The House Edge: Dealing with Capital in Contemporary Indigenous Art

Caitlin Chaisson, September 2023

The House Edge features work by sixteen contemporary artists who articulate the many ways Indigenous nations and peoples have dealt with capital in cultural space. The exhibition considers the economic dimensions of Indigenous sovereignty and how forms of value circulate against ongoing settler-colonial aggression and arrogation. As Weleh Dene scholar Glen Coulthard articulates, "like capital, colonialism, as a structure of domination predicated on dispossession, is not 'a thing,' but rather the sum effect of the diversity of interlocking oppressive social relations that constitute it."[1] Capitalism and colonialism might assume the shape of stubborn facts, but the artworks discussed demonstrate how foreign notions of land ownership, property, and consumerism are contested and redirected through Indigenous practices and economies.

Reservation gambling operations have transformed access to financial capital, a subject that is considered in detail throughout this exhibition. Indigenous peoples across the Americas have always defended their inherent and absolute right to govern activities that happen on their land, and in the 1970s, the scope of Native American sovereignty in the US was tested in the courts when several landmark cases affirmed their jurisdiction over commercial bingo parlors, and later, high-stakes casinos.[2] In 1988, Congress passed the federal Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA), a framework to oversee what is now a multibillion-dollar industry.[3] This law has had immense material and symbolic effects. For nations that have pursued gaming, casino-derived wealth has offset generations of forced impoverishment due to chronic underfunding by the US government. Revenues from casinos are a means to mitigate these hostile deficits, with funds used for essential housing, education, medical and infrastructural services, as

[1] Coulthard, Glen Sean. *Red Skin, White Masks*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014. 15.
[2] Key legislation prior to IGRA included Bryan v. Itasca County (1976), Seminole v. Butterworth (1981), and California v. Cabazon Band of Mission Indians (1987). For more, see: Treuer, David. *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee: Native America from 1890 to the Present*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2019.
[3] The 2022 fiscal year gaming revenues broke records by bringing in $40.9 billion. 519 gaming operations are owned by 244 out of the 574 federally recognized tribes in 29 states. For more, see: Harris, Mavis. "FY 2022 Indian Gaming Revenue Breaks Records at $40.9 Billion." National Indian Gaming Commission, July 19, 2022. https://www.nigc.gov/news/detail/fy-2022-indian-gaming-revenue-breaks-records-at-40.9-billion.

well as support for cultural activities like language revitalization, arts, and philanthropy. Perhaps most significantly, these monies are being used by nations to buy land back.[4]

Gaming is not a panacea, and it comes at a price that is unevenly shared. Nongaming stances within are grounded in significant political, cultural, and spiritual concerns. Nations that are interested in gaming are required to enter into state-level compact agreements, thus IGRA forces a surrender of "some measure of sovereignty to the states in order to exercise their federal right to run gaming establishments."[5] IGRA also triggered subsequent legislation to cut spending on critical reservation programs "because of perceived 'abundance' of gaming revenues,"[6] echoing termination-era sentiments from the 1950s when Congress unilaterally renounced their obligations to tribal nations if they demonstrated "a thriving economy."[7] Additionally, non-Indigenous opposition to gaming is mired in "special rights rhetoric" [8]—and this, as Lenape scholar Joanne Barker notes, denies the unique legal status of Indigenous peoples.[9]

Amidst these dynamic social, ethical, and political relations, *The House Edge* examines the transactions of capitalism and colonialism through the specific angle of gaming. How is it that gaming has become one of the most salient paths towards self-determination? How do structural imbalances of power between settler governments and Native American nations reveal themselves through gaming? And in what ways are the cultural implications understood through contemporary art? This essay will trace the multifaceted dialogues initiated by the artworks, including the significance of gambling in both mythic and secular contexts, the lands and territories most immediately at stake, the long political histories at play, community-based recreation, and the transcendence of market-based value systems. As Ojibwe scholar Gerald Vizenor has asserted in his expansive writing on the subject, "casinos are the wages of sin and sovereignty."[10] They

