

Archival Predecessors and Indigenous Modernisms: Archives in Contemporary Curatorial Practice on the Northwest Coast

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Les projets d'expositions archivistiques—et leur documentation—sont des lieux de production de connaissances en histoire de l'art, ainsi que des interventions politiques, qui placent les documents dans un autre contexte afin d'interroger les canons et les façons de voir des colonialistes-colons. À partir de ces relations discursives, visuelles et archivistiques, cet article examine deux rétrospectives solos des œuvres sculptées et peintes des artistes modernistes kwakwaka'wakws, Doug Cranmer ('Namgis) et Henry Speck (Tlawit'sis), présentées à Vancouver en 2012. En considérant comment les conservateurs ont fait appel aux archives familiales intimes et à des documents du domaine public, il traite de l'utilité des archives du modernisme pour activer des liens affectifs, ancestraux et familiaux au-delà des modes de compréhension canoniques et historiques des mouvements esthétiques et des contextes de production.

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1. Shawn Atleo, National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations in Canada, first used the term “resetting” to address the future of economic relationships between First Nations and the Canadian state. See Shawn Atleo, “It’s time to reset relationship between Canada and First Nations,” *Globe and Mail*, October 14, 2011.

2. I focus here on the Vancouver-based, original installations of each show, although both were

It is late summer 2012, on the unceded, Coast Salish territories currently known as Vancouver, British Columbia. On the public grounds of the Vancouver Art Gallery, the tent city of Occupy Vancouver has been dismantled. Later that year, Idle No More, one of the largest Indigenous social and environmental movements in recent history, will begin, leading into the Sovereign Summer of 2013. Although, as many activists have pointed out, the word “idle” is not quite accurate and suggests a false image of prior inactivity. In fact, threats to Vancouver’s lands and waters—and the active resistance against these threats—are an ongoing reality of settler-colonial occupation in the region. That summer was no exception, as controversial pipeline projects—Northern Gateway and Kinder Morgan—threatened to cut their way across many Indigenous territories. Activists, artists, and curators were already organizing around these threats in cafes, movie theatres, artist-run centres, and other meeting places, filling the generative space between Occupy and a new movement, as yet unnamed. As a non-Indigenous researcher working with artists on political histories of Northwest Coast art, I joined in some of these conversations, as sovereign acts became inextricable from aesthetic ones: water from the tent city threatening to seep into the Vancouver Art Gallery’s storage; young carvers making sea creature masks inspired by their environmental activism. I remember these meetings as being marked by a sense of urgency—and rising hope. Shawn Atleo, then Grand Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, articulated such feelings through the curative metaphor of broken relations being “reset.”¹

I begin by remembering this pregnant pause between social movements as a moment of potential resetting, because it helps to situate the two solo-retrospective art exhibitions that were on view in Vancouver that summer: *Kesu': The Life and Art of Doug Cranmer*, curated by Jennifer Kramer at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia (MOA), which showcased painted and carved work by Kwakwaka'wakw artist and teacher Doug Cranmer; and *Projections: The Paintings of Henry Speck, Uzdi'stalis*, curated by Marcia Crosby and Karen Duffek at MOA's Satellite Gallery, which displayed watercolour works by Kwakwaka'wakw artist Henry Speck.² Both exhibitions represented their subjects as “modern artists,” situating their practices within the context of their multi-faceted roles in 1960s Vancouver as teachers, ceremonial practitioners, and producers of urban public culture. As I shall discuss, both did so in historicizing and resolutely non-formalist ways, emphasizing

conceived as travelling exhibitions. Versions of *Kesu'* were also installed at Campbell River and at the U'Mista Cultural Centre in Alert Bay. According to its curators, *Projections* may also travel in the future.

3. Richard William Hill, "Was Indigenous Art Better in the 1980s and Early 90s?," *Canadian Art*, March 21, 2016, <http://canadianart.ca/features/was-indigenous-art-better-in-the-1980s-and-early-90s>.

4. Deborah Doxtator, "Basket, Bead and Quill, and the Making of 'Traditional' Art," *Basket, Bead and Quill*, exh. cat., ed. Janet E. Clark, Thunder Bay Art Gallery (Thunder Bay: TBAG, 1996), 18.

5. See David Zeitlyn, "Anthropology in and of the Archive: Possible Futures and Contingent Pasts," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41 (October 2012): 461–480. As Zeitlyn observes, in anthropology much of this work draws variously on Derrida and Foucault's understandings of the archive as embodying the repressed Freudian desire or biopower, while also maintaining an ethnographic interest in how archives are used and activated. In comparing the two exhibitions, this latter approach is my primary focus, although the broader implications of archival knowledge production are also important, because the archival narration of modernism and Indigenous participation in modernity matters a great deal to what is remembered and forgotten in settler states. For a discussion about locating Indigenous knowledge in the archive in an Aboriginal Australian context, see Lynette Russell, "Indigenous Knowledge and the Archive: Accessing Hidden History and Understandings," *Australian Academic & Research Libraries* 36, 2 (2005): 161–171. On the need to read both with and against the grain of colonial archives, see Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

6. For a summary of these debates in art and anthropology, see Fred R. Myers, "Primitivism," *Anthropology, and the Category of 'Primitive Art,'* in *Handbook of Material Culture*, eds. Chris Tilley, et al. (London: SAGE, 2006), 267–284. For a history of these entanglements in the context of Canadian exhibitions, see Diana Nemirow, "Modernism, Nationalism, and Beyond: A Critical History of Exhibitions of First Nations Art," *Land, Spirit, Power*, exh. cat., National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa: NCC, 1992). On the recent reversal of these forms of appropri-

the archival, the autobiographical, and the performative in their strategies of display, which placed both artists' works and lives amidst mid-twentieth-century social conditions on the Coast.

