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Madsen, Deborah Lea

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'Walking the Walk/Talking the Talk': On Survivance, Spatial Narrative and the National Museum of the American Indian

Deborah L. Madsen

In this paper I want to address the issue of point of view, in the context of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) as a Native place that stages itself as the location of a cross-cultural encounter. It seems to me that some of the controversies that have surrounded the National Museum of the American Indian can be approached constructively through the concept of narrative. The spatial placing of the visitor within the museum space, and the shaping of the visitor's possibilities for movement within the museum displays, enacts a linear narrative that corresponds to the telling of a history. It is precisely the telling of historical narratives that the National Museum of the American Indian deliberately places into question – to the considerable discomfort of some visitors. I begin by outlining the mission or intention of the museum designers and curators before describing briefly the objections that have been made to this conception of what this particular museum should be. I want then to suggest some ways in which we can approach this controversy narratologically, and to think about what the National Museum of the American Indian tells us about contemporary approaches to the study of American Indian cultures.

Mission of the National Museum of the American Indian

The National Museum of the American Indian summarizes its mission as follows: 'The National Museum of the American Indian is committed to advancing knowledge and understanding of the Native cultures of the Western Hemisphere, past, present, and future, through partnership with Native people and others. The museum works to support the continuance of culture, traditional values, and transitions in contemporary Native life.' (<http://www.nmai.si.edu/subpage.cfm?subpage=press&second=mission>)

The website entry then goes on to elaborate:

The National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) was chartered by Congress in 1989 as the 16th museum of the Smithsonian Institution. The NMAI is the only national museum dedicated to the Native peoples of North, South, and Central America. Our educational mission is to preserve, present, and celebrate the Native cultures of the Americas. // ... Much more than a collection of exhibition galleries and artifacts, the NMAI actively promotes “cultural continuance.” Through our exhibitions, and most importantly, through our educational programs and outreach to Native communities, the NMAI helps Native people revive and sustain their cultural heritage. In doing so, the NMAI has established collaborative and mutually beneficial relationships with tribal communities throughout North, South, and Central America. The hallmark of this museum is that all aspects

of our exhibitions and programs are presented from the Native perspective
—“in the Native voice.”

One of the key terms that recurs throughout the museum, particularly in the textual commentary on exhibits, is Gerald Vizenor's concept of 'survivance.' The exhibit 'Our Lives,' co-curated by guest curator Jolene Rickard and the National Museum of the American Indian curator Gabrielle Tayac, for example, carries the text: 'SURVIVANCE . . . is more than survival. Survivance means redefining ourselves. It means raising our social and political consciousness. It means holding on to ancient principles while aggressively embracing change. Survivance is about how we continue to be Native in rapidly changing times. It means doing what is necessary to keep our cultures alive. The term was first put forward by Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor in his book *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance* (1994).' Survivance, in this context, is more than just survival and more than just resistance; it is both: creating representations through storytelling and simulation that can create social change by transforming attitudes and beliefs. Survivance is the opposite of victimry, which embraces the conventional stereotypical images of Native peoples that Vizenor calls 'terminal creeds.' In *Manifest Manners* he writes: 'In other words, the postindian warriors of postmodern simulations would undermine and surmount, with imagination and the performance of new stories, the manifest manners of scriptural simulations and "authentic" representations of the tribes in the literature of dominance' (1994, p. 17). By assuming what Scott Lyons calls 'rhetorical sovereignty' or the power of community self-definition, Native American communities appropriate the right to construct their own narrative histories and the formulate their own self-definitions. For instance, one of the National Museum of the American Indian installations offers an image of North America in 1491 but this exhibit refuses to be reconciled within an historical narrative of contact and colonization told from 'the Native point of view.' Throughout the National Museum of the American Indian the visitor encounters this same refusal to offer invented images of Native peoples, images invented, in Gerald Vizenor's words, by 'the literature of dominance' (1994, p. 55).

