways to produce garments for
non-Native people who desired Native-made clothing. When she was a child, family
members began taking her to museums and galleries, where she gained access to various
cultures such as Japanese, Scottish, and Jamaican, which all added to her broad concept
of design. Michaels attended Cristo Rey Catholic School in Santa Fe, where she wore the
uniforms of pleated skirts and white shirts (Potter 2009). These youth experiences were
the genesis of her fashion career.

Her first fashion-related job involved working in the costume department at the
Santa Fe Opera in the mid-1980s. She studied Native fashion at the Institute of American
Indian Arts under Wendy Ponca. Afterwards, she continued her path in fashion design at the prestigious School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Since graduating, she has created several lines of clothing, apprenticed with a classical Italian tailor, participated in numerous fashion shows, and, most recently, she has been invited to show her work during New York Fashion Week in 2009 and 2010 (figure 18).

Her first runway show occurred in 1994, and she has since gone on to show at Indian Markets, galleries and museums, and international fashion events. Michaels participated in the first Santa Fe Indian Market fashion show in 1996, but left to pursue her vision unregulated by expectations drawn from literal historical reproductions or Hollywood stereotypes. She stated, “I moved on because patrons weren’t ready to be so contemporary. They wanted Santa Fe style” (Roberts 2008). While her more established instructor Wendy Ponca stated that she never felt obligated to replicate the Santa Fe style, Michaels, a then-emerging artist, felt the need to break free. She focused on creating garments that experimented with different textures and silhouettes, and, as she explained, “something that makes you feel beautiful and cultured” (Billingsley 2006). Now, Michaels and other Native designers are celebrated as the ones who will take the Santa Fe style new directions and into the future.

Michaels designs women’s clothing and accessories, including dresses, tops, blouses, skirts, pants, jackets, shawls, purses, scarves, and umbrellas. She has also created men’s shirts, jackets, and kilts. She uses cotton, leather, feathers, beads, silk, felted wool and velvet. Prices for her garments and accessories, which she sells from her gallery or through custom orders, range from $90 to $10,000. Her designs reflect the contemporary
world in which she lives, but are also heavily influenced by her experiences with multiple Native cultures. Michaels says she might spend as long as a month creating one garment in addition to the time it takes for her to conceive of the design (figure 17). She elaborated, “Some of these concepts I play around with and it takes seven years for me to execute. Fashion is extremely difficult and so time-consuming. You need to be dedicated for long hour hauls and your mind has to be evolving in the piece” (Billingsley 2006). She also drew inspiration from fashion notables such as Giorgio Armani and Issey Miyake. From 2000 to 2003, she studied with a classical Italian tailor in Venice, which she noted was an experience that was invaluable in improving the quality of her skills as a couturier. The ability to cut is one of the crucial techniques that a designer can bring to couture, thus separating themselves from other designers who only sew.

Following in the footsteps of Lloyd Kiva New, Michaels focused her garment design on the many ways that she could render textiles. Approximately fifty years after Cherokee fashion designer Lloyd Kiva New debuted his desert-inspired line of garments, Michaels created a collection featuring garments in rich colors derived from her environmental surroundings as well. She attended IAIA when Lloyd Kiva New was an advisor for fashion programs, and his influence on her work is evident. Similar to New’s previous garments, her collection is inspired by the world around her. She incorporates imagery of dragonflies, eagle feathers and water. Drawing on the importance of water to the Pueblo people, Michaels – whose given name is Water Lily – integrates water references into her work as hand-painted raindrops falling from the clouds, as silk-
screened fluid layers of soft material, and by dying garments in various hues of blue (King 2010, Potter 2009).

Michaels creates her fabrics from silk and felted wool, sometimes deconstructing it by cutting or weaving it to achieve new patterns. She texturizes leathers into grid patterns for a bark-like appearance. Her latest work weaves wide strips of felted wool to create handbags which resemble basketry; she also creates scarves from faux fur and feathers. She recently began incorporating silk corn husks into handbags. Michaels’ work both engages and questions the stereotype of the eco-conscious Indian. About her work, she explained, “The designs are nature based. That’s who Natives are, very nature-oriented. Without that we don’t breathe. And many people don’t get this. I try to take elements that are Native and then work on stylizing the design so it’s very contemporary” (Billingsley 2006).

Michaels’ use of eco-aware materials and ideologies in her couture corresponds and translates easily to current trends. Sandra Black’s 2008 book about the eco-couture trend, called *Eco-Chic: The Fashion Paradox*, investigates the ecological effects of current trends in fashion. With advances in technology, and the new ‘fast fashion,’ clothing can be created quickly and cheaply and made accessible to more people via online shopping. Black warns that our new consumer throw-away culture has seeped into fashion and has huge environmental impacts. Eco-couture hit the runways in a noticeable way in 2008, and the green trend was adopted by fashion with open arms. The list of natural materials utilized by designers now includes more than just cotton and hemp;
consumers can buy their clothing made with unusual materials, including bamboo, coconut, seaweed, and soybeans (Potirala 2009).

While cotton continues to be a commonly used fiber, the use of man-made materials in fashion has increased significantly in the past decade. One report found that synthetic fibers accounted for over half, or 58%, of the fiber demand in 2006. With the increased use of these materials comes an increased environmental impact. The production of synthetic fibers, for example, is energy-intensive, and they are not biodegradable nor are they easily recyclable (Potirala 2009). Many of the new unusual natural materials are proving to be sustainable, but cotton is not – the amount of water and poisonous sprays that are needed to avoid disease are notoriously harmful to the environment. The question here, however, should turn to the eco-fashion business and the Native role in it. While the majority of the designers maintain that their participation in green couture derives from their Indian awareness about the environment, they run the risk of reaffirming the cliché that Native efforts are inherently eco-sensitive.

Native fashion designers Michaels and Virgil Ortiz (Cochiti Pueblo) are two designers who are blazing the green trail for Native fashion. Michaels explains about her eco-friendly work, “It’s putting an organic feeling to who we are. It’s like everything Natives stood for in the first place that made us ‘savage’” (Billingsley 2006). With a unique twist, Michaels makes an excellent point: although Native people were looked down upon as uncivilized savages for their use of natural materials in clothing and were forced to adopt Euro-American attire, now we are witnessing an intellectual reversal (similar to the hippies of the 1970s). These Native designers seek to expand the green
movement. One t-shirt company, Tansi Clothing, based out of Saskatchewan offers affordable options. The company’s mission includes donating to non-profit organizations that give back to Indigenous communities. The company also promotes positive messages by inscribing inspirational words and messages on their shirts, such as ‘peace,’ ‘don’t give up,’ ‘green,’ and ‘strength,’ which are all written in the Cree language (Lewis 2009). Michaels seeks to change our perceptions of the materiality of ‘fast fashion.’ She stated, “I hope that each wearing will create memory and meaning. I’d like to defy the consumerist sense of fashion as something we can put on, take off, and casually cast aside” (Potter 2009).

Michaels also questioned what constituted Indian art. She has created garments that blur the boundaries between art and fashion and could be deemed wearable art. Unlike other designers, such as Margaret Wood, who took a more literal approach to modernizing Native American traditional attire, Michaels’ versions are symbolic, abstract, or metaphorical renditions. One of her lines, Naturally Native, examines the idea of relationships. For example, she created silk scarves in the shape of eagle feathers, to reference not only the tribal connection to eagles but also the mating practices of eagles, and she incorporated deer antler motifs in some pieces to represent the strength of the male in relationships. Other garments are influenced by Pueblo and Hopi inlay designs. One blouse, with a strip of beads across the back, is inspired by jewelry made by the Ancestral Puebloan People, the Anasazi, as well as the late renowned Hopi jeweler, Charles Loloma. The front button on the shirt is a collaborative effort with Santa Fe blacksmith Frank Turley and woodworker Sam Maloof. While these sources of
inspiration may seem typical, she presents them in new ways and her avant-garde designs break from the ‘Hollywood Indian’ imagery, and break down stereotypes. At a 2008 lecture, she expressed her distaste for the squaw image of Native women and sought to instead present the side of women with which she was familiar and convey the resilience of women who were feminine yet strong (Michaels 2008).

One reporter stated, “Clothing designer Patricia Michaels isn’t afraid to buck the mainstream’s concept of Native American style” (Billingsley 2006). Michaels explained that people too readily consider a leather fringe jacket or a beaded headband the extent of Native fashion. While she sometimes does incorporate fringe, she explained she does so in new ways so as to not conjure up images of the stereotypical Indian attire. She explained, “Some of my clothing is political, some about beauty and protection of women, strength, and some making a statement about stereotypes” (Billingsley 2006).

This uninhibited fashion sense, as with most avant-garde art, was met with criticism. According to Michaels, a number of institutions have declined her applications to display her work because it did not correspond to expectations of Indian attire, and, in short, did not appear to be ‘Indian enough’ (Michaels 2006). In response to claims that her work did not convey Indianness, Michaels covered a white dress in black numbers from her Certificate of Indian Blood. This criticism and opposition, instead of deterring her, has fueled her determination, and, for over two decades she has continued to pursue creative fashion design as a career.

Michaels explained the difficulty in finding a market for avant-garde Native fashion, but was hopeful that times were changing; she explained, “When people see
something so different and new it’s kind of hard to take, but now it’s finally happening” (Billingsley 2006). Like her predecessors, Michaels sought to renounce the stereotyped Native clothing style, though apparently she has gone one step farther, to the point that some gallery owners or market judges view her work as ‘not Indian enough,’ which seems to be a new criticism unique to this wave of designers – although it is the same critique that painters and sculptures have endured, especially those who seek to break from a stereotype yet still demonstrate aspects of their cultural heritage. The criticism in fact paradoxically means that breaking this barrier will be as hard as it was for artists working in other media.

Michaels has designed numerous clothing lines that focused on, or attempted to enhance, femininity. She explained, “The world is moving so fast, and I find that sometimes women can’t let go a bit. They don’t allow their femininity to happen” (Santa Fe Reporter 2003). Michaels has created a wide range of garments that emphasize the sensual side of their owners through the carefully considered use of materials, draping techniques, fluid silhouettes, and color selection. Michaels has worked with a number of materials to create garments with intricate detailing. For example, she once created a bodice covered with dozens of hand-cut appliquéd fabric flowers. Michaels explained that her work reflects an artistic idea that fashion is an ever-changing cultural expression, and she attracts clients who appreciate art and textiles and who are daring in their fashion sense. She asserted, “You have to be a strong hearted person to wear something that really conveys something beautiful, because a lot of times people are comfortable
camouflaging themselves into wearing black” (Michaels 2008). Michaels’ garments celebrate the body and the female form.

Michaels considers her designs as inspired by the feeling she gets from connecting with family and friends during Pueblo celebrations. Nancy M. Mithlo, in her book *Our Indian Princess* (2008), explained that Native women artists draw inspiration from their community. Like Michaels’ female contemporaries in the art world, as well as her predecessors, “this allegiance to community is key to understanding the unique nature of Native arts production and circulation” (Mithlo 2008: 71). Michaels stated, “I feel fortunate to have my culture. It’s my sanity, there’s no place else like my village in the world. What you get back from much of the world is materialism, but what you get back from ceremony is a strong heart” (Billingsley 2006). She demonstrates how maintaining connections to her home community is important to maintaining sense of self. She explained:

> Indian women have always done this. Ceremony is a sacred place, a place of respect. The women all get dressed together in one big room, helping each other. We are taught to enter this space in grace and beauty, we represent our ancestors and are role models for the young ones. It is a part of the cycle of life, the ethics of the tribe. You must feel and look your best, honoring the beauty inside, respecting self, you present your outer self as beautifully as possible. It is important to me to create designs and textiles that can be used both in ceremony and on the street. My designs are not just for Indian people, they are for the world. (Ahtone-Begaye 1994)

Michaels incorporates the ‘ethics’ of ceremony, which includes presenting the self respectfully and beautifully to represent the ancestors, into her fashion creations to honor one’s inner beauty and provide role models for the future. She extends these concepts to the outer world: she stated, “I am trying to enlighten an industry” (Michaels 2008). She
seeks to transfer these qualities of sharing and helping, as she does in preparation for ceremony, to the fashion industry and the broader world.

However, it is important to note that Michaels does not incorporate any of her tribe’s ceremonial symbols or sacred designs into her work. She stated, “Those symbols are not mine to take, they belong to the community” (Billingsley 2006). Several Native American artists share this sentiment. Responding to a question about the use, or non-use, of certain subject matter per community guidelines of taboo, artist Laura Fragua-Cota explained to Mithlo,

> You see…I think that even though I do work and I consider myself an individual, I am still a part of that people…. There are things…just because I am away from the reservation does not give me the right to talk about whatever I want or show or make whatever I want to make. It’s that responsibility…. there are certain things that I feel, because I am a part of this community, that I cannot do or I cannot show.  
> (Mithlo 2008: 70)

Community membership requires a sense of responsibility towards that community, in which conscientiousness, respect, following proper protocols, and not sharing specialized esoteric and powerful knowledge (including the replication of certain designs that are to be used only in specialized circumstances) is exercised and valued.

In 1994, Patricia Michaels held her first one-woman fashion show. “Native Couture is Here!” featured her original textiles and fashion designs. The gala event included an evening dinner buffet, raffle, and jazz music by Emily Haozous. Proceeds from the event benefited fashion design scholarships and museum textile acquisitions for IAIA. Orval Garcia (Acoma/Crow/Tewa) served as Michaels’ assistant, and Lloyd Kiva New and Janus Zimolak were event advisors. Professional and amateur Native models
wore Michaels’ garments, including her colleague, the experienced Pilar Agoyo. Students from IAIA, who were interested in the field of modeling, fashion design, or performance art, participated in the event.

In a letter to Mary Kate Mendoza at the Cultural Affairs office in Albuquerque, the IAIA Curator of Education Marie K. Watt explained the significance of Michaels’ fashion show:

This is an important opportunity to recognize the contributions of Native American designers, especially because Indigenous designs are often appropriated and used out of context. As a result, the integrity and history of Native design is somewhat unknown and underestimated by the fashion world. At the Institute we [are] aware of the world class contributions of Indian designers and artisans. We anticipate this event will underscore and bring into prominence that Native Couture is Here!

(Watt 1994)

One goal of Michaels’ show was to recognize the talents of Native clothing designers, but also to acknowledge and celebrate the historical influence of Native attire on the non-Native fashion world. These contributions, Watt explained, continue to be underestimated by the fashion world.

Eleven years later, Michaels was featured in the fashion show From Culture to Couture in Toronto in November 2005. The event organizer, Jamie Hill, stated, “The thing about Patricia is that her sensibilities are to make works of art rather than playing into the market of selling a lot of items in a women’s clothing store” (Billingsley 2006). Michaels fabricates sculptures out of cloth. She noted that her stepfather, Frank Turley, was a blacksmith, artist and teacher, and his style of metal fabrication challenged her to be sculptural with garments. Hill explained that the beauty of Native fashion by designers such as Michaels is the blending of the old with the new. Hill stated, “They’re expressing
themselves in modern materials” (Billingsley 2006). Michaels’ attention to fashion as art has separated her from other designers.

Also in 2005, during Indian Market, IAIA teamed Native clothing designers Patricia Michaels, Dorothy Grant, Virginia Yazzie Ballenger, and Marcus Amerman (Choctaw/Hopi) with designers from Africa in a cross-cultural project that culminated in a fashion show and gala called *Tribal Fusions*. Supported by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the event was touted as a celebration of Indigenous cultures in an unprecedented event, following the trend to reach beyond borders with a global focus. The show drew a large crowd and was the result of a two-year effort at IAIA to bring together Indigenous cultures and clothing design talents from two continents. The event featured the work of four American Indian and three African designers, whose diverse talents covered the fashion spectrum, from evening gowns to swimwear.

Della Warrior, then president of IAIA, explained, “Out of this collaboration these two groups of Indigenous people can draw on their mutual talent and their commonalities and hopefully develop a model for economic development in the arts” (Crawford 2005). This unique collaboration strove to provide the designers with valuable knowledge pertaining to the growth of this field as an economic source, and to help women market their aesthetic talents from their cultural perspectives. About African women, one participant explained, “Rural women are very marginalized but they are very, very skilled custodians of the culture. It’s something that needs to be done with the greatest respect, dealing with ancient traditions” (Crawford 2005). Similarly, Native American women are deemed ‘cultural carriers,’ but, as Mithlo has noted, the motivations of this role are not
always translatable to the economic values of Western capitalism (2008: 6). Indeed, one important lesson that came out of the exchange was that there was a need to modernize, but not to Westernize (Magome and Yazzie 2007: 16). The exchange report noted that participants believed that it was possible to create wealth by leveraging culture and tradition to better lives and increase the prosperity of Indigenous communities (Magome and Yazzie 2007: 16).

Another goal of the program was to lessen the reliance on marketing middlemen who might “distort the true value and meaning” of traditional skills, or would resell at higher prices for their own profit. Similar to the efforts of the IACB in earlier decades to promote fashion and the arts as forms of economic development, the event coordinators recognized the potential for female crafts-sellers to obtain financial independence, which is not a new idea (e.g., Landes 1938, and Wilson & Cole 2009). They sought to connect tribal Indigenous women from different parts of the world in a collaborative event to work towards establishing a market on a global level (Crawford 2005). The goal was to help establish the makers and their communities as the ones who would benefit from the sales, as opposed to the historically-situated middlemen. The event was deemed a success, and the artists were able to learn from each other and engage in discussions pertaining to timely topics of globalization. Furthermore it drew hundreds of people to the fashion show, demonstrating the support of this movement. While the event ultimately sought to improve the lives of Indigenous female artists, it nonetheless ascribed to colonial agendas of promoting capitalism, and endorsing late-nineteenth-century concepts of cultural purity and authenticity. At least one IAIA participant of the
exchange questioned her role in promoting colonizing practices for rural African communities (Simpson 2008b).

The report suggested that Native American and African designers should participate in fashion shows during the New York, Paris, London, and Milan Fashion Week events. The report also advised that designers ensure that they are adequately prepared to present their lines professionally – designers must compile packets of order forms, photographs, and descriptive sheets listing their clothing lines. Importantly, designers must be capable of filling orders that would result from showing at a large event like any of the aforementioned fashion weeks (Magome and Yazzie 2007: 79). Attending these events unprepared would undoubtedly have detrimental effects for the designers’ careers.

Michaels’ career, which took shape in the late 1980s and expanded in the 1990s, spanned over two decades in which the face of fashion underwent several changes and diversity became a main issue. In particular, changing concepts of beauty took center stage as the conflict over the use, or rather non-use, of black models became a topic of heated debate. In 1997, fashion superstar Jean Paul Gaultier created the first runway fashion show to feature only black models. A decade later, individuals who were concerned about diversity in the fashion industry, such as Bethann Hardison, gathered in New York in 2007 to discuss the lack of black faces in the fashion world (LIVE from the NYLP 2007). Michaels, as well as other Native designers, actively worked toward the inclusion of underrepresented Native American models in their shows, but they also included models that departed from the stereotyped appearance of a Native model.
However, her show at Buffalo Thunder Casino and Resort north of Santa Fe in 2010 included a cast of mostly fair-skinned models, which was noticed by audience-goers. The selection of models raises the question of who is the targeted market, and whether or not this targeted market limits the development of Native fashion.

As Parezo noted in her article on the Indian Fashion Show (2007), viewers of these events anticipate seeing a certain type of person wearing Native American attire, and the models are thus expected to have the stereotyped Native phenotypical features that include dark skin, brown eyes, and long straight black hair. Departure from these characteristics causes viewers to surmise that something is wrong. The problem addressed in Parezo’s article might stem from the fact that the dresses were ‘traditional’ attire – which are more closely associated with the familiar black and white staged photographs of the late 1800s and early 1900s – and that they were placed on 1950s non-Native mannequins. While we expect to see a fully-beaded Cheyenne dress on a Cheyenne person, when that same dress is on a fair-skinned Marylyn Monroe-looking mannequin, the overall presentation may be akin to what Phillip J. Deloria described as Indians in unexpected places, or rather, Indian attire in unexpected places (2004).

The negative reaction noticed by Parezo pertaining to Indian clothing on non-Native people seems to dissipate when related to contemporary attire, due to two reasons. The first is that Native designers make a concerted effort to include Native American models, regardless of how ‘Indian’ their appearance may be. They include non-Native models to promote a sense of diversity, but also as a marketing tactic to communicate that their garments are for non-Native people as well. The second reason involves the
increasing knowledge and acceptance of cultural diversity among the varied tribes. One

visitor to Parezo’s *Fashion Pathways* exhibit commented,

> I am happy to see that the mannequins are diversified. Our true tradition of America is represented here and acknowledgement that the Indians from all tribes live on in the new generations and through this are not ashamed to acknowledge their heritage. The doors are open and it shows, communication has started always through art.

(Parezo 2007: 40)

While some audience members, like the one mentioned above, may view the diversity of models as a positive sign, others, both Native and non-Native, maintain that the majority of models should be physically recognizable as Native people, and this typically deciphers as exhibiting darker skin and hair colors.

