

Challenges and possibilities in curating international Indigenous contemporary art

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Summary

THESIS BACKGROUND

Through exhibition and an expanding international art scene new trends and movements emerge. A concept that has emerged, through exhibition presentations, is the notion of an international Indigenous contemporary art. With this I refer to the very idea that international Indigenous contemporary art can be seen, or feasibly considered, as a guiding concept for an exhibition. A large-scale exhibition named *Sakahàn* proposed this in 2013 by presenting Indigenous contemporary art as a possible international concept. With this as my starting point I have looked into denominators and explored obstacles for this concept's sustainability within the global art scene.

PURPOSE

The main purpose of this essay is to (1) present a nuanced and thoroughly discussed exposition of the term 'Indigenous' when it relates to an international perspective within contemporary art, and (2) discuss its consequences for displaying all Indigenous contemporary art as one, regardless of local significance, in an exhibition setting. Another subgoal of this essay (3) is to show the curatorial power of defining culture and identity.

STRUCTURE

In this essay there are three chapters. Chapter one is for background knowledge that can be useful to have before reading the discussion part in chapter two and three. Chapter two presents an international perspective on Indigenous contemporary art with a clear focus on the exhibition *Sakahàn*, but also trans-Indigenous denominators and curating Indigenous contemporary art. Chapter three presents a structural perspective on Indigenous contemporary art through historical view on the exhibition space and critical perspective on the exhibition space today. At the end there are appendix 1 and appendix 2 with pictures that are sometimes referred to throughout the essay.

RESULTS

Three main results emerge in this essay: (1) Through the main exhibition example *Sakahàn* the discussion part in this essay seeks to find out what could and could not sustain the concept of Indigenous contemporary art in an exhibition setting. Possible challenges by presenting Indigenous contemporary art with a cosmopolitan perspective is the neglect of the

local that often is significant for specific artworks context. Also, assimilation into the main body and/or homogenization of Indigenous contemporary arts artistic diversity. (2) Notions that can sustain the concept of international Indigenous contemporary art is the common content the artworks can have, such as land and colonialism. In exhibition presentation international mobilization through strategic essentialism can be a reason for a global perspective and looking at Indigenous contemporary art from the perspective of a forged diaspora can sustain the notion of Indigenous contemporary art as a concept internationally. (3) Context is also crucial when discussing exhibition presentations. Through this essay's chosen exhibition examples the assessment is that structural, historical and contemporary context can define an exhibition presentation. If context is not incorporated the Indigenous contemporary art can be perceived as deterritorialized and therefore art institutions only reincarnate their own established ideas rooted in modernity and colonized mindset of herding Indigenous contemporary art into 'the other'. By only importing artworks, through an additive process, and not importing the understanding and the context can make a weak political import.

CONCLUSION

International Indigenous contemporary art can be considered a guiding concept for an exhibition based on common denominators. At the same time many exhibitions reduce 'Indigenous' to a buzzword, rather than looking at it as a concept, by avoiding what actually can bound Indigenous contemporary art together internationally and/or not recognize historical or contemporary context that is crucial for the artworks presented. By doing this the presented Indigenous contemporary art is deterritorialized rather than imported with its context. This underlines the defining power exhibition presentation can have for what it is presenting. So, many exhibitions that present Indigenous contemporary art as a concept don't recognize these denominators in the curatorial presentation, therefore the concept is misused and can seem like an empty political gesture.

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Introduction

Thesis

Through exhibition and an expanding international art scene new trends and movements emerge. A concept that has emerged, through exhibition presentation, is the notion of international Indigenous contemporary art. With this I refer to the very idea that international Indigenous contemporary art can be seen, or feasibly considered, as a guiding concept for an exhibition.

In this essay I will discuss the term ‘Indigenous’ and the usage of it in relation to contemporary visual art and exhibitions. I will also discuss if international Indigenous contemporary art is something that we can meaningfully refer to and talk about in the context of a global art scene. Can ‘Indigenous’ be a collective term in the international art scene that include all Indigenous groups globally, or is it a misnomer that only reduces the term to a buzzword in the international art scene?

The main purpose of this essay is to present a nuanced and thoroughly discussed exposition of the term ‘Indigenous’ when it relates to an international perspective within contemporary art, and discuss its consequences for displaying all Indigenous contemporary art as one, regardless of local significance, in an exhibition setting. Another subgoal of this essay is to show the curatorial power of defining culture and identity.

My point of reference and reasons for course of direction

I would like to point out that I myself am not of first people descent. Therefore one can say I am more of an observer than a participant of Indigenous culture or the Indigenous contemporary art scene. Anyhow, I believe that one can still contribute with a so-called outsider perspective. Still, I want to acknowledge where I stand and admit that I don't have all the first hand knowledge or understanding regarding Indigenous cultures. As the the Sámi professor Harald Gaski has argued that if one “treat indigeneity open-mindedly and ferly in their writings”¹ everyone can contribute.

¹ Gaski, Harald. “Indigenous Aesthetics: Add context to context” in *Duodji Reader* (ed.Gaski and Guttorm). (Oslo: Davvi Girji, 2022). p.218.

One of my main sources and exhibition examples is *Sakahàn* (2013). The reason for the choice of *Sakahàn* is based on its scope and size, but foremost on the usage of the term “Indigenous’ in relation to the international approach the exhibition had when presenting Indigenous contemporary art. Also, the decision to dedicate a large portion of this essay to *Sakahàn* is the common thread it hopefully creates in this essay by always being a reference point. Other exhibitions will be mentioned, but they will not be elaborated on as much as *Sakahàn* due to limited page span.

The global perspective on Indigenous contemporary art appeared often as a defining question when writing the exhibition report in KUN4900. With a critical view on the term’s meaning and usage within visual contemporary art, I want to discuss exhibitions that construct groupings to make them fit the western globalized format of the art scene of today.

The essays structure, theoretical framework and previous research

The choice of theory is also based on a notion made by Gaski. His perspective is that we can learn from each other, not only between trans-Indigenous shearings and exchanges of ideas, but also from general global debates within the humanities and social science.² Therefore one can use Indigenous theory and the other established theories within academia to get a wide range of references around the Indigenous contemporary art scene.