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[4] Anthes, Bill. "Learning from Foxwoods: Visualizing the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation." *American Indian Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (2008): 204–18. 204.
[5] Spilde, Katherine A. "Indian Gaming Study." *American Anthropological Association*, no. 11 (1999). 87.
[6] Sinclair, Jane. "No Admission Required: Sovereignty, Slots and Native American Art." Doctor of Philosophy, University of New Mexico, 2014. 8.
[7] Cattelino, Jessica R. "The Double Bind of American Indian Need-Based Sovereignty." *Cultural Anthropology* 25, no. 2 (2010): 235–62. 239.
[8] For public testimony that perpetuated these beliefs, see: "Implementation of Public Law 100-497, The Indian Gaming Regulatory Act of 1988, and Related Law Enforcement Issues," Senate Hearing 103-17, Part V, October 5, 1993.
[9] Barker, Joanne. "Recognition." *American Studies* 46, no. 3 (2005): 133–61. 134.
[10] Vizenor, Gerald. "Gambling on Sovereignty." *American Indian Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (1992): 411–13. 413.

are imperfect and powerful—emergent from a complex socioeconomic situation that a remarkable number of artists have chosen to address.

The Gambler

People were making bets long before Columbus ever came ashore, as Osage and Cherokee legal expert and art collector Dr. Rennard Strickland once said.[11] Ancient practices have informed Chaz John's multipart work *A Gambling Spirit (Self-Portrait) / Life is Short, Skip Rent, Gamble on the Special Olympics, Get Evicted, Relapse on Four Loko, Treat Yo Self* (2023), and *Tribal Shell Game* (2023), which builds upon the artist's wider interests in collective dreaming and tattoo imagery, and the intersections of recorded history, tribal stories, and personal experience. Using painting, sculpture, and printed matter, John references the Ho-Chunk story "The Spirit of Gambling." In this account, the first being made by the Creator was imperfect, and cast off to the north. Known as the first male, Kunu was envious of the prosperous lives being led by those who came after him. He devised a plan to gamble with the humans for the gifts the Creator had bestowed upon them, and won everything. Starving and destitute, the humans had to find a way to outwit this evil force and get the gifts back.

The power of stories to inform cultural values is foregrounded in Rachel Martin's drawing *Yéil's Sock Money Story* (2023). Yéil, the Tlingit Raven—a sacred trickster who is always up to something—is seen discretely slipping a wad of twenty-dollar bills into their tall athletic sock. A luminously yellow running shoe fills the center of the page. The artist's work celebrates the rich visual and oral histories of her nation while recognizing the evolution of tradition that occurs with the transfer of intergenerational transfer of knowledge. Martin's practice knowingly diverges from the characteristic precision of Northwest Coast formline design. The slight imperfections in the artist's handiwork are deliberately humble and her use of collage furthers the idea of two planes, or dimensions, being brought into contact. There are human elements of the spiritual world, and spiritual elements of the human world—the two are bonded and reciprocal even if a direct connection is not immediately visible.

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[11] Cronley, Connie. "Rennard Strickland: Doctor, Lawyer, Indian, Chief Art Collector and Storyteller." *Sooner Magazine*, Fall (2009): 9–13. 12.

The mythic promise of the American Dream has always been underwritten by risk, speculation, and unfair odds. Harry Fonseca's star-spangled canvas *American Dream Machine* (2005) pictures a leaping Coyote who has won the jackpot. Surrounded by an eruption of coin tokens and dollar signs, the slot machine's video display pictures US flags billowing in a kaleidoscopic arrangement. The artist first began the series of Coyote paintings in 1979, adopting the character not only because of Coyote's significance in Maidu creation stories, but also because of their cross-cultural importance for many Indigenous cultures.[12] In Fonseca's work, this figure is fashioned as a leather-clad, high-top sneaker-wearing resident of the modern world who "improvises the next step in the embattled dance of native life; he acculturates Indian resistance to and the necessity of accommodating with a Euroamerican 'invasion' over tribal soils, social ways, cultural mores, and fragile ecosystems."[13] Coyote accesses the unlikely favors of the American Dream through his luck at the slots, the "machine" designed to bring prosperity and upward mobility to Native American nations.