Michaels incorporated her unique vision into each of her garments using textures that challenged modern conventional forms. Her work, which is elegant, fluid, sophisticated, and organic, blends her heritage with inspiration drawn from the ever-changing world around her, including elements from the natural environment, such as feathers, as well as aspects from city life, such as buildings. Her New York collection whimsically depicted tall buildings and manholes reflected in water. In 2009, Michaels joined Virgil Ortiz and Dorothy Grant for New York’s Fashion Week. These three designers marked a historical moment – this was the first time in history that Native designers participated in an event in Manhattan during the Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week. However, they did not show at the elite and hard-to-get-into Bryant Park. Their work was displayed at an event hosted by Gail and Murray Bruce and Michael Chapman at Ramscale Penthouse Studio. Physically, Ramscale is on the outer limits of the fashion week events, located on West Street, and a few blocks away from Bryant Park.
In 2010, Michaels was selected by the newly-formed UNRESERVED: American Indian Fashion and Art Alliance to represent the Design Collective at the Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week in February. The 2010 event was held at the Bryant Park Hotel, which, once again, was not the tents at Bryant Park that exist as the fashion center for the week – but the hotel overlooks the park and regularly hosts several important events during fashion week. The UNRESERVED Alliance is dedicated to building a Native presence at the New York Fashion Week events, as is Michaels, whose work has matured over the years, and her garments demonstrate that tradition and modernity can combine to sustain the creativity required for dynamic, not static, cultures.

II. Pilar Agoyo: Pushing the Boundaries at Indian Markets

Another designer who studied under Wendy Ponca is Pilar Agoyo (Ohkay Owingeh/Cochiti Pueblo/Santo Domingo Pueblo). Agoyo’s work is difficult to categorize and her talents in couture are diverse. She has designed costumes for various films and completed commission work for a wide range of clients. Through her fashion, she continues to push the boundaries of contemporary Native American clothing design. In the past few years, she has participated in the Santa Fe and Heard Indian Markets, where she has submitted her unconventional designs to the juried events. These avant-garde garments undoubtedly force patrons and judges to rethink their understanding and expectations of Native fashion.

Agoyo never thought to pursue fashion when she first entered IAIA, however, she enrolled in a textiles course at the behest of her advisor. She stated, “I ended up falling in
love with it. I was 18. I found out I had a natural talent for it” (Roberts 2008). But when she graduated with a degree in fashion design in 1990, she realized there were no established outlets for work in Native fashion. To remedy this situation, she collaborated with Wendy Ponca, Marcus Amerman, and Patricia Michaels to create the Native Influx group of designers, models, and artists. They would host their own fashion shows, taking on many responsibilities as event producers, clothing designers, choreographers, hair and make up artists, sales representatives, spokespersons, and models (Agoyo 2006).

Agoyo’s fashion designs reflect her multidimensional personality and identity. She explained, “It’s very much influenced by punk rock and club-like stuff. It’s always about your identity” (Roberts 2008). In some cases, she infused Pueblo embroidery and pottery designs from her culture into formal gowns, slick vinyl pants and high-end runway ensembles (figure 20). At other times she incorporated found objects into her garments and accessories. She explained, “My kids are my inspiration. I find myself influenced to make purses and accessories with their old Pokémon cards and Legos” (Santa Fe Reporter 2002). She has designed extravagant Halloween costumes, tailored opera gowns, and made bikinis out of Pendleton material, bordered with rhinestones, and accessorized with a fur wrap. Her designs add drama to the regular fashion show event. At a fashion show in Santa Fe in 2010, for example, Agoyo’s line-up included large silver wings. While one audience member remarked that the wings distracted attention from the presentation of Agoyo’s dress, the spectacle nonetheless caused a memorable moment.
In 2002, Agoyo opened a gallery with Native fashion superstar Virgil Ortiz and her husband, the award-winning metalsmith Cody Sanderson. Because of her creativity and efficiency with a needle, she is frequently hired as a seamstress for movies, and her resume includes working on films such as *Into the West* (Dornhelm and Mimica-Gezzan 2005), *Wild Hogs* (Becker 2007), and *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (Spielberg 2008). Her current fashion garments incorporate unconventional pairings of fabrics like vinyl or metallic leather with pottery designs cut and stitched in reverse appliqué. Agoyo is known for incorporating into her design vision everything from plastic to newspaper and raffia place mats.

In recent decades, it has been noted that both fashion and art have become driven by society’s obsession with popular culture (English 2007: 2). Similar to other contemporary avant-garde fashion designers, Agoyo challenges the seriousness of couture by introducing ‘fun’ children’s elements into her work, such as the Hello Kitty icon, or cards from the Pokémon Trading Card Game. While the use of this imagery undoubtedly demonstrates the influence of her children’s lives and experiences on her work, it also references a broader movement, taken up by both Native and non-Native artists, to infuse pop icons into their designs. Both Hello Kitty and Pokémon became huge pop cultural phenomena in the 1990s, and the famous cat was endorsed by celebrities such as Mariah Carey, Paris Hilton, and Britney Spears, who were photographed wearing various items from the brand (Walker 2008). Consumers appreciated Hello Kitty’s mixed heritage, and contemporary artists borrow from her style or include her in their artwork to reference cultural hybridity. Native artists have long
incorporated aspects of American pop culture into their work – whether it was the merger of Native and pop cultural materials or an acknowledgment of the image of the Indian as a fixture in popular culture.

Agoyo, Sanderson, and Ortiz have worked together for photo shoots, fashion shows, and special events. Her portfolio boasts images of her edgy work along with Ortiz’s leather designs, which are all complimented by Sanderson’s jewelry of thick metal, jagged edges, and innovative designs. In 2002, the three shared a Santa Fe plaza boutique called HEAT: A Freak Boutique. The sign for their store, written in red letters that simulated dripping blood, suggested to those walking by that this boutique was not a typical, stereotypical, Native American clothing store. Set in the resort town of Santa Fe which architecturally emphasizes a regional nostalgic past, this self-proclaimed “freak boutique” was a noticeable outcast. Interestingly, the designers of HEAT claim celebrity clients such as news anchor Diane Sawyer. Their ability to attract a diverse client base demonstrates the skill and creative potential of these artists, as well as their willingness to experiment. Fashion as a field, after all, is a site of experimentation, where safe decisions are overshadowed by daring ones (Bolton 2004) and designers are encouraged to be creative, nonconformist, revolutionary, uninhibited, and, perhaps above all, different.

In addition to custom clothing design, Agoyo has worked often with costume design. Two of the films for which she was hired as a seamstress demonstrate the range of her creativity. For the film *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (Mitchell 2001), an independent gay camp flick featuring a transsexual punk rock character, she created theatrical attire, and one of her pieces was an extravagant flag-striped cape donned by the
lead actor for the opening scene. She also designed costumes for various episodes of the *Into the West* series (Dornhelm and Mimica-Gezzan 2005), a Steven Spielberg and DreamWorks Television epic tale of the American West in the nineteenth century. The garments made for this series focused on replicating accurate historical attire. Agoyo is a quick-worker who can create a full costume in less than two days (Agoyo 2006). She plans to continue working with theatrical and film costume design in the future, and in 2008 and 2009 she created clothing for *Gamer* (Neveldine and Taylor 2009) and *Terminator Salvation* (McG 2009). Garments she constructs for films influence her couture; for example, the military style jackets made for these recent movies inspired the creation of a long coat decorated with her recognizable star symbol for the Heard 2009 Indian Market.

Ben-Alex Dupris (Colville), who designed a line of underground street couture in the early 2000s, explained that fashion today, which is modeled after modern European standards, tended to neglect Native American or Indigenous roots (Dupris 2009). People in the industry are expected to approach fashion from this Euro-perspective. Dupris stated, “I just couldn’t absorb that” (Santa Fe Reporter 2002), and he decided to infuse his clothing line with meaning rather than simply as a piece of cloth that carries no value. He wanted to carve a niche in the fashion world by integrating couture and personal meaning, one that encompassed his culture, spirit and heritage. He stated, “Everybody’s always telling stories about Indian culture and stories about Indian clothing. This way they can wear the clothes that keep that cultural meaning” (Santa Fe Reporter 2002). Both Dupris and Agoyo created a new trend, one that honored Native customs and
beliefs, but also acknowledged modern society and the process of change. They incorporated their Native heritage to an ever-evolving modern culture and demonstrated that change does not mean acculturation or working only under a foreign perspective (Santa Fe Reporter 2002).

Agoyo submitted a dress to be judged at the Santa Fe Indian Market in 2006 and the Heard Indian Market in 2007. Agoyo used traditional Pueblo designs, but made the dress out of black and silver vinyl (figure 19). Through her choice of design elements and materials, Agoyo forced judges and potential clients to question their own perceptions of Native American fashion. Is it Native fashion because of the designs used? Do the materials, process, or techniques used make it uniquely ‘Native fashion’? Or is it Native fashion because it was created by a Native person? These questions are not easy to answer, but Agoyo’s work forces the dialogue to begin. Vinyl is a stiff and difficult material to work with in clothing design, so her use of it demonstrated her skill as a couturier. In addition, she used the arduous and intricate reverse appliqué process. One of the regulations enforced by SWAIA for the Santa Fe Indian Market – to ensure traditionalism – stipulated that clothing designers could not use commercial buttons or zippers. To circumvent this regulation, Agoyo used dimes for buttons, which was actually a practice used by Native people in the 1800s and prior. Agoyo found a creative way to bypass strict guidelines, and revive a traditional practice. Interestingly, she received a blue ribbon at the Santa Fe Indian Market, and second place at the Heard Museum Guild Indian Fair and Market for this garment.

In the spring of 2009, Agoyo submitted her star coat to the Heard Market and was
awarded a second place prize for it. The military-style long coat was inspired by the recent costume work she completed for film projects. Furthermore, Native people have long used American, French and British military garments, which were traded for, received as gifts, or taken from the bodies of soldiers they killed. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, European and American military dress, and its accoutrements, were incorporated into clothing worn by Native peoples, and became distinctively Native attire. The material for Agoyo’s military-style long coat was bestowed to her by Lloyd Kiva New’s wife Aysen after his passing. She incorporated coins for buttons, and decorated the long black jacket with red stars, which, the designer explained, is the English translation of her last name Agoyo. She combined disparate elements – the material (coins for buttons, material from Lloyd Kiva New), the garment style (a long coat derived from America’s popular film wardrobe), the design (star symbols referencing her name and heritage) – to create an Indian Market award-winning entry.

III. Indian Markets: Locations for Re-Defining Native Art

The Southwestern Association for Indian Arts Indian Market in Santa Fe ranks as one of the three biggest Native sales and performance events in the country, alongside the Heard Museum Guild Indian Fair and Market and the Eiteljorg Museum Indian Market in Indianapolis. The Santa Fe Indian Market attracts an estimated one hundred thousand people and brings more that twelve hundred participating artists (Bernstein 2007: 58). The annual Heard Indian Fair and Market began in 1958 as a fundraising project and over fifty years later it draws nearly twenty thousand people. In 2006, more than six hundred
of the country’s top Native artists participated in the juried event. For more than 75 years, these markets have been a place where visitors from around the world come to learn about Native cultures and art. The markets feature artist booths, music and dance, and cultural performances and demonstrations. Visitors stroll through the maze of booths and tables, and watch back-to-back performances by champion hoop dancers, Native American Music Award winners, and internationally acclaimed Indigenous dancers and singers.

Indian markets throughout the country draw thousands of people and bring in millions of dollars in revenue to the local communities and fuel the Indian art market economy. For example, it is estimated that the Santa Fe Indian Market brings over $100 million in revenues per year (Southwestern Association for Indian Arts, Inc. 2006). The largest and longest-running market is the Santa Fe Indian Market, on which later markets have been modeled after, albeit with slight modifications. The Santa Fe Indian Market was born in 1922, years before the Indian Arts and Crafts Act (IACA) of 1935 was enacted by Congress in order to prevent the fraudulent sale of art items as Native-made, especially jewelry in New Mexico. Markets, then, were intricately connected with the development of the IACA. Both played, and continue to play, a central role in the development of the Native fashion movement, since IACB funded fashion events in the 1970s, and the markets include fashion designers and feature fashion shows.

The beginning years of the IACA corresponds with increased government support for the revitalization of Indian arts and cultures. Preservation was desired. By supporting the use of materials and techniques recognized as traditionally situated in tribal practices,
this act assisted in the conservation of some of the arts of Native cultures. Not only did
the act promote revitalization and preservation among Native crafts makers and artists,
but it also promoted awareness among consumers pertaining to ‘authentic’ Native arts.
With a central concern for ‘authenticity,’ the act sought to improve the quality of Native
arts by promoting the use of ‘genuine’ materials and hand-made techniques.

Discussing the use of the words ‘genuine’ and ‘authentic,’ Webster’s Revised
Unabridged Dictionary states, “We call a document genuine when it can be traced back
ultimately to the author or authors from whom it professes to emanate. Hence, the word
has the meaning, ‘not changed from the original, uncorrupted, unadulterated’: as, a
genuine text” (1998). Furthermore, Webster’s contrasts ‘genuine’ with ‘authentic’:

> We call a document authentic when, on the ground of its being thus traced
> back, it may be relied on as true and authoritative; hence its extended
> signification, in general literature, of trustworthy, as resting on
> unquestionable authority or evidence; as, an authentic history; an authentic
> report of facts.

(1998)

The authenticity of a Native product relied upon its conformity to evidence, which for the
dominant society resided in popular scholarly documents that traced back to the
information accumulated in the formative years of anthropology. Only recently has this
information been seriously questioned. Products that conformed to this information were
deemed authentic and were therefore worthy of trust, reliance, or belief. For Native artists
who depended on the sales of their products, consumer trust was important. Recent
concern over authenticity stems from the issue of authority and who gets to decide or
determine if an art object is authentically ‘Indian.’
The IACA promoted improvements in quality of Native art products so that the standard price of Native products would increase as well. It was hoped that the arts would then substantially influence tribal economies. Development of the Native economy for increased self-sufficiency was a main goal of the original inception of the Act in 1935. Also, it was assumed that higher priced objects would attract a consumer population of higher class who understood taste, good craftsmanship and artistry, and aestheticism; and the support of upper-class individuals was sought since the act was created, and they were the ones who pushed the bill through – having worked on this issue in the 1920s and 1930s.

The various markets held throughout the country share many of the same general goals, missions, and aspirations as the IACA. Markets were developed to educate both the artist and the buyer about appreciating quality or “true” Native art, to promote cultural preservation and intercultural understanding, and to discourage the production of curios through sponsorship and awarding of cash prizes for the ‘best’ pieces. Markets offer a means to advance the careers of Native artists, and they provide economic opportunities for Native people. Markets were designed to encourage sales, to introduce prospective buyers to artists, launch careers, establish artists as noteworthy, encourage cross-cultural education, and to exhibit and display Native America’s finest art (Bernstein 2007).

The IACA, by suggesting which materials and techniques to use, set the standards for future art creation. An example of this standardization in guidelines is the Santa Fe Indian Market. The Southwestern Association for Indian Arts, Inc (SWAIA) oversees the
Indian Market and implements production standards that nearly mirror the IACA’s standards. SWAIA explained, “One of the reasons that SWAIA’s Santa Fe Indian Market is the most prestigious Indian art show in the world is that the organization holds the 1,200 artists selected each year to very high materials and production standards” (Southwestern Association for Indian Arts, Inc. 2006). These standards are based on criteria established by non-Native people, who had strict views of what it meant to be authentic. Turn of the century anthropological study greatly influenced the present perception of Native cultures. Anthropologists categorized the cultural materials of Native people into styles according to tribes. Their labeling became regarded as fact, though recent tribal collaborative efforts have led to the re-categorization of many of their collections and how they were labeled in museums. Collectors searching for authentic Native objects used anthropological studies to base their purchases. With museums housing these initial collections, this way of collecting influenced the patrons who bought Native arts.

This practice has had a stultifying effect on many artists who wish to experiment with their art. To not use a material on the accepted list can disqualify one from a judicial category. It also influences judges who work on the premises of nostalgia as well as craftsmanship. Rarely are Native categories of beauty considered in these competitions. While the SWAIA continues to hold their Indian Market to strict standards, other markets, such as the Heard Museum’s Annual Indian Fair and Market have found ways to include new and innovative Native-made artwork. For example, while SWAIA contends
that shirts, buttons, and beads are non-allowable, the Heard Museum allows such items in the interests of creativity and to broaden the conceptualization of modernity.

Also it is important to note that the connection between Native women and the Santa Fe Indian Market is a long one. For example, artist and archaeologist Kenneth Chapman worked with several Native female artisans, such as Maria Martinez (San Ildefonso), to understand their work from a Native design perspective. From this type of interaction, it was thought that a fair or market would provide the opportunity to educate both the makers and the patrons (Southwestern Association for Indian Arts, Inc. 2006).

The Indian art markets are juried shows and the artists and their artwork are carefully selected, and judges play an important role. Awards are presented to the artists whose work the judges decide characterizes noteworthy art. Initially, prizes were awarded to educate both artists and buyers, but the influence of today’s market judging is such that an award affects buyers’ and artists’ conception of what constitutes prize-winning art. Collectors rely upon these markets as sources of information on the best in Native art, and the judges’ decisions are rarely questioned (Bernstein 2007: 54). Now, as SWAIA director Bruce Bernstein noted, collectors also weigh in on their opinions about the best art, “by camping out in a particular artist’s booth” (2007: 53), thus demonstrating whose artwork is most worthy.

Many negative and positive aspects of these markets exist. For example, the guidelines concerning materials, methods, and the final product restrict the creation of art and stifle artistic expression. Rules that defined ‘traditional’ and ‘authentic’ Native art emphasized tracing lineage and implementing styles from historic periods. The awarding
of prizes ‘validated’ certain Native art as significant and influenced the acceptance and creation of future Native art. Despite this, many positive aspects of the markets have prevailed. For example, markets provide opportunities for artists to reach audiences who possess both an appreciation for their work as well as the buying power to purchase it. The markets transform artists into business people by developing their skills in retail sales, financial planning, and record keeping. Artists achieve greater visibility and prominence by participating in these events. By making new contacts and renewing former acquaintances, the artists can expand their client lists beyond their home areas, adding collectors who might make additional purchases in the future. Intertribal markets provide institutions with a way to support contemporary artists by calling the public’s attention to the vitality and diversity of living Native American cultures. Market visitors may deal directly with the artists, allowing an opportunity for them to obtain a broader understanding of the construction techniques and processes involved, the significance of the designs or the materials used, and the cultural context for an artist’s creation. Finally, museum-sanctioned markets offer buyers the assurance that they are dealing with reputable artists (Bernstein 2007).

Like other markets, the art submissions for the Heard Museum’s Market fall into one of the following eight classifications: Baskets, Diverse Arts, Jewelry/Lapidary, Paintings/Drawings/Graphics/Photography, Pottery, Sculpture, Textiles, and Wood Carvings. The category for Baskets is one of the smaller groups, and Jewelry and Lapidary is the largest. Each classification is further divided into Divisions, and a First
Place, Second Place, and Honorable Mention award is given in each Division. In addition, awards are given for Best of Classification and Best of Show.

The Indian Market at Santa Fe has excluded top designers from its juried portion. Devoted to the promotion of Native art and the preservation of Native cultural heritage, SWAIA maintains strict standards for the inclusion of any textiles or garments. Items such as shirts, jackets, or purses are deemed ‘commercial,’ and these items are ‘non-allowable’ and are barred from judging. Many of the textile artists excluded from the Santa Fe Indian Market found the Heard’s annual market a profitable alternative. Spotlighting a designer, Virgil Ortiz, at the 47th Annual Indian Fair & Market exemplified the Heard’s openness to designers, and also its respect for the medium of high fashion.

On the 2006 Heard Market artist list, forty-seven individuals were listed under the Textiles, Weavings, and Clothing classification, which consisted of five divisions: A. Traditional Rugs, B. Non-Traditional Rugs/Weavings, C. Quilts/Sheets/Table Linens, D. Traditional Attire (woven or sewn), and E. Non-Traditional Attire (woven or sewn). Some of the designers who participated in this market included Pilar Agoyo (San Juan/Cochiti/Santo Domingo), Virginia Yazzie-Ballenger (Navajo), Tammy Beauvais (Mohawk), Patricia Michaels (Taos Pueblo), Penny Singer (Navajo), and Margaret Wood (Navajo/Seminole). With the Heard’s open support of Native designers, it is an ideal venue for fashion designers who test the boundaries between tradition and modernity.

Fifty-nine artists were registered in the Heard’s textiles category in 2007 and 2008. For the latter year, the majority of weavers, forty to be exact, were Navajo. This
high number was probably due to both the location of the market in the southwest and the close proximity to the Navajo nation, but also because of the strong Navajo weaving tradition. The remaining nineteen artists included seven Pueblo and four Mohawk weavers, quilters, and designers. Margaret Wood suggested that the focus on southwest artists had much to do with the economy – artists weighed potential gains against costs to decide whether or not to participate. Wood explained that she participates, not because it is particularly profitable for her, but because she lives in Arizona, and the Heard Market is a great time to reconnect with old friends (Wood 2009).