The essay's structure is divided into three chapters:

- The first is background knowledge that can prove important for the topic of this essay.
- The second is to seek if Indigenous contemporary art can be an international concept by looking at artworks and exhibition examples.
- The third is to see if Indigenous contemporary art should, in a structural sense, be a guiding concept within exhibition presentation.

The essay's structure is divided into three chapters. I will set the scene in chapter one to introduce and define some background knowledge that can prove crucial when reading the rest of the essay. This includes what I define as Indigenous contemporary art based on political and historical references, and it will also discuss the term 'Indigenous'. In chapter two I will have a clear focus on the exhibition *Sakahàn* (2013) because it was a large-scale

² Gaski, Harald. “Indigenous Aesthetics: Add context to context”. p.218.

exhibition that based itself upon the notion of international Indigenous contemporary art. To discuss a global perspective of Indigenous contemporary art I am using Harald Gaski «Add context to context» and sociologists Colin Samson and Carlos Gigoux and their book *Indigenous Peoples and Colonialism: Global Perspectives*. With their perspectives I will discuss if the possibility of common content in international Indigenous contemporary art is sustainable and assess the use of the term 'Indigenous' within contemporary art. I will also try to find a common thread in aesthetics and content that can emphasize the use of the term 'Indigenous' that can accommodate all Indigenous contemporary art around the world. I will also use philosopher Jacques Rancière's «The Politics of Aesthetics» and «The Emancipated Spectator» to get a better insight in the view on art *Sakahana* withholds, and what this expects from spectators. This will be supplemented with the perspectives of Lynn Wray from the text "Taking a position" where this contributes a new view on art within the curatorial. I will apply Wray's perspective on curating on the written sources from the *Sakahana* exhibition. In chapter three, to get further insight to this topic, I will try to place the concept of international Indigenous contemporary art in the context of a diaspora to assess possible similarities to a diasporic identity internationally. The notion of a diaspora in relation to Indigenous contemporary art can give a greater understanding of how Indigenous contemporary art can be a concept internationally, especially through exhibition presentation, since other cultures and artforms have prospered in a trans-national environment. I will also look at the development of 'Indigenous' as a concept within the international art scene as a result of possible globalization and colonialism. By looking at concrete examples of exhibitions I will discuss the different perspectives of a globalized and a postcolonial art scene. After this I will dig into the backdrop of exhibition presentations through looking at art institutions and the international art scene's history, where I will link modernity and colonialism. Then I will direct a focus towards decolonization and the so-called post-colonial world we live in today, here also with a focus on exhibition presentation. Here I use Rauna Kuokkanen to get a greater comprehension of decolonization. Towards the end of this essay I will point to decolonization of art institutions and the exhibition space. To tie it all together I will in the conclusion try to answer the question if international Indigenous contemporary art is a concept in exhibition presentation, and can we refer to this very idea of international Indigenous contemporary art in a meaningful way?

The sources and theories I use in the discussion part of this essay will hopefully contribute to create a nuanced picture of the essay's topic. Close reading of the chosen literature will be

crucial, in addition to analysis of exhibitions that can be used in argumentation within the scope of the essay subject matter. The literature I have chosen shapes the direction and perspective this thesis withholds regarding the subject I am approaching.

It is important that the source material is diverse. Several sources are written by people that identify as Indigenous, in this way the ‘insider’ view is also incorporated. Together these perspectives and theories can hopefully give great comprehension on the question asked in regard to the use of the term ‘Indigenous’ in international contemporary art today as the thesis proclaims.

Previous research within this topic exists, but often these publications are in relation to exhibitions, like the book *Sakahan International indigenous art* and articles such as “Detoxing and Decolonising Museums” by Sara Wajid and Rachael Minott in relation to the exhibition *The Past is Now*. Other previous research is often not specifically about this topic, but within the realm, in other academic disciplines.

Method

In this essay I will be using context such as historical, cultural, political and linguistic competence with the aim to increase the possibility of thoroughly understanding the subject matter. I will use a reflective approach with emphasis on having a holistic perspective to the term ‘Indigenous’, and at the same time use concrete examples, such as the selected exhibition examples. Together they will hopefully intertwine and reach a collective understanding. In its own way, the essay will also be a concept analysis, as the term ‘Indigenous’ is at the center of this essay. So this essay will present a theoretical approach with my own observation of the mentioned exhibition. Some of the exhibition examples I have seen myself, those from 2022 and 2023, but most I only have read about or seen pictures. Close reading of chosen literature as reviews, academic articles and theory will be crucial, in addition to observation and analysis of exhibitions done by me.

Clarification of terms and disclaimers

‘Indigenous’ and ‘western’

It is also important for me to mention that I am aware of the arbitrariness of me using wording as ‘Indigenous’ and ‘western’ in this essay, when I discuss the possible limitations, possible generalization, and categorizations this puts on Indigenous contemporary art. Rauna Kuokkanen stated “Indigenous peoples in the world resist one fixed definition for Indigenous peoples given the vast diversity of their political and geographical situations around the

world.”³ Still, I will use some terms that are perceived as categorization as a heuristic device in order to show the differences between these categories that actually exist, and are often significant, although they contain differences and are diverse.

‘Decolonial’

In this essay the focus isn't necessarily on that colonialism was the occupation of space, but that it is just as much about the imposition of a cultural narrative.⁴ To understand this we as spectators of art have some rethinking and unlearning that can be done. Decoloniality pointers is something that can be applied when presenting Indigenous contemporary art in exhibitions. Decoloniality is not self-evident in the subject of art history, so I would like to argue why decoloniality is important within art history and art exhibitions.