<u>Land Lotteries</u>

Indigenous-settler relations have long been marked by gambling, and the struggle for land continues to be the central dispute. Colonial North America, and the US in particular, expanded through funds raised by lotteries in Europe and governments later distributed "surplus" land through homesteading raffles.[14] Aamjiwnaang artist Nico Williams's beadwork *Mots cachés (Navy)* (2020) depicts three cascading scratch-and-win lotto tickets. The word search contains a grid that interlinks peoples, places, and politics. One row reads "Oliver Act," the name of a 1911 amendment to Canada's Indian Act that enabled towns with a population of eight thousand or more to forcibly displace neighboring Indigenous communities, while another row references the conflict over fishing rights during the 1989 Wisconsin Walleye War—two examples of blatant treaty violations. Williams's words of confrontation, like "roundup" and "wrestle," are pierced through by those of support, such as "aunties" and "sage." For Williams, who speaks of

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[12] Archuleta, Margaret, and Rennard Strickland. *Shared Visions: Native American Painters and Sculptors in the Twentieth Century*. Phoenix: The Heard Museum, 1991. 95.
[13] Lincoln, Kenneth. *Indi'n Humor*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993. 148.
[14] Stein, Wayne. "The Apex of a Long Struggle." *Wicazo Sa Review* 13, no. 1 (1998): 73–91. 81.

"building a world within these tickets,"[15] defining moments of both injustice and resilience in Indigenous territories shape opportunities possible in the future.

The legacies of twentieth-century displacements are also embedded in Terran Last Gun's drawings on accounting papers. These works recall ledger drawings—a style developed in the 1870s by Plains peoples who were imprisoned and relocated by the US military. Using old and recycled papers provided by the wardens who thought drawing would hasten the assimilative process, ledger drawings were an evolution of record-keeping traditions under extreme duress. This artistic inheritance is visible in Last Gun's works, but rather than depicting scenes of battle or daily life, he foregrounds symbols of Piikani lodge painting and cosmologies. *Reconstructing the West* (2022) depicts a great circle pierced by a sharp form. The vibrant geometric shapes obscure the records beneath it—lists of debts and payments handwritten in 1903. In another work, the rows for cash, tax, and levies are blank. Rings of yellow radiate from the center of *Arrival of Magnificent Energy* (2023) rendering the bureaucratic formulas for land and property below it faint and unsubstantial by comparison.

An image of land is carefully plotted in *Bingo Hall* (2004), a photograph Kimowan Metchewais took in North Carolina, where the Cree artist was living at the time. "BINGO" is boldly lettered in red across a towering billboard on spindly legs. The sign is like a suture, conjoining a divided pictorial space: the top half is blue sky and white clouds; the bottom half a verdant field, with long grasses that make it difficult to parse the debris littered in the foreground. Post and wire fencing cuts the space below the sign, receding into the distance where a stone wall, a building, and a hedge of trees form a makeshift horizon. The artist, who frequently collaged and layered photographs into compositions, achieves a similar effect here by simply shooting the scene straight on. Metchewais once said, "I am concerned about how people see the landscape of North America,"[16] and *Bingo Hall* evokes the various ways the land has been patchworked together, claimed, and prized.

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[15] Williams, Nico. Conversation with the author, May 12, 2023.
[16] Metchewais, Kimowan. Qtd. in Ash-Milby, Kathleen. *Off the Map: Landscape in the Native Imagination.* National Museum of the American Indian: Washington, DC, 2007. 23.

A Political House

Onöndowa'ga:' artist G. Peter Jemison's *Treaty Indians/Violations* (1990–95) and *Choices—Great Law or Gambling?* (1998 and 2006) were created in the years following a period of intense violence in Haudenosaunee territories over gaming operations that led to the deaths of several people.[17] A clipping in the top corner of *Treaty Indians/Violence* is a headline reading "200 years of peace" which Jemison extends in handwriting to read "and violations of treaties." The artist abridges recent events with the US government's failure to honor and uphold the terms of the original treaties. As Jemison has expressed, this was a period of profound cultural discord. Whereas *Treaty Indians/Violence* is visually accumulative, *Choices—Great Law or Gambling?* is clearly demarcated into four quadrants. A wash of blue paint in the center surrounds two people positioned head-to-head. On the top, a white figure is upside down. On the bottom, an Indigenous figure—perhaps Handsome Lake, the Seneca prophet whose vision in 1799 became the basis of a moral code that is still practiced today. Handsome Lake warned against five things white people brought to America, including coins and playing cards. To the left of the figures, Jemison draws a hand of cards, and on the right, an image of one of the human figures from The Great Chain Covenant—a wampum belt presented by George Washington to the Haudenosaunee in 1794 at the Canandaigua Treaty.[18] The choices, as Jemison's drawing elicits, revolve around many axes: cultural, spiritual, and political.