Interestingly, Pilar Agoyo (San Juan/Cochiti/Santo Domingo), Virgil Ortiz (Cochiti), and Patricia Michaels (Taos Pueblo) were not present in 2008. Agoyo began showing at the Heard Market in 2006, and shared a booth with her husband, Cody Sanderson, for two years. Agoyo was not present in 2008, but her husband won Best of Show. Agoyo was in attendance again at the 2009 market, whereas Michaels and Ortiz were not. Ortiz, who won Best of Show in 2006 for his Wildflower Design two-piece dress, was selling his pottery this weekend at a gallery instead of the Heard Market.

By consistently showing at King Galleries of Scottsdale during the market, Ortiz is able to still sell his pottery, without having to deal with market rules and registration, judging deadlines and timetables, and the time and effort required of having a booth at a market – in which artists are expected to stay at their booths for long periods of time throughout the weekend. In other words, Ortiz is able to still sell his art – and he always sells out – with less time and effort on his behalf. Michaels, on the other hand, has recently focused her time on getting into New York Fashion Week events, rather than
securing a booth at the Indian markets. These artists have found other more lucrative options for their work.

In 2006, ten of the sixteen ribbons were awarded to Navajo artists, but, in the division for non-traditional attire, only one of the four ribbons was awarded to a Navajo artist, Penny Singer. The other ribbons went to Dina One Heart Gilio (Colville), Virgil Ortiz, and Margaret Roach Wheeler. In 2007, ten of the fifteen ribbons went to Navajo artists, while in the non-traditional attire category, Pilar Agoyo was the only non-Navajo to be awarded, next to Singer, Arista La Russo, and Tahnibaa Naataanii. Of the fourteen ribbons awarded in the textiles category in 2008, eleven went to Navajo artists. The other ribbons went to quilter Carla Hemlock (Mohawk of Kahnawake) and clothing weaver Margaret Roach Wheeler (Chickasaw/Choctaw). Wheeler placed second in the non-traditional attire category, and Penny Singer placed first. Wheeler and Singer had won ribbons the previous year at both the Heard Indian Market and the Santa Fe Indian Market. Navajo designer Mae Mallahan (Navajo) received an honorable mention for her Black and Red Mesa Coat, and D.Y. Begay (Navajo), who is known for both her traditional biil weaving and her ‘landscape’ rugs, placed in Division B. Non-Traditional Rugs. Virginia Yazzie Ballenger (Navajo), who is known for her velvet blouses and broomstick skirts, placed in Division D. Traditional Attire for her two-piece dress, titled Fibers of Changing Traditions. Of note, Margaret Roach Wheeler placed first in her category in 2009, beating out fellow Navajo weavers, which, Wheeler maintained, was the first time this has ever occurred for her (Wheeler 2009).

In 2008, the Heard Market employed sixteen judges and five classification
managers. The classification manager of the Textiles and Baskets categories was Ann E. Marshall, Ph.D, who is director of collections, education and interpretation at the Heard Museum. The 2008 Textiles judges included Steve Begner, Debbie Drye (Hopi/Paiute), Ann Hedlund, and Margaret Wood (Navajo/Seminole). Begner, owner of Turkey Mountain Traders in Scottsdale, specializes in antique American Indian art. Drye is an artist and well-known katsina doll carver. She frequently participates as a judge at the Heard Market, and also at the Student Art Show. Textiles scholar Dr. Ann Hedlund has written and lectured extensively on topics such as trends in textiles, and was also the director of the Gloria F. Ross Center for Tapestry Studies in Tucson, which fosters the creative practice and cultural study of tapestry. Wood is a clothing designer and quilter, and she frequently exhibits at the Heard Museum exhibitions and markets (see previous chapter).

IV. Penny Singer: Visualizing the New Navajo Classic with a Needle

One designer who frequently participates in juried Indian Market events, and takes home blue ribbons, is Navajo fashion designer Penny Singer (figure 21). Singer, born in Tec Nos Pos, Arizona, is currently based in Albuquerque. Self-taught in the art of clothing-making, her entry into the field came somewhat late. Though Singer learned to sew from her mother at age seven, making small items such as pillowcases and doll clothing, she pursued other artistic interests in subsequent years. She explained that a sewing machine, which was given to her as a high school graduation gift, sat idle for years. However, while studying photography and film at the Institute of American Indian
Arts, Singer began sewing men’s ribbon shirts. A friend encouraged her to take the shirts to an art market, where they were well-received, and Singer’s career as a clothing designer was launched. She explained, “I work in all clothing forms. Anything that is fabric, I can create into wearable art” (Hay 2007).

Singer described her clothing as a contemporary take on Native attire. To some degree her designs, such as corn, dragonflies, turtles, rivers, butterflies and horses, could be deemed universal across many cultural affiliations, but she incorporates these in symbolic styles specific to her Diné heritage. Her custom jackets start at $700, handbags are $400, and both are commercially successful and merited with awards for their artistic value. Although Singer’s repertoire of custom-made items includes mainly jackets, shirts and purses, she has also created wall hangings, dance regalia and children’s clothing. A special feature of her garments is the use of buttons created by respected Navajo silversmiths Michael Roanhorse and Jennifer Curtis. She stated, “It’s wearable art. You’re getting two artists in one” (Hay 2007).

While her career began with traditional ribbon shirts and social dance regalia designed for family members, she soon discovered appliqué and incorporated it into her garment and purse creations. Singer begins her custom jackets with lightweight wool flannel. Next she applies appliqué in animal shapes, landscapes, or geometric Navajo patterns used in traditional textiles. In addition to jackets and shirts, Singer has recently added shawls and capes to her clothing line (Roberts 2008). One of these pieces, _Butterflies in Motion_, was made with wool, silver, and silk, and featured red butterflies that were appliquéd onto a black cape. The elegant cape was spotlighted in the _Native_
Couture II: Innovation and Style exhibit at the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The exhibit opened in August 2009, and highlighted fashion garments by thirteen of Native America’s top designers.

Originally trained as a photographer and videographer, she now incorporates photographs, appliquéing them onto handbags, to tell stories through her wearable art. Singer also views the process of garment-making as akin to painting on a canvas. She explained, “It’s like drawing on fabric. It’s given me the freedom to do what I want with fabric. I draw with a needle” (Roberts 2008). She sees the fabric that she uses as a canvas, the thread as her color palette, and the sewing machine and needle as her brush. Combining the principles of storytelling, photography, and painting with fashion design, Singer carves out her own definition for Navajo classic attire. Working mostly at Indian markets, powwows, and similar events, Singer has slowly earned significant recognition and a loyal following.

Indeed, her focus is on incorporating southwest Indian design motifs onto classic silhouettes rather than experimenting with new exciting forms. Interestingly, few Native fashion designers – except for, perhaps, Michaels, Agoyo and Wheeler – discuss clothing design in terms of sculpture or performance art, suggesting the emphasis is generally on the element of incorporating symbols onto Euro-American attire. In this way, ‘Native fashion’ runs the risk of merely following trends rather than shaping them. Nonetheless, Singer effectively infuses ancient symbols into everyday and special occasion wear, such as jackets, capes, vests, and shirts. In this way, she inscribes the symbols of her ancestors
onto modern cuts, to make them relevant, important, and valued, and to create a pathway for cultural persistence.

V. Creativity, Advocacy, and Identity: A New Generation of Native Female Designers

IAIA was a major institutional source for educating and stimulating a movement of Native fashion designers in the United States. However, since the Institute stopped offering courses in clothing design in the 1990s, few new designers have emerged from its doors. Instead, students in Santa Fe have sought sewing courses at the Santa Fe Community College to meet their needs. Three young Native female designers who continue the legacy of the women presented in this chapter include Consuelo Pascual (Navajo), Rose Bean Simpson (Santa Clara), and Tazbah Gaussoin (Picuris/Navajo).

Consuelo Pascual (Navajo) is a 2005 graduate from New Mexico State University, where she majored in Fashion Merchandising and minored in Marketing and Management. She graduated from the Santa Fe Community College in 2010 with a degree in Fashion Design. With her interests in fashion design, music, art, and comic books, Pascual’s influences draw from varying sources that include science fiction flicks as well popular television shows such as *Project Runway, Sex and the City,* and *Ugly Betty.* The visually stimulating work of Tim Burton and the late Alexander McQueen find their way into her aesthetic choices, and her musical interests in punk, rock, industrial, trance, 1980s new wave, alternative, and Indie music also influence her selections in fashion design. Though her instructors have advised against it, Pascual incorporates
unconventional materials (like vinyl), and subculture designs (like skulls), into high-end couture – producing sophisticated dresses with a distinctive edge (figure 23).

Recently featured in the 2010 Santa Fe Art of Fashion show, Pascual’s latest designs are futuristic dresses – influenced by the blackness of outer space, the glimmer of stars, and the architecture of a fluid space ship. She also plays with fabric texture, and her latest pieces feature variations of pleats – the intricate detailing of which is time-consuming. The designs formed by pleating has Pascual creating varying silhouettes, and this, combined with her sleek aesthetic, creates an exciting new path for Native fashion.

In addition to Native fashion, Pascual also supports the recent Native t-shirt movement. With more and more new, albeit small-scale and grassroots, Native owned t-shirt companies launching in the past decade, Pascual appreciates their ability to infuse everyday items with Indianness. About one company, Un3ek Sy5tem, she stated, “I think their contemporary graphics [and] Native American design approach is really cool and fun, definitely a great way to keep things moving forward” (Pascual 2009). On the other hand, she critically dissects non-Native fashion designers who appropriate Native imagery, especially those who take from Navajo aesthetics. She also questions the current ‘green couture’ trend. She explained,

I remember a classmate who was from China and she couldn’t understand how bamboo textiles were considered ‘green’…just be an educated consumer and don’t buy into the idea of ‘eco-chic’ without truly understanding the process of how it is created.

(Pascual 2009)
Similar to how Sandra Black critiques the current ‘green’ trend, Pascual also acknowledges the fact that over-consumption has negative effects on the earth regardless of whether or not the products are made with natural materials.

Rose Bean Simpson (Santa Clara) represents a new generation of artists who blur the boundaries in art and work freely and skillfully in a wide variety of media. While seemingly breaking from Native traditions, these artists actually continue the tradition of incorporating new materials into preexisting cultural patterns. Simpson has pursued the ‘pure expression of truth’ (Simpson 2009) through many forms of art including drawing, printmaking, sculpture, creative writing, dance and music. Adding to this repertoire of diverse art forms, Simpson also experiments with fashion design, creating Native streetwear couture – specialized fashion inspired by youth and skate culture (figure 24).

Incorporating pop references in her work, she studies the interaction and intersection of Native cultures and American pop culture via mainstream media. In a 2008 interview, she discussed the power of media society in influencing contemporary Indian lives (Simpson 2008a).

Describing the negative impact of mass media sources such as magazines, television, and films, she explained, “People are very used to falling into the system and following the mass media in what you’re supposed to do, what they tell you to do because what you are isn’t special, isn’t important, isn’t beautiful” (Simpson 2008a). The absence of Native imagery in the media, according to Simpson, sends a signal to Native people that their beliefs, practices, and cultures are unimportant. With accurate depictions of Native people in the media still a significant concern (Azocar 2007; Briggs, et al.,
2002; Briggs and Lewerenz 2003), Simpson recognizes the trend for Native youth to view non-Native celebrities as role models. This trend, she worries, may be abusive to Native cultures, especially when those images promote an over-sexed body image and expression of self. She explained,

I’ll be walking in the supermarket isle and I’ll see the cover of a magazine and I’ll literally start hyperventilating because I have such a hardcore reaction to pornography or that kind of sexual energy that is misplaced all over the world. Right now in our Native society it’s so prevalent that it desensitizes everybody.

(Simpson 2008a)

The sheer number of these images that have saturated our daily lives has caused a gradual desensitization towards sexualized imagery to the point that it is no longer questioned but accepted as the utmost form of expressing beauty. Simpson seeks to return ‘the process of thinking’ to media. She wondered, “How do you take control of the media and make it something that is positive and induces consciousness rather than unconsciousness” (Simpson 2008a). One way was to capture and utilize this shock value in her artwork in order to challenge ideas about stereotypes and objectification.

Interestingly, Simpson previously modeled for Native fashion designers such as Patricia Michaels and participated in the Tribal Fusions exchange with Africa. These experiences influenced her design and aesthetic theories. Demonstrating how norms in the fashion industry can affect perceptions of the self, Simpson explained,

I used to model sometimes when I was younger, and I got so angry that I felt like a clothes hanger, that it was not about who I was, but what I looked like, and that was just perpetuating, perpetuating everything that I completely disagree with because it’s not about the soul. So I pierced my nose, I pierced my nose and put a spike through it.

(Simpson 2008a)
Simpson disapproved of the privileging of outward physical appearance over inner personality, ‘the soul,’ and expression of self. Retaliating against commonly held perceptions of beauty by the modeling industry, Simpson demonstrated that other forms of beauty could exist. Recent studies discuss how piercing is pursued to achieve levels of uniqueness (Armstrong, et al., 2004, 2007; Lynn and Snyder 2002). In this case, Simpson chose a large nose piercing to physically separate herself from the modeling industry that she grew to disagree with. She utilizes her artwork and her own body to promote the ideologies she believes in.

Another model of Native couture, Tazbah Gaussoin, comes from a family of artists and designers. While her mother Connie and older brothers David and Wayne Nez are more widely known for their jewelry work than Tazbah, she is a young artist who participates in her family’s artistic projects. Her family members, who comprise the Tsosie-Gaussoin Studio, collaborate to create innovative jewelry and fashion designs. David Gaussoin explained, “I feel artists must push themselves and not be afraid to create new designs or ideas; this is what helps an artist grow” (Tsosie-Gaussoin Studio 2009). This openness to experimentation has led Tazbah, along with her brothers, to create dresses for family art showings. Initially, the brothers created loosely-draped ‘dresses’ to serve as backgrounds for their photo shoots and shows, and Tazbah served as a model, stylist, and hair and makeup artist. As their jewelry developed, so did their ‘dresses’ to create an entire ‘look’ which, in a sense, became large, multifaceted sculptural pieces that featured not only unique and spectacular jewelry, but also dresses. These garments experimented with both metallic and earthy colors, slick and crumpled textures, and
structured and free-flowing silhouettes. Tazbah and David’s dress was a center piece of the *Native Couture II: Innovation and Style* exhibit at the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture in Santa Fe. The two-piece pleated metallic silver and black skirt was topped with the *Modern Feather Boa*, by David, Wayne and Tazbah, which was an aesthetically-rendered copper piping that swirled outward around the neck of the mannequin.

Elsewhere, Native female artists have launched companies selling accessories. Though they sell jewelry and accessories, and not clothing, they promote a ‘look’ and style, and venture into creating other forms of wearable art products. For example, Enspired Visions, founded in 2006 by Alexis Augustine (Navajo/Cochiti/Santo Domingo), is based out of California. Her cousins Erma Trujillo (Cochiti Pueblo), Alissa Augustine (Navajo) and Niko Deroin (Otoe Missouria/Choctaw) served as business partners. The genesis of the group transpired, according to Augustine (Native Voice TV 2006) when she questioned why fashion models, who were so prevalent in media, never spoke. These models promoted a silent image of women in which their voices or opinions were never heard, and Augustine sought to change this situation. As Augustine stated,

> We here at Enspired Visions feel that beauty is not based solely on the physical aspect… Beauty is in the way she walks the way she talks the way she smiles. Her Spirit.

*(Augustine 2009)*

This marketing statement speaks to her projected clientele: Augustine’s business celebrated the image of the activist woman who works within the urban Native community to provide role models and promote change for women and youth (Augustine 2009).
In early 2008, Trujillo and Alissa Augustine, branched out and founded GrayFox Creations. Their mission statement reiterated that of Enspired Visions. They explained,

GrayFox Creations is a continually growing company which utilizes, advocates, and encourages the importance of self expression through visual art, apparel, music, writing, spoken word, and photography. All outlets serve as a means to promote unity and cultural preservation throughout the Native American community, as well as serve as an outreach to educate others, as well as self, to develop a better understanding of all indigenous peoples worldwide.

(Augustine and Trujillo 2009)

Following in the footsteps of its sister company, GrayFox promoted the expression of the self through the arts, which included a multimodal approach involving the visual, the vocal, and the interactive aspects of performance – of which apparel plays an integral role. These grassroots companies may not last in the long run, but they represent a movement of young urban female artists, who combine entrepreneurship with creativity and community advocacy, and thus continue the legacy of the women discussed in the previous chapter.

About expressing identity in an urban setting, writer and actress Lisa Charleyboy (Tsilhqot’in/Chehokee/Dutch/Mexican) has stated,

No one that meets me in that [urban] environment would know that I am Native. I felt like I blended into the multi-cultural mosaic that is Toronto and that the only way people would recognize me as Native is if I somehow emulated their vision of what a native woman looks like.

(Charleyboy 2009)

These experiences – and understanding of self – led to Charleyboy’s photoshoot with First Nations photographer Nadya Kwandibens (Ojibwa) in which Charleyboy wore an Iroquoian beaded buckskin wedding dress through the busy city streets of Toronto.

Although she is not Iroquoian, Charleyboy connected with the buckskin dress because
she knew that it was a way to visually convey to non-Natives her identity as a First Nations woman. She explained,

So the imagery is a part of those pre-conceived stereotypical constructs that non-Natives place onto all Native women today. I even overheard someone say while shooting, “Look Pocahontas is crossing the street.” One of the only ways that I as a Native woman living in the city can be recognized as such is to don stereotypical garb that non-Natives can recognize.

(Charleyboy 2009)

Charleyboy raised an important question: How, in our current multi-cultured world, can Native people express their unique identities, especially when it carries so much weight with regard to personal worldview and connectedness to place without appearing to buy into stereotypes? Instead of blending into the multi-cultural mosaic of Toronto, she instead supported fashion statements that express Indianness, whether they are Native-made or not, and wore her identity on her sleeve. Charleyboy, like the women in this chapter, and the designers in the previous chapters, balance expressing Indianness and combating stereotypes. Native American fashion designers offer their non-Native clients ways to celebrate the diversity of Native cultures and they offer their Native clients options so that they can express Indian identity without being stereotypical.

VI. Conclusion

The Native American female fashion designers presented in this chapter infuse their ideas of beauty into their garments. They were receptive to individual tastes, such as color and fabric preferences, but also incorporated their own ideas about how to make their clients look as ‘beautiful’ as possible, and in a Native way. This played out in
different ways for each designer. For example, Wendy Ponca explained that her ideas of
beauty were intimately tied with a sense of confidence. Achieving this sense of
confidence in fashion could be accomplished in many ways, such as incorporating
accessories like feathers to reference strength and bravery, which are the qualities that
feathers are commonly bestowed in Native cultures. Ponca believed that she derived
strength from wearing a feather in her hair. She transferred this belief to her students,
models and clients. Michaels, Agoyo, Ponca, Simpson, and others, also connected beauty
with ideas of confidence and uniqueness. Unique individuals were beautiful, and they
expressed this beauty and distinctiveness with specially-made garments.

Young designers, such as Consuelo Pascual, Rose B. Simpson, Bethany
Yellowtail, and Maya Stewart, work within their own culturally specific worldviews as
well as within the global art world and aesthetic framework of fashion. Some designers
are schooled in fashion. Others are multi-media artists who approach clothing-making
from perspectives that continue tribal, community, and family traditions. Their
“collections” are not solely restricted to clothing and accessories, but may include
pottery, painting, sculpture, and other artistic media, such as photography and film.
Simpson works from the perspective of a multi-media artist who molds anthropomorphic
sculptures from clay and extends this practice to fabric, Pascual focuses on garment
construction and is conscientious not to break any Navajo spiritual rules, and Stewart is
inspired by Chickasaw cosmological beliefs about the star world. Through their work –
like their predecessors – these artists display their unique identities, and their inner
personalities, to broader audiences.
In our increasingly mobile world, Native designers exhibit their artwork on their own bodies, as well as on the bodies of people who buy their creations, and use their garments as tools of cross-cultural education and understanding. Native female designers play integral roles in cultural continuity and change by transferring traditional designs and concepts to a new medium, and in doing so, negotiate creativity and conservation of tradition simultaneously, and thus continue the long history of Native American culturalized personal adornment. By creatively adapting and updating traditional garments to meet international fashion’s changing body silhouettes, they modernize traditional designs and make them relevant in our contemporary lives. When Native designers Indianize contemporary fashion, they promote pride in Native identity and educate audiences about the diversity and vitality of contemporary Native cultures.

Today, Native couture designers create exclusive fashions for Indian market events, individual stores, have their own clothing lines available through elaborate websites, or have expanded their efforts into the ready-to-wear market. For many contemporary designers couture is a profession providing income for themselves, their families, and communities. They have participated in fashion events world-wide, including those in Amsterdam and South Africa. Some designers use eco-friendly materials, such as Patricia Michaels, emphasizing the important role of Native communities in maintaining the health of the earth. They use soy-based or bamboo fibers that are ‘green,’ yet still luxurious.