The emphasis upon survivance and continuance, rather than loss and victimry, is made also by Richard West, the museum Director, in his remarks at the Opening Ceremony, on the National Mall, on September 21, 2004:

‘I always have believed, ... that the National Museum of the American Indian is really a symbol for something bigger and more important than even that beautiful Native place just across the street [the Capitol]. And that is this: it is a symbol for the hope, centuries in the making, that the hearts and minds of all Americans, beyond this museum and throughout the Americas, will open and welcome the presence of the first peoples in their history and in their contemporary lives. // We have lived in these lands and sacred places for thousands of years. We thus are the original part of the cultural heritage of every person hearing these words today, whether you are Native or non-Native. We have felt the cruel and destructive edge of the colonialism that followed contact and lasted for hundreds of years. But, in our minds and in history, we are not its victims. As the Mohawks have counseled us, “It is hard to see the future with tears in your eyes.” // We have survived and, from a cultural standpoint, triumphed against great odds. We are here now -- 40,000,000 indigenous people throughout the Americas and in hundreds of different cultural communities. And we will insist, as we must, that we remain a part of the cultural future of the Americas, just as we were a part of its past and fought so hard to be a part of its present. // But

the National Museum of the American Indian is even more significant as a symbol for this: that, at long last, the culturally different histories, cultures, and peoples of the Americas can come together in new mutual understanding and respect. That understanding and respect make possible the true cultural reconciliation that until now has eluded American history.' (<http://americanindian.si.edu/opening/index.html>)

But, we must ask, how is this elusive mutual understanding and respect to be achieved, and to be achieved within the specific physical environment of the museum space? How can a place like the National Museum of the American Indian set out to provide an environment where 'the culturally different histories, cultures, and peoples of the Americas can come together'? We can begin to approach this question through the design philosophy of the primary design architect, Douglas Cardinal (a member of the Blackfoot nation) who won the design contract in 1993. Cardinal describes his inspiration for the design process as following from the Native American concept of meeting in a circle to build consensus. "Each person speaks and there is no debate," he explains. "You never try to prove that someone else is wrong and you are right. As you speak, you speak from the heart and, after a while, you speak as one voice." A circle of elders came together in Washington, D.C. as he asked for their advice about the design for the National Museum of the American Indian. The elders agreed that the building should celebrate Native American contributions rather than bemoan the staggering losses of Native land, culture and life, according to Cardinal.

In his company's brochure, the architecture of a building is described as an active agent in the constitution and health of communities, and in the shaping of the consciousness of those who use, work, and live in the built environment:

Our architecture's primary aim is to facilitate individual and social transformation through the development of human capabilities and to foster a dynamic synthesis between intellectual, spiritual and physical dimensions within the buildings. We firmly believe that our buildings must contribute through a physical environment through the development of students who are technically and morally prepared to contribute to their community and around the world. Our buildings *perceive themselves* as active members of its local, national and regional community, and recognizes its proactive role in promoting unity and the well-being of these communities. This commitment stems from a belief that architecture can expose the human being as a noble creation, and that each person is a material and spiritual entity (Cardinal Company Brochure <http://www.djcaarchitect.com/Portfolio/portfolio.html>, my emphasis).

The conception of the building as an actor in the physical, moral and spiritual environment, and the design characteristics of the National Museum of the American Indian, from the collaborative design process to the curvilinear form of the completed structure, are typical of Cardinal's work, dating from the late 1960s. In the case of buildings designed and built by Cardinal, the architectural medium is the communicative message. And this is entirely congruent with the stated intention of the National Museum of the American Indian. An NMAI document dating from 1996 states that: 'The building must have a language of its own, a language that speaks for the aboriginal peoples of the Americas, a language that wraps the visitor in a different paradigm of perception' ('Explore the Museum,' <http://www.nmai.si.edu/subpage.cfm?subpage=dc&second=building&third=architect>). How is this articulate architecture realized in the museum building? A few obvious examples

include: the exterior cladding of Kasota dolomitic limestone from Minnesota, treated to give the building the appearance of having been carved by wind and water; and crystal prisms, installed in the windows of the atrium facing true south, that catch the sun's rays and reflect a light spectrum or rainbow, thus animating the interior of this central space.

Upon entry, the visitor encounters the 'Welcome Wall' where hundreds of words meaning "welcome" in Native American languages are projected onto a screen inside the entrance to the building. The visitor moves into the 'Potomac,' the central atrium which stages changing themes, the first of which was 'Native American Boatbuilding Traditions.' This atrium space can be seen from balconies on every level of the museum.