The National Anthem (1997–2000) and *The Posse* (1995) are two narrative paintings from Ojibwe artist Jim Denomie's *Renegade* series. For Denomie, the towering mesas of the splintered landscapes are a metaphor for the confinement and isolation produced by the reservation system, which he directly connects to a range of political and historical events through scenes of "the last winged warriors being chased by the cavalry."[19] The central mesa in *The Posse* radiantly glimmers, crested with a diamond-shaped casino. A winged horseman in a blackjack vest dashes past leaving a trail of dollars. A white man riding a hobby horse and an armored vehicle clumsily chase

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[17] "G. Peter Jemison." Interview. In Abbott, Lawrence, ed. *I Stand in the Center of the Good*, 87–105. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994. 99.
[18] Ganondagan. "What Is Wampum?" n.d. https://ganondagan.org/Learning/Wampum.
[19] *Jim Denomie Interview*. The Buffalo Show, 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LcUp9qr6sKc.

in pursuit. From the shadows, a crowd of hands outstretch, some reaching for the floating cash and others clasped in prayer or thanks. In *The National Anthem*, the betting is now for sport. The Indigenous figure wears traditional clothing and the winged horse has been replaced with a delivery truck of “surplus cheese”—slang for money and also a term for government foods provided to those on welfare. The figure winds up to pitch to a batter that follows on the hood of a limousine, while a racetrack horse and prairie schooner jockey for first.

Playing “hardball”[20] is how current New York Governor Kathy Hochul has described her tactic for negotiating with the Seneca Nation’s gaming operations. In November 2022, Governor Hochul “froze the Senecas’ bank accounts to force the tribe to turn over $564 million on gambling revenue—money that had been in dispute for four years. She then directed $418 million toward the financing of a new home for the Buffalo Bills,”[21] a football franchise with a three-decade relationship to her husband’s video lottery business. Peter Jemison refers to this corruption in *Seneca Lands Defend* (2022), one of the latest pieces in his decades-long series of paper bag drawings. Using a repurposed Lands’ End shopping bag, Jemison reworks the brand name into a phrase that reads “Seneca Lands’ Defend from NY Greed.” Red, white, and blue shapes run across the bottom of the bag like a distortion of the NFL insignia. A football readied for a placekick is drawn on one side while “collusion” is spelled out on the other, further underscoring the two-sidedness of the state’s maneuver.

According to the team’s website, the Buffalo Bills are named after “one of the most colorful figures of the American Old West,”[22] obscenely misrepresenting the showman’s legacy. William “Buffalo Bill” Cody recruited and cast Indigenous performers in the late nineteenth century in his “infamous re-creations of American history,”[23] which became an engine that perpetuated “Wild West” frontier mythology worldwide. Cody earned his “Buffalo” sobriquet for his role in slaughtering the bison, depriving tens of

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[20] Root, Jay. “Despite Hochul’s Pledge, Her Policies Have Helped Her Husband’s Company.” *The New York Times*, May 8, 2023.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Buffalo Bills. “Important Dates in the Bills History: How the Buffalo Bills Got Their Name,” November 30, 2015. https://www.buffalobills.com/news/important-dates-in-bills-history-how-the-bills-got-their-name-16401977.
[23] Nesteroff, Kliph. *We Had a Little Real Estate Problem*. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2021. 7.

thousands of Indigenous peoples the essential being they relied on for nutrition, clothing, housing, tools, and ceremony. Those who participated in Buffalo Bill's show were often facing starvation or imprisonment. Sitting Bull, a Hunkpapa Lakota leader, fought against the encroachment of white gold miners and settlers in the Black Hills, defeating General Custer in 1876 and then fleeing to Canada. Eventually, he was extradited back to the US where "he was given the option of prison time or performing with Buffalo Bill."[24] He chose to perform. Ojibwe artist David Bradley's *Indian Heroes Series: Sitting Bull* (1995) offers a dense assembly of photos, teeth, hair, beading, and painted imagery that pays homage to the leader and his campaigns against the US military. Bradley's portrait of Sitting Bull draws a connection between these historic conflicts and contemporary issues. At the top of the work is an encampment fashioned out of newspaper clippings about the Rosebud Casino and photocopies of dollar bills, suggesting that gaming has become the new attraction.

