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THE TAXONOMY OF EXTINCTION: BRIAN JUNGEN'S TOMBSTONE

by

Jasen Evoy

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in

Art History and Visual Culture
at

Lindenwood University

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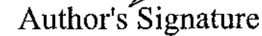
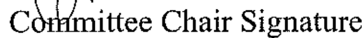


Author's Signature

Dr. Jeanette Nicewinter	5/2/2022
Committee Chair	Date



Committee Chair Signature

Dr. Sarah Cantor	5/2/2022
Committee Member	Date

Committee Member Signature

Dr. Khristin Landry	5/2/2022
Committee Member	Date

Committee Member Signature

THE TAXONOMY OF EXTINCTION: BRIAN JUNGEN'S *TOMBSTONE*

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the School of Arts, Media, and Communications
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master Art History and Visual Culture
at
Lindenwood University

By

Jasen Evoy

Saint Charles, Missouri

May 2022

ABSTRACT

The Taxonomy of Extinction: Brian Jungen's *Tombstone*

Jasen Evoy, Master Art History and Visual Culture, 2022

Thesis Directed by: Jeanette Nicewinter – Chair
Sarah Cantor – Member
Khristin Landry-Montes – Member

This thesis focuses on the recent work (*Tombstone*, 2019) by Brian Jungen, a Canadian artist of mixed European and Dane-zaa heritage. The work is explored in detail, leveraging concepts present in Jungen's existing body of work to extract intent and meaning through Jungen's complex use of space, materiality, and iconography. *Tombstone* is a large scale, multimedia sculpture consisting of white plastic Rubbermaid stepstools cut and assembled into the form of a turtle or tortoise shell resting on a bank of thirty-seven black filing cabinets. While *Tombstone* initially presents itself as aesthetically sparse, it is a deeply-layered commentary on inequity, power relationships, and coloniality. Although Jungen deals with many of these issues throughout his body of work, *Tombstone* condenses his concerns with stark economy. The work is dense, confronting the complex and unbalanced interactions, both contemporary and historic, between colonial governance and Indigenous Americans. Informed by his experiences as a Dane-zaa and a member of the Doig River Nation, Jungen's *Tombstone* leverages Indigenous symbolism and modernist materiality to comment on a range of issues including colonial museological practices, the exploitation of First Nation resources, ethic taxonomy, the disposition of Native American remains, and the bureaucratic hegemonies that have conflicted with Native American identity and sovereignty in British Columbia. Jungen's concerns and the presentation of *Tombstone* align closely with the work of decolonial theorists, particularly Annibale Quijano's coloniality of power. This analysis focuses on *Tombstone* through the lens of decoloniality, applying the critical theory to a visual analysis of the work.

Acknowledgements

The writing of this thesis has been a remarkable journey. As a student returning to a master's program after two decades of teaching, I am tremendously grateful for the opportunities I have had to improve my craft and expand my understanding. I would like to thank the faculty and staff of Lindenwood University, particularly Dr. James Hutson, Dr. Sarah Cantor, and Dr. Khristin Landry Montes, for their invaluable support in this process. I would also like to issue my particularly heartfelt gratitude to my Committee Chair, Dr. Jeanette Nicewinter; your guidance and mentorship has made the completion of this experience not only possible, but the high point of my academic career.

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At the beginning of human existence - *I'yehe'eye'!*
It was the turtle who gave this grateful gift to me,
The Earth - *I'yake'eye'!*
Thus my father told me - *Ahe'eye'-he'eye'!*[1]

- Arapaho Ghost Dance

INTRODUCTION

Brian Jungen, a contemporary artist of Dane-zaa and Swiss descent, questions subjectivities in his sculptures and installations. He wields the visual vocabulary of European Modernism, consumerism, and capitalism to create multilayered commentaries on contemporary society and coloniality within the museum and gallery setting. His work examines museological practices, fetishization, consumption, commodification, and extinction – often through the appropriation and reconstitution of iconic, mass-produced Western goods ranging from cheap patio chairs to three-hundred-dollar Nike Air Jordan trainers. Jungen challenges power relationships, disquiets expectations, and confronts the complex, pervasive legacy of colonialism in his body of work with materiality playing a central role.

The focus of this analysis, Jungen's *Tombstone* (2019), exemplifies these characteristics of his oeuvre using nothing more than plastic stepstools and metal filing cabinets (Fig. 1). Jungen's *Tombstone* represents the colonial museological display of a timeless, extinct Indigenous world marked by bureaucracy, ethnographic taxonomy, and environmental exploitation. In visually naming these inequities and their resultant impacts on Native American culture, Jungen's work constitutes a profoundly decolonial act. In *Tombstone,* the massive turtle shell suggests the chronologically suspended, anthropological display of a vanishing Indigenous

[1] Harltey Burr Alexander, *Native American Mythology* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2005), 172.

world - a haunting specter Jungen accusatorily places on the black pedestal of governmental bureaucracy.

At first glance, *Tombstone* evokes a sense of wonder and confusion; a bone-white, skeletal, plastic turtle shell rests on a plinth of black metal filing cabinets. Upon closer inspection, it is revealed that the odd structure of the shell is fabricated from hundreds of cheap plastic stepstools that have been cut apart and reassembled into a mimetic form (Fig. 2). The work is massive at nearly six feet high, eight feet wide, and seven feet deep. Much like the academic paintings of the French Salon, where such massive scale indicated a historical, mythological, or biblical subject, its size insists on political and cultural significance.[2] The title of the work, *Tombstone*, provides another clue as to the intent and meaning contained within the work, suggesting a memorial or marker for a grave.

Placing *Tombstone* within a decolonial framework involves not only an understanding of the iconology and materiality of the work itself, but an understanding of contemporary context and the exhibition where it was displayed. For Jungen, means of display and presentation within gallery and museum settings constitute a central aspect of his oeuvre and are essential to challenging existing subjectivities and preconceptions regarding Indigenous culture, particularly those of timelessness and extinction. *Tombstone* is highly relevant at this moment in time because museological practices surrounding Indigenous arts and artifacts have come under increasing scrutiny. While recent landmark exhibitions, such as *Hearts of our People: Native Women Artists* at the Minneapolis Institute of Art, *Art Along the Rivers* at the Saint Louis Art Museum, and *Larger than Memory* at the Heard Museum in Phoenix, demonstrate significant

[2] "Brian Jungen, Tombstone, 2019 - Catriona Jeffries," catrionajeffries.com, accessed June 1, 2021.

progress in foregrounding Native voices, the colonial practices of "inclusion" and "recognition" still represent institutional standards, and Indigenous art is still often classified through an ethnographic lens. Jungen seeks to expose and challenge these subjectivities through the complex, and often conflicted, materiality of his work.

Tombstone was one of the final elements completed for Jungen's 2019 exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario, *Brian Jungen: Friendship Centre*, a large-scale presentation of works spanning the artist's career.[3] Throughout the exhibition space, Jungen juxtaposed Indigenous themes, consumer materials, and contemporary sports culture to recontextualize the viewer's experiences and preconceptions of the objects (Fig. 3). While *Tombstone* itself is somewhat enigmatic, the potential meaning of the work is interpreted though an informed examination of his body of work as a whole and the application of a decolonial analysis to the object itself. Breaking down how the work connects to contemporary and historic hegemonies reveals a powerful indictment of coloniality. Jungen's use of complex, often seemingly contradictory, imagery, materials, and display deconstructs existing power structures and creates a space for decolonial action by challenging the viewer to reconsider their preconceptions regarding the interactions of the colonized and colonizer.

[3] Art Gallery of Ontario, "Artist's Talk: Brian Jungen," YouTube, June 20, 2019, 57:56, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRHTzfTf0ks&t=3001s.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many of Brian Jungen's works, such as his *Prototypes for New Understanding* (Fig. 4) and the *Cetology* series (Fig. 5), have been extensively addressed in scholarly texts. His use of consumer materials, space, and his penchant for modernist aesthetics have been widely discussed. On the other hand, the primary subject of this thesis - Brian Jungen's *Tombstone* - is a relatively recent work and has been the subject of very little discussion or analysis within the art-historical field. The existing body of scholarship on Jungen investigates his transformative materiality, simultaneous engagement with modernism and Indigenous practices, deliberate manipulation of site and display, and explorations of his Native identity. While these explorations fail to examine the recent artwork *Tombstone* in detail, they provide a key to the artistic vocabulary applied by Jungen to his body of work and enable an analysis of the complex, layered meanings laced throughout the work.

One of the most essential sources on Jungen's work is the artist himself; as a living, contemporary artist who engages with various media, he has described various aspects of his work in artist talks, interviews, and publications. Some of the most direct explanations of the artist's intent are evident in the video series *Art 21's* episode "Vancouver," a series of extended email exchanges with Ken Lum, and an hour-long artist talk with Kitty Scott, the Modern and Contemporary curator for the Art Gallery of Ontario. In each of these cases, Jungen responds to questions that probe the connections between his Indigenous identity and his artistic practices.

In addition to these first-hand accounts by the artist, there are a range of other sources addressing Jungen and his work. These include a handful of journal articles addressing his exhibitions, texts dealing with Native American art that include his work within a broader discussion, and a limited number of texts that address his work directly. Some of the latter take

the form of short essays within two compilations: the 2005 *Brian Jungen*, and the 2019 exhibition catalog *Brian Jungen – Friendship Centre*.[4] Although both sources are largely pictorial, the brief essays contained within are insightful and delve into greater complexity than many of Jungen's interviews. An additional and extensive source is Emily Merson's *Creative Presence*; this 2020 text investigates a series of contemporary Native American works that create opportunities for decolonial activity through shifting viewer perspectives.[5] Merson highlights Brian Jungen's *Prototypes for a New Understanding* as a key example.

Materiality

Perhaps the most discussed aspect of Brian Jungen's work centers around his use of materials. In the 2011 article "Brian Jungen's Verfremdungseffekt: Strange Comfort at the National Museum for the American Indian," Marlis Schweitzer describes Jungen's transformation and recontextualization of consumer goods through an Indigenous lens, evident in works such as his *Prototypes for New Understanding*.[6] This series of sculptural works, originally displayed in glass cases, involved the dissection and reassembly of hundreds of Nike Air Jordans, transforming the shoes into twenty-three forms resembling masks created by the Haida of the Pacific Northwest (Fig. 6). As Schweitzer indicates, Jungen's inspiration for this act came from the experience of seeing the highly sought after, expensive trainers on display in Niketown,

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[4] Brian Jungen, Kitty Scott, and Art Gallery of Ontario, *Brian Jungen - Friendship Centre* (New York, Ny: Delmonico Books-Prestel, 2019); Daina Augaitis et al., *Brian Jungen* (Berkeley, Ca: Douglas & Mcintyre, 2005).