Installed between emergent political movements, both *Kesu'* and *Projections* seemed to bear a heavy retrospective and social weight: a sense of what modernism was—and is—in Northwest Coast art histories matters to the kinds of resetting work that art can effect. Given the long-term nature of exhibition cycles, neither *Kesu'* nor *Projections* quite matched the contemporaneous political ferment; yet both, I argue, offer a vision of Indigenous modernism in which future imaginaries are present, as what is contemporary depends very much upon what is recognized and named as "modern" or "modernist," as well as the kinds of continuities that are narrated across time. This essay engages with both exhibitions to reflect on questions of Indigenous modernism, what the practice of this epochal phrasing means, and how, as a category, it is helpful in moving beyond a mode of criticism that art historian Richard William Hill has called "mannered triumphalism"—a celebratory and detached art criticism of Indigenous resurgence that merely declares canonical—and, by extension, political—victories.³ As Mohawk critic and curator Deborah Doxtator pointed out twenty years ago, such inclusion-based approaches to Indigenous modernism risks merely conflating Indigenous criteria of value with dominant art-historical ones, and "side-steps the recognition of Native aesthetics and conceptual systems as viable ways of understanding art."⁴ Engaging with Indigenous modernism as if it were somehow a settled category or contained historical period poses similar risks, as the colonial archive is revisited for celebratory signs of inclusion or, conversely, claims of utter incommensurability and subversion. Neither does justice to the full potential of thinking through these categories and their material manifestations.

In the discussion that follows, I consider both exhibitions' production, simultaneous installation, and reception to show how each enacts a critique of modernism and canonical art histories. They do so, I suggest, partly through a shared activation of visual archives, including photographs, film, and new media, that makes material connections (and divisions) between public, private, and community sources of art history and knowledge. Approaching archives as contested sites of colonial governance and resistance in settler states, I build on scholarship that construes "the archive" as both a physical repository and process of knowledge production in which the manner of assembling, circulating, preserving, and accessing its contents contributes to past and future imaginaries of Indigenous sovereignty.⁵ Questions of ownership and belonging are also important to these archival activations, as the story of both exhibitions complicates the stories of modern art's appropriation of Indigeneity that predominate in art-historical discussions of modernism and primitivism.⁶

Indeed, although technically solo-retrospective shows, neither *Kesu'* nor *Projections* explicitly pose the question of Cranmer or Speck's inclusion in established hierarchies of value, or press an argument for their recognition as "master artists."⁷ Rather, both exhibitions work against such emphasis on art's presumed autonomy through a biographical and regional specificity.

ation, see James Clifford, *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

7. On the gendered problematics of the categories of “mastery” in Northwest Coast art, see Marcia Crosby, “Indian Art/Aboriginal Title,” MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1994.

8. Dot Tuer, *Mining the Media Archive: Essays on Art, Technology, and Cultural Resistance* (Toronto: YYZ Books, 2005). On Indigenous media as critical remembering practices, see also Carla Taunton, “Indigenous (Re)Memory and Resistance: Video Works by Dana Claxton,” *Post Script* 29, 3 (2010), 44.

9. Faye Ginsburg, “Embedded Aesthetics: Creating a Discursive Space for Indigenous Media,” *Cultural Anthropology* 9, 3 (August 1994), 365–382.

10. Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003). On archival surrogates as objects of cultural knowledge, see also Zeitlyn, “Anthropology in and of the Archive,” 469. My use of “predecessors” to signal these institutional arrangements of the art world is also indebted to conversations held in 2015 as part of the editorial advisory of the art-criticism publication *C Magazine*, whose issue “Predecessors” (Spring 2015) explores the multiple networks and temporalities of art and critical practice.

11. Michael M. Ames, *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992), 62.

12. Aaron Glass, “History and Critique of the ‘Renaissance’ Discourse,” *Native Art of the Northwest Coast: A History of Changing Ideas*, eds. Charlotte Townsend-Gault, Jennifer Kramer, and Ki-Ke-In (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013), 487.

13. Crosby, “Indian Art/Aboriginal Title.”

14. Ronald Hawker, *Tales of Ghosts: First Nations Art in British Columbia, 1922–61* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003).

15. Eugenia Kisin, “Unsettling the Contemporary: Critical Indigeneity and Resources in Art,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 3, 2 (2013): 141–156.

16. Marcia Crosby, “Making Indian Art ‘Modern,’” *Ruins in Process: Vancouver Art in the Sixties*, 2009, <http://vancouverartinthesixties.com/essays/making-indian-art-modern>.