The Lelawi Theater, separate from the Main Theater, is where visitors are introduced to the idea of the museum by the short film 'Who We Are.' The description of this space on the National Museum of the American Indian website reads: 'This 120-seat circular theater offers a dazzling multi-media experience designed to prepare museum-goers for the themes and messages they will encounter during their visit to the museum. A 13-minute presentation immerses viewers in the vibrancy and diversity of contemporary Native life and explores, from a Native perspective, the strength that different communities across the hemisphere derive from their connections to land, religion, traditional knowledge, self government, and self expression. Overhead, images fill the 40-foot dome, transporting viewers to the vast reaches of the Arctic, the cool forests of the Northwest Coast, and the high plateaus of Bolivia. A centre structure supports four additional screens, and emerging from the floor is a cast-acrylic "rock" that transforms from a rushing creek to a storyteller's fire. Surrounding visitors are objects from the collection that link to the stories. Among the tribal groups highlighted in the presentation are the Mi'kmaq (east), the Maya and Aymara (south), the Inupiat and Haida (north), and the Lakota, Muscogee-Creek, and Hopi (west).' The Mitsitam Cafe offers meals and snacks based on the indigenous foods and culinary traditions of the Americas. This two-storey space overlooks the water feature that winds along the north side of the building. The Chesapeake Museum Store is an upscale store that incorporates into its design the work of Native American artists; for example, and I quote again from the website, 'countertops and benches built of cedar and alder and adzed by master carvers. Fine purple and white tiles, crafted from Quahog shells, were inlaid in the display cases by members of the Wampanoag tribe of Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts.' The Roanoake Museum Store, on the second floor, links to the 1st floor Chesapeake Store by means of a twenty-foot totem pole carved by Tlingit artist Nathan Jackson. 'Window on Collections,' located on 3rd and 4th levels, display more than 3500 items in a series of exhibitions. Each gallery and museum space is circular in shape and these intersecting circles plot a circular movement for visitors to the galleries and other spaces. Immediately the visitor enters the National Museum of the American Indian, s/he is directed to the left in an arc-shaped movement around the performance space of the atrium.

Outside, the external environment is conceived as a continuation of the building and part of the museum which acknowledges the importance of Native peoples' connection to the land. Four distinct areas comprise: forest on the northern edge of the site; wetlands at the eastern end; meadow to the southwest of the building; and traditional croplands on the south side of the building. More than forty large uncarved 'Grandfather Rocks' symbolize the longevity of Native peoples' relationship to the environment; four special stones are the Cardinal Direction Markers, placed along north-south and east-west axes; these axes intersect at the symbolic heart of the Museum at the centre of the circle of sandstone marking the Potomac area of the building and emphasizing again the centrality of the Potomac as the central meeting place.

From the Old to the New

The National Museum of the American Indian, as a place and as an institution, defines itself in key ways against the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. The opening ceremony in September 2004 began with a ceremonial march of American Indians from the Natural History to the American Indian museums. The map of the route took the procession symbolically from a site adjacent to the National Museum of Natural History, down the National Mall in the direction of the Capitol, to the new space of the National Museum of the American Indian.

The procession from the Natural History Museum to the Museum of the American Indian represented a means of taking the symbolic location of Native America out of the old and into the new: out of 'nature' and into 'culture.' The chronology or sequential unfolding of meaning through the encounter with staged artefacts that is characteristic of the museum experience was, in a sense, displaced into the public space of the National Mall as thousands of Native people marched, not in protest but in celebration, from the former site of Native presence within the nation's capital to a new place of Native devising. Not artefacts but individuals of astonishing diversity participated in celebrating the opening ceremony.

Let me go back a little and remind you of the 'place' of Indians in the National Natural History Museum. There, on the first floor of the museum, along with the fossils and the dinosaurs, you find an exhibition entitled 'Native Cultures of the Americas,' consisting of three representative displays. In the 'virtual tour' of this exhibition the following text describes the questions that are answered by the artefacts:

How did native peoples live at the time of their early encounters with non-Indians? What changes occurred and what traditions endured following those contacts? Some answers can be found in this hall; future exhibits will examine these questions in depth. Here, learn about the staple foods of the northernmost native peoples, adaptations to moccasins, and the relationship between weather and clothing
(<http://www.mnh.si.edu/museum/VirtualTour/Tour/First/Native/index.html>).

Here, in narrative terms, we have an omniscient third-person voice telling us the story of Native cultures in the context of European contact. This is not a Native voice describing Native experience; it is not a voice that puts into question the relationship between Native and European. We are given a single authoritative and reassuring (to some) historical narrative with no space for questioning alternative perspectives on this history. The ideological assumptions that inform the choice of what objects will be represented and how are obscured, naturalized by a Euramerican narrative of post-contact Native cultures and made to appear self-evident.