The women discussed in this chapter wear their own designs in fabrics, colors, silhouettes, and symbols that they feel compliment their bodies and celebrate their
identities. Patricia Michael’s conception of beauty was ephemeral and celebrated the body. Her loose flowing fabrics blurred body outlines and shape, and focused on a sense of spirit. While Pilar Agoyo’s notion of beauty glowed with shiny or luxe fabrics and bold Pueblo designs, Penny Singer’s focused on incorporating Native design elements into everyday wear. All of these definitions of sartorial beauty are about looking and feeling special, conveying identity, understanding relationships to community, exhibiting strength, and expressing voice.

By inscribing Native symbols onto modern cuts, Native designers refigure these designs and the concepts behind them to create a pathway for cultural persistence. Native creativity, fashion, and tradition intermix to produce a unique sense of couture that is receiving increased recognition and notoriety. As artists, they incorporate their own creative spirit, and take risks. They are also well-versed in the broader fashion movement and receptive to the latest trends, including new silhouettes and color palettes. They blend all of these aspects to create beauty and art for the body that offers a unique sense of self-expression.
CHAPTER 7
OF CLAY AND BODY: THE POTTERY
AND FASHION DESIGNS OF VIRGIL ORTIZ

“I told (Virgil) when he first started that there is no difference between you and your ancestors of the 19th century. Everything is the same. The only difference is that you, as a young Indian man, are influenced by other things going on around you than what your ancestors were influenced by.” – Robert Gallegos, quoted in Shaw (2006)

Cochiti potter-turned-designer Virgil Ortiz is celebrated in magazines, included in museum exhibitions, honored at juried events, and featured in Fashion Week shows. He has broken the buckskin barrier by questioning boundaries in his work and pushing the concept of tradition to new realms. Beginning with his pottery, Ortiz revives and remixes traditional vessel shapes and design motifs. His couture clothing lines extend his aesthetic practices onto different forms through a new medium, and, in a sense, bring his pottery to life. Performance, including portraying ‘otherness’ and acting out ‘Indianness,’ becomes a key component of his overall art vision.

Always pushing past the expected, Ortiz incorporates stereotypically ‘Indian’ elements in unexpected ways to please and excite his audiences, to advance his artistic vision, and to comment on stereotypes. Through the use of bold tribal tattoo motifs, feathers, and creative reinterpretations of pottery designs, Ortiz provokes his audiences into wanting more than the typical Indian style. With his use of other elements, such as
blindfolds and a secret language, Ortiz adds an additional, if unattainable, metaphorical level of ‘knowing’ and understanding his sometimes subversive work. Born into a family of clay artists whose work critiqued societal and cultural norms and practices, Ortiz extends this practice to clothing to subvert American fashion culture and express pride in his Pueblo heritage. As a former religious leader in his community, Ortiz recognizes the importance of cultural property rights, communal use of symbols, and respecting the tradition of ceremony. However, his work also warns against elitist practices that would render relevant cultural traditions unchangeable and thus unusable in contemporary society. European and American fashion has long been influenced by Native attire, and Ortiz has been the first Native American fashion designer to work collaboratively with an American couture designer to develop a true fusion of the styles, and to receive the recognition for it. Since his 2002 collaboration with Donna Karan, Ortiz has been featured in several newspaper and magazine articles and, with his boundary-crossing art, crossed over to national and international fame.

This chapter provides a critical analysis by investigating the fashion spectacles of Ortiz, whose work plays with and interrogates many boundaries, including those of male and female gender norms, underground and mainstream cultures, low and high art categories, and civilized and savage constructs (Batkin 1999, Baker 2004, Clark 2006, King 2000, Ortiz 1995). With his collaboration with Karan, Ortiz entered the mainstream fashion world, and has since become an international success. Through his work, he transfers Cochiti aesthetic concepts to the fashion world, including Cochiti composition and color theory, the Cochiti tradition of parody and social commentary through
performance, Pueblo storytelling and oral tradition themes, and cultural continuity through subversive creativity. Ortiz uses the lens of Cochiti aesthetics to understand, and express to others, the world around him. This chapter chronicles his trajectory, and analyzes his art, garments, and fashion shows and performances.

I. Virgil Ortiz: The Artist

Virgil Ortiz creates art in a variety of media, including clay, print, and cloth. Ortiz comes from a well-known family of potters, and his first form of artistic expression was in clay. He stated that it was not until he was a teenager that he realized his clay creations were considered art (Bishop 2006, Mountjoy 2007). It was then that he decided to develop his own style of figurative pottery (figure 26). Since then, his pottery has been exhibited throughout the country and internationally, including Paris at the Cartier Foundation for Contemporary Art in 2001.

One must view the fashion designs of Virgil Ortiz as extensions of his pottery and thus of the Cochiti pottery tradition. Ortiz sees a direct connection between his pottery and clothing designs; he succinctly stated, “[They] feed each other” (Bishop 2006: 46). The majority of his clay pots and figures are created with Cochiti clay, white and red clay slips, and black wild-spinach paint. They are decorated with corn, sun, and moon designs, as well as zigzag lines representing water. These colors and symbols are all used in his couture lines as well (Figure 27). Ortiz explained that the garments in his 2007 Scottsdale show were inspired by Cochiti pueblo pottery and that all the designs were Native designs (Truveo 2008). While other Native designers might update traditional attire,
Ortiz, on the other hand, recreates traditional Cochiti pottery and places it on the human form.

Ortiz’s family of potters is known for creating free standing clay figures. Ortiz’s mother, Seferina, taught her children, Inez, Janice, and Virgil, the Cochiti pottery-making techniques of both vessels and clay figures. Babcock et al. explained, “Seferina learned to make pottery in the 1960s from her mother, Laurencita Herrera, one of the few potters making human figurines in the decades before the Storyteller” (Babcock et al 1986: 34-39). These figures became known as Monos, or Muños. Some maintain that the Spanish term monos means ‘monkey,’ and others insist the definition to imply ‘pretty’ or ‘dainty’ (Babcock et al. 1986, Shaw 2006). Seferina’s figures featured traditional Cochiti pottery designs as well as naturalistic painted details (Babcock et al 1986: 34-39). The history of the Cochiti Muños is well-known and recounted often, perhaps because it expresses Indian agency, subversion, and revitalization.

Barbara Babcock and Guy and Doris Monthan, in their book *The Pueblo Storyteller: Development of a Figurative Ceramic Tradition*, described the long tradition of Puebloan figurative pottery. Spanish clergy who arrived in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries found the Pueblo figurative pottery to be of religious significance. In their zealous efforts, missionaries punished individuals, destroyed the figures, and denounced Native religion as devil-worshipping and witchcraft. Two consequences of the missionaries’ actions were the patterns of secrecy that developed and a gap in the ceramic record. Babcock et al. explained, “Despite the efforts of Spanish and then Anglo missionaries to stamp out Pueblo religious and ‘idolatry,’ the ceremonial system
survived, together with its figurative painting, carving, and pottery traditions” (1986: 5, 10).

Babcock, Monthan and Monthan describe the development of these pottery figures to increasingly incorporate Anglo attire in the mid- to late-1800s. The authors state, “By 1880, Cochiti potters were producing larger human forms whose painted clothing was almost entirely Anglo and whose stance as well as attire had an unmistakable note of caricature and mockery” (Babcock et al. 1986: 17). However, as Pueblo figurative pottery spread in the late 1800s, it was at first interpreted by Anglo customers to be of religious origin (Clark 2006: 81). While the consumers gladly purchased the ‘sacred’ figures, they later discovered that the clay figurines were actually caricatures of the non-Native newcomers to the Pueblos, such as priests, circus performers, tourists, and the white customers themselves. Art historian Jonathan Batkin stated, “Cochiti potters engaged in social criticism, conducting a discourse, often through parody, on the changing occupants of the Pueblo world” (1999: 43). These clay figures were both representations of and commodities for Anglo-Americans (King 2000: 338). Soon, this art form became regarded as inauthentic. Babcock et al. noted, “As recently as the 1930s, when Kenneth Chapman and colleagues at the Museum of New Mexico were encouraging significant pottery revivals, they were discouraging the manufacture of figurative pottery” (Babcock et al. 1986: 13).

However, as several scholars and Cochitis note, the figures were an extension of a long established traditional practice of societal critique through parody. Ortiz stated, “These figures were banned for a long time because they were social commentaries, they
were censored. I started making them to give them their voices back” (Diaz 2003: 213).
Cochiti critique of priests and tourists were silenced in order to protect the income-based
tourist market. Ortiz revived this practice in his figurative pottery, and the ‘inauthentic’
Muños is now recognized as a genuine Cochiti pottery style. Ortiz explained, “When I
first started making the figures, I had no idea what I was doing. Then a friend showed me
a collection of old pieces, and I was blown away – they were exactly like what I was
making!” (Díaz 2003: 213). He described this revival in a 1995 artist statement,

Staying within the tight boundaries of traditionally made Cochiti pottery, I
revive the Cochiti figurine, the Muños. Hard work, social criticism,
humor, and innovation are the basic ingredients of my pieces. Using
techniques, materials, and designs handed down from generations to me
by my mother, Seferina Otiz, I create the Cochiti Muños. Keeping the
pieces fresh and alive, giving them movement by the positioning of their
stance, detail of the painting, and overall quality are my goals for each
piece I create. I revive the subjects of the late 1800s, ‘The Opera Singer,’
‘Circus Men,’ ‘Grotesque Freaks,’ and ‘Social Criticism.’ I continue
where my people were forced to stop…. The Cochiti Muños is reborn.
(Ortiz 1995: 1)

Ortiz explained that these figures represent legitimate Cochiti art because they are
constructed using time-honored techniques, materials, and designs. They have been
produced for generations, and they exist within the guidelines of traditional Cochiti
pottery aesthetics and subject matter. He revived this practice, rendering it alive, fresh,
and contemporary in an era when Native people strive to regain, strengthen or continue
long-established practices as a form of cultural sovereignty. In proclaiming authenticity
and by educating others, Ortiz sets the stage to move beyond tradition.

Indeed Ortiz’s style is more than just Cochiti; it is also influenced by the ‘tribal
tattoo.’ His use of tattoo body art for his fashion shows and photo shoots appears to build
upon a fusion of Cochiti aesthetics, popular tattoo culture, and a global sense of tribal
tattoos. The pan-Indigenousness of his body art suggests his desire for a connection on a
global level. Indeed, Maureen Shwarz found similar results in her study on the North
American tattoo experience, in which her consultants’ stories revealed a longing to align
with the so-called primitive, via the Native American, in order to connect with a “primal
human essence seen as somehow lost through the process of civilization” (Schwarz 2006:
225). She stated,

In essence, people who get tattooed in North America frequently
experience this act as a means by which to forge a connection to the rest of
humanity; they see themselves as participating in a timeless spiritual quest
in common with people from cultures around the globe that practice
tattooing.

(Schwarz 2006: 225)

Similarly, Ortiz’s work draws on this desire while at the same time deconstructing
notions of ‘primal simplicity’ – which are often associated with the primitive – through
the intricate detailing of his body art and fashion shows.

Ortiz’s use of body art also signals a modern form of ritual and transformation.

Being and becoming a tattooed person for Ortiz’s shows is both a public and a private act
– Ortiz spends hours behind the scenes preparing his models for events by at first testing
different design patterns on their bodies, and then by painting the designs again for the
shows to transform the models into walking Muños figures. He takes fashion a step
further by inscribing the same swirls that he incorporates on his garments onto the human
skin. These unique body art designs help further differentiate Ortiz from other designers –
especially those who may seek to represent the Native in fashion – by offering a
culturally sensitive form of Indianness.
For decades, non-Native collectors, anthropologists, and art critics have determined the legitimacy of Pueblo pottery and have expressed this standardization in many ways, including Indian art market guidelines. For a long time, first place prizes at juried markets were awarded to those artists who replicated old forms and did not mix cultural styles. All the while, however, artists worked within guidelines and expectations by providing alternative interpretations of classic motifs. For example, Ortiz’s niece Lisa Holt (Cochiti) and partner Harlan Reano (Santo Domingo) invert patterns found on museum pots to produce striking new designs. Batkin stated, “Virgil Ortiz is recognized today as the paramount voice of figurative ceramists working in the Cochiti tradition of parody in clay portraiture” (Batkin 1999: 13). Ortiz and his family, who represent the new generation of award-winning artists, do more than just copy old forms. They introduce a new ‘traditional’ from which future generations will develop their creativity and cultural sensibility.

The social critique evident in Ortiz’s pottery parallels his critique of consumers in his fashion. Recently, high fashion found its way to runways on reservations via up-and-coming Native designers. It is thus an appropriate time for the emergence of Ortiz’s social commentary on the sometimes overindulgent, fickle, and fetish nature of high fashion as understood in popular American society. Of course these characteristics do not describe all fashion, instead, they are some of the elements that are brought forth in Ortiz’s work. It is fitting that these aspects of fashion are the ones he brings to the forefront, considering his ancestor’s focus on social commentary pertaining to outsiders coming into the Pueblos. Batkin described Ortiz as follows:
His style, which includes not only the work in clay, but his careful presentation of the work in print, and his fashion designs as well, lacks any apparent second-guessing of appropriateness. Bare-behinds of priests, sexual titillations, and plain open ridicule of collectors are all presented unapologetically. There is an air of naiveté about Ortiz’s work which is intoxicating. As a viewer, you long to be part of the joke, even if it’s on you.

(Batkin 1999: 13)

Ortiz’s social commentary in fashion is comparable to his ancestor’s critique of non-Native visitors to the Pueblos. These art forms offer an understanding of non-Pueblo people as ‘others,’ and thus a unique perspective on American culture, which draws on the long-standing view Ortiz derives from his ancestors.

Ortiz began making clothing when he was a high school junior in 1986 but had no formal training in fashion design (Ortiz 2007). He explained that he remembers when he was younger he would cut up his parent’s clothing, alter them, and sew them back together in different ways to create new patterns. He learned to sew as a teenager in order to create his own versions of the expensive clothing advertised in magazines and on television (Lockridge 2006: 26). His customized versions were based on tribal designs, and were typically event or club clothing made of vinyl, latex and leather, which were all materials he would continue to use in his later clothing designs. He started producing fashion shows in Santa Fe in 1998, and opened a boutique there in February of 2002 that he shared with his cousin Pilar Agoyo and her husband Cody Sanderson. These designers sold their one-of-a-kind garments, accessories, and jewelry out of this shop, called Heat: A Freak Boutique. With the sign for their store written with red lettering simulating dripping blood, this store was not the average Santa Fe Plaza boutique, and certainly not one that played on the usual Indian marketing motifs and tropes.
In 2002, New York fashion designer Donna Karan attended the 81st Annual Santa Fe Indian Market in August and met Ortiz. He explained, “She came to my boutique – Heat – during Indian Market 2002” (Walsh 2003: n.p.). The two of them collaborated to create a dress and a skirt, which would feature Karan’s cuts and Ortiz’s Pueblo pottery designs, such as the wild spinach, water, clouds, and fertility symbols of the southwest. Karan’s overall collection debuted as the Donna Karan Spring 2003 Collection during New York Fashion Week in September 2002. It was well-received and reviewers deemed her collection ‘patriotic’ as it “harkened back to the post-World War II era when there was a unified national opinion of what America stood for and where it should be heading” (Deeny 2002). This review reinforces the idea that Indianness continues to play a vital role in contemporary American notions of identity and in invoking a longing and nostalgia for the past and American history. With this collaboration, dubbed DKNYVO, Ortiz’s traditional Pueblo art was morphed onto the figures of runway models and transformed into haute couture. This highly publicized collaboration projected Ortiz’s work into the mainstream and demand for his art subsequently increased as well.

Since this 2002 debut as a high fashion designer, Ortiz’s budding career as a young artist expanded, and he was interviewed for newspaper and magazine specials, invited to fashion and art show events, honored at Indian Markets, and featured in exhibitions and books. Ortiz is perceived as being innovative, yet connected to his community, and is described as traversing boundaries and extending his knowledge and aesthetic practices to new territories, creatively using and blending various media, incorporating the new, and exploring all available resources. His family background is
discussed, and his proficiency in a ‘traditional’ art form is celebrated as offering an added ‘cultural dimension’ to his artwork. His connection to community is highlighted since he lives and works in the Cochiti Pueblo and supports local initiatives pertaining to language revitalization and youth programs.

In the fall of 2004, Ortiz was selected for a solo exhibition at the Heard Museum in Phoenix. Curated by Joe Baker, Virgil Ortiz: La Renaissance Indigène featured pottery, high fashion, storyteller figures, and a life-size leather and metal bedecked horse. It was installed in the Heard’s Crossroads Gallery. In Ortiz’s exhibition catalog, Baker stated,

Museums of art have largely relegated the so-called ‘cultural’ arts to only a subsidiary role: as object, adornment, a stage for topical discussions centered around cultural significance and meaning. In Virgil Ortiz we find a Native artist who is breaking down that stage, utilizing his traditions as inspiration for new work that moves well beyond the expected, therefore redefining any notions we may hold of ‘traditional’.

(Baker 2004)

By displaying the unexpected, Ortiz forces viewers to rethink the ‘expected’ and redefine the ‘traditional’ (Deloria 2004). For the Heard Guild’s 47th Annual Indian Fair & Market, Ortiz was selected to be the Signature Artist. As an honored guest, Ortiz was invited back to the 2006 Heard Indian Market and received an Honorable Mention Award in the category for Non-Traditional Attire. He also received two Judge’s Choice Awards, and, notably, he was the only artist to receive more than one of these prestigious ribbons. All three awards were for his signature black and tan dress, entitled Wild Flower Design. The dress mimics a pottery vessel shape, incorporates the Cochiti pottery color palette,
and contains his pottery design motifs. In essence, *Wild Flower Design* is a pot or vessel made of cloth meant to hold the human body.

The subsequent years were busy for Ortiz. In 2005, he traveled to Amsterdam to participate in an exhibition of five contemporary Pueblo potters, called *Free Spirit: The New Native American Potter*. After his *La Renaissance Indigéne* exhibit closed at the Heard Museum in May 2005, it moved to New York City and was shown at the National Museum of the American Indian’s George Gustav Heye Center in 2006. In the fall of that year, Ortiz was selected as the Poster Artist for the 85th Annual Santa Fe Indian Market. In this year, Ortiz was selling his *Indigéne* collection of outerwear, clothing, handbags, and jewelry, and his *Rezurrect* line of restyled clothing (Lockridge 2006: 26). In 2007, Ortiz introduced the *Renegade* collection of designer t-shirts. He also debuted his *Le Sauvage Primitif* collection of clothing at the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art in the spring of 2007. In November, *Le Sauvage Primitif* was featured during the Scottsdale Fashion Week. In 2008, his pottery and fashion shared display space at Ursa Gallery in Santa Fe and at King Galleries in Scottsdale. King Galleries continues to host shows for Ortiz with event titles like *Turmoil*, *Distortion*, and *Tourniquet* (King Galleries 2009). In 2009, Ortiz brought his work to New York during the Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week, and, in Santa Fe he debuted his Spring 2010 line, *Vagabond*, as well as his VO Home Décor Collection, at Shiprock Trading Company in Santa Fe.

This latest line, *Vagabond: Rogues, Tramps, and Wanderers*, takes the drifter as his muse. Representatives at Shiprock Trading explained,

> For over a century, the Vagabond has passed through the Pueblos, oblivious to cultural barriers and energizing the world with their own
power and mystery. Ortiz fuses the dynamic impression of the rogue traveler, the passionate vagrant, and the spiritual wanderer into his vision of The Vagabond through an organic mixture of art, high fashion and home décor.

(Shiprock Trading 2009)

With *Rogues, Tramps, and Wanderers*, Ortiz keeps with his interest in investigating people on the fringes of society, and also evokes Cher’s *Gypsies, Tramps and Thieves* trope. Well-known for her connection with the Indian via fashion and lyrics, Cher’s iconic headdress donned while singing *Half-Breed* is still a familiar image. Her *Gypsies, Tramps and Thieves* song recalls the story of a girl who ultimately follows the ‘cultural’ practices of her gypsy sideshow-performing mother (Stone 1971). Here, Ortiz reclaims this image and revamps it with a Puebloan twist, since wanderers have passed through the Pueblos for over a century and Cochiti artists have captured their images in clay figures. Ortiz is not the first designer to take the vagabond as muse – he is the first, however, to use this concept from the Cochiti perspective and does not merely recycle the stereotyped imagery of the gypsy, but rather thinks in terms of the global cultural traveler.

Ortiz’s fashion draws from many inspiration points. His earlier collections were comparable to heavy metal and rock and roll fashion (KNME New Mexico PBS 2009), since they contained similar elements: leather jackets, boots, blue or black jeans, flannel, and pins, studs, patches, and bullets as adornment. His use of these items also corresponds with the reintroduction of the rebel in popular culture. Ortiz’s clothing line, like heavy metal fashion, also incorporates modern military components, including field jackets, camouflage, and olive drab green uniforms. This incorporation of military fashion is not a new idea; in fact, Native groups have a long history of selecting elements
of military garb and including them in their everyday or special occasion wardrobe. Ortiz takes this practice into the twenty-first century and represents the iconic Native warrior.