Like all three exhibition curators, I remain cautious about a too-open and familiar use of the category “Indigenous modernism,” because such usage implies, first, that both constitutive terms—themselves categories of a certain expansive scale—are somehow made more clear when they are attached as an entity. Yet “Indigenous modernism” is also *real*, and *made* to be so through exhibitionary deployments of archival knowledge. Part of thinking with these exhibitions, and taking seriously the modernisms that they propose, involves “mining the media archive,” to borrow cultural theorist Dot Tuer’s provocative phrasing for the convergence of memory and media required in decolonial scholarship.⁸ These media might also be understood as what anthropologist Faye Ginsburg has named “embedded aesthetics”: systems of making art matter through the connections art activates between people, in contrast to the autonomous conceit of categories of aesthetic modernism.⁹ My title phrase “archival predecessors” is meant to signal such forms of relatedness in both institutional and familial spheres, and the residue of what is produced through these exhibitions’ embedded engagements with modernism. Following performance scholar Diana Taylor’s insistence on the complex and incomplete relatedness of lived cultural practices to their archival surrogates, I suggest these exhibitions enact visual archival returns and show the process that produces art-historical knowledge through their revisions of modernism.¹⁰

Modernist Myths

In art histories of the Northwest Coast, there has been a persistent narrative that divides Indigenous art production into a series of stages: a “Golden Age” of carving, painting, and potlatching in the late nineteenth century, followed by a period of decline until the mid-twentieth-century “renaissance” usually associated with the Vancouver Art Gallery’s *Arts of the Raven* exhibition in 1967; the latter is often described as the first exhibition to present Northwest Coast Native art as “art” rather than ethnography.¹¹ This way of narrating history is, as anthropologist Aaron Glass argues, myth-like in its pervasiveness, a teleological organizing of art that devalues cultural production in the period of so-called decline.¹² Moreover, as Tsimshian/Haida art historian Marcia Crosby has argued, the myth of the Northwest Coast renaissance also generates a troubling gendered narrative of “mastery,” which connects to an emergent—and newly enfranchised—“Aboriginal” political subject, while excluding Indigenous women’s artistic, political, and care work.¹³

As art historian Ronald Hawker has asserted, this era of so-called decline is, in fact, crucial to understanding both the art-historical conditions of the renaissance and the conditions of Indigenous modernity that preceded it.¹⁴ Indeed, this is the period in which Indigenous workers contributed their labour to wage economies in fisheries and canneries, and, as I have argued elsewhere, in which resource extraction became analogously and materially connected to art production as generating *cultural* resources.¹⁵ Re-visiting the importance of artists in this period to later practices of “making Indian art modern,” Crosby has also documented prominent women, including Kwakwaka’wakw artist Ellen Neel, whose carving during this period challenges the myth of a “Dark Age” in art production.¹⁶ In all of these

ways, the period before the so-called Northwest Coast renaissance—which coincides temporally with Western *philosophical* modernism—is significant to Indigenous modernity on the Coast.

And yet the myth of a historiographical Golden Age followed by periods of decline and rebirth persists in many forms, many of which are tied to the market: art and auction catalogues, curatorial appraisals, and didactic museum labels. This myth also provides an important art-historical language for many young carvers, as it names a difficult time in their family histories that included their parents' and grandparents' forced removal from communities into the violence of the Indian Residential School System.¹⁷ For this reason, I also do not wish to devalue the generative possibilities of this language, nor minimize modernity and capitalism's intrusions into peoples' lives and traditional livelihoods. Indeed, much like the contested category of Northwest Coast art itself, the narrative of decline also allows for a story of cultural resilience, perseverance, and midcentury redemption.¹⁸ At the same time, this contested character renders any exhibitionary attempt to represent historiographical complexity both politically and aesthetically fraught.

Moreover, in addition to being a vibrant, urban Indigenous art centre, Vancouver is also a node in international networks of contemporary art, and the city has been associated since the 1960s with an influential scene and mythos of conceptualism, and later the photoconceptualist work of artists such as Jeff Wall and Stan Douglas. The city's particular combination of "super-natural" views, extractive industry, and low-rise metropolitan outskirts have famously served as raw material for international art worlds, and have inspired the practices of American artist Robert Smithson and critic Lucy Lippard. Early conceptual-art practices, such as those of the N.E. Thing Co., formed by artists Iain and Ingrid Baxter, produced what Wall later called "defeatured" landscapes: a mundane, urban snapshot that rejects both touristic and Indigenous markers of place.¹⁹

As a mythos of art practice and historiography, "defeaturing" is deeply colonial, displacing the First Nations activism, rapidly expanding art scene, and Native engagements with the modern that were contemporaneous—and co-present—with these conceptual practices in the city. According to art historian Terry Smith, such defeaturing enacts a kind of perpetual modernist formalism that extends into the present. Smith names this "remodernism" in order to distinguish it from what he views as more radical, transformative, and relational forms of contemporary art. In remodernist practice, the multiple connectivities of the contemporary moment are reduced to a very particular narrative concerning the history of art, and are terminally preoccupied with a narrow radicalism that was already defined in the modernist terms of the 1960s.²⁰ Set amidst such historiographies of Vancouver art—a reduction and wilful forgetting of these complex engagements with modernism in which artists like Speck and later Cranmer were taking part—both *Kesu'* and *Projections* constitute an Indigenous modernism that works to unsettle denials of co-presence.

As I will explain, both *Kesu'* and *Projections*, with their biographical focus on artists excluded from the *Arts of the Raven*-renaissance canon and non-Indigenous avant-gardes, contribute to this project of representing Indigenous

17. On the complex legacies of art-making in the Indian Residential School System in British Columbia, see Sarah De Leeuw, "Intimate Colonialisms: the Material and Experienced Places of British Columbia's Residential Schools," *The Canadian Geographer* 51, 3 (Fall 2007): 339–359.

18. On art as a form of Indigenous cultural resilience against the violence of Residential Schools, see Heather Igloliorte, "Inuit artistic expression as cultural resilience," *Speaking My Truth: Reflections on Reconciliation & Residential School* (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2012), 115–125.

19. Leah Modigliani, "Engendering a Counter-Tradition: Jeff Wall, Photo-conceptualism, and the Gendered Politics of the Defeatured Landscape," PhD diss., Stony Brook University, 2010; see also Nancy Shaw, "Siting the Banal: The Expanded Landscapes of the N.E. Thing Co.," 1993, *Ruins in Process: Vancouver Art in the Sixties*, <http://vancouverartinthesixties.com/essays/siting-the-banal>.