Robert R. Janes wrote that we need to recognize that art institutions are mainstream institutions and thus embody the general consensus and values of the public at large.⁵ This is visible every time protest in relation to art institutions praxis occurs, because it shows that people perceive art institutions as a voice for our society. Jenny Kidd made several examples in her essay “Unprecedented Times?” of this, e.g in the Glasgow *Herald* a reporter states that “Gaelic language advocates are due to protest outside the museum today over what they claim is ‘linguistic and cultural erasure’ after learning that the entire exhibition would be curated in English”.⁶ Kidd’s examples can show that art institutions are seen as carriers of great meaning. Therefore their presentation of certain meanings can seem to justify these meanings just by presenting them, if it is intentional or not. This is important to note, because the colonizer's indoctrinated mindset in art institutions is not only affecting Indigenous people, but society at large. Therefore there is a need for a new cultural framework, because art institutions of all kinds are in positions to invent a new future for their communities by constructing an image of a desirable future for all.⁷

³ Kuokkanen, Rauna . “Towards an ‘Indigenous paradigm’ from a sámi perspective” in *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*. vol.2. pp.411-436. (Vancouver:University of British Columbia, 2000.). p.412

⁴ Bleiker, Roland and Sally Butler. “Radical dreaming: indigenous art and cultural diplomacy” in *International political sociology* (University of Queensland, 2016). p.65

⁵ Janes, Robert R. “Authentic change in Museums: A brief field guide to renewal” in *The Journal of the Anchorage Museum* issue 5. (Anchorage Museum, 2022). p.13-16

⁶ Kidd, Jenny. “Unprecedented Times?” in *Museum Activism* (ed.Robert R.Janes and Richard Sandall). (London/ New York: Routledge, 2019). p.391.

⁷ Janes, Robert R. “Authentic change in Museums: A brief field guide to renewal” p.13-16

Chapter 1 - Background knowledge on 'Indigenous' and Indigenous contemporary art

1.1 Historical recap of 'Indigenous' as a term

The term 'Indigenous' gained common acceptance in the 1970s, during a time when Indigenous groups around the world became more visible through activism and advocacy at local levels. In the United States, American Indian Movement was prominent. In Canada they established the Canadian National Indian Brotherhood. In Japan Ainu activism emerged and in Norway the visibility of Saami activism was at its peak.⁸ This led to an emergent network that became the platform for the basic human rights of Indigenous people to be considered at the United Nations. Between 1972 and 2004 the UN definition of Indigenous was refined several times to articulate a concept based on ancestry, relation to lands, language, culture continuity, and the right of self-identification. Today the term reflects an increasingly international cosmopolitanism, even as no official consensus yet exists on a common usage.⁹ This has led to some concerns about the term. Jolene Rickard draws attention to a problem caused by the term 'Indigenous'- that the term reinforces notions of presumed homogeneity rather than the recognition of sovereignty within Indigenous art.¹⁰ Also, J. Pretty brought up that the world moves towards cultural homogenization in society at large. In "The Consumption of a Finite Planet: Well-being, Convergence, Divergence and the Nascent Green Economy" J. Pretty discussed that this is the modernist promises* of a singular world.¹¹ This promise bases itself on that profit and increasing living standard, and this affects cultural practices¹² through e.g. streamlining and outsourcing of traditional craft. This cultural homogenization especially affects groups that already are in a marginalized position in society, like Indigenous groups.

⁸ Samson, Colin and Carlos Gigoux. *Indigenous peoples and colonialism, a global perspective*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017). p.177-179.

⁹ Lalonde, Christine. "Introduction: At the crossroads of Indigeneity, globalization and contemporary art" in *Sakahàn: international indigenous art* (ed.Christine Lalonde, Greg A. Hill, Candice Hopkins). (Ottawa: National gallery of Canada, 2013). p.15.

¹⁰ Lalonde, Christine. "Introduction: At the crossroads of Indigeneity, globalization and contemporary art" p.15 and Samson, Colin and Carlos Gigoux. *Indigenous peoples and colonialism, a global perspective*. p.196-197.

¹¹ Pretty, J. "The Consumption of a Finite Planet: Well-being, Convergence, Divergence and the Nascent Green Economy" in *Environmental and Resource Economics*, 55 (4) (2013). p.457-499.

*The source (11 and 12) uses this wording. It is not a source from the field of art history, but in context of the source it is meant to be in relation to modernity, not modernism.

¹² J. Pretty. "the consumption of a finite planet: Well-being, convergence, divergence and the nascent green economy". 2013. p.475-499

It is important to see “Indigenous” as an umbrella term for first people (status and non-status), because “Indigenous” refers to all first people groups, either collectively or separately. An example of use of the term in official international contexts is the ‘United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples’ (UNDRIP).¹³ In this setting it is a necessary word to use, to include all first people around the world. However, recently the term “Indigenous” has been more and more associated with activism and cultural context.¹⁴ The increased use of the word in culture context, more specifically the visual arts sphere, are what this thesis will discuss further.

1.2 A short historical recap of the the Indigenous contemporary art scene

In the 1970s there was a wave of first people issues addressed around the world simultaneously. It was a bigger movement around the world where Indigenous communities struggled for self-determination where colonialism mindset within governments undermined Indigenous land, resources and rights.¹⁵ With these issues put under the spotlight the culture practices of different first people groups were also more noticeable. The important thing to note about the 1970s is that in this time a common usage of the term ‘Indigenous’ started. It is a term many associate with solidarity across national borders.¹⁶ The 1970s and 1980s was a defining time when Indigenous groups struggled for recognition and self-determination.¹⁷ With complex processes, including the obvious political ones that concerned representation and the right to land and resources, a redefinition of Indigenous culture developed in this time.¹⁸ The main body also got more exposure to Indigenous culture and art through this visibility in the 1970s. An e.g is the Sámi art collection that was established in 1972, as the first Sámi art institution in Norway.¹⁹ The legacy from the 1970s is still visible by the Indigenous activism and art that continued into the 2000s.²⁰ Therefore I will define the 1970s as a starting point for Indigenous contemporary art. The activism in the 1970s also raised

¹³ UN, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD).

¹⁴ Queen’s University. “Terminology Guide”.

¹⁵ Coulthard, Glen Sean. *Red skin, White mask*. (London, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014). p.52.

¹⁶ Garneau, David. “Can I get a witness? Indigenous art criticism” in *Sovereign Words, Indigenous Art, Curation and Criticism*.(Valiz: OCA, 2018). p.15-18

¹⁷ Coulthard, Glen Sean. *Red skin, White mask*. p.52-53.

¹⁸ Coulthard, Glen Sean. *Red skin, White mask*. p.52-53.