[5] Emily Merson, *Creative Presence: Settler Colonialism, Indigenous Self-Determination, and Decolonial Contemporary Artwork* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020),

[6] Marlis Schweitzer, "Brian Jungen's Verfremdungseffekt: Strange Comfort at the National Museum for the American Indian," *TDR/the Drama Review* 55, no. 4 (December 2011): 153.

an exclusive store in New York where he encountered shoes elevated in glass cases like precious artifacts.[7] Jungen found the designer athletic shoes shared similarities with Indigenous masks, not only in form but also in status as fetishized, collectible commodities. Schweitzer points out another commonly-cited aspect of Jungen's materiality in this parallel, stating, "Jungen encourages audiences to reflect critically on the production and circulation of the objects he uses, both in their original and reconstituted forms."[8] Schweitzer asserts that this economic critique and sense of duality is further complicated by Jungen's own knowing participation in an art market where his works themselves become commodified.

In *Creative Presence: Settler Colonialism, Indigenous Self-Determination, and Decolonial Contemporary Artwork*, Emily Merson extensively discusses Jungen's *Prototypes*. She argues from a decolonial perspective, identifying the artist's use of materiality as a powerful means of "engaging with settler colonialism [to] name the coloniality of global power and introduce possibilities for audiences to cultivate decolonial sensibilities."[9] Merson asserts that Jungen's work creates a space for decolonial action by exposing unbalanced power relationships resulting in a loss of Native sovereignty over land and waterways.[10] In Merson's view, Jungen's choice of materials and means of transformation from consumer commodities to Indigenous or natural artifacts carries a tremendous political and social dimension, possessing the potential to draw out a discourse with the viewer regarding power structures and colonial hegemony. According to Merson, this recontextualization of familiar materials results in an uneasy

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[7] Schweitzer, "Brian Jungen's Verfremdungseffekt," 153.

[8] Schweitzer, 153.

[9] Merson, *Creative Presence,* 2.

[10] Merson, 17.

familiarity, ultimately challenging the way the viewer perceives Native arts and culture and opening a door for decolonial action.[11] Merson cites Jungen:

> I was interested in using the collection of Aboriginal artworks in museums as a reference point . . . and how that work has become synonymous with Native art practice and the identity of British Columbia. I wanted to use material that was paradoxical to that but merged some ideas of commodification, globalization and the work production of material. So I used Nike Air Jordan trainers which had a very similar red, white and black color scheme and graduated curved lines and proved to be very flexible working material.[12]

For Jungen, this fetishization of a consumer item harkened back to images of Native artifacts ensconced within ethnographic displays – an entanglement he sought to exploit and comment upon through his *Prototypes for New Understanding*.[13] In the essay "High Curios," Cuauhtémoc Medina further expands on Jungen's use of materiality as a tool for social commentary. Medina points out the parallel transformative nature of masks and shoes within his *Prototypes*, asserting that the highly-commodified trainers mimic the shamanistic power of Indigenous masks and are seen as capable of conferring athletic prowess and status.[14] He describes Jungen's juxtaposition of colonial display, Indigenous forms, and contemporary consumer commodities as a form of "cultural refraction" that forces the viewer to consider the work through multiple lenses and varied perspectives.[15] According to Medina, in fragmenting

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[11] Merson*, Creative Presence,* 60.

[12] Merson, 66.

[13] Cuauhtémoc Medina, "High Curios," in *Brian Jungen* (Berkeley, Ca: Douglas & Mcintyre, 2005), 30.

[14] Medina, "High Curios," 36.

[15] Medina, 30.

and conflating these fetishized goods, Jungen disassociates the value of objects and disorients the viewer, creating the potential for new perspectives on economics and capitalism.[16]

Further evidence of Jungen's intentional materiality is present in a 2019 artist's talk for the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO). In this public interview with Kitty Scott, Jungen further describes his interest in transforming materials in his exploration of cheap, ubiquitous patio furniture. He describes leveraging concepts of usage life cycles and disposable (but not biodegradable) materials and evoking a sense of the natural history museum and extinct species in his *Cetology* series, a trio of life-sized whale skeletons fabricated from plastic lawn chairs.[17]

In a separate analysis, Daina Augaitis argues that Jungen's use of materials, in examples such as *Cetology*, is also connected to his interpretation of, and reaction to, social hierarchies. By taking apart and reconfiguring ready-made objects, Jungen not only comments on commodification and mass consumerism, but also addresses hegemonic power structures. Augaitis states, "in a sense, his work begins to dismantle some rigid social conventions by breaking down existing stereotypes, embracing instability and opening up new spaces of engagement. He looks beyond the surface of everyday objects to extract more explicit meanings that begin to expose the roots of a social consciousness."[18] This interest in transformation manifests itself in Jungen's selection of plastic furniture as the medium for his *Cetology* series and *Tombstone*.

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[16] Medina, "High Curios," 35.

[17] Art Gallery of Ontario, "Artist's Talk: Brian Jungen."

[18] Daina Augaitis, "Prototypes for New Understandings," in *Brian Jungen* (Berkeley, Ca: Douglas & Mcintyre, 2005), 5.

In "Brian Jungen Courtside," Kitty Scott cites Jungen as stating, "[a]n endangered animal is made from an indestructible material." She interprets this as an indication of the ironic and conflicted use of materials in his plastic works.[19] This also connects to Jungen's comments referencing the use of whale oil as a historic fuel source in coastal cities, and its subsequent replacement with petroleum.[20] Jungen's deliberate and transformative materiality in these works is interpreted widely as disruptive of expectations and as forcing a consideration of the origins and ultimate disposition of such materials, as well as how the extraction of natural resources such as petroleum impacts Native communities and economies.

Scott is one of the closest sources to Jungen and one of the most frequent contributors to the literature on the artist. In "Brian Jungen Courtside," Scott describes how Jungen's repurposing of consumer commodities extended to the unusual material of Natuzzi designer couches in 2006. Jungen witnessed many members of his Dane-zaa community purchasing the expensive items of furniture after the tribal council distributed funds from a land settlement in the late 1990s, and he was surprised by the symbolic status the items conferred. He states, "I thought it was a crazy icon of wealth . . . but there's a lot of hide in them."[21] As Scott observes, this reference to hide also coincides with a shift in Jungen's approach to materials. In the mid-2000s, he began to spend more time with his Dane-zaa family, and began practicing Indigenous means of working, including tanning hides and crafting ceremonial drums.[22] His *Furniture*

[19] Kitty Scott, "Brian Jungen Courtside," in *Brian Jungen - Friendship Centre*, ed. Kitty Scott (New York, NY: Delmonico Books-Prestel, 2019), 15.

[20] Art Gallery of Ontario, "Artist's Talk: Brian Jungen."

[21] Scott, "Brian Jungen Courtside," 15.

[22] Scott, 17.

Sculpture (Fig. 7) comments on consumerism, but at the same time engages in traditional practices; in a performative act within the gallery, the artist “skinned” a dozen expensive, much-sought-after sofas and refashioned their remains into a 27’ tall tipi, treating the couches as stand-ins for buffalos. In Scott’s interpretation of Jungen’s works, these examples juxtapose themes of commodification, display, and materiality with indigenous ways of knowing.

Other dimensions of Jungen’s transformative materiality also relate to Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination. As highlighted in an email exchange between the artist and Ken Lum, Jungen encountered the creative reuse of materials in his mother’s family as a means of survival and economic necessity. He states, “when generations of folks live with government involvement in their communities or lives, it forces one to look for areas of autonomy and self-sufficiency, often through culture and economics.”[23] Within the correspondence, Jungen connects this repurposing of materials to poverty, but also to independence and identity.

Jungen’s selection of materials is also frequently associated with the vocabulary of Modernism, a conclusion largely based on his use of ready-made objects and minimalist aesthetics. In “Collapsing Utopias: Brian Jungen’s Minimalist Tactics,” Trevor Smith quotes Jungen regarding his use of the ready-made. Jungen describes it as “a device to merge paradoxical concepts,” and states, “often, such concepts have raised questions of cultural authenticity and authority while simultaneously comparing the handmade over the mass produced. I attempt to transform these objects into a new hybrid object, which affirms and negates its mass-produced origin.”[24] Smith connects Jungen’s aesthetics to earlier twentieth

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[23] Ken Lum, “Brian Jungen in Conversation,” in *Brian Jungen - Friendship Centre*, ed. Kitty Scott (New York, NY: Delmonico Books-Prestel, 2019), 101.

[24] Trevor Smith, “Collapsing Utopias: Brian Jungen’s Minimalist Tactics,” in *Brian Jungen* (Berkeley, Ca: Douglas & Mcintyre, 2005): 87.

century artists such as Robert Morris, identifying the use of specific Minimalist processes including the "multiplication of integers" (multiple iterations of a form as a means of construction), "theatrical use of scale," and the employment of mass-produced materials.[25] Smith also differentiates Jungen from established Minimalists in his use of social critique and his ability to "manipulate our desire for brands and consumer goods" through his use of materiality.[26] Further connecting Jungen's work to modernity, Augaitis also points out Jungen's use of prefabricated materials and stacks of consumer products as markers of Minimalism and a nod to Pop Art.[27] As both Smith and Augaitis observe, Jungen also draws heavily upon Indigenous materials and techniques, resulting in a juxtaposition of traditional and contemporary artistic practices.[28]

Identity

While Jungen's materiality dominates much of the current literature on the artist, his connections to Indigenous American identity and use of social commentary are also significant topics of analysis within the field. As Kitty Scott observes, Jungen is an artist of mixed Dane-zaa and European heritage, and he frequently comments on the Western predilection to devalue Indigenous culture through bland and meaningless appropriations of Native American imagery. Scott states, "[t]he City of Vancouver had long incorporated generic motifs such as riffs on flat

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[25] Trevor Smith, "Collapsing Utopias," 82.

[26] Smith, 88.

[27] Augaitis, "Prototypes for New Understandings," 8.

[28] Smith, "Collapsing Utopias," 85; Augaitis, 10.