20. Terry Smith, *What Is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

modernity in all of its local complexity. At the same time, both exhibitions maintain an attentiveness to the global dynamics that constitute “modern-ity,” Indigenous or otherwise, through an activation of the archive. As much as they are reflections on broader questions about Indigenous or “alternative modernities,” both exhibitions mine and materialize archival knowledge with the explicit purpose of bringing to light aspects of *regional* art history.²¹ By addressing the canonical, intimate, and sometimes idiosyncratic aspects of modernism, these exhibitions thus revise aesthetic and formalist understandings of what it means to be modern.

Representing *Kesu'*

The artist Douglas Eugene Cranmer, born in 1927 on the Kwakwaka'wakw territory of Alert Bay, British Columbia, was, by all accounts, an extraordinarily complex man whose roles included hereditary 'Namgis chief, husband, father, logger, gallery owner, and teacher. Indeed, the category “artist,” at least in its limited, Euro-North-American connotations, rooted as they are in the Romantic genealogy of an autonomous and often tortured genius, seems inadequate in capturing the depth of his impact on his family and community, as well as his influence on younger artists. Cranmer himself resisted being labeled as either a master carver or an artist during his lifetime, referring to himself instead as a “whittler and a doodler.”²² Over his career, Cranmer produced work for different buyers in different mediums: model totem poles, abstract paintings on wooden panels, and designs on mass-produced burlap sacks. Through his teaching, he also influenced a generation of young carvers at 'Ksan, the well known school for Northwest Coast art near Hazelton, British Columbia, as well as in Alert Bay and Vancouver.

Yet in spite of his prolific output and influence as a mentor, Cranmer refused to be represented in a retrospective show during his lifetime, and contradicted all attempts to categorize his practice with a sharp tongue and sense of humour. For example, he would tell visitors to the UBC carving shed in the 1970s that he was a janitor rather than the artist responsible for a pole, or turn on his chainsaw to avoid being bothered.²³ At the same time, Cranmer's refusal to identify as an artist was also complicated somewhat by his canny and cosmopolitan participation in Vancouver's art worlds. As the co-owner of the Talking Stick Gallery (1962–1967), Vancouver's first commercial gallery for contemporary First Nations art, and through his connections with modernists at the Vancouver School of Art (through his second wife, the late artist Judy Tweedie), Cranmer was also thoroughly embedded in the art world.²⁴

His refusal to be categorically contained presented the primary intellectual challenge for curator and anthropologist Jennifer Kramer as she began work on *Kesu'*, an exhibition that would, paradoxically, recognize Cranmer's contributions to Northwest Coast art through a posthumous narrative.²⁵ The risk of such containment is always present in the genre of solo-retrospective exhibitions; yet, for the story of a Kwakwaka'wakw man, these risks carry the added weight of ossifying and colonial forms of objectification that project particular biographical narratives as a universal Indigenous experience.

There was also a distinct personal pressure for Kramer's project to succeed. Cranmer's own family in Alert Bay had formally commissioned MOA

21. “Alternative modernities” is generally used to refer to postcolonial experiences of modernity, as a means of emphasizing its multiple centers and global permutations; see Dilip Goankar, ed. *Alternative Modernities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001). By contrast, art historian Bill Anthes' notion of “Native moderns” refers to both a stylistic and cultural form of modernity practiced by particular Native-American painters between 1940 and 1960; see Anthes, *Native Moderns* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). Both these concepts seek to expand who counts as “modern” beyond narrowly defined geographic, aesthetic, temporal and formalist associations. Yet, as Janet Berlo and Ruth Phillips point out, this language of multiple modernisms is notoriously imprecise, which is likely one reason why both *Kesu'* and *Projections* approach this question through an intercultural frame, in relation to Kwakwaka'wakw experience and engagement with other art worlds. See Janet C. Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips, *Native North American Art* (1st ed. 1991; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 243–291.

22. Jennifer Kramer, *Kesu': The Art and Life of Doug Cranmer*, exh. cat. Museum of Anthropology (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre/MOA, 2012), 17.

23. *Ibid.*, 15.

24. *Ibid.*, 96.

25. Jennifer Kramer, interviewed by author, Vancouver, BC, May 6, 2013.

and Kramer, the museum's curator of Kwakwaka'wakw art, to mount the exhibition to pay tribute to his legacy. Rande Cook, another 'Namgis artist, had worked with Cranmer's family and friends to organize a memorial auction in 2006 to raise money for the exhibition and the catalogue.²⁶ As a community-initiated exhibition, *Kesu'* was expected to embody a multiplicity of purpose that included art-world recognition as well as intimate portrayal; both projects were further complicated by the artist's contrarian nature, and the fact that Kramer did not know Cranmer personally, having only met him once. Her curatorial strategy—which was certainly also expected by her Kwakwaka'wakw interlocutors—was to assemble as many memories and accounts of Cranmer as possible from family members, former students, curators, artists, and other people who knew him well, and to present them, mosaic-like, through quotations and evocations of memory.

"It is tempting to celebrate Doug as an Indigenous modern artist ahead of his time," Kramer writes in the opening text panel, "yet to do so would impose an unwanted label. Doug engaged with the world on his own terms, sidestepping attempts by others to define or limit his actions and art." Indeed, the title *Kesu'* also suggests the dual role of the exhibition as a personal portrait overlaid by art-historical interpretations of Cranmer's modernism. As his sister Gloria Cranmer Webster explains in the exhibition catalogue, *Kesu'*, which means "wealth being carved," was the name given to Cranmer by elders at the celebration of his birth.²⁷ As a title for the exhibition, the name shows Cranmer's deep embeddedness in his home community, while also acknowledging his material success in the art world.