Today's gold rush manifests using entirely different financial instruments, but contemporary "entrepreneurs" and yesterday's "pioneers" rely on the same values—unbridled competition and exploitation of resources. Jaune Quick-to-See Smith's painting *Get Rich Click* (1998) anticipates the force of the Internet in digitally trading assets and how these virtual transactions remain earthbound and tethered to colonial narratives. The central icon of the painting is a Salish vest, adorned with paper clippings of florals, figures, and text. "Remember," a note advises, "sometimes it takes two days to become a millionaire." Smith embeds what appears to be an early advertisement for allotments on the artist's home reservation. The 1887 Dawes Allotment Act allowed the US government to break up land held in common on reservations into individual privately-owned parcels in an effort to coerce Indigenous peoples to assimilate into an agricultural and wage-based economy and to sell any "unclaimed" land to settlers.[25]

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[24] Nesteroff, 9.

[25] Despite the guise of individual autonomy this proffered, government officials did not consider Native Americans to be capable of property management, so the Department of the Interior presided over a trust to manage income from leases of mineral and timber rights. For a century, this money was stolen and misallocated, and a class action lawsuit for $137.2 billion was brought against the Department in 1999. Judge Lamberth described the trust as "the gold standard for mismanagement," charging the Department with gross malfeasance. A settlement was reached in 2009. For more, see: Brinkley, Joel. "American Indians Say Documents Show Government Has Cheated Them Out of Billions." *The New York Times*, January 7, 2003.

Described as “a mighty pulverizing engine to break up the tribal mass,”[26] this legislation accelerated ongoing land dispossession. The artist draws a throughline across the government’s rhetoric of purported financial gains of the Dawes Act and those anticipated by IGRA. After one hundred years of privatization, “there’s more than one way to play monopoly,” Smith’s clipping reads. “Trump it! Open a Casino.”

Recreation and Community

The colonial project of assimilation as a means of “civilization” depends upon the settler state’s dehumanization of Indigenous peoples. The parallel between assimilation and domestication is one of the central concepts of Chaz John’s *Rez Dog Mother with Bingo Sheet* (2018). Here, the artist appropriates the conventions of Victorian pet portraiture to depict dogs that roam the reservation. If nineteenth-century painters’ loyal and obedient canines were intended to perpetuate an image of the aristocracy’s mastery over nature, John’s series rejects the symbolism of servitude at the feet of empire. The rez dog mother appears outside in a dynamic landscape of blues and golds that also mimics her own coloring. She is neither tragic nor suffering and carries a bingo card in her mouth, turned away from the viewer as if ready to bound into the distance and collect her winnings.

Tongue-in-cheek humor prevails in Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie’s genre-bending, satirical video *NTV* (1994), with a broadcast motto that promises to “bring the rez to you.”[27] Splicing together soap operas, telethons, and commercials, Tsinhnahjinnie’s script channel-surfs across staticky cable, coalescing into a complex commentary on the politics of self-determination. In one scene, two men in suits are deep in conversation. “Look Buck, this kind of transaction happens all the time on reserves,” reasons one character, as the menacing sound of a pipe organ looms. The program ends in suspense: “Will Buck Skin sell out?... Next on *As the Teepee Trembles*…” *NTV* later flicks to *The Bingo Sisters*. Three women gossip and bicker, fantasize about

[26] Smith, Burton M. “The Politics of Allotment: The Flathead Indian Reservation as a Test Case.” *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 70, no. 3 (1979): 131–40. 131.

[27] This video was commissioned for the inaugural opening of the National Museum of the American Indian in New York City, for an exhibition titled *This Path We Travel* (1994).

winning, and flirt with servers until finally, one of the sisters wins big.[28] Tsinhnahjinnie's video can be seen as an extension of her photographic practice, and her wider commitment to the radical possibilities of Indigenous-led media. The artist, who is Seminole, Muscogee, and Diné, writes of the work, "when I encounter attempts to oversimplify the native experience for the convenience of 'knowing,' 'owning,' or for 'mystical exhibition,' I become impatient and respond with a responsibility that has been woven into my entire life."[29] *NTV* plays with cultural stereotypes and insider humor, refusing the tidy arc of beginning, middle, and end that would "complete" the picture of Indigenous life.