Haida formline designs, abstract renderings of thunderbirds, and geometric forms into its civic identity, and Jungen was interested in how people perceived them without fully understanding what they were."[29] This interest in how an audience perceives Indigenous styles and iconography is expressed throughout his body of work and is particularly evident in the mask-like forms of his *Prototypes*. This is also present in the use of animal imagery common in the Pacific Northwest, such as the whales in his *Cetology* series and the tortoise shell of *Tombstone*. Of his *Prototypes*, Jungen describes the work as, "about my experience of being First Nations and what that means at this time."[30] In the *Art21* feature, "Brian Jungen: Printing Two Perspectives," Jungen further discussed his exploration of Indigenous identity and duality in a series of back-to-back prints in 2016, using excerpts from community newspapers contrasting Native and white perspectives and highlighting inequity. Of the articles, he states, "[t]hese are the stories I would have read as a kid and they would have made me feel really bad about being Native . . . in mass media, you are always portrayed either like a sympathetic or really negative way."[31] This exploration of Indigenous identity within the paradigm of the colonizer and colonized is another frequent theme in his work and is tied to his personal history.

In his conversation with Ken Lum, Jungen delves into his heritage and cultural background. He identifies his parents as one of the first interracial couples (his father was Swiss, his mother Dane-zaa) in Northeast British Columbia, a rarity in the 1960s.[32] As a result of the

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[29] Scott, "Brian Jungen Courtside," 15.

[30] Scott, 15.

[31] Art21, "Brian Jungen: Printing Two Perspectives | Art21 'Extended Play,'" YouTube, December 22, 2016, 4:49, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f4rEaI8EdoM.

[32] Lum, "Brian Jungen in Conversation", 98.

marriage, Jungen's mother lost her Indigenous status – essentially declared non-Native by the Canadian government.[33] When Jungen's parents died tragically in a house fire, when he was seven-years-old, he and his siblings were split up and sent to live with his father's brothers (virtual strangers to the children) in white, middle-class Canadian society. Jungen had no contact with his mother's side of the family; he believes that his surrogate parents assumed an environment of addiction and poverty in his Native, matrilineal heritage, and as a result he was excluded from Dane-zaa culture.[34] Jungen expresses profound emotions regarding these experiences and likens them to a microcosmic version of the larger-scale parental policies enacted by the Canadian government, including forced assimilation through residential schools and relocation. Jungen and his siblings reapplied for tribal status with the Doig River Nation after high school and were reunited with their Dane-zaa family members and heritage.[35]

Although Jungen is best known for his sculptural installations and use of repurposed ready-made materials, his 2012 film *Modest Livelihood* provides critical insight on many of the cultural and personal issues confronted by his work. The film, created in collaboration with artist Duane Linklater, follows the pair, along with Jungen's uncle, on a hunting trip in traditional Dane-zaa treaty lands. In "Modest Livelihood: Inspiring a Practice of Indigenous Art," Gerald McMaster interprets the documentary as an affirmation of traditional Dane-zaa rights, critically sited in a striking landscape punctuated by evidence of the natural gas and oil industry.[36] The

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[33] Kate Taylor, "Brian Jungen's Audacious Indigenous Art Feels Timely and Necessary for a Canada Attempting Reconciliation," *The Globe and Mail*, June 24, 2019.

[34] Lum, "Brian Jungen in Conversation,"101.

[35] Lum, 98.

[36] Gerald McMaster, "Modest Livelihood: Inspiring a Practice of Indigenous Art," in *Brian Jungen - Friendship Centre*, ed. Kitty Scott (New York, NY: Delmonico Books-Prestel, 2019), 106-07.

film expresses a sense of continuity and survivance in the face of coloniality, and combined with the accompanying installation, represents an act that McMaster describes as "self-decolonization." He defines this as "a critical awareness of colonization as well as with interculturality and healing, through the mutual exchange of ideas and forms between Indigenous people and settlers."[37] McMaster's interpretation exposes Jungen's body of work to examinations of decolonial intent and meaning and highlights the cultural fluency of Jungen's practices.

As observed by Augatis and others, a significant marker of Jungen's work is this sense of interculturality; his work fluidly incorporates Western aesthetics and art history with Indigenous materials and techniques, an ability that allows him to engage both Native and colonial communities simultaneously. Augaitis describes Jungen as a model of "new world hybridity," citing his ability to move freely between contemporary urban culture and his rural, Dane-zaa roots.[38] This duality manifests itself in his use of modernist vocabulary in combination with Indigenous themes, resulting in conceptual works that address topics ranging from environmental exploitation to the commodification of Indigenous culture.

Space and Time

A complex, deliberate use of display within a gallery or museum space is one of the more nuanced elements that surfaces in critical examinations of Jungen's exhibitions. His use of display cases, pedestals, and environs that reference museum settings feature prominently in articles, texts, and his own interviews. For Jungen, means of display and presentation within

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[37] McMaster, "Modest Livelihood," 115.

[38] Augaitis, "Prototypes for New Understandings," 5.

gallery and museum settings constitute a central aspect of his oeuvre and are essential to challenging existing subjectivities and preconceptions regarding Indigenous culture.

Tombstone was one of the final elements completed for Jungen's 2019 exhibition within the Art Gallery of Ontario, *Brian Jungen: Friendship Centre*, a large-scale presentation of works spanning the artist's career.[39] Throughout the exhibition space, Jungen juxtaposed Indigenous techniques and materials, consumer goods, and contemporary sports culture to recontextualize the viewer's experiences and preconceptions. Jungen found the large, central gallery space in the AGO to resemble a gymnasium, a structure that carries significant meaning for the artist and many First Nations people.[40] Kitty Scott describes how on reservations, gymnasiums often serve as a vital space within community or "friendship" centers, hosting not only athletic events, such as basketball games, but Native dances, celebrations, and meetings.[41] Jungen cites a sense of welcoming inherent in these mixed-use spaces, a contrast to the intellectual and potentially alienating environs of the gallery or museum.[42] The artist installed backboards on the gallery walls and delineated a rainbow-hued series of markings on the floor to mimic the lines found on a basketball court, intending to transform the gallery and arranging his sculptures as potential players (Fig. 3). In the 2019 Artist's Talk for the AGO, Jungen and Scott discuss how the installation claimed the gallery as an Indigenous space and implied a reversal of the commonplace, often racist appropriations found in modern sports.[43] According to Scott, this

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[39] Art Gallery of Ontario, "Artists Talk: Brian Jungen."

[40] Art Gallery of Ontario, "Artist's Talk: Brian Jungen."

[41] Scott, "Brian Jungen Courtside," 21.

[42] Art Gallery of Ontario, "Artist's Talk: Brian Jungen."

[43] Art Gallery of Ontario, "Artist's Talk: Brian Jungen."

reference to the gymnasium connects to a critical space for social gathering on the reserve and invites the viewer to see the gallery within that context.[44]

Many of Jungen's works, including his *Prototypes for New Understandings, Cetology* series, and *Tombstone,* mimic the forms of scientific, archaeological, or ethnographic display employed by museums in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. These means of display often organized Indigenous objects anthropologically, according to how they were made and used rather than by specific cultural relevance. Further, natural history museums also often employed the diorama, rendering Native people as static, timeless examples of primitivism alongside extinct animal species.[45] In *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums,* Amy Lonetree describes early forms of ethnographic display employed by colonial institutions. The commonly used "natural history approach" classified Native Americans by such metrics as region and "stage of development," devaluing the importance of culture or worldview and emphasizing taxonomical categorization.[46]

These practices have a long history in the United States and Canada. During the late nineteenth century, North American museums and cultural institutions strove to collect, classify, and display Indigenous material culture.[47] As described by Erin Joyce, the Fine Arts Curator of the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona, the "cabinet of curiosities" served as the earliest form of

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[44] Scott, "Brian Jungen Courtside," 21.

[45] Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (Chapel Hill, N.C.; London: University of North Carolina Press, 2012): 14.

[46] Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums,* 15.

[47] In this intensive period of acquisition, Native populations marked a catastrophic decline due to genocidal policies and diseases such as smallpox. In addition to the collection of ethnographic and archaeological artifacts, Euro-American archaeologists excavated Native remains for sale to museums and collectors. Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums,* 13.

ethnographic and pseudo-scientific collection, with roots in the 16th century. Well-monied nobles amassed private collections of a wide array of artifacts, including objects from Indigenous cultures.[48] Eventually evolving into the first public museums, these collections rendered Indigenous culture through a Eurocentric lens of alterity and chronological discontinuity, eschewing works from contemporary Native societies in favor of historic artifacts.[49] Joyce describes these museological practices as a form of "structural violence" validated by the authoritative voice of the museum as an institution. Joyce states:

> When we view structural violence through the lens of a museum, the exclusion of diverse voices and equitable representation is indivisible from systemic forms of racism and colonial repression. Institutions like museums, the media, and the state all operate as formalized spaces that house and disseminate what is thought of as an official discourse, message, or meaning.[50]

Clearly apparent in his own commentary, Jungen's means of display is highly intentional and references these historic practices. He consciously mimics colonial settings, such as the ethnographic or natural history museum, and draws deliberate attention to the way in which Native arts have been (and in many cases, still are) displayed; Jungen cites encountering Haida artwork ensconced within the New York Museum of Natural History, describing such representations as, "in the realm of science and ethnography and anthropology."[51] Jungen's observations regarding the display of these objects illustrates his concerns for the manner in which institutional systems objectify and dehumanize Indigenous populations through static

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[48] Erin Joyce, "Captured Meanings," in *Larger than Memory: Contemporary Art from Indigenous North America.* (Phoenix, Arizona: Heard Museum, 2020), 37.

[49] Joyce, "Captured Meanings," 37.

[50] Joyce, 37.

[51] Art Gallery of Ontario, "Artist's Talk: Brian Jungen."

displays that are disconnected from living cultures. In *Creative Presence*, Merson argues that Jungen's adoption of display cases for the initial exhibition of his *Prototypes for New Understanding* draws a parallel to forms of displaying Native artifacts seen in many such institutions, practices that suggest and reinforce "imaginaries," such as timelessness and alterity.[52] According to Merson, Jungen articulates "his ongoing concern with how institutions such as museums, art galleries, and corporations reproduce colonial ways of seeing Indigenous peoples and produce self-knowledge of contemporary colonial settler societies."[53] In Merson's view, Jungen's use of ethnographic exhibition challenges the manner in which museums have traditionally represented Indigenous arts and the hierarchies such displays reinforce.