II. The Violin and the Savage: Performance, Exoticism, and Eroticism

Just as social commentary is important to Ortiz’s work, so is social parading. It is relevant to note that Ortiz wears his own clothing designs. Any commentary that he may be making about the world of fashion, he himself participates in. While he sometimes wore black contact lenses to events, he insists that when he returns to the Pueblo, his edgy appearance becomes more subdued. In this sense, his ‘social parading’ changes according to his ‘audience.’ Ortiz explained why this change according to audience is necessary, “It’s a small pueblo, and I don’t dress like that around here. They understand the deal; it’s all artwork” (Servin 2003: 1). Native art historian and scholar Nancy Mithlo pointed out, “Social masquerading has a long tradition in cultures across the globe…social parading is pursued by every one of us daily” (Mithlo 1999: 13-14). Art plays such a significant role in his everyday life, he even wears it, and dresses in clothing and accessories that turn him into a “walking piece of performance art” (Touchette 2003: 122). Adding to this aspect of performance, role play, and parody, Batkin also referenced the sacred Pueblo clowns when discussing Ortiz and his art, stating, “Sacred Pueblo clowns today mime and ridicule outsiders, and the same was probably true in the nineteenth century” (1999: 48). In this way, Ortiz plays the role of a more secular performer, one that mimes and questions the fashion and art worlds of outsiders. Native American studies scholar Jonathan C. H. King stated, “Yet because of the importance of
clowns in Puebloan ceremonials, Ortiz effectively places the outsider – the viewer, the curator, the American sideshow artist – each in turn at the center of his Puebloan world” (2000: 340). Through Ortiz’s analysis, reproduction, and distortion of these images, he presents the outsider in Keresan terms.

One of Ortiz’s first forays into fashion performance, and an example of how he places the outsider at the center, was a video he produced, called *The Side Show*, which was shot in the format of a fashion show and featured family and friends as performers. This video was inspired by the earlier Cochiti figurines that depicted circus sideshow performers in New Mexico (King 2000: 338). In 1999, Ortiz stated,

> I work with video and photography to recreate the old circus sideshows. I use models to portray some of the circus characters, like Siamese twins and tattooed people. I used some of my young nieces and nephews – three- and four-year-olds – to appear as small, dwarflike beings. Using masks and shooting in black and white adds to that old feeling, too.

(Diaz 1999: 32)

Ortiz’s interest in the old circus sideshows is significant to note. While American society may have ostracized or exoticized circus participants, these outcasts found a home and family in the circus world, and were successful performers in their own right. The 1932 film *Freaks*, produced by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), tells the story of circus sideshow performers. Producer and director Tod Browning portrayed the freaks as good people, while the only two ‘normal’ performers, a trapeze artist and a strongman, are the ones revealed to be conspiring to murder the midget lead for his large inheritance (Browning 1932). Browning selected actual circus performers for his cast, but the moviegoers in the 1930s were shocked by the actors’ deformities and the film was subsequently banned in some areas. The audience reactions to this now-cult-classic film
attest to society’s impressions of people who appear different (Lorefice 2002). The movie prologue stated, “The revulsion with which we view the abnormal, the malformed and the mutilated is the result of long conditioning by our forefathers” (Browning 1932). These outsiders continue to be celebrated in Ortiz’s work.

Performance is an important aspect of Ortiz’s fashion shows. He stated, “All of the people that model for me are dancers” (Truveo 2008), and this dance background influences his shows. He collaborates with Native performance artists, such as the Dancing Earth collective headed by well-known dancer and choreographer Rulan Tangen (Métis) for his events. The connection between fashion and performance is an ancient one in Indigenous communities – Native peoples have long created special attire, and painted their bodies, for dance events or ceremonies. Along with Dancing Earth, Ortiz draws on this history to create contemporary interpretations that combine modern dance with global Indigenous dance styles. About Ortiz, Mithlo stated, “he seems to simply like the act of drama associated with performance of any sort, whether it be in clay, fashion shows, or slick magazine ads. His face to the world, as casual as it might appear, is carefully constructed” (Mithlo 1999: 13-14). Ortiz understands the role that performance plays in relaying various messages. His shows and art can be understood or viewed as individual pieces, but are more evocative when seen in relation with each other as performances.

Ortiz’s 2007 Scottsdale Fashion Week show opened with a performance by Quetzal Guerrero. Guerrero is Native American, Brazilian, and Mexican, and is a singer, violinist, dancer, and model. Bedecked in black denim jeans painted with Ortiz’s
signature swirls, Guerrero’s torso, arms, and face were also painted with the artist’s curvilinear designs in black. Black horsehair hung from the model’s full-length black vinyl armbands, and long black feathers decorated his head. Bare-chested, tattooed, and feathered, this character evoked an image of the primitive savage (figure 27). However, with an unexpected twist, Guerrero held a bright blue electric violin. Blindfolded, he walked the full length of the catwalk, swaying and playing his violin. This juxtaposition of elements associated with the wild, such as nudity (bare chest), creatures (feathers), and tattooing (the word itself is of Native Polynesian origin), and those elements associated with the civilized, such as a violin (an important instrument to classical music) and couture fashion (born out of tailored stylings for the European elite class), coalesce to present a captivating opening impression and creates tension and desire, which are essential for performative runway shows.

Such an image was necessary to open a show titled *Le Sauvage Primitif*. Ortiz explained the genesis of this collection: during a 2001 Paris event, Ortiz was repeatedly referred to in the Parisian media as *le sauvage primitive*, or wild savage. At first, the racist label infuriated Ortiz. Soon after, however, he embraced the label, claimed ownership of it, and adopted it as the name for one of his clothing lines, which was released in 2007 (Ortiz 2007). Sally Price, in her book *Primitive Art in Civilized Places*, suggested that viewing the artist “as a primal creature with special gifts for tapping into the unconscious” has kept artists locked in their studios, painting or sculpting like silent workers, and has inhibited them from entering important discourses on art (2001: 133). Ortiz’s use of inversion and subversion for this clothing line is a thought-provoking, yet
dangerous, way to undermine stereotypes. By appropriating the label, he sought to redefine it along with the image of Native people. Interestingly, in France in the late eighteenth-century, a group of artists referred to themselves as *les primitives* and advocated a “return to classical sources as a creative stimulus for art and dress” (Mackrell 2005: 22). Ortiz, too, refers to classical Puebloan sources to create his art and couture.

III. The Exotic and Erotic: Defying Stereotypes While Playing Indian with Tattoos, Feathers, Leather, and Fringe

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, exotic is defined as, “Outlandish, barbarous, strange, uncouth. Also, having the attraction of the strange or foreign, glamorous” (2009). To render something exotic is to glamorize it and portray it as unusual, yet appealing, often with the implication of romanticization, stereotyping, or condescension. Exoticism can be thought of as the representation of one culture for consumption by another. Inherent in exoticism then is the appropriation of the ‘other.’ Exoticism can promote cultural dialogue since anything can be deemed exotic, depending on cultural perspectives. Ortiz utilizes this known attraction to the exotic and includes elements in his shows that will pique the desire to view the strange. Eventually, however, the unfamiliar becomes normal. For example, the voyeuristic consumption of the exoticized Native ‘other’ was generalized through popular cultural representations. Ortiz’s attempt to exoticize his models and garments may be an attempt to destabilize the expected Indian, which was already-commodified in the 1950s Hollywood westerns, the 1970s Hippie culture, and by Ralph Lauren and the Santa Fe style of the 1980s.
Ortiz’s black feathers, while some might deem them stereotypical, not only compliment the black body art and garments (which were of a predominantly black and white palette), but also harken back to Cochiti pottery motifs in which black designs are painted on a white background. In addition, several Pueblo pottery traditions include the feather symbol, such as the black-on-black pottery of Maria and Julian Martinez from San Ildefonso, and the Cochiti practice of embellishing the tops of pots with repetitive shapes, sometimes including complicated adaptations of older feather motifs. In *Archaeologies of the Pueblo Revolt*, Jeannette Mobley-Tanaka noted how crosses all but disappeared in pottery designs after the revolt of 1680, while bird imagery reappeared, demonstrating “an explosion of the use of feather motifs, across the entire Pueblo area, to the extent that almost every vessel has some form of feather motifs” (2002: 81). Mobley-Tanaka tied aesthetic practices, such as pottery, to strategic and deliberate resistance. Similarly, Ortiz’s use of the feather design symbolizes a conscious resistance.

Feathers included in any kind of Native imagery will always trigger associations (Bolton 2004). Ortiz’s feathers allude to various meanings and multiple points of reference – including the aforementioned purpose of aesthetics and Cochiti pottery references, but they also signal the traditional use of feathers as adornment by various Native communities, as well as the use of feathers by non-Native Hollywood costume-makers to signal Indianness. In the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s exhibition catalogue for *WILD: Fashion Untamed*, Andrew Bolton explained, “The appeal of feathers extends beyond aesthetics. Historically and cross-culturally, they have been used to convey both sexual and economic supremacy” (2004: 81). Sumptuous plumage, he noted, was a
blatant presentation of wealth and status, and the association of feathers with a virile masculinity is most obvious in the design and display of Native warbonnets (Bolton 2004: 81). Ortiz’s use of feathers accentuated these points: they were used aesthetically, but also to relay sexual, cultural, and economic messages that would signal to his buyers that these garments display affluence and style and mark them as chic and cultured individuals. Because feathers have strong connections with stereotypes does not mean that Native designers cannot incorporate them for aesthetic or philosophical purposes. However, any attempt to use feathers, or another similarly meaning-laden item, runs the risk of being simplified and over-generalized as ethnically stereotypical.

Through the use of plumage in his shows, Ortiz both subscribes to and resists stereotypes. He trains his audience how to see his work by presenting garments that are completely unexpected yet undoubtedly ‘Indian,’ next to garments that incorporate the more ‘stereotypical’ elements such as fringed leather jackets. Audience members responded by commenting on these jackets: “that’s stereotypical.” After observing his show and the diverse possibilities of Native fashion, these viewers seek something distinctively ‘Indian,’ yet not stereotypical. While leather fringe is an ‘authentic’ way to embellish garments, such as the Plains warrior shirts of the 1800s, fashion consumers seek other authentic forms that have not ‘degenerated’ into popular stereotypical sartorial triggers.

Ortiz’s art and couture can be read as a retaliation against romanticized depictions of Indians. He stated, “I would rather be photographed to look like a freak that to pose under a piñon tree gazing off into the distance while holding one of my pieces” (Diaz
1999: 33). A popular image of the noble Indian, this type of ‘posing’ does not interest Ortiz. Instead, he presents an entirely opposite ‘look’: one that is garbed in black leather and relays a sense of strength, mystique, and superiority. Ortiz’s aforementioned shop, Heat: A Freak Boutique, countered romantic stereotypes of Native people. Ceramics historian and gallerist Garth Clark explained, “Ortiz carefully controls the way he is perceived to ensure that he is not portrayed as an Indian stereotype” (2006: 81). However, Ortiz still plays with stereotypes – including those which he embodies: the mysterious man or avant-garde artist. His unexpected individuality refigures and positions himself in other categories (Deloria 2004). Ortiz’s art and presentations oppose the passive, peaceful, complacent, noble Indian stereotypes, such as those stereotypes commercialized in his home region of northern New Mexico.

While Ortiz fights being pigeonholed as a certain type of Indian, he also attempts to ‘other’ himself from the average American. Ortiz not only creates clay people fashioned after the circus-inspired Muños created by his ancestors, he also extends that style to the garments that he creates for himself and for sale. Thus he creates a direct connection between himself and the so-called circus freaks of the late nineteenth-century. In a review of the exhibit *Clay People*, King explained, “In associating marginal people with himself, Ortiz is defining and reconfirming his otherness by reference to, relatively speaking, those far outside of the normal Euro-American worlds. His work is also subliminally linked with nineteenth-century interest in the circus” (2000: 339). Indeed, the spectacles of his art work and performance pieces harkened back to the intrigue associated with the circus sideshows.
Whether intentionally or subconsciously, in ‘othering’ himself, Ortiz may be viewed, by extension, as ‘othering’ Native people. King explained, “In effect he is re-othering or re-exoticizing Native people through referral to the nineteenth-century with a strong late-twentieth-century focus” (2000: 341). It is important to note that sideshows of the nineteenth-century included individuals from Indigenous communities and third world countries. Native people were ‘exhibited’ alongside circus freaks and human anomalies (King 2000: 341). These individuals were thought of by the American public as ‘outsiders’ and were excluded from participating in American society. They were ‘caged’ either in World’s Fair expos where they were exhibited (Parezo and Fowler 2007), or on reservations where they were not allowed to leave without permission (Fusco and Heredia 1993). Ortiz examines this process of exoticizing and othering Native people. King explained, “Ortiz is in a rather dangerous sense revisiting ideas of Native inclusion in these sideshow performances, a grouping regularly regarded as an unacceptable aspect of the primitivizing Western mentality” (2000: 342). As Ortiz constructs his shows, he references the past and confronts the ‘primitivizing Western mentality.’ He also problematizes the outcast construct, which defines these individuals as people rejected from society or home. Ortiz proposes that, instead, these individual may have rejected mainstream class-based society.

Some individuals chose to group themselves with the societal outcasts. For example, men and women in the late nineteenth century actively tattooed their otherwise ordinary bodies in order to affiliate themselves with the outcasts of the circus (Mifflin 1997). Ortiz recognizes the power of body decoration to mark affiliation, and utilizes this
tool to raise questions pertaining to who is identified as an outsider, and why they are labeled as such. Ortiz once stated, “We tend to act out the roles that are assigned to us” (Diaz 1999: 33). As a self-recognized ‘outsider,’ Ortiz positions himself outside of popular American culture, and, as a detached individual capable of producing valuable critiques of American society, he utilizes his art and fashion as a platform for discussion. Finally, by associating himself and Native people with outsiders, Ortiz reinforces the idea that Native people are uniquely different than the broader American public. When discussing Ortiz’s motive for this association, King suggested, “the answer may lie in the continuing need for Natives to define ‘otherness’ – being ‘Indian’ may no longer entail ‘other’ enough” (King 2000: 341). If Native people have been colonized or assimilated, Ortiz seeks to re-exoticize them and denote their difference with the ultimate goal of confirming otherness, self-governance and Native national sovereignty by ensuring that Cochiti traditions persist.

Ortiz re-exoticized and aestheticized the ‘Native’ through his fashion shows and photo shoots. For example, the models in some of the DKNYVO promotional photographs were painted with dark skin (Walsh 2003), intensifying his black-and-white designs but also accentuating exotic otherness. His male models are often bedecked with geometric face paint, feathered hair pieces, and intricate braids (figure 27). He utilized black body art to bring attention to the bodies of his models, but also to cover them with a cultural second skin (Mifflin 1997, Brain 1979). In Ortiz’s opening for his Scottsdale fashion show in 2007, model Quetzal Guerrero’s partially-nude and painted body referenced tribal tattoos, making him a walking, living embodiment of historical contact:
the traditional practice of tattooing in some Native communities is well-known because of early voyagers, explorers, and travelers wrote about this practice, and used it as a marker of primitivism that was used to justify further infiltration into Native lands.

Guerrero’s torso was painted with Ortiz’s renditions of the swirling tribal ‘tattoos’ he painted on his pots. With this act, the Guerrero’s body became Ortiz’s vessel, and the model became a human incarnation of Ortiz’s clay art. The association between clay and the human body is a long standing one in Pueblo belief. According to Barbara Babcock and Guy and Doris Monthan, clay was regarded as a living substance: “In addition to many stories which tell how the people came to make pottery, every recorded Pueblo origin myth also describes the creation of life itself as occurring in part through the process of pottery making” (Babcock et al 1986: 9). Ortiz draws attention to this connection and reveals the relationship between decorating pottery and decorating the body: in both, identity is inscribed.

The exotic continues to be sought in fashion and accessories. The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s 2004 exhibit, WILD: Fashion Untamed, explored the ongoing obsession with animalism as expressed through clothing, and how the use of furs, skins, and feathers in couture relayed sensual exoticism. The fashion magazine Harper’s Bazaar featured a 2009 spread on shoes and purses made with animal skin prints and beaded embellishments. The fashion editor urged, “Evoke the exotic in chic skins and tasseled extras” (Pimentel 2009: 163). This editorial spread was the only one in the entire publication to feature a non-white model. Furthermore, only the legs, feet, arms, and hands of this dark-skinned model were shown, as she carried zebra-print purses and wore
leopard-patterned shoes. The title of the spread, *Most Desired*, said it all: not only is darkness associated with mysteriousness and intrigue, but also accessories or accents that suggest the exotic are desirable because they draw on the charm of the unfamiliar.

In addition to exoticism, Guerrero’s partially nude body also performed eroticism. Cree painter Kent Monkman explained the value of utilizing eroticism in art: “I play with sexuality and gender to discuss power” (Smithsonian Institution 2005). Ortiz, too, applied eroticism to discuss power relationships among the sexes and races. Numerous scholars discuss the American obsession with the Native male body (Dussel 2005, Sheardy 1999) – which is perhaps epitomized by the covers of romance novels – and with this dramatic opening, Ortiz and Guerrero capture the attention and imagination of the audience. Guerrero is non-threatening: his visual edge is offset with the sound of his violin. The combination of the swirling body art, long dangling horsehair and flowing feathers make Guerrero almost whimsical. As several authors note, plumage and tattoo art were both used throughout time as displays of wealth and status, and their display increased one’s erogenous power (Balvay 2008, Bolton 2004, Brain 1979, Franke 1999, Utanga and Mangos 2006). The Native models who participate in Ortiz’s shows note the erogenous power that this involvement bestows them (Gonzalez 2007). One of his male models, Adam Joaquin Gonzalez, explained, “it’s really cool because every one is beautiful and we roll up into these bars throughout the city and you can hear a pin drop when twelve-plus Native women and men roll in [sic]” (Gonzalez 2007). Raising desire, the models elicit attention from the audience and prepare them for the show to come – with both formal fashion shows and informal appearances at social events. Fashion, expressed in
varying combinations of form and function, is debuted at events that combine art and
function – fashion shows present the artwork, they incorporate varying elements of
performance and spectacle, and shock the audience into new ways of looking, and aim to
sell the clothing or image.

In his artwork and fashion, Ortiz also incorporates elements, such as black leather,
that refer to bondage and sadomasochism. Fashion historian Elyssa Da Cruz noted,
“While the tough armor of black leather has dominated fetish aesthetics since the late
nineteenth century, the prudish eye of high fashion only timidly introduced leather as
accessories and trimming in the mid-twentieth century” (2004: 166). French designers
Yves Saint Laurent and Thierry Mugler were two of the first couturiers to explore the
tough-chic possibilities and erotic connotations of leather as a ‘savage second skin’ (Da
Cruz 2004: 166). Ortiz incorporates these sexual fetish references and raises questions
about power and subversion. In one way, as King noted, Ortiz’s images exist as another
form of otherness by utilizing the powerful marginalizing capabilities of media sexual
exploitation (2000: 341), but in another way, Ortiz draws attention to this process of
exploiting the ‘other’ through sexualized erotic imagery. He covers his male and female
models in a protective second skin of black leather, which signals to the viewer ‘look but
don’t touch’ (Da Cruz 2004: 167). In this way, Ortiz reverses the power relationship.
Similar to Monkman’s artwork, Ortiz and Guerrero, in what could be deemed a seducing
manner, created an image that challenges audience members to “dismantle commonly
held assumptions regarding Native peoples, history, and the colonization of our
sexualities” (Smithsonian Institution 2005).
Through his artwork and fashion, Ortiz creates a hyperbolic Native male, but also invokes the Native femme, or huntress, and *la belle sauvage*, or Indian princess. Ortiz’s opening ‘act’ for the Scottsdale fashion show was balanced by the introduction of Ortiz’s signature model and muse, Leslie Elkins (San Juan Pueblo), representing the Native *femme fatale* (figure 28). Dressed in black, she wore a tight miniskirt over leggings, pointed high heeled shoes, arm sleeves, and a cinched black leather corset. She was blindfolded and carried a rose in her mouth. Long black feathers adorn her hair, and a modest black fur shrug was wrapped around her neck. She carried a bow and arrow referencing a ‘huntress.’ Ortiz’s juxtaposition of various meaning-laden objects and materials reasserted the tensions between the wild and the tame that he introduced with Guerrero (Bell-Price 2004: 11). Ortiz presented his version of the ‘modern primitive,’ an oxymoronic term to describe a style that appeared in the 1980s when tattooing and piercing became fashionable (Bell-Price 2004: 20).

Fashion historian Shannon Bell-Price discussed the exploration of the modern-primitive in couture and the use of the huntress as an intriguing modern feminine persona adopted by contemporary designers (2004):

> Of these [feminine personas] it is the archetype of the huntress, with her power and free-spirited independence, that is most frequently celebrated. When envisioning this prehistoric stereotype, contemporary designers invariably dress her in pelts, hides, and leathers…. Designers impress a savage sexuality onto the wearer by using such ancient tropes to convey modern concepts of womanliness.