Community relationships are a core element of Joe Feddersen's practice, which spans printmaking, ceramics, glass, and basketry. A long-time faculty member of Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, Feddersen recalls working on baskets during meetings as an antidote to administrative boredom.[30] Using traditional Plateau Salish techniques, the artist incorporates patterns as quotidian as truck tire treads, painted road meridians, and electrical transformers, signs and symbols from the surrounding world that "acknowledge today's reality."[31] After retiring from teaching and moving back to the reservation, Feddersen found he needed a way to reconnect with the community he had been away from for nearly forty years. Socializing at the bingo hall became the best way to do that. *Bingo* (2017) is one of several woven vessels the artist has made in relation to card games and games of chance. This work takes the form of a sally bag, a flexible cylindrical basket that is typically used to gather and store goods, which, here, is symbolically holds connections to home.

The influence of gaming on community life is also considered in the work of Nora Naranjo-Morse. Her three-minute video *I've Been Bingo-ed by My Baby* (1996) is set to Diné (Navajo) comedian and singer Vincent Craig's love ballad "Rita." Visuals of a

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[28] Other key sketches include a home improvement segment on *This Old Adobe*, guidance from the Elders in *1-800-CLAN-MOTHERS*, collect calls from the spiritual world in *TV Shaman*, a "Four Directions" aerobics class, and a "Nanabush" monologue about how the trickster spirit serves as the Chief Policy Analyst and CEO of the International Indian Arts Corporation.

[29] Tsinhnahjinnie, Hulleah J. "Artist Statement." In Wilson, Cheryl, ed. *This Path We Travel: Celebrations of Contemporary Native American Creativity*, 105–9. Golden: Fulcrum Publishing, 1994. 107.

[30] Cécile Ganteaume. Oral History Interview with Joe Feddersen, April 29, 2021. Smithsonian Institution. https://www.aaa.si.edu/download_pdf_transcript/ajax?record_id=edanmdm-AAADCD_oh_22078.

[31] Dobkins, Rebecca J. *Joe Feddersen: Vital Signs*. Salem: Hallie Ford Museum of Art, 2008. 26.

beautiful woman with sharp manicured nails and a corseted bustier convey the seductiveness of gaming, which Naranjo-Morse narratively bookends with scenes of a conversation between two Elders. Despite the levity of the plotline as a bungled attempt at love, the work was created out of grief—filmed shortly after the death of someone in her community. The artist noticed that the casinos on the reservation did not close, despite a local tradition to cease business and observe a period of mourning. The infiltration of capitalism as a belief system is a subject of critique that figures largely in much of Naranjo-Morse's practice. She pinpoints receiving her first credit card as a profound moment of cultural questioning "about the value system that I grew up with and the value system this card represented… it was almost like somebody was handing me this weapon."[32] In order to process these feelings, Naranjo-Morse created her iconic Pearlene series, a ceramic figurine who playfully navigates the challenges of life as a contemporary Pueblo woman. The artist retired Pearlene many years before making *I've Been Bingo-ed by My Baby,* but recalls her in the Pearlene Productions credit. Traditions and mediums are always evolving, as this work makes clear, but not without a responsibility to community.

<u>Accumulating Interests</u>

The experience of bereavement and the profound ways in which it can throw beliefs and values into focus is also considered in Duane Slick's hardedge geometric stripe paintings. *Midnight in the Metaphysical Economy* (2021) evokes the liminal threshold of a day where money is not the measure of all things. When Slick's father, a Meskwaki citizen and US military veteran, passed away after a long period of illness, the afterimage of the American flag draped over his casket stayed with the artist for several years. This symbol became central to Slick's work, as did the spatial density of darkness. "The idea of stacked horizons evolved out of the endless hours involved in painting the stripes of the American flag,"[33] the artist explains. Slick's canvases in this series are tactile, built from layers of paint so precise they render their own subtle

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[32] Holmes, Kristine. "'This Woman Can Cross Any Line': Feminist Tricksters in the Works of Nora Naranjo-Morse and Joy Harjo." *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 7, no. 1 (1995): 45–63. 50.
[33] Slick, Duane. "Delivered to the School of Advanced Research and the Indian Arts Research Center." Santa Fe, August 5, 2010. http://www.duaneslickstudios.com/pages/writings/SAR.html.

dimensionality. But this materialism is nuanced, not to be mistaken with the vapid materialistic impulse of accumulation and possession. The eventual dissolution of the flag provides the grounds on which other painted symbols important to the artist's Meskwaki and Ho-Chunk heritage emerge—foxtail grasses, coyote skulls and shadows, and connective ribbons of color that establish generational kinship. *Midnight in the Metaphysical Economy* is a proposition of time and value informed by symbolic currencies.