Jungen's manipulation of space and conflicting material vocabulary have also been described as displacing his work in time by confusing the viewer's expectation and perceptions as objects fluctuate between contemporary consumer goods, sculpture, and artifact. In *Objects, Others, and Us (the Refabrication of Things)*, Bill Brown comments on Jungen's use of museological display to refer to the means by which indigenous artifacts, often intended to be active within the present, are removed from time and suspended outside of living communities.[54] In Brown's opinion, Jungen's work serves as an "archaeology of the present," critically investigating alterity and subject/object relationships.[55] He asserts that Jungen's refabrication of contemporary consumer objects results in a similar form of dislocation that occurs when

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[52] Merson, *Creative Presence*, 66.

[53] Merson, 68.

[54] Bill Brown, "Objects, Others, and Us (the Refabrication of Things)," *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 2 (January 2010): 193-94.

[55] Brown, "Objects, Others, and Us," 186.

ephemeral Indigenous artforms, such as Haida totem poles, are removed from intended context and placed within the permanent setting of an ethnographic museum.[56]

According to Brown, Jungen's refabrication of common objects serves as deeply-layered commentaries on social, political, environmental, and economic realities. He describes Jungen's fragmentation of space and time using consumer goods and cultural references as highly complex and sophisticated, existing "at the very edge, or beyond the edge, of the analytic grids deployed to understand the dynamics of collection, institutionalization, and display."[57] Brown also identifies Jungen's assimilation of contemporary consumer culture as a reflection of nineteenth and early twentieth century Primitivism, observing that the artist reverses the exploitation of Indigenous arts by Western culture through the counter-appropriation of commodified sports paraphernalia.[58]

The existing literature on Brian Jungen suggests an artist who addresses contemporary and historic inequities imposed upon the Indigenous people of the Pacific Northwest from a sophisticated, dualistic perspective. Consistent markers of Jungen's work include his dynamic use of materiality in a way that dislocates the object, his use of Modernist visual language, and his ability to conflate contemporary consumer culture and Indigeneity. Jungen's own comments, as well as those of established experts within the field, indicate a substantive interest in a myriad

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[56] Brown, "Objects, Others, and Us," 192-93.

[57] Brown, 186.

[58] Late nineteenth and early twentieth century artists such as Gauguin, Picasso, and Matisse drew inspiration from the "primitive" sculptural art of Oceania and West Africa, identifying desirable formal qualities and symbolic traits present in these objects. Brown points out that Jungen's deliberate misuse of commodified Western objects such as Nike trainers draws a parallel with the Modernist practice of emulating the art of the "primitive" or "savage," commenting on the colonial practice of cultural appropriation. Brown, 202.

of issues faced by his community and reflected in incisive social commentary. As indicated by the authors presented here, Jungen’s work is remarkably complex and layered in meaning, ultimately targeted at challenging traditional power relationships and shattering preconceived notions of Native identity.

METHODOLOGY

Brian Jungen's *Tombstone* presents complex issues regarding Native American histories and contemporary inequities. The work's connections to Indigenous ways of knowing, materiality, display, and systemic colonial hierarchies correlate with many of the major concerns articulated by leading theorists in the field of decoloniality. Unlike post-colonial approaches, decoloniality seeks not only to identify and understand these intersections, but to provide potential avenues for resurgence and survivance.[59] An analysis of *Tombstone* using a decolonial framework has the potential not only to extract meaning from the complex materiality and imagery present in the work, but also to engage in decolonial action by confronting colonial subjectivities and creating the possibility of new perspectives.

The ability of Jungen's installations to spark dialogue about identity and power structures connects to the roots of decolonial theory, such as the works of Frantz Fanon, Anibal Quijano, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon describes colonialism as a system of violence and oppression that denies the humanity of Indigenous people.[60] This system destroys self-image and identity, eventually subjecting colonized people to inhabit the image projected by their oppressors.[61] Nelson Maldonado-Torres further describes and defines this idea

[59] Defined by Gerald Vizenor in *Manifest Manners*, surivivance refers to, "an active sense of presence, the continuance of Native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. . . Survivance means the right of succession or reversion of an estate, and in that sense, the estate of Native survivancy." Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (Lincoln, Neb. Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2010), vii.

[60] As articulated by Fanon, Quijano, Mignolo, Merson and other significant authors in the field of decoloniality, the institutional and cultural systems in the United States and Canada retain aspects of colonial, hierarchical power structures that disenfranchise, objectify, and dehumanize Indigenous peoples through the appropriation of land, resources, and cultural identity.

[61] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961; repr., Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2017), 6.

as “misanthropic skepticism,” a philosophical structure that supports colonialism by questioning the humanity of the “other” and resulting in the conclusion that colonized people are “primitive” and therefore lesser.[62] The colonial systems of power identified by these authors, most notably Quijano, are at the core of Jungen’s social critique.

Anibal Quijano identifies two myths that perpetuate the system of Eurocentrism, those of evolutionism and dualism; each of these plays a role in extracting meaning from *Tombstone*. The concept of evolutionism asserts that societies begin in primitivism and evolve towards a civilized nature along a fixed linear path, with European society representing the pinnacle of that development. As a result, any non-European society is deemed both inferior and chronologically anterior. Dualism, on the other hand, maintains hegemony by identifying differences between the colonized and colonizer as natural, racial traits rather than power relationships.[63] Quijano’s concept of Eurocentrism is paired with what he coins as the “coloniality of power,” another structure based on forms of colonialism and discrimination present in contemporary Latin America and critical to an analysis of Jungen’s work. He describes this system as a hierarchy based on racial classification, control of knowledge production, and economic dominance.[64] The result of this construct is a system that disenfranchises, excludes, and devalues Indigenous peoples.[65] Quijano points to globalization as the culmination of Eurocentric power centered

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[62] Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept,” *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2 (2007): 245.

[63] Aníbal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America,” *International Sociology* 15, no. 2 (June 2000): 542.

[64] Quijano, “Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America,” 539.

[65] Quijano, 540.

around capitalism, with classifications of race as a central axis of a hegemonic system that is still pervasive today.[66]

This construct of racial taxonomy as a means of ascribing value and social status has its roots in Eurocentric knowledge production. As described by Quijano, this stems from a subject/object determination. In this radical dualistic view, the subject, or entity, is the rational and superior European.[67] The Indigenous individual is primitive, incapable of reason – and therefore a non-entity. This exaggeration of racial and cultural differences leads to the justification of absolute dehumanization; the "primitive" can only be the object of domination and subjugation.[68] While these absolutist and racist perspectives have their roots in colonization, contemporary society and many institutions continue to objectify Indigenous people and culture; this is widely prevalent in ethnographic or anthropological museums, wherein Indigenous material culture and remains are classified and organized through chronology and taxonomy. This organizational process strips such artifacts of vitality and any connection to living people, rendering their cultures of origin as scientific curiosities to be studied from a Eurocentric perspective.

These hierarchical, economic, and taxonomic systems are central to the foundations of decolonial theory and Quijano's coloniality of power; Quijano's work differentiates between *colonialism* and *coloniality*; colonialism, as described by Quijano, refers to the violent process of

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[66] Quijano, "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America," 533.

[67] Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," in *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*, ed. Arturo Escobar and Walter Mignolo (New York: Routledge, 2013), 27.

[68] Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," 28.

invasion, displacement, and genocide enacted upon Indigenous peoples by a European minority.[69] Coloniality, on the other hand, survives colonization; this refers to the persistent, institutionalized systems of power and economic distribution that favor Western European cultural values and racial traits.[70] As described by Quijano, the categorization of race as a hierarchical construct has its origins in the colonization of the Americas, used by colonizers to justify domination over slave and Native populations. He asserts that the idea of "race" has no history prior to the colonization of the Americas, but that these biological differences became codified and classified according to 'color,' used to confer legitimacy and status. [71] Initiated as a means of classification between colonized and colonizer, physical and racial traits became signifiers of inferiority as conquered people were dominated by colonial Europeans.[72]

Recognition of these colonial systems of power spurs dialogue regarding possible solutions and means of counteracting centuries of racism and oppression, a topic taken up by Fanon, Tuhiwai Smith, and others. While Fanon insists that no decolonial action can occur without violence, Tuhiwai Smith argues for a series of decolonial "projects" that counteract colonial knowledge production and assert Indigenous self-determination.[73] These 25 projects are broad-based and thematic, with identifiers including "remembering," "claiming," and

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[69] Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," 22.

[70] Quijano, 25.

[71] Quijano, "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America," 534.

[72] Quijano, 534.

[73] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 2; Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples by Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 1st Edition* (Moorpark, Ca: Cram101 Inc, 2013), 143.

"indigenizing" - topics that in many cases demonstrate significant parallels to Jungen's use of materials, space, and imagery in a way that draws attention to the legacy of colonialism and Indigenous identity.[74]

As evident in Tuhiwai Smith's projects, the decolonial methodology extends beyond the postcolonial critique, not only identifying the relationship between colonizer and colonized but attempting to rectify and restructure power relationships in which Indigenous people have been displaced and dehumanized. Extending the work of Quijano, Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh articulate the intent of their text *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, and Praxis* as to "interrupt the idea of displaced, disembodied, and disengaged distraction, and to disobey the universal signifier that is the rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality, and the West's global model."[75] Verbiage such as "interrupt" and "disobey" are key here in parsing the active nature of decolonialism, as much about Indigenous *action* as Indigenous studies. At its core, the decolonial methodology is about exposing the false hierarchies established by Eurocentric knowledge production, racial taxonomy, and capitalism, with the aim of establishing Indigenous self-determination.

Brian Jungen's body of work deals with many of the issues confronted by decolonial theory, such as racial taxonomy, systems of knowledge production, and capitalist economics. *Tombstone* speaks to many of the key elements articulated by Quijano as structures present within the coloniality of power. An analysis of the work through a decolonial lens exposes the historic and contemporary systems and hierarchies present in British Columbia and confronted

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[74] Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies,* 144-47.

[75] Walter Mignolo and Catherine E Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, and Praxis* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018), 3

by Jungen, providing not only an extraction of meaning, but also the potential for decolonial action.

IN MEMORIAM MUNDI (IN MEMORY OF THE WORLD)

Presented on a massive plinth, the bone-white form of *Tombstone* at first suggests a geodesic dome or a strange fossil of a gargantuan lost species. The scale and proportion of the work demands the viewer's attention, which is further reinforced by the harsh contrast between the black rectilinear filing cabinets and the white, crystalline, semi-organic form of the plastic shell. Jungen emphasizes dualism and opposition, creating sharp visual binaries between the pale, seemingly natural mass, and a dark industrial base.