(Bell-Price 2004: 11)

In a similar fashion, Ortiz invokes the huntress to impart a sense of inherited female strength, power and independence. With her bow and arrow, Elkins can provide food (the
hunted) and clothing (the animal skins that she wears) for herself. This representation pulls from Ortiz’s creative rendition of the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 – of which he seeks to reproduce in various forms such as comic books and film – to create a female heroine. As previously mentioned, Ortiz constructs an image composed of seemingly contradictory components, however, the elements harmonize and the models appear “comfortable with the contradictions they embody, they radiate an atavistic, mythologized beauty through a successful fusion of the wild and the civilized, the crude and the refined” (Bell-Price 2004: 27). Ortiz reinterprets the prehistoric universalized huntress as a modern icon of femininity, the self-sufficient heroine as a hunter, protector, gatherer, and nurturer (Bell-Price 2004: 15, 31). Bell-Price explains, “This modern-primordial mode alludes to adjustments of gender identity imbedded in our digitally nomadic culture, with its increasingly complex ideals of femininity” (Bell-Price 2004: 31). Ortiz’s celebration of the huntress heroine fuses Puebloan, as well as pan-Indigenous and non-Native gender expectations to present a Native *femme* who expresses multifarious feminine ideals that speak to our increasingly globalized world.

Ortiz’s posse of models, artists, and dancers not only collaborate for fashion shows, but are also seen together at informal events. Garth Clark explained:

> He is rarely seen in Santa Fe without his head-turning entourage of friends and family. Their entrances at openings and other events, sporting outrageous clothes of his design, temporary tattoos, piercings, weird hairdos and other accoutrements, are already part of Santa Fe legend. (Clark 2006: 81)

As Ortiz’s model Adam Joaquin Gonzalez described earlier, Ortiz’s entourage, whether participating in a fashion show, or gathering for a casual social event, knows that they are
being looked at, and, in a sense, on display. They are aware of being the object of their audience’s gaze. Andrews wrote, “Ortiz’s work, regardless of the medium, always plays with the viewer by returning the gaze” (Andrews 2004: n.p.). Ortiz moves Native fashion from the margins to the center with his innovative, imaginative, and original artwork, and his insightful manipulation of performance and showmanship.

Ortiz’s models may distract attention from the clothing, yet they undoubtedly enhance the aspects of presentation and experience. These individuals present chic, avant-garde Indianness in the form of the partially-nude, sculpted Native male body, or the arrow-toting leather-clad huntress. One barefoot and long-haired male model in particular was loinclothed, feathered, and covered with body paint and face paint. The audience’s aroused reaction was not in response to Ortiz’s black loincloth and red and green Pueblo sash. This particular ensemble demonstrates how Ortiz is selling a ‘look’ and concept as much as clothing.

Various authors have begun discussing important issues pertaining to non-Western fashion design. The majority of these studies focus on African or Asian fashion systems (Kondo 1997, Loughran 2009, Nagrath 2003, Rovine 2001). In 2003, Sumati Nagrath discussed fashion in India and argued the following:

> despite its popularity in the West, Indian fashion is still looked at with an Oriental gaze and gets “defined as somehow lesser than, somehow Other to and somehow more feminized than [its] perennial Western foil” (Jones and Leshkowich 2003: 5).

(Nagrath 2003: 262)

Quoting the concurrent study by Jones, Leshkowich, and Niessen (2003), Nagrath highlighted the temporal significance of this topic. Nagrath’s central concern was to
discuss “the degree to which Indian designers internalize this Oriental gaze and how this internalization makes itself apparent in their creations for a domestic market” (2003: 262). Non-Western designers, Nagrath maintained, internalize old Orientalist tropes and re-manifest them on the runway. Nagrath utilized the framework proposed in Dorinne Kondo’s 1997 article on global Japanese fashion. In these articles, Nagrath and Kondo discussed the interplay between Indian, or Japanese, fashion and various forms of Orientalism. Kondo identified three key sites where Orientalist discourses are reinscribed and contested (Kondo 1997: 57).

The first space, she explained, was the moment of Western Orientalizing, wherein the old Orientalist construct of the uncivilized exotic ‘other’ are recirculated. Here, a non-Western designer is simultaneously perceived as an inadequate imitator as well as a racial threat. In this first moment, success is gauged by the recognition received in the West. The second moment is marked by ‘autoexoticizing,’ or exoticization of the self, which results from an appropriation of the Western gaze. With this action, one’s own culture becomes exoticized and particular symbology that is emblematic of their traditions is utilized (1997: 81). The final moment, Kondo maintained, wherein Orientalism becomes recirculated is the moment when the non-Western designer begins to use his or her current global economic and political power to Orientalize others (1997: 57).

In this model it is also important to discuss the moments of counter-Orientalisms – or moments when individual designers challenge and resist the Orientalist frameworks within which they are inscribed (Nagrath 2003: 363). Through these two studies, it becomes clear that first, in non-Western fashion events, the universality of Western
norms of fashion are accepted and promoted, and second, non-Western designers grapple with various forms of Orientalisms (Nagrath 2003: 362-363). Some designers also resist and subvert these moments of self-Orientalizing and the Orientalization of the Other: some break free from the restricting stereotypes evident in the Western gaze. Nagrath seems to suggest that there are only two ways to do this, to eradicate all references to the self as different and engage in American/European fashion, or on the other hand to refuse to perceive non-Western attire as ‘ethnic’ and to challenge the idea that there is a boundary between the traditional and the trendy. With his Indian Fashion Show, Frederic H. Douglas attempted to eradicate any perceived differences between American and Native clothing systems, and claimed that fashion was universal (Parezo 2007). By stressing the commonalities between the two using a selective lens, Douglas’ legacy raises an important question regarding whose categories of comparison are being used: American/European or Native/tribal?

Indeed, Ortiz’s initial success as a designer was determined by the recognition he received collaborating with American designer Donna Karan. However, he was also well-received by the Native community and was deemed a successful artist before this collaboration. His in-your-face art and fashion, while we might conceptualize it as ‘autoexoticizing,’ does not derive from an appropriation of the Western gaze, but rather from gazing at the West from an outsider’s perspective. His interest in societal outcasts debunks the myth of the consensus in fashion. As Jones and Leshkowich explain several successful non-Western designers “position themselves as conversant with cultured modernity by claiming knowledge of their ethnic heritage and a globally informed
understanding of why that heritage is valuable and fashionable” (Jones, Leshkowich, and Niessen 2003: 33). Ortiz’s events and participation in major fashion week shows can be seen as providing a platform for designers from which it becomes possible for them to question the restricting frameworks that define ‘Indian fashion system’ and reclaim control over representations of the self (Nagrath 2003: 364).

The Cochiti Muños were a form of social criticism, humor, and innovation, and these characteristics are evident in Ortiz’s fashions. He found a new way to expand this art form by incorporating the Muños’ key aspects, such as liveliness and movement, into fashion. Ortiz used the lens of Cochiti aesthetics to understand, and express to others, the world around him. He applied that lens in his contemporary work, and used it to create fashion for himself, his shows, and for others. Non-Cochitis may deem his work mere eroticism, or ‘kinky’ (Giuliano 2006, Servin 2003, Walker 2008), while this is an element, it is not the end-all. If we view his fashion as an extension of his pottery, we can grasp a fuller understanding of his designs.

As evidenced through Ortiz’s fashion, the significant thing about parody, is that it can “reaffirm the legitimacy of cultural order or challenge its irreversibility by demystifying that order” (Batkin 1999: 13). Through his clothing designs, Ortiz reaffirms the legitimacy of the Cochiti cultural order. He has found a new way to present Cochiti Muños to reflect today’s society, to continue their original intent of humor and satire, and to ensure their continuation.

Ortiz’s striking images force viewers to question expectations and explore other possible meanings. Unlike many Native-inspired fashions, he is interested in what Native
fashion could look like in the future. About his fashion, Ortiz stated, “I would basically describe the whole thing as Native American fashion stuck on fast forward” (Truveo 2008). How would Native clothing look if it was thrown hundreds of years into the future?

IV. Subversion and Resistance: Blindfolds and Secret Languages

While his fashions may seem like a far cry from the Muños of the 1800s, they actually share similar elements. Like his Muños, Ortiz’s Indigene line critiques high fashion consumerism, celebrates Indianness and expresses Native pride, and opens a dialogue pertaining to issues of resistance and acts of subversion. Touchette agreed, “He exposes the underbelly of society… the earliest examples of clay figures by their ancestors were equally shocking, equally confrontational” (2003: 122). Interestingly, while the early Muños featured the attire of Anglo men, the peculiar clothing practices of female non-Pueblos were not a main subject for potters in the late 1800s. Batkin stated, “Euro-American women, with their peculiar fashions and coiffures, might conceivably have been tempting material for a witty potter, but we have not located an example of this subject” (Batkin 1999: 43). Perhaps carrying this on, Ortiz paints his body art almost exclusively on the male body. Ortiz’s fashions take on the role that Muños served, and by taking the Muños to the runway, he reaches a broader audience in doing so. Ortiz utilizes his art to comment on social culture, including the fashion and art worlds.

Female models followed the dual opening with, first, Guerrero and his violin, and then Elkins with her bow and arrow. They were bedecked with feathers or traditional
Hopi bun hair styles, brightly tinted crimson red lips, and blindfolds. The blindfolds, Ortiz explained in a television special, reference a Pueblo story in which young girls were blinded by the Castilians because of their superior skill in archery (figure 28). Those familiar with the story will recall it when seeing this twenty-first century rendition, the rest of the world, however, will probably see the blindfolds as referring to something else.

On a basic level of understanding, the blindfolds may be viewed as aesthetically intriguing. On another level, some observers may perceive the association between this item and sexual dominance. In another way, viewers may take this association and draw conclusions about Ortiz’s work as discussing power relationships. Finally, his blindfolds may be interpreted as symbolizing those who blindly follow trends, buying into fashion and adopting behaviors based on popularity. That Ortiz would comment on the herd mentality associated with fashion by parading it down his runways is not a far stretch, Batkin explained, “Figurines expressed the ways that potters viewed those who differed from themselves, and many are humorous and satirical” (1999: 43). Here, Ortiz’s models could replace the figurines as the means to observe fashion victims, who dress according to popularity amongst peers. As Mithlo noted, “Indian artists continue to comment on the world around them using the tools that have served them best in the last millennium – humor and innovation” (Mithlo 1999: 12). While Ortiz uses new materials such as blindfolds and leather, his ‘traditional’ tools include innovation, humor, commentary, and peer pressure and gossip, which are ways to relay societal norms and values.
Indeed, subversion and resistance in the form of championing Cochiti aesthetics and culture over other forms are central aspects of Ortiz’s work. One way he accomplishes this goal is by bringing in the element of language in his art. For the *La Renaissance Indigéne* exhibition, Peter Held explained, “The artist also incorporates both real and imagined text in his work” (2004). Ortiz recognizes the importance of his native Keres language, but he also incorporates two forms of written language – the first is his use of general Native and more specific Keresan symbology, such as the wild spinach symbol (figure 25), which are recognizable picture-words, and the second is his incorporation of his own invented written language. As a youngster in Cochiti Pueblo, Ortiz and his friends created their own secret language, and years later these coded letters have morphed into a calligraphic surface design that embellishes his artwork and garments. While only a few individuals can translate these ‘words,’ Ortiz nonetheless uses them, and viewers enjoy them for their aesthetic value. Similarly, Ortiz uses Cochiti references to culture and language in his art and clothing will incite Native youth to rediscover their cultures. One reporter wrote, “The work of Virgil Ortiz speaks a language all its own. There is a code conveyed that reaches beyond words, conversing closer to soul: wild spinach, water, clouds, fertility symbols – all appearing in columns and rows” (Servin 2003). Though this description lends itself to mysticism, it nonetheless reflects a common interpretation that Native aesthetics present various levels of understanding. As curator Antonio Chavarria stated, “If there is anything I have learned by observing Pueblo artists is that symbols incorporated into pottery designs have
multiple levels of meaning” (2008: 8). While choosing one interpretation may underrate
the complexity of the art, not all levels are meant to be accessed by all individuals.

Ortiz incorporates several details in his artwork that are easy to miss to the
unknowing eye, such as the turkey track symbol to reference the important bird, but also
to beckon its power (figure 27). As John Berger noted in his book, Ways of Seeing, “The
way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe” (1972: 8). Ortiz’s
‘X’ symbol on his pottery and clothing have come to be perceived by some as his
signature or to reference dragonflies, but Ortiz explained in a television special that it
actually symbolized a turkey track (KNME New Mexico PBS 2009). Several scholars
have noted the importance of the turkey to the Pueblo peoples (Benedict 1931, Corballis
2002, Patterson 1992). Attesting to their import, the Pueblo created petroglyphs of turkey
tracks in the Rio Grande (Corballis 2002: 201). Alex Patterson explained,

> Among the modern Pueblo Indians, the turkey is symbolically associated
> with the earth, springs, streams and mountains, which are the homes of the
> cloud spirits. It follows that the turkey is viewed as an intermediary
> between these mountain water sources and the rain clouds that form on the
> peaks. He is also regarded as a teacher and helper.

(Patterson 1992: 201)

The turkey holds special significance in Pueblo culture, for it is associated with the
important element of water, which is symbolic of abundance and fertility. Ortiz, however,
utilizes the symbol because of its deceptive power. He explained that the symbol is
incorporated on regalia at Cochiti because, as his father relayed to him, a turkey can be
difficult to track because the direction of the bird’s tracks are sometimes hard to
determine. It is thus considered a good luck symbol to Ortiz since anyone who is trying to
determine his next move will be thwarted by this protective design, which, he maintains, is important for one to be successful in fashion (KNME New Mexico PBS 2009).

V. The Wild Spinach: Use of Symbols and Issues of Cultural Property Rights

Ortiz’s use of the turkey track symbol, the wild spinach design, and other Cochiti pottery motifs beckons the question of community and property rights: Who owns these symbols? Who can use these symbols? And, now that Ortiz has become associated with these symbols, particularly the wild spinach, will this problematize the usage of these pottery motifs for future generations? Susan Scafidi, author of *Who Owns Culture?: Appropriation and Authenticity in American Law*, explained, “Perhaps the most contentious internal issue of all is how to regulate the general public’s access to the cultural goods of a particular community – and who should benefit economically from their distribution” (Scafidi 2005: 10). Because of his family’s historical relationship with pottery-making, Ortiz seems keenly aware of the symbols that he can use on pottery, and which motifs he should alter for his garment collections. About Ortiz’s use of Cochiti motifs, author RoseMary Diaz posited,

This acclaimed artists’ latest success is in the world of high fashion, producing textile designs for the trendsetting international atelier of Donna Karan. Made from natural fibers printed with his trademark black-and-white designs, the stylish garments reflect the themes Ortiz explores in his pottery and sculpture – but the motifs have been altered out of respect for the culture.

(Diaz 2003: 213)

Diaz and other authors maintain that Ortiz artwork draws from a variety of inspiration points, including traditional Cochiti pottery motifs that he has “altered out of respect for
the culture,” which is a practice taken up by many Native artists, including the Navajo artists who secularized sandpaintings for commercialization and thus multiplied their functions to include educational, economic, decorative, and historic purposes (Parezo 1983: 21).

Ortiz’s own community plays a central role in his life; and while he frequently travels nationally and internationally, coming home is always necessary. When discussing his use of Cochiti symbols, it is important to note that Ortiz participates in the ceremonies of his Pueblo. His mother, Seferina, was a well-known and respected potter, and his father, Guadalupe, was a drum maker and member of the Cochiti Pueblo tribal council for more than 40 years (Lockridge 2006: 26). Ortiz participates in community events, and is committed to building programs for Cochiti youth. In fact, several Native designers participate in fundraising shows and events to promote self-esteem, leadership, and cultural awareness. About Ortiz, his artwork, and his community, one reporter noted,

Ortiz, we know from the public record, is a stand-up guy. Sure, he rolls with a posse of metrosexual, fashionista gadflies, but he remains rooted in respect for the traditions and values of Cochiti Pueblo. He uses his increasingly significant star power, not to mention his personal income, to create access to arts and culture for the youth of the pueblo and to preserve the Keres language.

(Fischer 2007)

If Ortiz ‘profits’ from the use of his community’s cultural practices, he ‘gives back’ through establishing the Ortiz Lighthouse Foundation, which offers a space to promote art creation and language instruction for Cochiti youth. This program incorporates Ortiz’s methods “geared to the pop culture attention spans of youngsters from Cochiti” (Ringlero
A main goal of this foundation is to ensure that Cochiti traditions persist, and that the symbols he uses continue to be used by the community.

With his figurative pottery, Ortiz interweaves elements of contemporary life with traditional Cochiti methods, materials, designs, and colors, and creates cultural items relevant to today. His Muños figures demonstrate how traditional arts can be appropriate to contemporary topics. Ortiz explained, “I think my role now is to help be a part of the continuation, part of the timeline… I want to make that link and spread it to the younger generation. My plan is not to have it die out, that’s all” (Batkin 1999: 13). Cognizant of his important role as a bridge from past to future, he also recognizes that his present actions will affect future generations. Touchette explained, “He continues that art form by selecting subjects from contemporary street life and presenting them in interpretations that range from powerful to outrageous” (2003: 122). By including pop culture in his work, Ortiz actually continues the tradition of incorporating outside subject matter into Cochiti aesthetic forms.

VI. A High Fashion Success: What Does It Take?

Ortiz’s fashion exists at the intersection of several Cochiti, Pueblo, Native, and non-Native influences, demonstrating how Ortiz’s work exists at the interstices of tribal, Native, and non-Native worlds. For his *La Renaissance Indigene* line and exhibition, Ortiz’s work featured his signature surface design which was inspired by traditional Pueblo pottery, tattoo patterns, and *art nouveau* fashion (Sekeres and Bradley 2006: 1).
For his solo-exhibition at the National Museum of the American Indian in New York, W. Richard West Jr. stated,

Virgil Ortiz has had tremendous success in synthesizing Cochiti pottery with contemporary design and his own, distinctive style. His abilities have delivered native traditions to a wider, global audience and strengthened the presence of Native people within the cultural dialogue.

(Sekeres and Bradley 2006: 1)

He extends his fashion production outward, past the edges of the runway and into the human mind. He states, “I want whoever has one of my pieces to evolve with it, to receive the energy and intent I’ve put there” (Heard 2006: 58). Infusing his artwork with good thoughts, energy, and spirit, is an important component of the process as well as the visual aspects. By incorporating Pueblo aesthetic elements into contemporary clothing design, Ortiz successfully Indianizes fashion.

Initially, Ortiz designed clothing with himself and his friends in mind, who were mostly Native individuals. One fellow designer, Ben-Alex Dupris (Colville), noted that Ortiz was the only designer who produced men’s jeans with the Native body in mind – namely, jeans that would compliment a figure with narrow hips (Dupris 2005). This act, Dupris noted, was both necessary and revolutionary. While the majority of designers serve a primarily non-Native client base, Ortiz’s creation of denim jeans that complimented a unique Native body type was commendable. However, Ortiz’s recent line of garments, and their corresponding high prices (i.e. a jacket priced at $1800), seemed to be produced with his collectors in mind, or those who first collected his pottery, and then went on to purchase his other creations in cloth. It appears that he has transferred his prices for his pottery onto his clothing. About Ortiz’s latest work, Dupris
stated, “I don’t know it, I can’t afford it, and if I wore it someone would punch me” (Dupris 2009). Referencing Ortiz’s out-there designs, high prices, and aggressively silk-screened graphic shirts, Dupris’ statement brings up an important point: who is Ortiz designing for, and how do we gauge his success as a designer?

His limited edition organic t-shirts feature the year 1680 and blend history, art, culture, and successful resistance. They portray his interpretation of the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, and are emblazoned with Pueblo superheroes derived from historical and cosmological references. These shirts undoubtedly make a political statement, express Pueblo pride and Indianize fashion, however, with men’s and women’s t-shirts priced at $80-$120 each, they are unattainable for a large group of younger consumers, including Pueblo and Native youth. So democratization of his clothing is not a goal or focus. But should designing for Native people be the focus? Writer Danielle Kwock stated:

Much like Ortiz’s pottery, the La Sauvage Primitiff collection fuses traditional tribal art with hip, contemporary structures and designs. Mixing materials like leather, cotton, tulle, chiffon, and denim, Ortiz has created a collection that feels young, raw, fresh and very now, without sacrificing a sense of the traditional.

(Kwock 2007: n.p.)