Attending to both of these familial and art-historical frames, *Kesu'* featured Cranmer's works in many mediums, including carved masks, prints, a canoe, an unfinished pole, and his famous abstract acrylic paintings on mahogany plywood from the 1970s. Rather than following a strict chronological organization, works were grouped thematically in "modules"—Kramer's term for the spatial sections of the exhibition—whose titles, "The Contrarian," "The Pragmatist," "The Individualist," "The Iconoclast," and "The Mentor," corresponded to facets of Cranmer's personality and career. Each module opened with a large didactic text panel showing a photograph of Cranmer—at work in his studio, for instance, or grinning while holding up a mask—alongside a quotation recounting an anecdote or encapsulating his orientation toward the world. One such description from his sister read, "Always his own man," and was featured on the exhibition's promotional materials atop a black-and-white photograph of Cranmer wearing a striped shirt and basketry hat | **fig. 1** | layered on top of a full-colour detail from one of his untitled acrylic plywood works, which the museum identified as a "non-figurative painting" from 1976. The color scheme of this flyer is echoed throughout the show, which is an appropriately 1960s and 1970s-hued portrayal of Cranmer's modernity. The exhibition's extensive use of quotations and archival images—from childhood mementos to carving shed portraits—shows Cranmer in many roles across his lifetime. In the panel for the "Iconoclast" section, Cranmer is shown as a dapper urbanite, strutting through Vancouver in the 1960s. | **fig. 2** |

Throughout the exhibition, Cranmer's ease in cosmopolitan urban life was positioned as connected with, rather than contradictory to, aspects of

26. Ibid.

27. Gloria Cranmer Webster, "Forward: *Kesu'*: Wealth Being Carved," *Kesu'* ..., 2.



Figure 1. Doug Cranmer, 1965.

Figure 2. Text and image panel for "Iconoclast" module, shown installed in *Kesu*, 2012. Photo: University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology.



his traditionalism and ceremonial privileges. His mahogany acrylics, for instance, were given as much importance as his 1974 Chief of the Undersea mask, which embodies Cranmer's acquired privilege to represent the legend in carved form.²⁸ *Kesu*'s extensive discursive framing through quotations by family members and friends was also enhanced by objects that add weight to memory: a bentwood coffee grinder carved by his friend and student Richard Sumner is encased in a vitrine alongside a text panel on "Coffee Time," recounting Cranmer's frequent coffee visits to the carving studio that occupied the former Residential School in Alert Bay, while a broom and wood shavings in a corner reference Cranmer's ruse of being a janitor instead of an artist. Tools, including handmade knives, bevels, and a chainsaw, were displayed underneath three photographs of Cranmer that show him logging and carving with power tools, | fig. 3 | alluding playfully and in earnest to the Indigenous importance of both modes of working wood.

Turning to the exhibition's use of visual archives, the extensive display of large-scale photographs of Cranmer commemorated its subject while showing the range of modern settings in which he was at home and the diverse publics with which he was interlinked. Such a duality of place spanning public life and home life is, I suggest, characteristic of the intimate sort of modernism that is claimed by both exhibitions, and echoes and complicates historian James Clifford's theorizing of the routes involved in "Indigenous commuting" between different spaces of contemporary life.²⁹ These images do not visualize a simple story of Cranmer's tracking between "on-reserve" and "off-reserve" forms of Indigeneity. Rather, he is shown to be at home in many worlds. These qualities of the exhibition resist sensationalizing such creative talent—undeniably singular and flamboyant—as the work of an autonomous genius.

Moreover, as many scholars of Indigenous photography have asserted, the routes of the pictures themselves—a crucial factor in "photographic sovereignty"—are also important to the social relations generated in and around images, and in approaching the archive as a power-inflected process, as well as a material assemblage.³⁰ Kramer described to me how many of the photographs were loaned from Cranmer's family on much stricter terms than most museum images: the family albums from which they came could not stay in the museum, and had to be returned to individual family members by hand rather than by mail.³¹ In these ways, the images were treated as "treasured possessions," to borrow a phrase from anthropologist Haidy Geismar—a kind of cultural property that was inalienable even as the individual photographs could be reproduced for the exhibition and the catalogue.³²

In addition to assembling photographs and conducting interviews, Kramer also commissioned two local artists, Colin Griffiths and Michael Glendale, to produce new audio-visual work for the show. Entitled *Remix*, this interpretive audio-scape and video slide show was installed in the exhibition and featured Cranmer's favourite jazz tracks, as well as assembled media clips. These clips included public broadcasts, such as a 1965 CBC segment titled, "The Indian as Artist," in which Cranmer talks about the art market alongside artists Don Smith and Henry Speck, and stills from a film shot by the Salmonista Video Crew, the Alert Bay-based film collective of which Cranmer was an original member.³³ Through these media clips, Cranmer is shown to

28. Susan Walker, "Kesu': Doug Cranmer, Reluctant Master," *Canadian Art*, April 26, 2012, <http://canadianart.ca/reviews/kesu-douglas-cranmer-moa/>.