¹⁹ RidduDuottarMuseat. “De sámiske samlinger”. https://rdm.no/no/de_sámiske_samlinger/ (seen 07.05.23)

²⁰ Coulthard, Glen Sean. *Red skin, White mask*. p.168-170.

awareness of treatment of Indigenous art, because what earlier had been seen as “just” artifacts got now the regretful treatment as contemporary art.²¹

Here it is important to emphasize that I am focusing on contemporary art, and not Indigenous art in general. The Indigenous art scene has always been rich in its diversity of mediums, techniques and expression, so there are links between Indigenous art and the contemporary Indigenous art of today. From the start Indigenous contemporary art was influenced by tradition, activism and politics, but foremost to express oneself on one's own terms. They also had to navigate the complexity contained in the concept of indigeneity.²²

Today, through exhibition presentation, an international Indigenous contemporary art scene has been developed and through this is a possible concept to refer to within visual art?

This has been developing for years. Since the 1970s Indigenous culture has been more visible in the international art scene.²³ In this period visual Indigenous contemporary art also gained a more recognizable voice, but it was mainly based on the distinctive significance of the locality of the Indigenous belonging to the artist.²⁴ The importance of the local is in contrast, and sometimes in conflict, to the international perspective on Indigenous contemporary art because of the threat of ignoring this distinctive local significance. There is a difference between having an international audience and being internationalized by being categorized in a way that erases something that is distinctive in one's art, in this case the local. I will discuss the latter aspect further later in this essay.

1.3 What makes an artwork Indigenous contemporary art?

The term “Indigenous” indirectly places itself in a global perspective of first people when in relation to contemporary art, because it implies that “Indigenous” is a possible concept internationally. A concept that can include the entirety of the world's first people. Some use the term to describe first people groups on a local level, but in this essay the term is viewed as a collective term that is supposed to accommodate everyone globally. If a group of first people are mentioned in this essay specifically it will be by their self defined name.

²¹ Samson, Colin and Carlos Gigoux. *Indigenous peoples and colonialism, a global perspective*. p.181-183

²² Hill, Greg. “Afterword: Looking back at Sakahàn” in *Sakahàn*. (Ottawa: National gallery of Canada, 2013). p.140

²³ Garneau, David. “Can I get a witness? Indigenous art criticism”. p.15-18

²⁴ Tripura, Prashanta. “What does or should ‘indigenous art’ mean?” in *Sovereign Words*. (Valiz: OCA, 2018) p.45

To be strict around who can make Indigenous contemporary art can prove to be tricky based on the categorization that has hunted Indigenous groups through a colonial history.

E.g. For an artwork to be 'judged' as Indigenous contemporary art, must the work be made by an artist whose status legally is recognized by national governments? To answer yes to this question can seem arbitrary based on the colonial impositions of identity that have had reins on first peoples right of self-definition for so long. Many postcolonial scholars and critics today reject bureaucratic and legislated assignments of identity. They argue that the artist subjectivity, formed by extended identification with an Indigenous community, should be a primary criterion.²⁵ The Indigenous artists and writer David Garneau addresses in the essay "Can I get a witness?" that anyone that declared themselves as a Indigenous artist is one. This requires that mainstream acknowledgement is of secondary importance because the determination to the Indigenous cause is the primary importance in one's artistry.²⁶

So, we can discuss who are Indigenous artists, and therefore make Indigenous contemporary art, based on their own subjective ideas behind the topic. At the same time I would like to emphasize that to define Indigenous contemporary art is difficult, this is because the consensus about being an international concept is not in a unanimous agreement just because an exhibition has proposed this existence. Meaning we can not get a direct answer on what makes artworks Indigenous contemporary art. However we can have a viewpoint on who makes it.

1.4 The Curatorial

I would like to elaborate on what I place in the meaning of the word curatorial when I use it in this essay. I have looked at Aneta Szylak's expanded notion of context within the curatorial. Szylak's goal is to show that context is not a frame for usage for the curator, but an event that is not only deliberately created, but also occurs spontaneously and without agency.²⁷ Szylak wrote in her essay *Curating Context*: "Perhaps we are not curating 'in-context' but rather we 'curate context' as such. In so doing, we are not only addressing

²⁵ Phillips, Ruth B. "The Modern and the Modernist in Twentieth-Century Indigenous Art" in *sámi Art and Aesthetics, Contemporary Perspectives* (ed. Svein Aamold, Elin Haugdal and Ulla Angkjær Jørgensen). (Danmark: Aarhus University Press, 2017). p. 327.

²⁶ Garneau, David. "Can I get a witness? Indigenous art criticism". p.15-18

²⁷ Martinon, Jean-Paul. "introduction" in *The curatorial - a philosophy of curating* (ed. Jean-Paul Martinon). (London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2013). p. 12.

artworks, these same artworks also become the means of arriving at meaning.”²⁸ She also wrote “We are not taking things from the context, but rather inserting things into it.”²⁹

With Szylak's notion of *curating context* I would like to address that I see curatorial choices not as a context that the curators can only decide for themselves, but context is also created by an exhibition's contemporary time and space. The exhibition space is not an autonomous place without connections to the outside world.³⁰ The outside world can create context in addition to curator in relation to exhibitions.

This view on the curatorial opens up for many discussions about what context can make us discover and to this Szylak wrote “What does context make possible? Grounding, understanding, political engagement, answerability to ethical demand, knowledge production? This is part of what we are trying to discover.”³¹ But she also stressed that “The curatorial does not fix problems and it is not an agent of good will. It does not resolve social problems, but may cause the shared context to come up with modes of articulation that we are able to recognize.”³² This latter statement is important to address for my essay as well, I don't have the opinion that an exhibition can get “it all right” and be “all that”, but *curating context* can give us a forward praxis that let us reinvent the exhibition each time we take a closer look, this because the context can never be a hundred percent predetermined.

²⁸Szylak, Aneta. “Curating Context” in *The curatorial - A Philosophy of Curating* (ed. Jean-Paul Martinon). (London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2013). p.217

²⁹ Szylak, Aneta. “Curating Context”. p.221

³⁰ Altshuler, Bruce *Exhibitions that made art history: vol.2: biennials and beyond: 1962-2002*. (London: Phaidon, 2013). S.283.