In contrast, the National Museum of the American Indian places into question the whole notion of curatorial epistemic authority. So, in the National Museum of the American Indian, where we might expect to find a display that walks us through the history of warfare, instead we are given an installation that consists of a wall of firearms arranged aesthetically but with no apparent chronological, historical or narrative logic. The layout and the installations of the National Museum of the American Indian make explicit the question of which narratives are customarily told, and which should be told, about American Indians. The singular and authoritative viewpoint of museums such as the National Museum of Natural History is fractured by the public performance of the question: whose history is being narrated and by whom? Peter Vergo, the author of *The New Museology* (1989), argues that:

... every acquisition (and indeed disposal), every juxtaposition or arrangement of an object or a work of art, together with other objects or works of art, within the context of a temporary exhibition or museum display means placing a certain construction upon history, be it the history of the distant or more recent past, of our own culture or someone else's, of mankind in general or a particular aspect of human endeavour (p. 3).

The New Museology

As this citation suggests, I believe that the National Museum of the American Indian can be usefully described in terms of the so-called 'new museology': a movement towards the construction of museums that foreground problems of representation, narrative and memory in the design of the museum and its exhibits. The distinctive circularity of the building design and of the internal exhibition space clearly indicates that the National Museum of the American Indian is indeed a 'new museum.' The National Museum of the American Indian is concerned not so much to transmit an authoritative knowledge about American Indian cultures but to construct particular narratives and to deconstruct the presuppositions that are brought with the visitor into the museum's intellectual environment.

Each of the three permanent exhibitions – 'Our Universes', 'Our Peoples', and 'Our Lives' – consists of a central display surrounded by a sequence of eight installations, each devoted to an individual tribe. Each installation is the creation of tribally appointed curators, working with National Museum of the American Indian staff who develop the central installation. The content of the tribal installations is not prescribed but embraces five principles described by Richard West as:

- community: our tribes are sovereign nations,
- locality: this is Indian land,
- vitality: we are here now,
- viewpoint: we know the world differently,
- voice: these are our stories (cited in Cobb, 2005, p. 375).

These tribal installations are not presented according to any explicit logic. So we can encounter the Seminole followed by Tapirapé, Wixarika followed by Cherokee. This absence of logic, where visitors follow a path from one installation to the next without a logical pathway dictated to them, in conjunction with the circularity of the display space, can be profoundly disturbing to visitors accustomed to being placed as passive recipients of a third-person spatial narration.

Not only the individual tribal installations and their spatial form but every element of the National Museum of the American Indian design is disruptive of the assumptions the visitor brings to this museum. Let's take the example of the two museum stores which have been the focus of some criticism of the National Museum of the American Indian. Some visitors have found it inappropriate that the museum's ground and first floors should be dominated by these stores. In my view, these stores intelligently put into question the role of commodification in the production of American Indian artefacts specifically, and in the functioning of museums and the 'art industry' in general. The layout of the more up-scale Chesapeake Museum Store on the ground floor blurs the distinction between an art gallery and a museum store. Many of the objects on display are priced well outside the budget of the average visitor and so their display must be more or less permanent. The manner in which these objects are displayed is clearly evocative of a gallery rather than a shop, particularly

when contrasted with the more conventional Roanoke Museum Store on the first floor. In fact, a recent *Washington Post* review of the National Museum of the American Indian exhibition 'Listening to Our Ancestors: The Art of Native Life Along the North Pacific Coast' begins: 'If you didn't know better you'd think you were in an art museum' (Feb 6, 2006, CO1).

Similarly, the Mitsitam café disrupts the visitor's expectation of a museum cafeteria, even before one enters the café. The space is set out exactly like that of the display galleries, so the visitor expects that around the corner, past the signposted entrance, will be another exhibition space. The visitor must walk along a long corridor, along the length of the café, before finding the entrance. Entering the space involves doubling back upon oneself but now on the café side of the dividing wall. The café itself is set out in the same way as the galleries, with circular units representing not tribal installations but now regional Native cuisines. In these ways, the movement of the visitor through the physical space of the National Museum of the American Indian places into question all the assumptions about museums, Native museums, and the relationship between museums and their external socio-economic influences, that visitors bring with them into the museum space.