While these starkly contrasting forms are suggestive of a somewhat minimal, Modernist aesthetic, the work is richly layered with meaning. Jungen's *Tombstone* is as much an act of social activism as it is an aesthetic object, aimed at shifting the viewer's perspective by revealing contemporary and historic inequities. The work functions within a decolonial framework, visually establishing markers associated with Indigenous culture and "modern" materiality, creating conflicting and hybridized imagery that requires the viewer to question contemporary and historic relationships between Canadian society and Indigenous peoples. *Tombstone's* skeletal appearance draws strong connections to the collection and display of Indigenous remains, and critiques the way Native American culture is represented within colonial institutions. Jungen's materiality also acts as a potent focus for decolonial investigation; his use of mass-produced, petrochemical-based consumer products evokes questions about the exploitation of Indigenous resources in addition to environmental concerns. Jungen has expressed an interest in such materials as representative of cheap, disposable, and ubiquitous consumerism, but engages with them in a way that expresses Indigenous ways of knowing and

making.[76] His use of filing cabinets as a plinth for *Tombstone* is also highly relevant, connecting to decolonial themes surrounding bureaucracy and racial taxonomy.

THE SHELL

Turtle Island

The complex plastic form resting on an array of black filing cabinets emulates the shape of a hollow turtle or tortoise shell, an iconographic reference that carries significant weight. As verified by the artist in interviews and label copy, the testudinate form represents Turtle Island, a common Native American term found in many origin myths describing the world or North America.[77] The Dane-zaa creation story is an earth-diver tale, and shares much in common with that of other Native American tribes such as the Iroquois, the Arapaho, the Ojibwe, and the Delaware.[78] In many of these stories, Turtle swims in a primordial sea; at the urging of a supernatural being, animals dive to the seabed to retrieve soil (with Muskrat eventually proving successful) and spread the earth onto the back of Turtle.[79] As a result, Turtle becomes Turtle Island, host to mankind and a key symbol in Native cosmovision by representing the Earth. In addition to standing in as a signifier for the physical Earth, the concept of Turtle Island has come to represent the Native American world – inclusive of pre-contact culture, identity, land, and

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[76] Art21, "Vancouver," Art21, September 23, 2016, https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s8/vancouver/.

[77] Art Gallery of Ontario, "Artist's Talk: Brian Jungen."

[78] Jaguar Bird, "Grandfather Charlie Yahey (Dreamer): The Dane-Zaa Creation Story," YouTube, July 9, 2019, 40:57, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EIEWzMRrcno.

[79] Amanda Robinson, "Turtle Island," www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca (The Canadian Encyclopedia, November 6, 2018), https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/turtle-island#:~:text=In%20some%20Ojibwe%20oral%20traditions.

rights. Jungen's use of this signifier encompasses the traditional belief systems and heritage of Native Americans, but also references contemporary conflicts regarding land and sovereignty.

Modernist Materiality

Jungen's use of materials in Tombstone results in a modern, mass-produced aesthetic; this is contrasted by the work's iconography, which suggests an ancient, extinct turtle. From a representative perspective, the work suggests timeless Native American mythology and ancient megafauna; the direct forms in metal and plastic, however, insist on something much more immediate. *Tombstone's* ability to strike both contemporary and historic chords is derived from these contrasts in content and materiality. This dichotomy references the contemporary vibrancy of Indigenous culture in opposition to timeless colonial displays of lost or vanishing peoples.

Jungen's mimicry of traditional, Indigenous forms, such as the shell of Turtle Island, and his hybrid use of contemporary materials also serves to confuse the viewer's sense of chronology, simultaneously referencing "timeless" Native American tradition and modern consumerism. Brown states that Jungen, "recycles certain 'ubiquitous' global consumer products . . . on behalf of dilating a spectator's sense of time and on behalf of expanding any understanding of cultural systems and cultural space."[80] Jungen leverages the chronological duality of *Tombstone* as a central element, presenting an object that seems to vibrate with uncertainty between past and present. The work recalls a range of potential hybridized emulations from the Art Historical canon, including the influence of Duchamp's ready-mades, Picasso's *Bull's Head*, and Donald Judd's manufactured industrial forms. Jungen's structure also makes architectural references to the utopian geodesic domes of Buckminster Fuller, a theme he

[80] Bill Brown, "Objects, Others, and Us (the Refabrication of Things)," 185.

has explored in previous works and clearly draws upon in the repetitive modules composing the shell of *Tombstone*.[81] This use of a Modernist structural and material vocabulary displaces the work in time by confusing the viewer's expectation and perceptions, drawing clear visual connections to the twentieth century while simultaneously suggesting natural or cultural history.

Commodification and Consumption

Jungen demonstrates a hyperawareness of commodification and global economic relationships, a strong indicator that his use of petrochemical based, mass-produced plastic stepstools carries significant intention and meaning. The materiality of *Tombstone* voices Jungen's concerns with the oil and gas industry's impact on Native lands and culture, exploitative economic transactions between colonizer and colonized, and the social hierarchies and distinctions enforced by Eurocentric economic and racial axes.

The specific type of plastic furniture Jungen selected for *Tombstone* is also significant. The shell is constructed entirely out of stepstools, inglorious objects used as a means of ascension. Here, the stepstool becomes a signifier for the concept of the stepstool as that which is (or those who are) "stepped upon," not as a tangible, physical object but as an indicator of the radical dualism and racial superiority inherent in colonialism. Connected with the turtle as a representation of Native culture, this further expresses the colonial relationship between settler colonists and Indigenous peoples, with the body of the turtle (or the very waterways, lands, and bodies of the Indigenous community) reduced to a collection of stepstools used for economic gain by an exploitative hegemony.

This commentary on the ongoing impact of colonialism on Native peoples circles back to the economic nature of Quijano's coloniality of power. According to Quijano, one of the central

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[81] Smith, "Collapsing Utopias," 81–82.

pillars of Eurocentric hegemony is control of labor and resources; Quijano states, "[f]or the controllers of power, the control of capital and the market were and are what decides the ends, the means, and the limits of the process. The market is the foundation but also the limit of possible social equality among people."[82] The use of cheap, mass-produced plastic furniture in *Tombstone* references the rampant exploitation of natural resources - such as the petrochemicals used to produce such consumer goods – without regard to Indigenous lands or sovereignty. By extension, this economic disregard asserts a Eurocentric world view that disenfranchises Native Americans and renders them subject to a capitalist hegemony under the Canadian government. Jungen's references to ubiquitous consumption in *Tombstone* illustrate the imbalanced economic relationship between Native bands and the companies that extract oil and gas from their lands.

Environmental Exploitation

With *Tombstone* assembled from cheap plastic furniture widely available in global markets, Jungen's economic critique is easily evident. The work is equally indicative, however, of the artist's awareness of the environmental impact of such mass production and consumption. Jungen frequently features cheap, molded forms such as garbage cans, lawn chairs, or (in the case of *Tombstone*) stepstools in his work. These plastic items are often deemed disposable due to their inexpensive nature and questionable quality, and yet they are anything but. As Candice Hopkins observes in her essay "Reflections on the Vernacular" within the exhibition catalog *Brian Jungen: Friendship Centre*, such examples of plastic furniture are "banal, cheap, and ubiquitous items that are markers of our hyper-consumerist society." She goes on to state:

> The chairs themselves don't last long (plastic rots internally over time), their legs are prone to folding and breaking, and they're often discarded after a short period of use. Brian has pointed out that part of his attraction to these particular items has to do with

[82] Quijano, "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America," 548.

> their source material. The plastic in the chairs is produced through the metamorphosis of an organic substance (petroleum) into something inorganic and environmentally toxic, a material transformation all too common within capitalist culture.[83]

The use of these petrochemical-based plastics is another layer of Jungen's sharp commentary, this time on environmentalism and the oil industry. In a 2019 interview with Kitty Scott, the Modern and Contemporary Curator at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Jungen described one of his early explorations of cheap, petrochemical furniture in the creation of a massive plastic skeletal whale. He states, "I kept seeing those chairs just like everybody else. . . when they are broken, people just chuck them out, because you can't really fix them. . . [in my research] I stumbled upon the history of the whaling industry in the West Coast, and I read that a lot of cities would be lit at night by burning whale oil, and that was later replaced by petroleum. That's where the idea [originated], of using these chairs which are made from petroleum as well into this very organic object." In his use of plastic furniture, Jungen explores the nature of a material that begins as organic (oil), is processed into an inorganic substance (plastic), and is then reclaimed into an organic form through his sculptural process.[84] *Tombstone* demonstrates his exploration of this material by using cheap, plastic, Rubbermaid stepstools as a primary material, which continues his commentary on environmentalism and the impact of the petrochemical industry.

Evidence of this environmental exploitation is abundant. The petroleum and natural gas industries have become daily presences in the Dane-zaa community; massive company trucks rumbling down roads, new oil wells being drilled, and gouts of flame used to burn off excess

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[83] Candice Hopkins, "Reflections on the Vernacular," in *Brian Jungen - Friendship Centre*, ed. Kitty Scott (New York, NY: Delmonico Books-Prestel, 2019): 121.

[84] Hopkins, "Reflections on the Vernacular," 121.

natural gas are frequent reminders of the rich resources present in Northeastern British Columbia.[85] These resources sometimes lead to jobs and a boon to the local economy, but just as often lead to long-term concerns regarding health, environmental damage, and the dispossession of Native lands.[86]

Through his works with plastic furniture, Jungen reclaims a material transformed from petroleum to a manufactured commodity and reverts it back to the organic, referencing not only the commodification of an Indigenous resource, but also consumption and environmentalism. Where reversal of the object in many of his earlier works appears exploratory and playful, Jungen's choice of materiality in *Tombstone* seems to take a darker turn; here, the use of the plastic, petrochemical, non-degradable material suggests the displacement of traditional means of subsistence, environmental toxicity, and even the complicity of the petrochemical industry in the extinction of Indigenous culture. Jungen's harsh critique may present a silver lining, however; by repurposing the manufactured forms of the plastic furniture into the Native American symbol of Turtle Island, he also suggests a reassertion of Indigenous sovereignty over the material and the land from which it originated.

Skeletal Remains

With *Tombstone's* shell established as a stand-in for the Indigenous American world, the lack of a turtle within the shell becomes a glaring omission. This vacancy suggests that the shell represents a dead turtle rather than a living one, and by extension references Native culture as extinct rather than extant. With this compounded by the skeletal appearance and bone-white

[85] Hopkins, "Reflections on the Vernacular," 122.