³¹ Szylak, Aneta. “Curating Context”. p.221

³² Szylak, Aneta. “Curating Context”. p.221

Chapter 2 - A international perspective on Indigenous contemporary art

In this chapter I will use the *Sakahàn* exhibition to argue the possibility for Indigenous contemporary art to be perceived as an international concept in an exhibition presentation, since *Sakahàn* was a large-scale exhibition that has proposed this existence. So, I will point out and discuss ideas that possibly can substantiate and contradict the notion of this concept. This will follow with a decoding of exhibition formats and curatorial concepts, possible parallels to methodology within Indigenous studies that can correlate with the idea of this concept's existence. I will look at potential common denominators, both aesthetic and content, within Indigenous contemporary art. I will also look at reasons to maintain this notion and ensuing political aspects of upholding international Indigenous contemporary art as a concept.

I would also like to point out that it has been difficult to find pictures of the layout and assess their curatorial choices in the exhibition *Sakahàn*. Either they did not document it well through photos or these photos' availability to the public, through the internet, are limited. Also, in 2013 social media wasn't what it is today, so there aren't many good pictures to find there. Still, through social media I found out that it was not allowed to take pictures in the main exhibition, something that can explain the lack of available photos of the exhibition space (appx.2 fig.8 and appx.1 fig.4). At the same time, the creators of *Sakahàn* published several articles in *Sakahàn International Indigenous Art* in relation to the exhibition, here they describe their vision, concept and understanding of international Indigenous contemporary art etc. and this is what I will use.

2.1 Looking back at the exhibition *Sakahàn*

In 2013 the National Gallery of Canada arranged and held an exhibition named “*Sakahàn: International Indigenous art*”. They held this exhibition as an ongoing commitment to collect, study and exhibit Indigenous art at the institution. The exhibition had around 150 works by over 80 artists from 16 different countries. With this international aim they wanted to open up a global dialogue on Indigenous art practices.³³ The exhibition “Land, Spirit, Power: First nations at the National Gallery of Canada” (1992) can be seen as a prequel to *Sakahàn* on the

³³ McLaughlin, Bryne in Canadian Art. “Curator Q&A: How Indigenous Art Took Centre Stage in *Sakahàn*” (2013). <https://canadianart.ca/interviews/sakahàn-national-gallery-of-canada/>. (seen 03.03.23)

basis that they wanted to expand from Indigenous art from Canada to show a range of Indigenous contemporary art from all over the globe. The *Sakahàn* exhibition wanted to widen the field of Indigenous contemporary art to an international audience, and wanted silent connections to emerge between practitioners and their art globally.³⁴

Sakahàn exhibited Indigenous contemporary art, but the exhibition did not exclusively have the theme Indigenous identity as Marc Mayer (earlier director and CEO of the National Museum of Canada) states in the “Foreword” in the book that was published in relation to the exhibition. While many of the artworks addressed the subject of identity, many works frequently cite history, stories and perspectives that sited specific local context.³⁵

One of the creators, Christine Lalonde, of *Sakahàn* underlined specifically, in publication in relation to the opening of the exhibition, the space they have created for the local significance at the same time as the exhibition is international.³⁶ They seem to have considered possible reactions and critique against a global perspective on Indigenous contemporary art.

So even though the term ‘Indigenous’ is used in an international context in the title of the exhibition, the creators wrote that this had no intent to assimilate first peoples stories and experiences. However, the local significance in artworks displayed in an international exhibition isn't automatically explicit for the visitors just because curators declare it. In some aspects the international view collides with the local nuances of different Indigenous groups. I will discuss this further in subchapter 2.3.

2.2 Applying the cosmopolitan perspective to *Sakahàn*

The international perspective on Indigenous contemporary art that *Sakahàn* presents did not originate with them. Within Indigenous methodology (A method of looking through the eyes of the colonized and is designed not just to voice the voiceless but to prevent the dying - of people, culture, and ecosystems³⁷) this is called the *cosmopolitan* perspective. There are several perspectives one can have when contemplating different first people contemporary art around the world. *Sakahàn* operates within an international and comparative perspective. This can correlate with the setup of the cosmopolitan perspective, because the cosmopolitan

³⁴ Lalonde, Christine. “Introduction: at the Crossroads of Indigeneity, Globalization and Contemporary Art” in *Sakahàn*. p.16-19.

³⁵ Mayer, Marc. “Foreword” in *Sakahàn*. (ed: Greg A. Hill, Candice Hopkins, Christine Lalonde). p.9

³⁶ Lalonde, Christine. “Introduction: at the Crossroads of Indigeneity, Globalization and Contemporary Art”. p.16-19.

³⁷ Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies Research and Indigenous Peoples*. (London/New York: University of Organ Press, 1999). p.19-37.

perspective has an international approach and compares globally to situate new knowledge within Indigenous studies.³⁸ Therefore I have decided to exclaim the topic of the cosmopolitan perspective in this subchapter.

Within the cosmopolitan perspective it is acclaimed that the reason for this global aim is to bring new perspectives and activate knowledge in innovative ways.³⁹ Therefore the comparative aspect can be a tool for composing narratives when used, for example, in exhibitions, such as *Sakahàn*. The cosmopolitan perspective releases an opportunity in the exhibition space, by letting this international aim seem cohesive even though the artworks have very little to do with each other, other than all being made by different Indigenous artists from all over the world. The comparative aspect is included in the cosmopolitan perspective because it is assessed that it contributes to see “Indigenous” as an embracing term on the basis of common values between different first people communities, and maybe differentiate values that distinguish from the mainstream Western.⁴⁰ Still, the use of the word ‘Indigenous’ in comparative terms can seem problematic based on the significant local differences Indigenous groups around the world behold and the central role the locality has to their culture. To shift the use of the term ‘Indigenous’ to a global perspective can seem like comparing or ignoring distinctive local culture and traditions. The comparative aspect presence in *Sakahàn* seems to make Indigenous contemporary art accessible for an international art scene. This can have an uncertain outcome; on one hand it can seem like an adaptation to manage ‘the Indigenous’ into the international art scene only to serve the international art scene. On the other hand it can make a space for trends to occur and transform and then nourish the local culture at one's homeland. Harald Gaski claims that the comparative aspect in the cosmopolitan perspective is not to be confused with creation of a hegemony of the world's first people by the collective usage of the term ‘Indigenous’.⁴¹ However, when the term ‘Indigenous’ is used in exhibition spaces with an international perspective, it can be a thin line between assimilating Indigenous stories into one entity, or using the comparative aspect to develop further knowledge about Indigenous contemporary art.