Interconnectedness is also a core principle of Matthew Kirk's practice, where process and product are inseparable. Kirk's artworks have the immediacy of stream-of-consciousness mark-making and the solidity of concrete poetry. That some of Kirk's earliest series of paintings were made using sheetrock and recycled construction materials is not incidental, forming a direct connection between the artist's visual language of found, invented, and Diné (Navajo) iconography with the built environment. The element of chance features largely in Kirk's painting and sculpture: materials that happen to be found, marks that happen to line up, objects that happen to fit. In *Shoot The Messenger* (2023), Kirk takes the surface of his drawing table, slices it into segments, and reassembles the pieces with articulating hinges. A palimpsest of accumulated marks and notes from previous projects are reconfigured. There is a consideration of movement and balance, with portions of the sculpture being held up by its own resistance and tension. Everything appears in relation to something else.

A temporal density manifests in Bently Spang's video *Boutique of the Damned* (2002), which the artist has concisely described as "500 years in five minutes."[34] Spang draws a direct link between colonization and consumer capitalism. Spang's innovative use of digital stop-motion harkens back to the jittery days of early cinema and silent film. The video begins with closely cropped scenes of Hollywood cowboys on horseback, then jumps forward in time to footage shot from the dashboard of a vehicle driving at night. "Despite the odds, and the predictions of our imminent demise, we survived," reads an intertitle. "And in order to survive, we had to change." Then, the "Blue Guy" appears—a persona who would later become an essential character in Spang's

[34] Spang, Bently. Conversation with the author, December 11, 2022. This video was originally produced for an installation of the same name in an exhibition titled *Staging the Indian: The Politics of Representation* (2002) at the Tang Teaching Museum, Saratoga Springs, New York.

performance repertoire. The seated artist first models the stoic impression of a Tsitsistas man, looking past the camera. Blue paint begins to spread across his face, mark by mark, until he's transformed. A silver cowboy hat and wraparound sunglasses instantaneously appear to finish the look. Spang gives a smirk then points with his lips, and finally turns to face the camera directly. *Boutique of the Damned* denudes the stereotypes and assumptions that define popular understandings of Indigenous life, exposing the vanities of money and power in colonial America.

The Next Hand

Everybody knows the house always wins. And the longer the game is played, the greater the house edge. For hundreds of years, the settler state has been the beneficiary of a built-in advantage of its own making—setting the rules of engagement and then choosing when to abide by them. Indigenous nations have always found ways to disabuse colonial power of its perceived authority, gaming being just one recent example. But the magnitude of the effects of IGRA still remains to be seen. Pragmatically, Indigenous-owned gaming organizations have offered "more control over the pressures and flows of powerful economic and political forces in daily life than would exist without them."[35] But rather than strictly "trying to revenue share our way to social justice," as Joanne Barker has smartly critiqued of other attempts at contemporary economic reforms, the artworks in this exhibition exemplify her call to a more productive force of change that demands "empire's accountability to the territorial rights of Indigenous peoples."[36] Artists in the exhibition contextualize the emergence of gaming from a much longer narrative of capitalism and colonialism. As Glen Coulthard posits, "Indigenous anticapitalism is best understood as a struggle primarily inspired by and oriented around *the question of the land*—a struggle not only *for* land in the material sense, but also deeply *informed* by what the land *as a system of reciprocal relations and obligations* can teach us."[37] An exponent of deliverance and destruction, decadence

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[35] Lawlor, Mary. *Public Native America: Tribal Self-Representation in Museums, Powwows, and Casinos*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006. 23.
[36] Barker, Joanne. "The Corporation and the Tribe." *American Indian Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (2015): 243–70. 267.
[37] Coulthard, 13.

and corruption, gaming is a venture that can hold all the extremes, inequities, and paradoxes that have been dealt at the table of Indigenous-settler relations to date, so perhaps it's the most honest metaphor of them all.

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