29. Clifford, *Returns*, 51.

30. On photographic sovereignty, see Hulleah Tsinnahjinnie, "When is a Photo Worth a Thousand Words?" *Photography's Other Histories*, eds. C. Pinney and N. Peterson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 40–52; see also Mique'l Dangelis (Askren), "Bringing our History into Focus: Re-developing the Work of B.A. Haldane, 19th Century Tsimshian Photographer," *Backlash* 24, 3 (2007): 41–47.

31. Kramer, interviewed by author, Vancouver, BC, May 6, 2013.

32. Haidy Geismar, *Treasured Possessions: Indigenous Interventions into Cultural and Intellectual Property* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

33. On the Salmonista Video Crew, see Kathryn Bunn-Marcuse, "Kwakwaka'wakw on Film," *Walking a Tightrope: Aboriginal People and their Representations*, eds. Ute Lischke and David T. McNab (Waterloo: WLU Press, 2005), 305–334.

be both an artist being represented through film, and a conscious producer of his own image. Like the photographs, this re-mixing represents what it means to be both “modern” and “Indigenous” and it is therefore *connective*: it reassembles Cranmer’s own various interlinkages with public broadcasting, the U’Mista Cultural Centre, and a political video crew to create a network of Kwakwaka’wakw modernity. Such media also embody the “remixing” required to activate the archive while revising canonical understandings of *how* Northwest Coast art became modern, discursively tracking back and forth between archives, exhibition, and cultural practices.

I also experienced the reach of this discursive movement during my time as a teacher and guest at the First Nations-run Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art in Terrace, British Columbia. At the Freda Diesing School, First Nations students from all over the Northern region learn design, painting, and carving. As is the case with most art education, design training involves travelling to exhibitions and studying art catalogues. In 2012, several students from Freda Diesing travelled to Vancouver to see *Kesu’*; the exhibition catalogue arrived in Terrace in the fall, where its reproductions became a well-worn resource for students learning Northwest Coast art history, design practice, and how to balance their own community obligations with the practical work of making a living “down South” in Vancouver’s art market. Such relations and engagements with archival surrogates is what I am glossing here as work with “archival predecessors.” Indeed, it is this embeddedness or relatedness, enabled archivally, but extended through practice, that generates a narrative of modernity very different from other regional stories of the 1960s and its legacies.

Responding to *Kesu’*, reviewers lauded Cranmer’s art as “innovative”—a word so commonly used in relation to modern Northwest Coast art it is almost meaningless, but nevertheless a term of value and avant-gardist approval. For instance, *Georgia Straight* newspaper reviewer Robin Laurence identified the multi-faceted and contextualizing approach in *Kesu’* as anthropological, drawing familiar territorial lines around art and anthropology. “It is curious to imagine,” Laurence writes, “how a ‘high-art’ museum or gallery would have handled Cranmer’s work,” noting that the exclusion of biographical details is a convention of “postmodern criticism” that finds biography “too reductive.”³⁴ Laurence also wonders to what extent such a treatment, which would never be applied to “contemporary white male artists,” is also othering in its insistence on the biographical and the familial.

This criticism shows a paradoxical demand that is unfortunately typical in criticism of Indigenous art: the charge that a given interpretation is too ethnographic, which means that its curators’ have succumbed to a colonial mode of producing knowledge that is, by all accounts, objectifying. A charge of formalism carries similar risks, claiming that the categories of visual knowledge are too aestheticizing to contain a form of cultural production that is so intimately tied to land, community, and the kinds of “visual metaphors” that Doxtator defines as being central to modern Indigenous art.³⁵ To my mind, Laurence misrecognizes the archival predecessors involved with this exhibition as anthropological in origin rather than community initiated. Indeed, the memory of Cranmer and his relation to Northwest Coast

34. Robin Laurence, “*Kesu’*: The Art and Life of Doug Cranmer is a Full and Fitting Tribute,” *Georgia Straight*, April 10, 2012, www.straight.com/arts/kesu-art-and-life-doug-cranmer-full-and-fitting-tribute.

35. Doxtator, “Basket,” 18.



Figure 3. Installation shot of *Kesu* showing Cranmer alongside his carving tools, 2012. Photo: University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology.



Figure 4. Henry Speck, *Moon Mask Dancers*, 1962, gouache on paper, 35.6 × 42.9 cm. MOA purchase from Muse Antiques & Art Galleries, Vancouver. Photo: Derek Tan, University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology, courtesy of Hank Speck.

Figure 5. Installation shot, *Projections*, 2012, Museum of Anthropology Satellite Gallery. Photo courtesy of Karen Duffek and the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology.



art historiography—and for contemporary artists working today—*matters* in a sense that exceeds what is generally meant by biography or ethnography. As much as they offer scholarly revision, the relations represented in *Kesu'* are also deeply felt, connecting different kinds of spaces and sites for producing knowledge and memory through the technologies of display.

Installing Modernism's Backstories

The exhibition *Projections: The Paintings of Henry Speck, Udzi'stalis* focused on the watercolour works of Kwakwaka'wakw artist and Chief Henry Speck (1908–1971), whose Kwakwala name “Udzi'talis” means “the greatest.” Also affiliated with MOA, *Projections* was considerably smaller in scale than *Kesu'*, and installed in the museum's downtown Satellite Gallery. In many ways, however, it was an equally significant project in terms of its contributions to art-historical understandings of Speck's work and Northwest Coast modernism. Co-produced by Karen Duffek, MOA's contemporary art curator, and Marcia Crosby, an art historian and doctoral candidate in UBC's Department of Art History, Visual Art & Theory, *Projections* built on its curators' longstanding interest in Speck as an artist and ceremonial practitioner. The show also extended Crosby's earlier work on modern Aboriginal art as part of *Ruins in Process: Vancouver Art In the Sixties*, an initiative undertaken by the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery at UBC and the artist-run centre grunt gallery, which resulted in an online, searchable archive of texts, images, and other documents pertaining to the period.³⁶ Much like *Kesu'*, *Projections* was also a major revisiting of a significant, understudied figure in Northwest Coast art via a previously unassembled archive. As Crosby explains in the exhibition's sourcebook—an accompanying exhibition document comprised of a conversation between her and Duffek—Speck's work wasn't so much forgotten as excluded from art histories on the basis of his paintings' “traditional metaphysical referents, or their seemingly positivist focus on form,” as well as the canon's inability to reconcile these representational attributes as “modern.”³⁷