³⁸ Krupat, Arnold. “Nationalism, transnationalism, trans-Indigenism, Cosmopolitanism: Four perspectives on native american literatures” in *Journal of Ethnic American Literature* 3 (2013). p. 5-63.

³⁹ Gaski, Harald. “Indigenous Aesthetics: Add context to context” p.221

⁴⁰ Krupat, Arnold. “Nationalism, transnationalism, trans-Indigenism, Cosmopolitanism: Four perspectives on native american literatures”. p. 5-63.

⁴¹ Gaski, Harald. “Indigenous Aesthetics: Add context to context”. p.221-223

2.3 The local in a international context

On the basis of what I have discussed, I think a reason for critique of exhibitions under the cosmopolitan perspective is the neglect of the local; the importance of awareness of first peoples local communities and its context to their identity. Local significance that communities find defining for themselves will easily be overlooked if one sees all Indigenous communities as one, and the artworks will be deterritorialized. I will argue that the cosmopolitan perspective's placement of all first people groups around the globe as one unit, within contemporary art, can perform a disservice to the entirety of Indigenous groups by micro assimilating them. The cosmopolitan perspective overlooks the arbitrariness of making an entity of Indigenous groups because it can resemble colonizers' mindset by assimilating their culture to "the other". Othering as a term originated with the historian Edward Said in his book *Orientalism*. Said describes the notion of "othering" as the invention of 'a difference' to separate a dominant culture for a supposedly inferior "other".⁴² This underpinned notion is central to avoid when cultures that aren't the main bodies are presented in art institutions and exhibitions today. To avoid othering, museum workers have to be aware of language, display, promotion etc when creating an exhibition, because othering is indoctrinated in the main body.⁴³ Museum workers can make mistakes they never intended, solely based on ignorance. An example can be seeing contemporary art displayed in a manner that resembles how the West has treated stolen artifacts as in the so-often-imperialistic curiosity cabinet from the 17th century.⁴⁴ This example also points to the complexity of presenting Indigenous art in a well thought through way that does not remind spectators of the past of exotifying "the other". So, overlooking locality can prove to be regrettable if one chooses to group Indigenous contemporary art as one in an exhibition presentation.

At the same time, another perspective within Indigenous methodology that can seem to include the importance of the local significance of first people communities is the *nationalist* perspective, often called the sovereignty perspective.⁴⁵ The nationalist perspective only looks

⁴² Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. (London: Penguin Books: 2003). p. 3-21

⁴³ Janes, Robert R. and Richard Sandell. "Introduction" in *Museum activism*. (ed. Robert R. Janes and Richard Sandall) (London and New York: Routledge, 2019). p.1-3

⁴⁴ von Schlosser, Julius. *Art and curiosity cabinets of the late Renaissance: a contribution to the history of collecting Kunst- und Wunderkammern der Spätrenaissance* (ed. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann). (The Getty Research Institute: Los Angeles, 2021).

⁴⁵ Gaski, Harald. "Indigenous Aesthetics: Add context to context" p.221

at one first people group and focuses on the common values within this group.⁴⁶ This perspective is also selective in the regard that they decide to focus on what the group has in common rather than the differences that exist based on geography, customs and language. One example is the Sámi people in northern Europe. They are today seen as a group, with little focus on the differences like language, ancestry, and geography. The nationalist perspective also emphasizes on what binds together rather than focus on what divides.⁴⁷ So perspectives that focus on the local, rather than the global, also choose to focus on some aspects rather than others. So the arguments against the cosmopolitan perspective based on the ingest of individual and local culture into a group culture can be applied to several perspectives in Indigenous methodology.

My latter argument here points to a breach in logic in a strictly theoretical sense when discussing the cosmopolitan perspective. When applying it to *Sakahàn* one has to look at the reasoning and aftermath of using a global perspective in a contemporary art exhibition. Because the cosmopolitan perspective is clearly a globalized perspective. Before the technological advantages we have today globalization was based in the commerce interests to develop international influence and start operating on a global scale, and this can resemble the Western idea of imperialism and colonialism to enrich oneself.⁴⁸ There is of course a difference between imperialism and colonialism; imperialism is an ideology about creating an empire to expand one's dominance⁴⁹, and colonialism is first and foremost depriving resources from a region where the colonists have designated themselves as rulers and the exploitation of capital benefits themselves.⁵⁰ Still, both operate exploitative relationships with the regions and people they subjugate.⁵¹ This expansion of one's own dominance is done through globalization. Globalization and colonialism/imperialism are very different things, but one, colonialism/imperialism, can not exist without the other, globalization. Because globalization is the process by which establishments develop further international influence by operating on a more international scale⁵², and this is a small part of what colonialism and imperialism execute in their undertaking. Since this globalized perspective has some

⁴⁶ Krupat, Arnold. "Nationalism, transnationalism, trans-Indigenism, Cosmopolitanism: Four perspectives on native american literatures". p. 5-63.

⁴⁷ Kovach, Margaret. *Indigenous methodologies, characteristics, conversation, and contexts*. (Toronto: University of Toronto press, 2009).

⁴⁸ Rothermund, Dietmar. *The Routledge companion to decolonization*.(Routledge: London, 2006). p.2.

⁴⁹ Britannica. "imperialism". (last updated 23.03.23) <https://www.britannica.com/topic/imperialism>

⁵⁰ Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. "Colonialism".

⁵¹ Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. "Colonialism".