Despite the youthful feel of his garments, consumers under the age of thirty may find it difficult to purchase these shirts, which are the most affordable garments he sells, and fit them in their budget. Instead, like his potter, the prices for his garments suggest he pursues an older or wealthier client base with expendable income, which is the typical high fashion clientele. In 2006, Ortiz’s men’s deerskin Rezurrect shirt jacket was listed for $1800, and his women’s deerskin Strength jacket decorated with pony hair and his secret writing was listed for $1600 (Around 505 2006: 43). Because the creation of
fashion, especially prêt-a-porter and couture, demands that high-quality materials and intricate detailing techniques be utilized, Ortiz does not create low-end fashion. Few Native people purchase his garments, and his couture is much like Native art: it is purchased by non-Native collectors. But since it is worn, this act brings in a whole new level of ‘collecting Native’ to a place of ‘wearing the Native.’

While he comments on the fashion industry with his shows like he comments on the Indian market with his figurative pottery, he nonetheless strives to be a successful designer of the highest caliber in the national and international markets. He stated, “I want to survive in the real world as a designer who happens to be Native American” (Ortiz 2007). As he stated before, quality and hard work are important characteristics of his art. While the Native community and market is important to him, Ortiz does not limit himself, and he shows his work at several non-Native venues, such as at local, national, and international fashion shows and events. Recognition on these varied levels is important in advancing his personal goals of “redefining the standards for traditional Indian art” and “to change the indigenous art world” (Ringlero 2006: 27). Determining his own classifications and definitions of his work, Ortiz incites a movement of change through demonstration.

As for his pottery, Ortiz maintains that it is produced in the traditional manner starting with collecting the clay. He explained, “I do not plan to get rich from pottery – it was a gift that was given to me. The whole making of pottery for me is a prayer. But I do not have a problem with accepting a million dollar check for clothing” (Clark 2006: 85). Ortiz produces only a select few pieces of pottery per season. He explained,
I was raised in a potting family and was taught to respect the clay and the process, and to not expect to make more money off it than was needed to support one’s family. I realized I can reach a much broader audience with fashion, while still incorporating Cochiti designs and ideas.

(Ortiz, n.d.: 14)

Ortiz maintains that it is his pottery that pays the bills (Lockridge 2006: 27) and funds his other projects, such as fashion, which in turn fuels the development of his youth-centered arts, culture, and language programs and the Ortiz Lighthouse Foundation. The diversification of his art forms is one what that Ortiz circumvents the economic caveat of pottery-making. He hopes that his other projects, such as fashion and film, will soon be as profitable as his pottery, which individually sell in the thousands. For example, at his Turmoil show at King Galleries in 2008, his pots sold for prices between $5,000 and $9,000. Santa Fe Reporter visual arts critic Zane Fischer, however, contends that Ortiz’s other art forms, especially the prints he displayed at Ursa in 2007, lacked meaning, “What is missing entirely is any sense of layered complexity, any hint of irony, any sense of soul” (2007). Cognizant of community restrictions on the commercialization of pottery – especially since the white slip used at Cochiti is in short supply – Ortiz’s poster prints may have been bare of the meaning and content that Fischer and others recognize in his pottery because Ortiz hoped to profit from them.

VII. Conclusion

When high fashion and Native culture come together, Indigenous traditional symbolism and cultural practices mesh with modern cuts and materials to create entirely unique and highly sought-after Indigenous haute couture. Native designers, such as Virgil
Ortiz, demonstrate that their creations will adapt and refigure to produce ever-new tastes. Designers work in their own culturally specific terms, and are successful, selling garments, participating in fashion shows and art exhibitions, and winning prestigious awards. Through their garments they preserve old traditions and create new ones and demonstrate continuity and innovation. By creatively adapting and updating traditional garments they modernize traditional designs and make them relevant in our contemporary lives. By Indianizing non-Native contemporary fashion, these designers make fashion their own, they educate about Native design motifs and elements of culture, they express pride in Native identity, and they celebrate their unique cultures. By inscribing their symbols on modern cuts, they continue to refigure their designs and the concepts behind the designs to create a pathway for cultural persistence.

Ortiz’s *Indigene* line critiques high fashion consumerism, celebrates Indianness and expresses Native pride, and opens a dialogue pertaining to issues of resistance and acts of subversion. Ortiz’s most recent line, *Le Sauvage Primitif*, includes elements of erotica and plays on expected stereotypical clothing items, such as leather, fringe, and feathers. However, by infusing contemporary clothing design with Pueblo design elements and meaning, Ortiz successfully Indianizes fashion.
CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION: NATIVE HIGH FASHION TODAY AND TOMORROW

Native high fashion, after steadily building throughout the 1900s, is flourishing in the twenty-first century. Designers work in their own culturally-specific terms, and are successful, selling garments, participating in fashion shows and art exhibitions, gaining press coverage, and winning prestigious awards. Through their clothing designs they preserve old traditions and create new ones. These garments, and their accompanying storied experiences, shed light on cultural shifts. The study of clothing has much to do with the study of people – how they think and talk about their clothing says much about their cultures. By creatively adapting and updating tribal garments, Native designers modernize tribal attire and make it relevant in their contemporary lives. By Indianizing non-Native fashion, Native designers infuse tribal aesthetic design into fashion, while educating others and allowing patrons to express, define, and perform their varying notions of Indianness. Visual culture is recognized as a way to understand, activate, enhance, and value the connection between contemporary Native artists and previous generations. Native fashion designers utilize clothing as an expressive cultural art form, they consider themselves to be vital links to the past, and they conceptualize their work as new interpretations of ancient traditions.

As I returned to the central question of this book – what is Native high fashion? – I recalled a conversation with an artist friend in which we quipped, half-jokingly, that it is like Native art, “Native fashion is diverse, hard to define, and incredibly complex.” While this definition seems like more of an excuse than an honest attempt at defining the subject
at hand, it is important for me to state that the definitions, categories, and attire itself will, I hope, continue to evolve, especially as this movement develops. Much like the Native American fine arts movement of the twentieth century, new materials will become available, new subject matter will be tackled, and new issues will undoubtedly arise. The Native American traditional practice of creating personalized, highly-embellished garments translates easily to the art world of couture. Prior to contact with Europeans, Native attire incorporated local and traded materials and elements of design from a variety of traditions. As handmade attire, each garment was made for a specific individual and his or her unique body shape. As a continuation of the age-old tradition of personal adornment, Native designers Indianize contemporary fashion through a new grammar that promotes pride in tribal identity and brings the diversity and vitality of contemporary Native life to the fashion world.

By presenting a multi-vocal historical narrative of the development and evolution of the Native high fashion movement in the United States, this study is intended to begin the discussion on Native fashion. Due to limited page space and time constraints, I was unable to discuss every Native designer in depth, therefore my focus turned to the American southwest region (though I do include some brief discussions pertaining to Northwest Coast and Plains Indian designers). In the future, follow-up projects should be conducted, spotlighting more designers and other regional Native fashion movements. Regional studies on Native fashion in Oklahoma, First Nations fashion design in Canada, and Native fashion designers in the Northwest Coast region deserve further research, as
do topical studies on the evolution of powwow fashion and the development of Native-operated t-shirt companies.

Though Native fashion is currently breaking through many ‘buckskin’ ceilings, it is important to recognize that these accomplishments are built on the shoulders of those designers who have in the past had to batter down the door. Virgil Ortiz, Dorothy Grant, and Patricia Michaels made history with their New York Fashion Week event in 2009; however, fifty years earlier, Lloyd Kiva New participated in the Atlantic City International Fashion Show as the first and only Native designer to show his work there, which was met with much acclaim by the international audience. In 2010, the UNRESERVED Alliance launched their Designer Collective, but, twenty-five years earlier, Wendy Ponca, along with numerous artists, founded the popular Native Uprising designer collective based out of Santa Fe. In 2002, Virgil Ortiz collaborated with New York fashion giant Donna Karan and received worldwide recognition, yet, decades prior, Native beadworkers and weavers shared their artwork with Ralph Lauren’s team of designers, bringing international attention to southwest Native aesthetics. In addition, fifty years prior to this, numerous women produced dresses, gloves, beadwork, purses and hats for the Indian Arts and Craft Board outlets that found their way into the Neiman Marcus Department stores in Dallas and New York. The designers in this study draw success from their own hard work and creativity, but also benefit from the accomplishments of past designers and artists. In addition, like their artistic predecessors, they break new paths and create new possibilities for future generations.
The Native couture movement has been growing in waves since the opening of Lloyd Kiva New’s Scottsdale boutique in the 1940s. Since then, several designers, some located deep within Indian Country, have produced exciting and fashionable garments for regional and national markets. These influential and trailblazing designers include Margaret Wood, who wrote the first book on the topic of Native fashion, and Wendy Ponca, who taught Native fashion for a decade at the Institute of American Indian Arts.

I begin this dissertation with Lloyd Kiva New because in many ways he can be considered the ‘father’ of contemporary Native high fashion. Although there are many mothers and grandmothers of this movement, New opened a new market for Native clothing, and his work was recognized on a national and international level. In December of 1945, New celebrated the opening of his first boutique, selling unique handbags influenced by Native American traditional tribal pouches and design motifs. Within ten years, his business expanded to include clothing. As the designer, New worked extensively with other Native artists: Manfred Susunkewa helped design and print exclusive fabrics, Andrew Van Tsinajinnie also painted unique silkscreened designs, and Charles Loloma created the distinctive buttons, clasps, and metal detailing. Working with artists from different tribes, New was aware of tribal taboos concerning sacred imagery, and he would alter certain design elements in order to secularize them for the market. New and his assistants introduced Native design to the world of haute couture. At the same time, he provided new options for Native artists – he advocated that Native artists could embrace modernity and the market without relinquishing their Native identity. He
also believed that tribal empowerment could be achieved through the economic
development of the arts, especially since the arts are considered central to culture.

New played an important role in revolutionizing Native customary clothing
design by celebrating Indianness and its ability to create a truly unique ‘American’
image. He advocated that Native cultures were essential to American identity. Although
this was not a new concept, New and his colleagues believed that ‘the Native’ could be
the basis for a modern art and fashion movement in the United States. He explained that
there wasn’t anything more American than the Native American, and he encouraged
people to express this sentiment on their clothing. He drew upon traditional Native design
concepts to create items that would work within Anglo-American paradigms of gender,
class, and ethnicity.

An interesting case study, New’s business prospered when opportunities for
Native people were limited. He acknowledged social limitations and cultural expectations
but successfully worked within these frameworks to create new possibilities for Native
people. He used his fashion shows as occasions to educate wealthy and influential people
about the importance of Native cultures. The creation of Native fashion at this time can
be conceptualized as a re-affirmation of Indian identity in the face of increasing pressures
for acculturation, and of adaptive resiliency – of inverting acculturation and assimilation
– and it was one of many efforts undertaken to communicate the continued existence of
distinct Native cultures to the world at large.

As Rosemary Diaz wrote in 2003, “Lloyd Kiva New is a tough act to follow.”
After he effectively established himself as a premiere Native artist, educator, and
businessman, he went on to co-found the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe in 1962, where he ensured that students would be allowed to pursue their creativity in whatever medium they choose, including fashion and textile arts. About New, Marcus Amerman stated, “Lloyd was an innovator’s innovator. I always say that you can’t teach innovation, but he knew how to identify talent, nourish it, and allow it to become” (Diaz 2003: 155). With an institutional foundation that reflected his principles, New encouraged students to experiment in the field of Native attire. Textile arts, weaving, and silkscreening were integrated into the curriculum at IAIA since its inception, which played a key role in the development of the Native couture movement. The Traditional Techniques courses, which taught students age-old methods related to a number of tribal clothing practices, was central to the IAIA course offerings.

It is important to note that IAIA emerged as a new type of institution out of a dark history of Indian education. Indian boarding schools, which were established to assimilate, acculturate, and Americanize young Native students, literally stripped each student of his or her tribal clothing upon arrival and immediately dressed them in Anglo-American attire. Clothing, which could instantly and visually communicate one’s identity to others, was viewed by school officials as a potentially ‘dangerous’ means to perpetuate Indianness. Because of the power of clothing to relay ‘identity, it was of utmost import to ‘re-fashion’ Native youth in American clothing. In other words, clothing was used as a visual tool of the assimilation process, and this practice of ‘re-clothing’ was utilized to inflict rapid symbolic change in order to indicate a controlled cultural transformation at these institutions.
Clothing was perceived by school administrators as a site where dangerous Indianness could be safely brought under control. Later, it was a site that was deemed safe, where culture could be acted out in ‘performances of Indianness’ such as plays or pageants. On the other hand, clothing was used by students as a form of survivance to mask difference and blend in. Students also used clothing to ‘code-switched’ back and forth between ‘citizen’ American clothing and traditional tribal attire, demonstrating to non-Natives their affiliation with Indianness as well as the compatibility of Indianness with American citizenship.

Because of requisite sewing classes at the Indian boarding schools, the practice of clothing-making in Indian communities was forever changed. School officials restricted Native American creativity in clothing-making to that which could be understood as acceptable within an American Victorian-era paradigm. Yet, Native students worked within these ‘guidelines’ and negotiated opportunities to express individuality or tribalism, and sewing became a tool for creativity. Students found creative ways to work within the system to maintain their cultures, and some even incorporated new sewing skills into their tribal cultures – in the form of star quilts and new clothing styles for instance. These students demonstrated unique tactics of survivance; they did more than just survive, endure or respond to the boarding schools – the stories of student survivance in something as basic as clothing demonstrated their resistance in the form of active presence. These experiences had lasting impacts on Native clothing design in contemporary times, and these skills, in sewing and in creative subversion, would be passed down to future generations and influence the development of Native fashion.
IAIA was established to correct and atone for inequities in education and lack of opportunity for Native students. Two of the goals of this new type of institution were to develop pride in Indian identity and to improve the economic status of Native people through the arts. First taught by Josephine Wapp, the Traditional Techniques course was one of IAIA’s most popular classes. In these classes, students learned many varied techniques and skills, including Pueblo embroidery and crocheting, Navajo weaving and dyeing styles, Plains bead working, and Woodlands finger weaving. After the first course, students were allowed to ‘adapt’ these techniques to modern fashions. Students were encouraged to extend Native clothing traditions into the contemporary realm and push them in new directions.

These courses gave students the opportunity to create garments and participate in fashion shows throughout the country. These shows were seen as forms of community outreach, cross-cultural education, and as cultural celebrations. They were a means to highlight the complexity and validity of Native fashions, to create an awareness and pride in this aspect of Native cultures, and to celebrate diversity. These events enhanced student work, and introduced tribal designs and clothing styles to the fashion world in the 1960s and 1970s. The unique shows were touted as important ways to share the history and evolution of Indian attire to various audiences. The fashion show format was refined at IAIA at this time – which included an introduction to traditional attire, a ‘move through time’ with the most ‘contemporary’ designs shown at the end, and an intermission cultural performance – and it continues to be utilized by most Native fashion
designers today. This format is a crowd-pleaser since it mingles the beauty of traditional attire, the theatrics of a performance, and the exciting creativity of new designs.

In the early 1980s, a young Wendy Ponca joined the IAIA staff as the new Traditional Techniques instructor and worked there for a decade. As the Institute’s main fashion instructor, her teaching methods and vision as a designer undoubtedly impacted the careers of her students and the development of the Native fashion movement. Ponca, like other designers, was a storyteller, utilizing her garments and the human body to relate Osage tribal stories. Aptly, Ponca has been described as an Osage avant-garde, but also as perpetuating the legacy of Spider Woman, who taught weaving to the Osage people. In addition to using innovative new materials in her fashions to tell traditional Osage stories, Ponca also included body art and feathers into her fashion shoots and shows to relay a sense of tribal beauty. This way of working directly related to her philosophy concerning garments and adornment: what you wear should convey identity, confidence and a tribally-informed sense of beauty.

Ponca incorporated and brought back the use of Osage symbols on bodies and on fabric. They were applied for their decorative and aesthetic value, used symbolically to mark identity and to reference traditional Osage cosmology, and presented theories of female beauty and power. These marks were not only patterns on fabric and on the flesh, they were also messages that presented tribal philosophies and represented a potent connection to previous generations. Ponca demonstrated that the popularity of fashion could offer Native people a means to revive traditional practices and open a road for expressing Indian distinctiveness and group affiliation for future generations. Ponca
combined these aspects to impart a symbolic relationship that reveals a timeless, yet contemporary, connection to Osage identity. The stylings of Wendy Ponca also relayed a language and can be viewed as rebellious fashion statements as well as powerful performances of Indianness.

One of Ponca’s most exciting ventures included the co-founding of a collective of Native American designers, artists and models in the mid-1980s. The group, Native Uprising, was the first known all-Native fashion clothing design cooperative effort of its kind, and it was comprised of alumni and students of IAIA’s Fiber Arts department. The creativity of this group essentially forced SWAIA to create new categories for the Santa Fe Indian Market. This group sought to champion fashion as art, deconstruct essentializing stereotypes, encourage cross-cultural understanding of Native cultures, and impart oral tradition and cosmological beliefs. Ponca’s students included noted designers Patricia Michaels and Pilar Agoyo who would emerge in the 1990s. These two designers went on to redefine Native fashion, landing trunk shows during New York Fashion Week and winning awards at various Indian market events with their avant-garde designs.

The two chapters that followed the discussion on IAIA, education, and the innovative design instruction of Wendy Ponca focused on female designers. These were key chapters because many Native design traditions were perpetuated by women, and this continues today. Women have produced many works of outstanding beauty and utility – with textiles and clothing-making being some of the most significant.

Located far from the fashion centers of New York City and Los Angeles, female designers worked in Indian Country serving a new clientele demographic – the leaders
and advocates who emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. They spoke at conferences and
government meetings on behalf of their tribes for improved education curricula, better
health care plans, and more women’s shelters and alcohol rehabilitation programs. These
women wanted to wear garments that would relay their identities as strong professional
Native women, and several designers answered their call to fill this void. Jewel Gilham,
Remonia Jacobsen, Luanne Belcourt and Myrtle Raining Bird, Margaret Wood, Marjorie
Bear Don’t Walk, Patta Joest, Margaret Wood, and Margaret Roach Wheeler were some
of these women, designing chic contemporary Indian fashion from their home
communities in Montana, Arizona, Missouri, Colorado and Oklahoma.

Some of these designers were promoted by the Indian Arts and Crafts Board,
demonstrating the IACB’s effort to support economic development in Indian
communities through fashion as a marketable craft-art. These women created innovative
fashion in their home communities, displaying new forms of powwow chic or Indianizing
professional attire. They also brought fashion shows to the local level, employing their
family members as assistants and models. They effectively turned the events into
community celebrations and displays of cultural vitality. These shows were educational
in nature, and were most often directed at tribal youth to teach and revive clothing and
adornment practices.

Many of the designers began making clothing for themselves when they were
young, having learned sewing in school or from their mothers and grandmothers. They
experimented, fusing American fashion with elements they grew up knowing as Indian.
Though they learned basic techniques at school or from family members, these designers
often referred to themselves as ‘self-taught’ and refined their skills through experimentation. They promoted the idea that they possessed an ‘inherent’ creative quality, which is a commonly held stereotype about Indian artists as naturally-gifted. However this idea also discredits the merits of Western education by suggesting that success could occur without it. These designers honed their skills by creating garments for themselves or family members to wear to events and make statements about fashion, culture, and identity.

Designers such as Margie Bear Don’t Walk created clothing in the 1980s for females who wanted to display their identity as leaders, and to convey confidence and a tribally-informed sense of beauty. They were not complacent with the options available to them since the majority of Anglo-American attire did not adequately express their identities or tastes in fashion. Therefore they created their own garments that reflected the self, which included their pan-Indian identity or tribal affiliations. This reason explains why Native fashion is so diverse – it draws on tribal diversity but also individual creative personalities. They presented new (tribal) ideas about beauty, and they infused their garments with ideals pertaining to identity, gender, the female body, and representation.

In the 1970s, Margaret Wood began sketching clothing ideas that would later become the basis of her revolutionary book on Native fashion. The goals of her project were to create contemporary versions of Native clothing designs and styles, to reveal Native women as talented, creative, and innovative, and to encourage Native youth to continue their tribal clothing practices. Her designs reflected two popular veins of Native couture: one is to create modern garments inspired by traditional Native clothing styles
from the 1800s, and the second is to draw inspiration from contemporary fashion design and Indianized non-Native fashion styles. From her experiences, Wood surmised that an increased awareness of Native cultures and a greater acceptance of cultural diversity in the 1970s facilitated the resurgence of traditional practices in Native communities. While her book’s examples focused on 1970s popular fashion trends, the principles that she provided could be applied today and into the future.

It was in this chapter that I became aware of the role that clients and customers played in supporting this movement. Designers need buyers and wearers to keep their businesses growing, and some of them diversified their client base to also include non-Native buyers. Others returned to working only for their families and relatives when they tired of the daily grind as a couturier. Designers like Wood who secured both Native and non-Native clientele were able to maintain their businesses and continue to design clothing today.