Critical Responses to the 'New Museology' of Native America

Amanda Cobb, in her *American Indian Quarterly* article, 'The National Museum of the American Indian: Sharing the Gift' (2005) describes the museum as, 'a place that actually provoked a former trustee of a prominent American art museum to remark, "I don't like this museum. This museum is not for collectors. There's something else going on in here." Ironically, [she observes] that is the point' (p. 365). And museum Director Richard West, in his telling of the incident in an interview, confirms that the National Museum of the American Indian will never be, during his tenure and, he hopes after, simply 'a palace of objects.' It is the refusal of the museum-as-repository and the emphasis upon the responsibility of the National Museum of the American Indian to protect, support, and enhance Native cultures and communities that Edward Rothstein, reporting for the *New York Times*, finds objectionable. In his review of the museum upon its opening (September 21, 2004), Rothstein complains:

... the museum will advocate not just for artifacts but also for the living cultures that once created them. Most museums invoke the past to give shape to the present; here, the interests of the present will be used to shape the past. And that makes all the difference.

He goes on to bemoan the diverse constituencies that 'filter away detail instead of displaying it,' minimizing difference even while celebrating it, the landscaping that in his opinion is 'marred by fussiness,' 'the studious lack of scholarship' which he seems to identify with the paucity of explanatory text to interpret the exhibits. Indeed, the list of complaints culminates with: 'No unified intelligence has been applied.' We might echo Amanda Cobb and respond: that is the point. What kind of unified intelligence would Rothstein like to see? Along with other critics of the museum, he wants the intelligence of the fact, the label, of the authoritative interpretation. As Marc Fisher put it: '... the three main exhibits fail to confront the clash between foreign colonists and the native people they found here. There is no effort to trace Indians' evolution from centuries of life alone on this land to their place on reservations and among the rest of us today.' Amanda Cobb remarks, 'Most critics seemed to expect a sort of revisionist history – the colonization of America from "The Native American" point of view' (2005, p. 381).

Not only the mainstream Euramerican press but also Native American groups have expressed dissatisfaction with the National Museum of the American Indian. The American Indian Movement (AIM), for example, objects that the genocidal policies of the United States government have not been represented and calls for the museum to be renamed the National Holocaust Museum of the American Indian. The *Native American Times* reports Clyde Bellecourt as saying: 'I visited the museum on Tuesday and there wasn't much and there is so much to be told. ... They should have a wall to speak about the holocaust of tribes who disappeared. They don't say who was responsible for it. Our history is not being told.' Those who criticize the National Museum of the American Indian, whether white or Indian, regret the absence of a clear, authoritative and, above all, singular voice that controls the unfolding narrative that is the sequence of exhibits. The lack of extensive textual commentary is criticized. The refusal of the curators to interpret the material on display, preferring to allow the selection to speak for itself, is an important component of the museum's refusal to offer a single history of Native America by compromising diversity. Here again, the museum blurs the distinction between museum as such and an art gallery. In a gallery we would not expect the work of art to be offered as an interpreted artefact; rather, we would expect that art can 'speak for itself' to its universal, human significance. However, the absence of textual explanation or guidance can also function within a museum context as an exclusionary gesture, excluding those who do not possess the cultural capital required to understand the significance of what is offered on display. What is at stake is the authority of the tribal curator to take control of the meaning of a the museum space, by organising the display according to the tribal preferences that guide the curatorial choices.

Narrative Point of View and American Indian Studies

Craig Womack, in *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* (1999), expresses the view shared by such prominent Native commentators as Elizabeth Cook-Lyn and Robert Warrior, that Native cultural production is best analysed and interpreted by Native peoples. He argues:

European contact is a given; toward the purpose of contributing something toward Native studies, however, I am more interested in what can be innovated and initiated by Native people in analyzing their own cultures rather than deconstructing Native viewpoints and arguing for their European underpinnings or even concentrating on white atrocities and Indian victims (p. 12).

This is precisely what the National Museum of the American Indian sets out to do, by stressing the survivance and continuity of tribal communities rather than emphasizing conflict with white America. Further, by employing Native curators and involving tribal members in the curating of specific tribal exhibitions the National Museum of the American Indian demonstrates 'Native people in analyzing their own cultures.' But, as Womack acknowledges, an emphasis upon tribal specificity also raises the issue of pan-tribalism. He writes:

One of the obvious areas of inquiry in Native studies in the future will have to be the effect of pan-tribalism on Native cultures, from boarding schools to the urban demography of Native populations, to the pow-wow circuit, to beginning global alliances and awareness among indigenous populations worldwide ...' (pp. 18-19).