⁵² National Geographic Society. "Globalization". (last updated 20.05.22) <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/globalization/>

similarities to colonialism, one can ask if a cosmopolitan perspective is working against the Indigenous contemporary art, such as in the *Sakahàn* exhibition, based on generalization of first people communities for the sake of adapting to the ongoing globalization of the world? In the cosmopolitan perspective Gaski argues for this is apparently a non-issue. Because according to Gaski the cosmopolitan perspective is also anti-imperial.⁵³ One of the goals with the cosmopolitan perspective is to set an anti-imperial focus on the ongoing globalization, and in this case the Indigenous contemporary art scene. In one way it is to keep up with the ever advancement of globalization, because if one isolates and does not exchange culture, an already threatened first people culture will maybe be less visible, and even worse - disappear.⁵⁴ It can be beneficial to not only evolve on a local level within Indigenous contemporary art, but also evolve in an international space of Indigenous contemporary art. This can work in favor of communicating Indigenous knowledge and strengthen their place in the international art scene because of its togetherness. This wish for culture exchange can be described based on the idea of *mondialité* introduced by Edouard Glissant. He was against the homogenization that he saw emerge in an increasingly globalized world. The term *mondialité* refers rather to a culture exchange, acceptance and preservation of cultural diversity. The term has later been used by curator Hans Ulrich Obrist in relation to the art scene and curating.⁵⁵ Recognition is central to move on in a globalized world without losing cultural diversity, this implies inclusion of non-western art and art by minorities in an international space, but not in a manner that will prove to be assimilating, but rather through recognition of its cultural origin.

2.4 The use of the term ‘Indigenous’ in *Sakahàn*

As mentioned earlier, ‘Indigenous’ as a term in the international art sphere suggests a perspective that looks to first people and sees a loosely defined community within the term. David Garneau observed “ It is hard to come to appropriate terms. ‘Indian’ ‘Aboriginal’, ‘Native’, these are all colonialisms originally designed to herd the diverse many into manageable one”⁵⁶ This description underlines the void the word ‘Indigenous’ filled in a contemporary art scene that has developed in postcolonial time. But has the term 'Indigenous’

⁵³ Gaski, Harald. “Indigenous Aesthetics: Add context to context”. p. 221.

⁵⁴ Garneau, David. «Can I get a witness?» p.15-20.

⁵⁵ Obrist, Hans. *Ways of curating*. (London. Allen Lane, 2014). s.15.

⁵⁶ Garneau, David. “Necessary Essentialism and Contemporary aboriginal Art,” *Essentially Indigenous?* National Museum of the American Indian (New York, 5-6 May 2011). p.14

been used by the globalized art scene to ‘herd the diverse many into manageable one’? I have already addressed “Indigenous” as a term in this essay, but I would like to elaborate on the term usage in the exhibition context of *Sakahàn*. What the term ‘Indigenous’ means in relation to contemporary art has been constructed in global times and through exhibition presentation. Exhibitions are places where this constructed identity has prospered based on the globalized art scene of today. Still, the existing vocabulary surrounding indigeneity is complicated. With a multitude of identifiers used around the world to identify as Indigenous it can rarely be any clear definition or common ground in what an Indigenous artist is or Indigenous contemporary art is or what the criteria to belong to this ‘international community’ is, and therefore ‘Indigenous’ can seem to be reduced to a buzzword for exhibition presentation. So, I will discuss possible common criterion, based on visual similarities and content in Indigenous contemporary art, with artworks from the *Sakahàn* exhibition in subchapter 2.6 and 2.7.

2.5 *Sakahàn* curatorial choices: content-based interpretation and an anti-authorial

Something *Sakahàn* does not address, and is not common to address when presenting artworks in an exhibition in general, is the theoretical view on art from the instigator's perspective. By looking at *Sakahàn*'s goals and wishes for the exhibition a clear theoretical perspective within art theory takes shape. The curators wish that the artworks will emerge a new understanding and view on Indigenous contemporary art and Indigenous issues, as stated in the “Afterword” by one of the curators Greg Hill.⁵⁷ This indirectly demands a great extent of interpretation by spectators. *Sakahàn* clearly states that they want visitors to see beyond the artworks themselves. See meaning, commentary and tie silent connections between the works on display as it is mentioned by Mayer (former CEO of The National Gallery of Canada) in the “Foreword” of the book published in relation to the exhibition.⁵⁸ The exhibition operates within content-based interpretation if we base it off these mentioned wishes from the creators of *Sakahàn*. To investigate and understand the preconceived wishes for *Sakahàn* I will rely on the philosopher Jacques Rancière.

In *Politics and Aesthetics* Rancière points out that during the mid 20th century new identities began to emerge to advocate for marginalized groups in society. Rancière sees this emerge through the change of perception, not applicable party politics or government legalization,

⁵⁷ Hill, Greg. “Afterword” in *Sakahàn* (ed: Greg A. Hill, Candice Hopkins, Christine Lalonde). (National Gallery of Canada: Ottawa, 2013). p.136.

⁵⁸ Mayer, Marc. “Foreword”. p.16-19

but discreet transformative experiences of perception, something one can get through art. Rancière proclaimed that critical art is an art that aims to produce a new perception of the world, and therefore create a commitment to this transformation.⁵⁹ This can resemble the core intention of *Sakahàn*; produce a new perception on what Indigenous art can be by presenting it in an international context, with art that often has great political content, that the spectator has to interpret and see the silent connections between.

Rancière sees the correlation between aesthetics and knowledge as not only a cognitive question, but a social and political one. This correlation is an ever-lasting theme throughout Rancière *oeuvre*. In *The Emancipated Spectator* he considers how aesthetics might create the conditions for emancipation from state power by redistribution of sense.⁶⁰ This redistribution starts with aesthetics as a means by which people learn how to make sense.⁶¹ To see these connections for oneself can give the viewer an opportunity to learn how to emancipate themselves from regimes of oppression, like in the case of *Sakahàn* the colonized western perspective, because being confronted with one's own sense-making happens when opposition between viewing and acting is challenged altogether - then emancipation begins.⁶²

At the same time, there are arguments against exhibitions, such as *Sakahàn*, that are non-direct with their intent and meaning in their curatorial choices. In "Taking a position" Lynn Wray writes how the anti-authorialism standard in exhibition has taken over the exhibition space. By this she means that spectators are given the impression that museums and exhibitions are objective.⁶³ *Sakahàn* can fit in this description of an anti-authorial exhibition space like Wray describes. Because even though goals and intention is declared in a manner that would seem like they had a clear point and perspective with the exhibition, it doesn't show through curating. An example can be seen in Maika'i Tubbe's supplement wall text to the work *A life of its own* (appx.1,fig.1) that it is about this specific work, not what it contextualizes in relation to other works or the exhibition. This shows why *Sakahàn* is anti-authorial; not being political through the curatorial, but displaying contemporary artworks that are laced with political meaning. When asked by Bryne McLaughlin in an interview what the

⁵⁹ Rancière, Jacques. "Distribution of the sensible: politics and Aesthetics" in *The Politics of Aesthetics*. (Continuum: London, 2007). p.13-19.