Like Doug Cranmer, Speck held many public, political positions and ceremonial privileges over the course of his lifetime, including membership in the Native Brotherhood of British Columbia and as an initiated Hamat'sa dancer. Speck was also prolific, producing artwork for both commercial and community purposes, and *Projections* shared *Kesu'*'s emphasis on these aspects of Speck's modernity. Like Cranmer, Speck is considered a “modern” artist, because he was a “modern” man who balanced multiple demands of modern Indigenous life at midcentury, even if, according to canonical aesthetic criteria, his modernism is not visible in his work. Throughout *Projections*, this modernity is undeniable in Speck's paintings, which take up complex themes ranging from Kwakwaka'wakw performance rights to Indigenous Christianity in vivid, figurative compositions that challenge the relegation of the art-print scale of the works to mere commodity status. | **fig. 4** | Indeed, part of the point is that these categories are blurred by Indigenous modernism. According to Crosby and Duffek, as Speck's work came to prominence in the 1960s, his paintings were often critically reduced to their traditional and decorative qualities, rather than being considered for their expression of

36. *Ruins in Process: Vancouver Art in the Sixties*, 2009, <http://vancouverartinthesixties.com>.

37. Karen Duffek and Marcia Crosby, *Projections: The Paintings of Henry Speck, Udzi'stalis*, exh. cat., Satellite Gallery/Museum of Anthropology, UBC (Vancouver: sg/MOA, 2012).

complex Indigenous public (and private) life on the Coast that blurs the categories of art and commodity.³⁸

In displaying the modern conditions of its subject, *Projections* was even more media-dependent than *Kesu'*, relying on an excavation of the details of Speck's public persona through a projection-based installation strategy alluded to in the title. | **fig. 5** | Several original paintings were hung on either side of the Satellite Gallery's single room, while reproductions of other works were projected onto a large screen, positioned perpendicular at the back of the room like a dance screen in a Kwakwaka'wakw big house. Behind this screen, another large-scale projection cycled through archival images of Speck, including newspaper clippings. Duffek describes this installation strategy as "releasing the 'trapped beasts' from their frames, projecting them digitally within an expanded concept of 'media,' and on a scale closer to the dance screens that [Speck] and others created for community use."³⁹

Much more could be said about Speck's work; for my current purposes, however, I am particularly curious about a question that Crosby raises in the sourcebook, as it troubles any easy reliance on the category of Indigenous modernism. "What, when, and where is modernism for Henry Speck?" she asks, using this much more specific question to lead into a detailed account of aspects of modernization that affected Speck during his lifetime, including his work at the Kwakwaka'wakw Arts and Crafts Organization.⁴⁰ Such concrete details are also part of the curatorial strategy that she and Duffek—and, indeed, the whole *Ruins in Process: Vancouver Art in the Sixties* project—take in documenting Speck's modernism. But Crosby's question is also relevant to *Projections* as an installation that embodies the archival relations that I am arguing are crucial to conversations about modernisms, Indigenous or otherwise. Moreover, displaying Speck's modernist practice as multiply networked also *generates* these relations, projecting them onto a broader landscape of modernist practice in Vancouver.

Two examples help to show what I mean. First, it is significant that *Projections* is an exhibition borne out of *Ruins in Process: Vancouver Art in the Sixties*, a digital archival project whose title evokes the accreting, contingent substance of art history and its archives. *Projections* benefits from these prior "ruins." Indeed, many of the same documents available on the digital database are given concrete, if ephemeral form in the show's projected media. Such projections of a digital archive are significant, amplifying emerging art-historical understandings of the period. They connect archival documents with institutionalized narratives, intervening into the persistent myth of Northwest Coast art's re-emergence after 1967. As with the *Ruins in Process* site, a kind of productive tension is generated between the inherited story of Vancouver's avant-garde and its "defeating" strategies and Speck's work in the same period. Seeing them side by side in mediated digital and performance-based installations allows for inquiry into their points of connection, as well as their discontinuities, and shows simultaneous entanglements with political, ceremonial, and everyday worlds that are not necessarily held separate in Kwakwaka'wakw knowledge systems.

Second, through the installation of the two screens, a biographical "back-story" for Speck's practice is materialized, thus locating his work in public art

38. Duffek and Crosby, *Projections*. For an example of contemporary Kwakwaka'wakw interventions into these categories through crest art on T-shirts, see Aaron Glass, "Crests on Cotton: 'Souvenir' T-Shirts and the Materiality of Remembrance Among the Kwakwaka'wakw of British Columbia," *Museum Anthropology* 31, 1 (Spring 2008): 1–18.