[86] Hopkins, 123.

color granted to the carapace by the reassembled stepstools, the structure conveys a sense of death and extinction. In addition to these visual cues, the title lends a funerary association and suggests a literal tombstone for Native American people and culture.

The skeletal aspect of *Tombstone* targets the historic colonial practices of grave robbing and bone hunting, comments on the innumerable skulls and skeletons contained within institutional collections and evokes a conversation regarding the repatriation of Indigenous remains.[87] Jungen sheds light on the colonial practices of collection and exhibition in presenting a massive, lifeless turtle in this manner; in rendering *Tombstone* skeletally, he mimics the assemblies of ancient animals found in natural history museums, drawing connections between the Native world represented in Turtle Island and representations of Indigenous material culture as scientific curiosities or as evidence of a vanishing race. *Tombstone's* reference to bones draws a strong connection to conflicts in the United States and Canada regarding the disposition of Native burials and grave goods. The work insinuates the collection and display of Indigenous remains as specimens or curios in anthropological or natural history settings, addressing centuries of grave robbery and the institutional uptake of Indigenous skulls and skeletons for pseudo-scientific reasons. From this vantage, Jungen's work could be seen as a challenge to the objectification of Native Americans inherent in the collection and exhibition of such remains.

The collection of Indigenous remains *Tombstone* alludes to was rampant during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, driven by racist ideologies justifying the displacement or extermination of Native peoples. In the United States, the procurement of Indigenous

[87] See Andrew Gulliford, "Bones of Contention: The Repatriation of Native American Human Remains," *The Public Historian* 18, no. 4 (1996) and Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (Chapel Hill, N.C.; London: University of North Carolina Press, 2012) for further scholarship on this subject.

skeletons and skulls was not only condoned, but in some cases mandated; in 1862, U.S. Surgeon General William A. Hammond directed officers and medical officials to "diligently collect, and forward to the office of the Surgeon General, all [Native American] specimens of morbid anatomy, surgical or medical, which may be regarded as valuable."[88] Native American skulls in particular became highly collectable commodities, purchased by museums, scientific institutions, and amateur collectors. With skulls selling for five dollars apiece, and twenty dollars for a complete skeleton, grave robbing became a lucrative profession in the late nineteenth century.[89]

These mortal remains were acquired through the excavation of both ancient and contemporary burials, and even procured as trophies from the dead in the aftermath of battle. One of the most egregious of these incidents occurred on November 29th, 1864, when Colonel John M. Chington led a force of nearly 700 volunteer soldiers against a camp of Arapaho and Cheyenne at Sand Creek, Colorado. The troops, many of them drunk, executed over a hundred women, children, and the elderly, taking gruesome trophies including genitalia and scalps. Some of the dead were beheaded, their crania sent to the Army Medical College in Washington D.C. for study.[90] In the 1880s, requests for the remains of Native Americans came from Harvard, the Army Medical Museum, and other institutions, spawning what Andrew Gulliford refers to as a "cottage industry," resulting in the financially incentivized looting of burials and post-mortem battlefield decapitations.[91]

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[88] Andrew Gulliford, "Bones of Contention: The Repatriation of Native American Human Remains," *The Public Historian* 18, no. 4 (1996): 123.

[89] Gulliford, "Bones of Contention," 125.

[90] Gulliford, 123-24.

[91] Gulliford, 124.

One of the most famous collectors of remains was Franz Boas, considered the "father of cultural anthropology." Despite his progressive advocacy for Indigenous peoples, Boas financed his fieldwork through the sale of the bones he collected, selling to the Smithsonian, the Field Museum in Chicago, and international collectors.[92] Boas eventually collected "roughly one hundred complete skeletons and two hundred skulls belonging to Kwakwaka'wakw and Coastal Salish peoples" for display in museums and colonial institutions.[93] One of Boas' contemporaries and competitors, George Dorsey, also participated in grave robbing in the acquisition of remains for major institutions. Dorsey took advantage of the tragically harsh Montana winter of 1883-84, which resulted in nearly a quarter of the members of the Blackfoot tribe in Browning dying of starvation. Six years later, Dorsey excavated the shallow graves and shipped 35 skeletons to the Field Museum in Chicago.[94]

Tombstone not only comments on the institutional collection of Native American bones for ostensibly "scientific" purposes, but also bears relevance to much more capitalist ventures. Early in the twentieth century, with the auto tourist industry booming, Indian burial sites became popular middle-class attractions. In Wickliffe, Kentucky, Fain King opened his "Ancient Buried City," an amateur excavation of a Mississippian mound burial. Charging a dollar each for the guided tour, King exposed and exploited the remains of 150 individuals and their grave goods, selling souvenirs and "artifacts" of dubious origins.[95] Such activities were not limited to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; in the 1980s, the prehistoric remains of somewhere

[92] Gulliford, "Bones of Contention," 125.

[93] Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums,* 13.

[94] Gulliford, 125.

[95] Gulliford, 126-27.

between 800 and 1200 individuals were dug up on the private land of Slack Farm in Kentucky, their skulls rendered into ashtrays and candleholders and offered for sale; skulls that could not be used to produce these gruesome souvenirs were smashed and discarded by the looters.[96] Given Jungen's penchant for commentary on the commodification and fetishization of Native American culture, *Tombstone* also draws attention to such forms of profiteering and objectification.

While the widespread and egregious looting of Indigenous remains was largely curtailed by late twentieth century legislation in the United States and Canada, vast quantities of skeletons and skulls remained in storage within major public institutions. According to a report by the American Association of Museums in 1988, the documented remains of 43,306 Native Americans were held across 163 museums in the United States, with 18,600 held by the Smithsonian alone.[97] In 1990, the passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) provided significant human rights legislation, requiring museums to catalog remains and notify Native communities of their holdings. Lonetree states that by the time of the passage of NAGPRA in the US, American institutions and collectors possessed anywhere from 300,000 to 2.5 million examples of Native skulls and skeletons.[98] Some of these remains have been repatriated, but the vast majority have not been affiliated with specific tribal groups and continue to sit in storage within public institutions.

Although some provinces have enacted legislation regarding the disposition of Indigenous remains, no federal mandate on the scale of NAGPRA exists in Canada. Various forms of guidance have been introduced, such as the 1996 *Royal Commission on Aboriginal*

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[96] Gulliford, "Bones of Contention," 130.

[97] Gulliford, 120.

[98] Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums,* 14

Peoples (RCAP) and the Canadian Archeological Association's *Statement of Principles for Ethical Conduct Pertaining to Aboriginal People* of the same year, but ultimately such documents only provide recommendations in contrast to the legally enforceable protections ostensibly enacted in the United States by NAGPRA.[99]

Early 21st-century activism and resolutions (such as the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) and Canada's *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*) are demonstrative of progress in the realm of Indigenous rights but represent small measures in relation to past atrocities. The historic collection and fetishization of Indigenous remains dehumanized Native peoples, reducing their desecrated skeletons to commodified curiosities and collector's items. Many artifacts and remains found their way into (and are still contained within) ethnographic and natural history museums, categorized and displayed much in the same way as flora or fauna and suggesting the preservation of a lost race rather than the exhibition of vibrant contemporary cultures. As Lonetree states, these practices perpetuate "romantic Indian/noble savage motifs," suggest a timeless, fixed identity, and represent "Indigenous peoples as artifacts."[100] *Tombstone's* emulation of a skeletal turtle not only carries significant meaning in this regard, drawing attention to colonial histories and practices in surrounding Native American skulls and bones, but also references contemporary conflicts over the repatriation of Indigenous remains.

While physical form of Jungen's assemblage bears clear connections to Indigenous remains, the title of the work cements an association with death and burial. In naming the work

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[99] Margaret Hanna, "The Changing Legal and Ethical Context of Archaeological Practice in Canada, with Special Reference to the Repatriation of Human Remains," *Journal of Museum Ethnography* Pacific Ethnography, Politics and Museums, no. 17 (2005): 143-44.

[100] Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums,* 12.

Tombstone, Jungen creates a powerful and direct indication that the work marks a grave. Given that the shell symbolizes the Native American world and pre-contact culture, the vacant carapace and funerary title insinuates Indigenous extinction. Taken as a whole, the title and iconography of the work present a monumental burial marker for the people and culture of Native North America.

Intentional Display

In *Tombstone*, Jungen mimics the presentation of endangered or extinct specimens, questioning museological practices regarding Indigenous material culture and remains. He challenges the fabricated vision of Indigenous peoples as a "timeless" or "vanishing" race in colonial institutions by leveraging the exhibition of his own work in comparison to ethnographic and scientific display. His suggestion of "timelessness" and chronological displacement serves to question Indigenous alterity from the evolutionism asserted by European Modernism, while his imagery, materiality, and processes challenge radical dualism by evoking a sense of Indigenous and Western European hybridity.

Jungen's means of display demonstrates an extensive understanding of the interactions between viewer, institution, and artist. He capitalizes on the authoritative voice of the gallery or museum, but also challenges the viewer to examine their assumptions regarding institutional credibility. *Tombstone* refers to several traditional means of museum display, tying together many of the deliberate strategies Jungen employs in other examples throughout his oeuvre. The most overt of these references in *Tombstone* is that of the work as an aesthetic object, with the object displayed as one would expect in a gallery or Western art museum. The object, in such

cases, is isolated, sharply illuminated by bright lighting, and displayed with minimal context.[101] Susan Vogel describes a similar, and equally deliberate, use of space and display to emphasize the aesthetic nature of Indigenous objects in the 1988 exhibition *Art/artifact* at the New York Center for African Art.[102] In this exhibition, the curators intentionally contrasted forms of display to manipulate the viewer's experience – much like the manipulations Jungen applies to his own work. As described by Vogel, "the physical setting of an object is part of what makes it identifiable as art."[103] Jungen leverages the Western museum or gallery setting as one aspect of his presentation, resulting in a perspective that places emphasis on the formal qualities of the object and initially deemphasizes cultural or social significance.

While *Tombstone* initially presents as an object to be considered from a Modernist, formal perspective due to its form and presentation, the bone-like plastic stepstools forming the shell suggest the exhibition of a natural specimen rather than an art object. As a result, *Tombstone's* organic form draws a parallel to the display of remarkable or extinct species encountered in the natural history museum. Western survey museums have historically represented Indigenous art as artifacts and Native people in the realm of anthropology or natural history. Many forms of exhibition associate Indigenous tribes with ancient or lost peoples that need to be preserved, rather than contemporary cultures. Displays such as the "Old New York" diorama in the American Museum of Natural History (Fig 8) and the "Three Sisters" diorama at

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[101] James Clifford, "Four Northwest Coast Museums," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 221.