The inclusion of indigenous communities ranging geographically from the arctic circle to the southernmost tip of South America, but without a curatorial layout to mirror the north-south geography (in other words, visitors do not move gradually from northern to southern tribes as they walk through the exhibitions) – this is a controversial move on the part of the National Museum of the American Indian. Its pan-tribal statement about American Indian identity deconstructs any monolithic image of Native America and also powerfully challenges the identification of ‘America’ with the United States. In this context, Native viewpoint is not easily defined, as the central display of ‘Our People’ makes obvious by asking the visitor to think about the range of definitions of ‘Native’ that have historically been imposed upon communities: definition by appearance, by blood, by scientific charting, or by governmentally recognized documentation.

The textual support offered in this exhibit asks explicitly: who decides who is Native? In the context of the Native diversity emphasized by the National Museum of the American Indian this question, with the correlative question concerning non-Native constructions of Native people, cuts to the heart of the museum's project as an 'ideas museum,' based on the idea of 'the American Indian,' and proposing unity-within-difference or difference-within-unity as the fundamental paradigm. As Amanda Cobb observes of the three permanent exhibitions, 'the combination of the spine and and community curated installations demonstrates that the Native peoples of the Americas share some common values, world-views, and experiences but remain distinctive and diverse cultures – each acting with its own sense of agency but starting from a common place in values or experience' (2005, p. 375).

In the preface to his book *Red Matters: Native American Studies* (2002), Arnold Krupat quotes D.H.Lawrence's observation that:

‘every continent has its own great spirit of place. Every people is polarized in some particular locality, which is home, the homeland.’ (5-6). [Krupat goes on to remark that] For all the mystified nature of Lawrence's philosophy, one may take very seriously his contention that ‘the spirit of place is a great reality,’ and that, just as ‘China produces the Chinese and will go on doing so’ (6), so, too, has America produced its own Native people and will go on doing so. This is something the Euramerican invader-settlers still have to recognize ... (p. viii).

To return to Gerald Vizenor's concept of 'survivance,' which I invoked at the outset to describe the refusal of the National Museum of the American Indian to embrace any except Native-defined images of Native people and communities: it is the inability of 'the Euramerican invader-settler' to recognize Native rhetorical sovereignty, identified by Arnold Krupat in this quotation, that the National Museum of the American Indian directly confronts. We might recall here Vizenor's discussion of Ishi, in *Manifest Manners*. Ishi, 'the last of the Yahi,' lived out his life in the museum of the University of California as an icon of the 'vanishing American.' In the chapter entitled 'Ishi Obscura' Vizenor argues: 'Ishi is a simulation, the absence of his tribal names. He posed at the borders of the camera, the circles of photographers and spectators, in the best backlighted pictures of the time' (1994, p. 126). As Vizenor perceives, Ishi is the image of a Native person constructed by 'the Euramerican invader-settler' to fill the seeming void left by the unwillingness of Anglo-Americans to see Native communities on their own terms. 'Ishi became the absence of his stories of survivance, the wild other to those he trusted in silence' (Vizenor, 1994, p. 128). In the National Museum of the American Indian we find no Ishis: James Luna is here, however, in the form of a photographic exhibition of his performance 'The Artifact' (1987, the Museum of Man, San Diego). For this performance piece Luna, wearing only a loincloth, lay on a bed of sand in a

glass museum display case from where he returned the gaze of curious visitors, many of whom were disconcerted to find that the 'Indian' on display was not dead, as expected. This refusal of a 'dead' image for Native peoples is carried through the design, exhibits, mission, and activities of the National Museum of the American Indian.

I would like to conclude by drawing attention to one of the most radical strategies by which the National Museum of the American Indian attempts to force visitors into an enactment of recognition, by manipulating the narrative point of view of visitors as they move through the museum space. This is the installation of a corridor comprised of two frosted glass panels upon which are projected images of Native people so that visitors have the impression that they are walking together with these Native people as they leave the gallery. However, if the visitor moves quickly through the corridor and out of the gallery the visual illusion is destroyed. The installation insists that one must stand awhile, take time to adjust one's perspective, and to see these images of Native people in three dimensions, as our real contemporaries and not as the constructions of our historical narratives, is the point made by the National Museum of the American Indian as a whole. If visitors should leave this museum with their heads full of questions, rather than answers, with unsettled certainties about what they know and how they know, but with a renewed commitment to work actively to gain understanding – then that would be a very good thing.

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