In the 1990s a new crop of female designers emerged – many of whom had connections with IAIA, studying under Wendy Ponca. These designers actively sought to deconstruct stereotypes by focusing on construction process, experimenting with new silhouettes and forms, and drawing off of tribal concepts. Emerging designers, such as Consuelo Pascual and Maya Stewart, are tribally or regionally specific with their work and are careful to stay away from sacred imagery. They are interested in the formal qualities of fashion, such as refined couturiere methods, or in ideas – such as connection with the sky world or in investigating identity. They also demonstrate an interested in streetwear couture, suggesting new directions in Native fashion are forthcoming.
One of the central issues that arose in this study has to do with presenting diverse concepts of beauty. I spent two chapters wading through this complicated topic, which began after reading an article written by Rayna Green in 1988. While the majority of her musings focused on body size rather other phenotypical attributes such as skin color, yet she made an important point: many perceptions pertaining to size and beauty exist but were being ignored by the fashion industry, which sought a culturally hegemonic ‘look.’ Two decades later, this situation continues.

In chapters five and six, I proposed that Native designers of high fashion (along with their models), who are armed with a traditional concept of ‘beauty’ (such as those that extend from tribal epistemologies), have the potential to offer options for displaying ‘beauty’ and can subvert globalized notions of the fashioned beauty: the thin and pale-skinned young European-looking female. Some Native designers have been more successful than others at promoting diversity on the runway, with the biggest ‘hurdle’ being the need to ‘fit in’ in order to ‘make it.’ In other words, some Native models feel pressured to shrink their body size in order to fit in to the small sample sizes used on the runways, and Native designers sometimes hire pale-skinned models to relay to potential buyers that their garments are made for everyone (an important tactic used to sustain their fashion businesses). So while some models and designers are determined to view their work in the industry as propagating a good, or “beautiful,” way of life that could be understood in their tribal ways, they still succumb to industry demands, conforming to a standardized physical type. This topic is not an easy one to discuss – but it is incredibly important.
Recent studies on this phenomenon suggest that a preexisting framework currently exists in the fashion world which champions the ‘thin and pale’ for models. These standards, along with societal forces, influence the designers’ visions and executions for their fashion shows. Their shows, in turn, affect our daily lives and shape our self-perceptions and definitions of beauty. Native female designers, by presenting shows that reflect tribal cultures at the community level and national level, can offer alternate forms of expressing beauty to both Native youth and the broader American public. This allows Native designers to subvert American gender and youth obsessive norms and claim a self-fashioned Indian identity beyond the “princess” and the “squaw.”

My final chapter investigates the work of Virgil Ortiz, whose work was receiving much acclaim when I started this project in 2005. Ortiz was first a potter, but now works in a variety of media, including fashion design. As a young potter, Ortiz learned the tradition of making Munos from his family. This figurative pottery is associated with social commentary, and Ortiz extended this practice to clothing to challenge American fashion culture and express pride in his Pueblo heritage. Ortiz extends Cochiti aesthetic concepts to the world of fashion: he uses Cochiti composition and color theory, the tradition of parody and social commentary through performance, storytelling and oral tradition themes, and cultural continuity through subversive creativity.

Ortiz’s work in fashion provides interesting insight as to how Native designers derive inspiration from tribally-specific aesthetic influences, as well as broader popular cultural concepts. Ortiz transfers Cochiti aesthetic theories to the fashion world, and he uses this lens to conceptualize the world and re-present it to others. His work, then,
exhibits multiple, if unattainable, levels of ‘knowing’ and understanding his sometimes subversive work. Ortiz’s garments demonstrate the potential of Native fashion to ‘remix’ traditional tribal artistic practices, such as pottery, for the human form.

Ortiz integrates the Cochiti tradition of parody and social commentary through performance in his fashion shows. He juxtaposes elements associated with the wild (such as feathers and tattoos), and elements associated with the civilized (such as a violin and couture), to comment on stereotypes. He exoticizes his models to exacerbate ‘otherness’ because he does not want to be seen as an American – nor does he want to be viewed as a stereotypical ‘Noble peaceful Indian’ either. Instead, he seeks to denote his difference with the ultimate goal of confirming Native national uniqueness in order to reassert tribal autonomy. Ortiz reaffirms Cochiti nationhood by ensuring that traditional Cochiti practices persist. Furthermore, profits from his art sales go toward his Lighthouse Foundation, which was created to provide Cochiti youth with a space to learn their language and aesthetic practices. As a former governor of his pueblo, Ortiz recognizes and values the important roles that language and the arts play in cultural continuity and promoting ideas of sovereignty, self-governance, and nationhood.

To advance his goal of promoting Cochiti language and arts, Ortiz incorporates Pueblo storytelling, symbology, and oral tradition themes into his garments and shows. He accomplishes this task through two forms of written language – the first is his use of Native, Pueblo, and Cochiti symbols, which are recognizable picture-words, and the second is the incorporation of his own invented written language. Both promote cultural continuity through subversive creativity. The symbols he uses have multiple levels of
meaning, and not all levels are meant to be accessed by all individuals. For example, Ortiz’s ‘X’ symbol on his pottery and clothing are perceived by some to be his signature or to reference dragonflies, but he explained that it actually symbolized a turkey track – which holds special significance in Pueblo culture because of its association with water and its deceptive power. Overall, Ortiz’s clothing critiques high fashion consumerism, celebrates Indianness and expresses Native pride, and opens a dialogue pertaining to issues of resistance and acts of subversion.

Several interesting topics emerged during the research and writing processes of this study, and these overarching topics included those of pan-Indianism, concepts of diversity, the tradition of innovation, fashion as a form of communication, and deconstructing stereotypes.

Pan-Indianism is a well-documented ‘outcome’ of the boarding school experience. By forcing young students from various tribes to come together, live together, and learn together, these institutions created environments where students learned about other tribal cultures and developed hybrid cultures and languages as a result. Many students went on to marry a classmate from another tribe, and their children held a type of ‘dual citizenship’ in which they grew up learning both parents’ cultural heritage. This sense of pan-Indianism has affected Native fashion, and many designers have freely used elements from other Indian cultures. For example, Lloyd Kiva New used Northwest Coast design motifs and made cedar hats, Josephine Wapp taught various tribal weaving techniques, and Margaret Wood wrote about different regional styles. These designers were not concerned with tribal authenticity in the sense that they were
creating styles derived from other cultures. This sense of ‘free use’ could have arisen from the fact that New worked with artists from various tribal backgrounds, Wapp, on the other hand, had established herself in the pan-Indian world of powwows, and Wood hailed from two disparate tribal backgrounds: Navajo and Seminole. In other words, these designers occupied pan-Indian spaces and felt comfortable within them – one could even argue that such transcultural spaces enabled them to be successful and helped a flourishing of experimentation which often vacillates with periods of traditionalism in art.

Over time, though, this freedom of use has changed. Though many designers continue to utilize key elements of Plains attire (such as fringe, feathers, and beadwork), for the most part they stay within the realm of their own traditional tribal or regional clothing techniques. For example, Pilar Agoyo creates garments that feature Southwest Indian motifs or symbols that reference important elements of Pueblo culture. In addition, designers are increasingly aware of cultural rules, and do not utilize sacred symbols in their garments for sale; for instance, Virgil Ortiz is careful to tweak certain Pueblo pottery symbols for use on fashion.

Today, designers are aware that a tribally-specific market is too small to sustain a fashion business, therefore they create garments that derive from their heritage yet work within other cultural paradigms and fit into other fashion circles, and clients include those from other Native tribes as well as non-Native people. Patricia Michaels is one such designer who has struck a balance between infusing her garments with Indianness, without violating any cultural taboos or being too tribally-specific. Her ‘Indianness’ is abstract, and it is loosely based on the Pueblo concept of water, which is central to her
Taos cultural traditions, yet is rendered as such to also connect with other non-Taos clients. Michaels also crosses cultural boundaries by focusing on draping, creating loose flowing garments that celebrate the body. These designers perceive the use of sacred subject matter as a form of indiscretion, illuminating a broader discussion on expressing identity, and demonstrating why strategies of self-representation aim to go beyond mere critiques of negative images.

Innovation and diversity are the two constants in Native American art. In league with the creative practices of avant-garde Native artists, contemporary Indian fashionable garments challenge Westernized stereotypes. Innovative designers build on and reinterpret the past, pushing traditional boundaries and departing from the stereotypical notions of Indian attire, while still paying homage to their cultural roots. Contemporary Native designers continue the legacy of their predecessors by creating garments that push fashion into new realms.

While Native fashion exists as a fusion of the Native and the non-Native, it should not be deemed as any ‘less Indian’ because of it. An historical analysis of Indian attire has shown us that Native people have always incorporated new materials and ideas into their preexisting frameworks, even before European contact. Today, these new non-Native materials and ideas include more than just Western or Anglo-American influences; they also consist of other cultures from around the world, such as those from Asia or Africa. Some designers look specifically at other Indigenous art as an important trend in the future since the idea of Indigenousness – of Native peoples as a group – is
developing and will gain ground in the future because of the human rights initiatives and the increasing interaction of disparate Indigenous groups.

Similar to the development of the Indian painting movement, Native fashion has been at times expected to ‘look Indian,’ or, in the very least, reference ‘the Indian.’ The designers’ culturally-specific ideas concerning their contemporary work and cultural traditions aim to broaden the current understanding of ‘authentic Indian art’ and to increase the knowledge pertaining to the possibilities of contemporary Native art. Like their predecessors, contemporary Native fashion designers employ elements of a visual language to speak ‘through’ their work, thus continuing age-old traditions pertaining to storytelling through garments.

For these designers, tradition is the source of innovation. Native fashion is a diverse art form that draws from the historical evolution of Native-made attire and fuses aesthetics with function. The concept of tradition has been, and will continue to be, hotly debated. Frequently when we think of ‘traditional’ Native attire, we think of those garments produced in the 1800s, prior to the reservation period. These images of the buckskin dresses, the chief’s blankets, and the feathered bonnets have been captured by the captivating photographs of Edward Curtis. They have been used as referents to determine its authenticity. While these images are important historical documents, they do not adequately express the ‘tradition of innovation,’ which shaped the evolution of Native attire. In the past, Native women were celebrated for their ability to dream new designs into being. As evidenced by this dissertation, tribal stories continue to be a main source of inspiration and innovation in aesthetic pursuits.
Another important concept highlighted in this study was that art and aesthetic practices contribute to cultural continuity. Many scholars have discussed how Native art practices have strengthened group cohesiveness, often in the face of adversity. Art can function as an effective means to perpetuate a cultural self-image due to its high visibility. This statement is particularly true for clothing, because it is something that we see in our everyday interactions. Many of the designers in this study think of themselves as vital links from the past to the future – their designs are inspired by work done by their ancestors, yet are updated and negotiated to work within a contemporary system. The designers hope future generations will be inspired by their work to ‘further tradition,’ and present Native clothing practices as alive, essential, and relevant in our modern lives.

Throughout this study, I thought of fashion as a form of expression and a form of communication. It is a way for us to express our inner selves to the outer world. Fashion developed from both a ‘need for distinction’ and a ‘need for union,’ since it can both signal difference and express community. Several theorists discuss the ‘semiotics of clothing,’ and analyze how clothing is a language – a code which may be deciphered to some extent, yet also maintain some level of ambiguity. Our clothing sends instant visual cues to others about our identities. Because of this power to send messages, we can use clothing to mask difference, blend in, or ‘perform’ other identities. Interestingly, these theories of ‘clothing semiotics’ – which were initially developed from investigations of European systems – hold particularly true for Native clothing systems. For example, Joseph and George Horse Capture demonstrated in their book on Plains Indian men’s warrior shirts that the garments themselves were used as mnemonic devices to recall
stories. The materials, methods, or designs invoked stories (and still do), and although these stories were most often connected to an individual, their collective history has built and shaped community identity. The Horse Captures present a powerful case demonstrating the connection between Native attire and the tradition of storytelling. The designers spotlighted in this dissertation used clothing as a communicator (like storytelling) in different capacities, including to display identity, celebrate cultural heritage, create and perpetuate tribal aesthetic practices and cultural traditions, and tell tribal stories.

It is important to return to a point made earlier – each designer, though from a different generation or decade, fought stereotypes. Through their designs and events, they deconstruct stereotypes, depart from the Hollywood image of Native attire, and encourage cross-cultural understanding of Native cultures. Native avant-garde artists have consistently and consciously worked in the ‘tradition of innovation’ as a challenge to the homogenizing and caricatured stereotypes. Theorists contend that stereotypes have real world ramifications – namely, the enacting of laws and policies that govern Indian affairs based on the disparaging views of lawyers and policy makers. Stereotypes are reinforced and circulated through the myriad practices that comprise U.S. popular culture. Clothing design is one such articulation in the expression of identity that holds the potential to reclaim the image of ‘Nativity’ in the public sphere.

For these reasons, collaborations between Native and non-Native designers have become a suggested option, especially with individuals such as Ralph Lauren and Anna Sui who have historically incorporated Native aesthetics into their clothing collections.
Native designers should also pursue the opportunity to present their own lines during America’s most important fashion event: the Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week in Manhattan. Since staging a show is expensive and time-consuming, forming a Native fashion design collective is a valid option to help share the costs in producing a full-length fashion show. The African fashion and culture magazine, Arise, hosted an annual African design collective fashion show during New York Fashion Week and their efforts shed light on the successes and challenges of forming a similar, albeit ‘Native,’ fashion show collective.

In 2010, two issues of Vogue featured Native motifs. The first was for Vogue Germany, and the second was U.S. Vogue, and both teetered on the verge of ‘playing Indian.’ Each fashion spread involved non-Native photographers shooting non-Native models styled by non-Native stylists and wearing non-Native designer clothing. The models were also obviously ‘bronzed’ to darken their skin color. The U.S. editorial, entitled, “The Warrior Way,” drew inspiration from the visually stunning imagery of the blockbuster film Avatar. The stylist for this photo spread selected print dresses with tribal patterns and exotic accessories, which, in combination with black body tattoo art and a ‘jungle’ setting, created a dramatic visual perpetuating the exoticism of the Tribal Trend.

The stylist, photographer, designers, and model fashioned their own versions of Warrior Chic – drawing from stereotypical tropes of the huntress and Amazonian wild female. As to the importance of this topic, several scholars note that when one group of people takes it upon themselves to represent another group of people they are exercising a form of power and domination. Those with the power to represent, consciously or unconsciously
‘reinvent’ people to better serve their own needs. As a result, the accounts and images
created by those in power often say as much about themselves as they do about the
subjects they attempt to represent.

A major concern for all designers involves recognizing the contributions of
Native artists, especially since Indian designs are often appropriated and used out of
context. As a result, the integrity and history of Native design is somewhat unknown and
underestimated by the fashion world. Although the ‘Indian Style’ or ‘Tribal Trend’ has
come into vogue at several moments in recent history, it has been represented by Native
American designers only a few times on a notable national scale. The most recent was the
showing by Native designers in 2009 and 2010 during one of the largest and most
important events in the fashion world: the Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week. Their
involvement marks an historical occasion: this is the first time that Native designers
participated in a New York Fashion Week event. Though it is only the beginning, these
Native designers and others are dedicated to promoting the reputation of Native
couturiers in the fashion world.

The events in New York received important press coverage, however, of the
reporters who covered the UNRESERVED event, several opened the segments by
explaining that there were several separate culture-specific events at Fashion Week, and
this was one of them. While these were indeed cultural events, Native fashion, however,
should be displayed as top-notch fashion events as well. Relying on promotion as a
cultural-event runs the risk of ‘ghettoizing’ Native fashion designers. Furthermore, the
‘separation’ of Native fashion may succumb to many of the problems highlighted in the
museum world, in the sense that if Native fashion has a continued cultured event slot, it may not be allowed beyond the red ropes of Fashion Week under the argument that it is already being represented elsewhere.

In discussing the future of Native fashion, it is important to note the growing trend of the democratization of fashion – fashion and haute couture are becoming increasingly accessible to everyday people. Designers recognize the need to make garments for Native people, because, without their support, the designer runs the risk of losing some degree of authenticity. In keeping Native people in mind while designing, many of the designers produce individualized ready-to-wear garments, which may also include street wear, such as specialized shirts or vests. These garments reflect the broader trend towards a more streetwise, informal, and individual way of dressing. The increased production of ‘low fashion’ and ‘street wear’ by young emerging multi-media Native artists/designers suggests that new ideas in Native fashion are on the horizon.

Many non-Native fashion designers create ready-to-wear lines and accessories to boost their sales, which in turn fund the production of their couture lines of high-end dresses and outerwear (which in turn, through fashion shows, boost their sales for their accessories and ready-to-wear), and Native designers participate in this system as well. For Native designers, creating ready-to-wear and accessory lines makes their work more accessible, which is a primary goal of these designers. This may be one of the reasons, coupled with the need to create garments for a diverse client base, that Native designers have had the most commercial success with scarves and purses.
In essence, Native fashion designers need to be versatile enough to design for
different body types – and must present this diversity on the runways or in fashion shoots. If designers do not accomplish this task, as previously mentioned, they will lose the support of Native customers. Native American viewers are keenly aware of the importance of self-representation on the catwalk (i.e., they want to see themselves on the runway), and are quick to point out when a Native designer selects mostly white-looking models. While such models may indeed be of Native American decent, viewers desire to see phenotypically-Native models (i.e., those with darker skin colors, thicker bodies, and long dark hair), or, in the very least, models that are truly – albeit physically – diverse (various heights, weights, skin and hair colors).

The evolution of Native attire has a long history and one that is not without challenges. Native people will continue reviving old practices and creating new ones. However, in order for the development of the Native fashion movement to truly flourish to its fullest capacity, the Native fashion world needs a base institution, where aspiring clothing-makers have the option to learn about Native traditional practices of clothing-making as well as American or European methods and skills. During the heyday of IAIA’s fashion program, several designers (both avant-garde and traditional) emerged. If IAIA can reinstate their fashion program and provide its students with instruction in both Indigenous and European fashion techniques, a new wave of Native designers will undoubtedly appear. Since IAIA stopped teaching fashion courses in the mid-nineties, Native fashion in the U.S. Southwest has come to somewhat of a standstill in the sense that few new designers have entered the fashion world. The major designers who are
producing shows today (such as Patricia Michaels and Pilar Agoyo) are the ones who were affiliated with IAIA in the 1990s. A new fashion program – one that collaborates with first-rate institutions like the Fashion Institute of Technology or Parsons yet also revives traditional historical Native clothing practices – can adequately prepare and bring Native couture to the key events and fashion centers. Native fashion, I contend, will always be in style because it is a truly ‘American’ form. Native couture continues to adjust to as well as transform public taste – the designers of which continue to redefine Indianness and authenticity.

The designers in this study used clothing as a means to express identity or promote pride in Indianness (either tribally-specific or pan-Indian). They expressed, interrogated, and subverted notions of Indianness, acknowledged commitment to community (i.e. no sacred symbols), demonstrated a form of ‘resistance through style,’ and communicated to non-Natives an active Native presence. All are trailblazers by opening new doors and creating new opportunities for Native people. They produced new possibilities in the world of design, offered new options for expressing beauty, and negotiated creativity and conservation of tradition.

Art is the strategy utilized by Native American people in the battle to maintain tribal cultures. Aesthetic practices, including those of clothing, play an important role in self-determination, cultural continuity, and cultural distinctiveness. Through the arts, Native people not only ensure cultural continuity, but advocate for the integrity of Native cultures, epistemologies, and peoples. We broadcast, in part, our perceptions about society – its politics, values, concerns, or its social issues – through art and dress. Art and
fashion play crucial roles in the process of reappropriating voice and representation, and asserting control of identity and self.
FIGURE 1: Kiva hand bag, featuring metalwork by Charles Loloma. Circa 1950s. Private collection. Photo by author.


FIGURE 4: IAIA student with kilt. Photo courtesy of the Institute of American Indian Arts archives.


FIGURE 8: Traditional Techniques instructor Wendy Ponca adjusts a shirt. Photo courtesy of the Institute of American Indian Arts archives.

FIGURE 10: Wendy Ponca clothing designs. Dress on right is handwoven, with Osage Spider Woman symbols. Photo courtesy of Wendy Ponca.

FIGURE 13: Motorcycle blanket by Wendy Ponca. Photo courtesy of Wendy Ponca.

FIGURE 14: Margaret Wood, wearing her own clothing, in her artist booth at the Heard Indian Market, 2006. Photo by author.

FIGURE 17: Patricia Michaels’ sketchbook. From the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture exhibit Native Couture II: Innovation and Style, 2009. Photo by author.

FIGURE 18: Patricia Michaels’ garments at Ramscale Penthouse Studios during the Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week in Manhattan, 2010. Photo by author.


FIGURE 23: Consuelo Pascual fitting a model for the Art of Fashion Show in Santa Fe, 2010. Photo by author.


FIGURE 26: Virgil Ortiz’s figurative pottery. Santa Fe, 2010. Photo by author.
FIGURE 27: Silk scarf by Virgil Ortiz, depicting a male model with feathers and body paint. The date 1680 references the Pueblo Revolt. Ortiz’s signature ‘x’ marking and wild spinach symbols are shown. Eternity boutique in Santa Fe, 2010. Photo by author.

FIGURE 28: Silk scarf by Virgil Ortiz, with image of female archer, wearing blindfold, feathers in hair, rose in mouth, and carrying a bow and arrow. Eternity boutique in Santa Fe, 2010. Photo by author.
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