[102] Susan Vogel, "Always True to the Object," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 195.

[103] Vogel, "Always True to the Object," 195.

the New York State Museum (Fig 9) show Indigenous people as romanticized “types” frozen in the past, not unlike the exhibitions of exotic or extinct species within those same institutions. This alienating form of display suspends Indigenous people and culture outside of time, generating a sense of temporal and social alterity through the institutional voice of the museum. By exhibiting Native Americans as Other and as chronologically distant, such displays also enforce Eurocentric perspectives and suggest the dehumanizing subject/object relationship inherent in colonial power structures.

The references to various forms of exhibition within *Tombstone* create opportunities not only to reflect on historic or contemporary inequities, but also to pause and question the influence of curators and museums on a viewer’s perception. Jungen disrupts colonial power structures and institutional authority through the mimicry of various forms of display, raising questions regarding how the presentation of an object impacts the meaning extracted by the viewer. Jungen’s critique acknowledges the authoritative voice of the institution, but also identifies systemic forms of racism and repression validated by museological presentation. He exposes the role of display and the power of institutional voice in shaping meaning and challenges the viewer to recognize how the organization and presentation of objects within a curated, cultural space can bias expectations and interpretation. Initially, his work seems to fit within the expected museological paradigm, but closer inspection reveals a challenge to preconceptions about the exhibition of Indigenous art. Ultimately, this commentary on display has the potential to encourage patrons towards an awareness of preconceptions, providing the opportunity for more nuanced and informed consideration.

THE PEDESTAL

An Unusual Plinth

The placement of *Tombstone* on a base constructed out of office furniture has multiple levels of symbolism, both referencing the European symbol of the pedestal as a place of cultural elevation and the bureaucratic and taxonomic function of the filing cabinet. The use of an oversized and visually dominant pedestal suggests importance and selection, as if the hollow shell has been identified as an artifact of great value or is expected to be recognized as a rare and ancient specimen in a natural history museum. The choice of a filing cabinet, a universal symbol of classification and systematic record keeping, expresses the racial categorization of Native Americans as Other, and further points to the racist settler colonial policies of the Canadian government in determining tribal status, negotiating treaties, and denying Indigenous sovereignty.

Racial Taxonomy

Placing the shell of *Tombstone* on a filing cabinet base draws a direct correlation to racist colonial practices of ethnic classification and taxonomy, and further associates the work with the colonial display of Indigenous American artifacts and remains. While Jungen's connection to the forms of display found in the natural history museum or the contemporary gallery are overt and readily identifiable, his connection to the cabinet of curiosities or forms of anthropological display is less obvious but highly relevant. As described by Lonetree, ethnographic or anthropological displays are typified by a form of organization that contrasts with what one would find in the contemporary art museum or gallery.[104] Within the anthropological setting,

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[104] Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 15.

works of art are often grouped together in display cases, categorized by classifications such as function, culture of origin, or chronological period.[105] Each of these distinctions represents a form of taxonomy - a process akin to the organization and classification suggested by Jungen's filing cabinet pedestal. Jungen's placement of the skeletal turtle shell onto such symbols of classification references the colonial history of displaying Native American remains and material culture through Eurocentric, ethnographic perspectives.

The use of racial classification to determine the place of an individual in society has a long history as a colonial tool, used by imperialist nations to justify slavery, manifest destiny, and social Darwinism. With European incursion into Africa and the Americas, new systems of ethnic classification were developed to justify European dominance over other peoples.[106] In the late nineteenth century, the systems used to classify flora and fauna developed by Carolus Linnaeus were widely applied alongside Darwin's theories of evolution in a process Charles Hirschman refers to as "race making," creating distinct ethnic categorizations based on physiological traits.[107] These forms of institutional racism reinforced colonial power over Indigenous peoples, supporting hegemonic systems that privileged white Europeans.

The colonial systems Jungen targets with *Tombstone* relate to Quijano's concepts of Eurocentrism and the coloniality of power. Quijano describes one of the forms of the coloniality of power as the use of taxonomical, racial systems of classification resulting in "a racist distribution of labor and the forms of exploitation of colonial capitalism."[108] Dualism, one of the

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[105] Lonetree, 14.

[106] Charles Hirschman, "The Origins and Demise of the Concept of Race," *Population and Development Review* 30, no. 3 (September 2004): 393.

[107] Hirschman, "The Origins and Demise of the Concept of Race," 395.

[108] Quijano, "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America," 536-37.

two central tenets of Eurocentrism, reinforces the disparity between colonizer and colonized as natural, racial distinctions rather than symptoms of power and circumstance. A key example of this can be found in the pseudo-scientific nineteenth century practice of measuring cranial volume to determine intelligence. In 1839, Samuel Morton (considered the founder of American physical anthropology) published *Crania Americana*, detailing the comparative volumes of Native American, African, and European skulls.[109] Morton, an avid collector of Native American skulls, concluded that the larger internal volume of Caucasian skulls indicated intellectual superiority over other races, perpetuating racist myths with mathematical observations.[110] The widespread looting of skulls in the nineteenth century was largely driven by a desire to determine the existence of physical markers proving the superiority of the white race. According to Elizabeth M. Koehler, much of the massive Smithsonian collection of Indigenous remains resulted from an 1868 order issued by Surgeon General J.K. Barnes, who directed his officers to, "Send him Indian skeletons . . . so that studies could be performed to determine whether the Indian was inferior to the white man . . . [and] to show that the Indian was not capable of being a landowner."[111] The filing cabinet base of *Tombstone* refers to these forms of scientific racism, ultimately leading to catastrophic legislation and governmental policies that displaced and dehumanized Indigenous populations in the United States and Canada, stripping away sovereignty and human rights from Native populations.

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[109] Gulliford, "Bones of Contention," 122.

[110] Gulliford, 123.

[111] Elizabeth Koehler, "Repatriation of Cultural Objects to Indigenous Peoples: A Comparative Analysis of U.S. And Canadian Law," *The International Lawyer* 41, no. 1 (2007): 111.

A History of Bureaucracy

Jungen's pedestal for the Native World is both a reference to the hierarchical classification of race in colonial systems as described by Quijano and the complex governmental bureaucracy that still surrounds Native American interactions with contemporary governments. Given the experiences of alterity and racial classification encountered by Jungen personally, as well as the historic inequities visited upon the Dane-zaa people, his selection of the institutional filing cabinet can be read to comment on ethnic classification and the systems of colonial governance that have disenfranchised Indigenous Canadians. The inclusion of Turtle Island potentially expands the bureaucratic infringement on Indigenous rights and identity to a continental (if not global) scope. Jungen visually identifies these systems of classification and power through the symbolic use of the filing cabinet as a stand-in for governmental policies and interventions, suggesting a cold, clinical interaction that strips away Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination through a miasma of forms and documentation.

The treaties, policies, and legislation that exert control over Indigenous land and lives are suggested as the contents of the filing cabinets upon which *Tombstone* rests. In explanation of his unusual selection for *Tombstone's* plinth, Jungen states, "I wanted the earth to be sitting on this endless representation of bureaucracy."[112] Jungen's use of the filing cabinets as a bureaucratic symbol challenges colonial systems by drawing attention to historic systemic hierarchies imposed on Native peoples by colonial systems, and references those still in place today used to determine tribal eligibility and Indigenous status.

Defective treaties and land agreements, boarding schools, and forced relocations mar the

[112] Art Gallery of Ontario, "Artists Talk: Brian Jungen."

history of colonial and Indigenous interactions. The first major Canadian document addressing Native Americans, the Royal Proclamation of 1763, permitted Native bands the right to occupy traditional hunting grounds and restricted the settlement of colonists. While the proclamation ostensibly protected Indigenous rights to traditional lands, it was often ignored by settlers and made provisions for the sale of Native land to the Crown. These provisions allowed the negotiation of the "Numbered Treaties," a series of agreements between Native bands and the Crown resulting in the sale, trade, or surrender of large swaths of land to the Canadian government in exchange for "annuities, goods, farm implements, and protection of Indian game rights in the ceded areas."[113] As a result, Indigenous peoples were restricted or relocated to reserves, much like the reservation system in the United States.

The reserve systems in Canada (like reservations in the United States) are manifestations of the coloniality of power, islands of alterity created to contain and isolate Indigenous peoples after stripping them of traditional lands and sovereignty. In a 2018 email conversation with Ken Lum, Jungen describes the impact of such cultural and geographic delineation. He states, "[t]he reserve system is a complicated thing. There is nothing to compare it to in the reality of non-native Canadians. I suppose the internment camps during the Second World War would be comparable, but the reserve system is so vast and has such crushing parental totality to it that it really has no equal."[114] Jungen's comments anchor his concerns with bureaucratic infringement on Indigenous rights and identity, further underscoring the commentary on colonial control over Native American lives implied by *Tombstone*.

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[113] Michael Mason, "Canadian and United States Approaches to Indian Sovereignty," *Osgoode Hall Law Journal* 21, no. 3 (October 1983): 426.

[114] Lum, "Brian Jungen in Conversation," 101.

Well beyond the geographic control exerted by the reserve system, the Canadian government attempted to eliminate Indigenous culture and "civilize" Native Americans through the forced imposition of European cultural systems. The Indian Act of 1876 established the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) and was created with the intent of extinguishing Indigenous culture. The Act banned Native ceremonies (such as the potlatch) and forced Indigenous children to attend residential boarding schools. [115] Beginning in the 1880s, church-run schools in Canada emulated American examples, and attempted to supplant traditional cultural beliefs and values in Indigenous children through forced assimilation.[116] These boarding schools impacted up to 150,000 Indigenous children and were marked by inadequate care, disease, and abuse.[117]

The Indian Act and other legislation also disenfranchised Native peoples from playing any role in the legislation impacting reserves and Indigenous rights. Until 1960, Indigenous Canadians could vote for council members in their own band but were unable to participate in federal elections without dire consequences. In order to vote in the federal elections that determined who made the laws governing reserves, they were required to surrender tribal membership and give up "Indian status," ceding any associated rights or benefits.[118]

Revisions to the Indian Act in 1951 further consolidated DIA control over Native American lands but did expand self-governance and some rights for some Indigenous peoples.[119]

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[115] Mason, "Canadian and United States Approaches to Indian Sovereignty," 429.