39. Duffek and Crosby, *Projections*.

40. *Ibid.*

and media worlds. On this second screen, much of the curatorial argument is made for his connections to multiple modern networks: we see the cover of the Surrealist journal *DYN*, bearing his illustrated work, as well as Speck standing in a suit with Vancouver-based art dealer Gyula Mayer at the opening of his exhibition at the New Design Gallery in 1964, or dressed in regalia in Alert Bay for the recognition of the coronation of British monarch George VI in 1937. Projected together, these images show the range of Kwakwaka'wakw experiences of modernity and Speck's embodiment of these trajectories, valuing public, sacred, and commodity worlds as legitimate realms of Indigenous art.

In physically locating this backstory behind a dance-curtain-like projection of his paintings, *Projections'* curators also raise the question of the relationship between formal aesthetic appreciation and deeper knowledge of an artist's lifeworld. Much recent scholarship on Northwest Coast art has asserted the complex relationship between these different ways of knowing about art and artists, and many Indigenous scholars, including Tsimshian art historian and dancer Mique'l Dangel, have argued for the importance of maintaining boundaries around what can be made public as a crucial aspect of Indigenous epistemologies.⁴¹ These generative tensions are given material form in *Projections'* activation of its media archive, in that the big house structure of the installation works against formalist framings (and reductions) of Speck's work as somehow aesthetically other than "modern." This contextual framing is also, quite literally, another screen, suggesting that this *public* interpretation of his work is knowingly a representation, rather than an intrusive art-historical excavation of the "real" Speck and his art-historical legacy. This spatialization of the problem of representation shares theoretical overlap with *Kesu's* multifaceted portrayal of Cranmer, which does not claim to be a formalist evaluation of the artist as "modern." How *could* either exhibition be such a thing, given the mediated character of their archives, and the contemporary significance of their curators' revisions? Revising and resetting involves much more than reappraisal within established colonial categories of modernism.

As a smaller exhibition, *Projections* generated less critical media response than *Kesu'*. However, in making Speck's modern work publicly visible, it resulted in a revaluing of it, and a subsequent increase in collecting of his watercolours and prints.⁴² In January 2016, Sarah Macaulay, the Vancouver-based owner of Macaulay and Co. Fine Art, brought Speck's work to the New York Outsider Art Fair, introducing a new category—"Outsider Art"—in relation to Speck's work. In a *Canadian Art* article titled, "When Is First Nations Art also Outsider Art?," critic Leah Sandals presents a range of perspectives on the relevance of this categorization, including Macaulay's own opinion that Speck's marginalization from canonical modernism—Northwest Coast or otherwise—renders the category of "outsider" an appropriate fit for a man who was excluded from full participation in modernist art worlds by virtue of his Indigenous status.⁴³

My interpretation of these categorical shifts in apprehending Speck's modernism—from "traditional" to "modern" to "outsider"—is that positioning the artist as an "outsider" contradicts something important to Crosby and Duffek's projection of his archive. As I understand it, their nuanced claim is that being "modern" involves a number of different kinds of outsides and

41. Mique'l Dangel (Askren), "Dancing Our Stone Masks Out of Confinement: A Twenty-first Century Tsimshian Epistemology," in *Objects of Exchange: Social and Material Transformation on the Late Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast*, ed. Aaron Glass (New York: BGC Focus Gallery, 2010), 37–48; see also Charlotte Townsend-Gault, "Circulating Aboriginality," *Journal of Material Culture* 9, 2 (2004): 183–202.

42. Karen Duffek, interviewed by author, Vancouver, BC, June 10, 2013.

43. In contrast, Ryan Rice, professor and co-founder of the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective, considers "outsider artist" a problematic and commodifying category imposed from outside Indigenous history (quoted by Sandals). In balancing these perspectives, Sandals' article echoes Crosby's assertions that Speck was in fact well known within his own communities, thus emphasizing the perspectival bias of the "outside" that Speck is deemed to have occupied. See Leah Sandals, "When Is First Nations Art also Outsider Art?" *Canadian Art*, January 22, 2016, <http://canadianart.ca/news/when-is-first-nations-art-also-outsider-art>.

insides. Theirs is not a claim of Indigenous essentialism for the category of “Native modern,” but rather an invitation to consider the shifting and situational aspects of the modern condition as they intersect with an artist’s roles over a lifetime. In this way, their narrative of Speck’s life disrupts aestheticizing categories of modernism by insisting that other modes—biographical and archival—also matter to his experience of being modern, mediated, and participating in public culture. Moreover, these complex backstories *are* modernity materialized, and expanding the regional story so that it disrupts the series of neatly ordered movements and schools is crucial beyond any category of “Indigenous modernism.”

Conclusion

By thinking with these two exhibitions, I have attempted to show how the contested category of “Indigenous modernism” does a kind of work, in the generative sense of cultural production. I have argued that both exhibitions’ extensive use of media may be understood as an activation of the archive—a crucial preoccupation of any solo-retrospective show of an artist’s work, to be sure—but that their particular significance lies in the social and property relations around both exhibitions and their archives, and how these transform “modernism” into something beyond its aesthetic referents. Indeed, in their invocation of so-called global art movements—Speck’s traffic with the Surrealists, Cranmer’s work with the Vancouver School—both exhibitions suggest a kind of modernism that is far more complex and intercultural than the stories of either of Vancouver’s avant-gardes—Indigenous and non-Indigenous—presently allows. Returning, finally, to the notion of predecessors, these archival excavations matter in the same manner as kinship as they reference an ancestral lineage and a futurity beyond their immediate circumstances. Admitting these aspects of Indigenous personhood is crucial to a narrative of contemporaneity that addresses histories of colonization, but doesn’t reduce Indigeneity to victimhood, reading both with and against the grain of the archive to make visible the complexity of public Indigenous modernism and its relations and thereby revising regional modernisms in the process. ¶