[116] Eric Taylor Woods, "A Cultural Approach to a Canadian Tragedy: The Indian Residential Schools as a Sacred Enterprise," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 26, no. 2 (February 16, 2013): 173.

[117] Woods, "A Cultural Approach to a Canadian Tragedy," 174.

[118] Mason, 429.

[119] Mason, 430.

The act impacted "status Indians" but conferred no additional rights to Métis (those of mixed Indigenous and Canadian ancestry) or Innuit peoples. Women became eligible to vote in band elections but would lose their Indigenous status if they married a non-Native; this legality impacted Jungen's personal history and identity, as his mother surrendered her tribal status by marrying a Swiss Canadian.

Jungen's reactions against these systems of colonial power and bureaucracy relate to his own individual experiences and those of the Dane-zaa people. In 1900, the Dane-zaa people signed Treaty 8 with the Canadian government. The treaty, which allowed the "right to live" by hunting and trapping on traditional Dane-zaa land, was mischaracterized as an agreement of sharing and peace rather than one of transfer of ownership.[120] Today, much the traditional Dane-zaa lands are used for farming and the production of oil and natural gas.[121] In the 1999 Marshall decision, the Supreme Court of Canada upheld the right for Indigenous people to maintain a "modest livelihood" through hunting, gathering, and fishing on tribal lands, allowing for subsistence but simultaneously denying the right to wealth accumulation by Native peoples from Indigenous resources.[122]

One of the most egregious abuses of power that *Tombstone* may allude to is the infamous "60's Scoop," a series of policies stemming from the Adopt Indian Métis (AIM) program that resulted in the forcible adoption of up to 20,000 children by middle-class white families.[123] This is a particularly poignant statement from Jungen given his own personal experiences with

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[120] McMaster, "Modest Livelihood," 107.

[121] McMaster, 107.

[122] McMaster, 106.

[123] Stephanie Cram, "When Kinship Was Colonized," *Herizons* 35, no. 2 (2021): 27.

classification, displacement, and adoption. Forced adoptions, like residential boarding schools, represent attempts to "solve" the Indigenous issue through forced assimilation and the obliteration of Native American culture, a point sharply emphasized by the skeletal form of Turtle Island resting on filing cabinets, representing the death of Indigeneity at the hands of Canadian policies.

Native American resistance to Canadian policy manifested dramatically in 1969 when the *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy*, known simply as "the White Paper," was proposed by the Trudeau government. The proposal intended to formally assimilate all Indigenous peoples in Canada by abolishing all previous legislation pertaining to Native Americans, including the Numbered Treaties and the Indian Act.[124] The document was met with dramatic resistance from Native American bands and activists primarily concerned with the dissolution of historic treaties regarding land, and countered by the *Hawthorne Report* (known as the "Red Paper") which defended special status and historical rights. Ultimately, the White Paper was shelved in reaction to the overwhelmingly negative reaction among Indigenous peoples.[125]

Jungen's comments and experiences regarding the legislative and bureaucratic impacts of colonial governance support the interpretation of *Tombstone* as a decolonial commentary. The filing cabinet pedestal of *Tombstone* draws a symbolic connection to dualistic colonial policies such as the use of a reserve system and Indigenous classification, acting as a semiotic signifier for racial taxonomy and imperialist bureaucracy. Jungen's overt use of this symbol draws attention to historical and contemporary injustices perpetuated by colonial institutions.

In exposing these examples of taxonomy and bureaucracy, Jungen emphasizes the impact

[124] Mason, "Canadian and United States Approaches to Indian Sovereignty," 431.

[125] Mason, 432.

of colonial forces on Native culture with this symbol of clerical stagnation and invites both Indigenous and non-Indigenous viewers to, as Merson suggests, "decolonize political subjectivities" by examining the role of government in determining Indigenous destiny.[126] As Merson also emphasizes, works such as *Tombstone* demonstrate the validity of visual culture as a form of knowledge production and the capacity for Indigenous artists like Jungen to disrupt colonial practices through the production of new aesthetic knowledge.[127]

Tombstone's capacity to challenge Eurocentric preconceptions about Indigenous culture stands as an aspect of the work related to the decolonial concepts of resurgence and survivance. Survivance, a term coined by Gerald Vizenor, encompasses survival and resistance. As described by Vizenor, this involves refuting the static and imaginary construct of the "Indian" or "noble savage" derived to distinguish Indigenous Americans from European invaders.[128] Jungen connects to this in emphasizing the contemporaneity of Native American communities, denying traditional narratives of timelessness and alterity. *Tombstone* emphasizes Indigenous presence and engages in decolonial action by prompting viewers to reconsider Eurocentric perspectives, pointedly referencing the imbalanced relationships inherent in colonial governance.

Taken as a whole, *Tombstone* stands as a representation of the relationship between colonized and colonizer. Jungen's subtle iconography, hybrid materiality, and mimicry of various forms of museological display enable him to establish rich, multilayered strata of meaning in a deceptively simple form. With *Tombstone*, Jungen criticizes the historic and contemporary practices of the Canadian government that have reinforced the coloniality of

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[126] Merson, *Creative Presence*, 3.

[127] Merson, 2.

[128] Vizenor, *Manifest Manners*, xi.

power and Eurocentric dominance through racism, bureaucracy, and the exploitation of natural resources.

CONCLUSIONS

Jungen's *Tombstone* is a dense, powerful work that condenses many of the concerns voiced in Jungen's ouvure into a single expression. The work sets up a series of visual and conceptual dichotomies anchored in Jungen's experiences and cultural hybridity. It is dramatically binary, contrasting black and white, organic and rectilinear, natural and manufactured. Beyond these initial optical impressions, the content and symbolism of the work deepen these oppositions into the social interactions between Indigenous Americans and European colonizers. Although Jungen's individual works often deal piecemeal with many of the same themes addressed in *Tombstone*, they are rarely expressed with such clarity and economy.

Tombstone may be aesthetically sparse, but the symbol-laden structure is anything but devoid of meaning. The assemblage stands as a representation of the Indigenous world, dead and hollow, resting on a plinth of steel filing cabinets documenting the history of colonial oppression in Canada. The iconography of the work comments on Jungen's personal confrontations with racial taxonomy and governmental policies regarding Native American identity, and by extension the experiences of other Indigenous peoples. His use of materiality connects to exploitation and consumption, while his means of presentation references the alienating forms of display perpetuated by Western institutions. The skeletal nature of the form creates connections to the pervasive, systemic practices of grave robbing and the collection of Indigenous remains during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, exposing a history of racial classification and objectification.

Tombstone represents a timely and incisive commentary on the legacy of coloniality, establishing a complex, difficult dialogue about inequity through hybridity and duality. The rich layers of meaning conveyed by Tombstone's materiality and symbolism result in a powerful

social critique, indicting Canadian society for contemporary injustices and historic atrocities. Jungen's ability to reference the Native American world and colonial institutions through the turtle shell and filing cabinets generates a visual and conceptual opposition with many layers of meaning and significant space for interpretation. His hybrid use of commercial materials and Indigenous practices sets up a dichotomy that challenges the viewer regarding where this work sits in relation to culture and time and poses questions about the relationship between the colonized and colonizer. Jungen's visual vocabulary and means of display further juxtaposes Modernism and Indigenous tradition, resulting in competing sensations of strangeness and familiarity.

Jungen's use of Turtle Island as a symbol of the Native American world is expansive, encompassing culture, people, history, and geography without chronological boundaries; the form universally represents the past, present, and future of Indigenous Americans. Crafting this symbol from cheap, consumable petrochemical furniture into a skeletal form is conflicting and paradoxical; it can be taken to suggest the extinction of Native American culture through exploitation and commodification or reference the reclamation of an Indigenous resource. Further, these polarities can be seen as yet undetermined potential outcomes that may serve as a nexus for discussion.

Being such a conceptual work, the efficacy of Jungen's *Tombstone* rests upon the interpretive ability of the viewer and can only suggest a potential for decolonizing action. As Merson states, "[w]hile the artist's selection of materials, media forms and locations explicitly call attention to the coloniality of global power, there is not an expectation of a monolithic

response or certainty that the outcome of audience experiences are known in advance."[129] Jungen's *Tombstone* provides an opportunity to challenge Eurocentric systems and the coloniality of power, generating a space for the viewer to question the meaning of his work, the manner of its presentation, and how it relates to contemporary culture and the environment. In exposing issues of identity, exploitation, and racism, Jungen makes space for meaningful discourse between the Indigenous peoples of Canada and the descendants of European invaders.

Jungen's massive *Tombstone* represents a time-fluid monument, a literal tombstone, to the extinction of Native American culture or even to the entirety of the world itself. Vibrating between past, present, and future, the work denies the anthropological display case brimming with the relics of a lost race in favor of a terrifying monumentality, both imminent and timeless. He twists the everyday into the sublime, and through his reconfiguration of materials and space forces a reconsideration of perspectives. *Tombstone* not only confronts falsehoods still perpetuated by many museums and cultural institutions today in how Native American arts are categorized, labeled, and displayed, but invites the audience to reconsider their conception of Indigenous art and participate in the work of decolonialism through the rectification of persistent colonial inequity.

[129] Merson, *Creative Presence*, 25.

Illustrations

Figure 1. Brian Jungen, *Tombstone*, 2019, Rubbermaid step stools, filing cabinets, 69 x 107 x 86 in.

Figure 2. Brian Jungen, *Tombstone* (detail), 2019, Rubbermaid step stools, filing cabinets, 69 x 107 x 86 in.

Figure 3. Brian Jungen, *Brian Jungen: Friendship Centre* (detail) 2019, Art Gallery of Ontario.

Figure 4. Brian Jungen, *Prototypes for New Understanding*, 1999. Installation view, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 2005.

Figure 5. Brian Jungen, *Cetology*, 2002, plastic chairs, 159 x 166 x 587 in. Installation view, *Friendship Centre*, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Canada, 2019

Figure 6. Brian Jungen, *Prototypes for New Understanding*, 1999. Original installation view, Charles H. Scott Gallery, Vancouver, 1999.

Figure 7. Brian Jungen, *Furniture Sculpture,* 2006, 11 leather sofas, Art Gallery of Ontario.

Figure 8. *Old New York Diorama* at the American Museum of Natural History.

https://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/permanent/theodore-roosevelt-memorial/hall/old-new-york-diorama

Figure 9. *The Three Sisters: An Iroquois Agricultural Field* at the New Your State Museum.

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