⁶⁰ Rancière, Jacques. *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso Books, 2009). p.10-134.

⁶¹ Rancière, Jacques. *The Emancipated Spectator*. p.10-134.

⁶² Applegate, Matt. "The Emancipatory Power of Critical Art". (New York: Binghamton University, 2012) p. 209-212. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.uio.no/10.1080/08854300.2012.714566>

⁶³ Wray, Lynn. "Taking a position" in *Museum Activism* (ed. Robert R. Janes and Richard Sandall) (London, New York: Routledge, 2019). p.318.

curatorial team do to rein the wide-ranging practices and approaches to art in the exhibition to make it cohesive, *Sakahàn* - curator Candice Hopkins answered:

We didn't want to come to this exhibition with preconceptions, or have a theme from the outset and then slot artists in, so we really tried to be as expansive as we could. In fact, this show is a very small subset of all of the research and tangents or threads that we could have taken with what we wanted to do. (...) ⁶⁴

This style of curating is re-venant in Hopkins work. She has stated that she sees curating itself as a "space of listening". ⁶⁵ This can indicate that Hopkins doesn't approach the art that is presented in the *Sakahàn* exhibition with theories of performativity. This means that she focuses on what something (such as an artwork) is, and not looks into what it does. ⁶⁶ Still, the "space of listening" declaration does not omit the exhibition from critique from the likes of Wray. Because Wray describes anti-authorialism in curating as a often counterproductive way to enhance the agency of the spectators. ⁶⁷ To explain by employing Roland Barthes proclaimed "the birth of the reader is the death of the author" ⁶⁸ the anti-authorial approaches place the responsibility for making meaning firmly on the viewer-as reader. There's a danger that any failure to construct meaning, to have an emotional, political or critical response to what one is presented - one's emancipation, could be misrecognized by spectators as the result of their own limitations. ⁶⁹ With guidance through the curatorial it will give a greater possibility, according to Wray, to conclude your own views and opinions. ⁷⁰ An anti-authorial curated exhibition, a so-called objective exhibition in its curatorial choices, like *Sakahàn*, can prevent discussion and subvert the idea that there is any alternative to what the spectator is presented, and may even come across as senseless when it isn't cohesiveness between content and presentation. Almost like an empty political gesture.

The choices by curating an exhibition in an anti-authorial way can conclude to working against the artworks by depriving its meanings by the depoliticization of them. When I employed Rancière arguments on what the creators of *Sakahàn* declared intent and goals for

⁶⁴ McLaughlin, Bryne. "Curator Q&A: How Indigenous Art Took Centre Stage in *Sakahàn*".

⁶⁵ Durón, Maximiliano. "The Sound of Listening: Candice Hopkins's Curating Lets Indigenous Artists Do the Talking" in *ARTnews* (2019). seen 24.04.23.
<https://www.artnews.com/artnews/news/candice-hopkins-12849/>

⁶⁶ Grini, Monica. "Contemporary sami art in the making of sami art history" in *sami Art and Aesthetics*. (Danmark: Aarhus University Press, 2017). p.298

⁶⁷ Wray, Lynn. "Taking a position" p. 315-320

⁶⁸ Barthes, Roland. "the death of the author" in *Image/music/text*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977). p.142-147

⁶⁹ Wray, Lynn. "Taking a position".p.318-319.

⁷⁰ Wray, Lynn. "Taking a position".p. 315-320

the exhibition I resonated that they indirectly expect content-based interpretation from spectators. At the same time, when applying Wray points about the anti-authorial curatorial format to *Sakahàn*s curatorial choices this doesn't conform with the declared intentions for the exhibition. So, the critic is based on the belief that it deprives people from self-reflection; the presented 'objectivity' prevents the audience from making up their own thoughts.⁷¹ The dread of being political in exhibition-making, within exhibitions that are clearly political, can be seen as omitting the postcolonial world we live in, by not addressing what actually can be a common denominator for the world's Indigenous people - colonization (I will elaborate on this in subchapter 2.7). By not focusing on this common denominator, and looking at what is most beneficial to the people that have lived under colonial oppression, can read like the focus is on that the West, or in this case the western art institution, "has closed that chapter" for themselves. This dismisses a demographic that historically has been overlooked and experienced several injustices, solely based on that the main body is jaded with the subject, even though they are not the ones living on the repercussions of colonial oppression. The perspective of Wray's "Taking a Position" on *Sakahàn* forces the emergent question regarding the (mostly) western perspectives within art institutions and the international art scene when discussing the avoidance of subjects such as colonialism: "How can emancipation of sense-making take place in an institution that is built upon and has facilitated the opposite mindset of the art they are showcasing?". The roots in a colonizers mindset goes deep, and I will elaborate on this in subchapter 3.3 and 3.4.

2.6 Common denominators in aesthetic

As mentioned earlier in this essay, *Sakahàn* wanted silent connections to emerge between exhibition practitioners globally.⁷² This implies that Indigenous contemporary art around the world can have similar content and somewhat similar visual characteristics. So in this subchapter I will look for these similarities in the visual presentation of contemporary artworks with examples from *Sakahàn*. I would also like to point out that this is a part of the comparative aspect within the cosmopolitan perspective, and the reasoning behind comparativism in the cosmopolitan perspective is the belief it contributes to see "Indigenous" as an embracing term on the basis of common values between different first people communities, and possibly differentiate them from the mainstream Western.⁷³ At the

⁷¹ Wray, Lynn. "Taking a position". p. 316-317

⁷² Hill, Greg. "Afterword: Looking back to *Sakahàn*". p.136.

⁷³ Gaski, Harald. "Indigenous Aesthetics: Add context to context". p.221

same time, with the latter as an aim, I have to point out that one of the declared goals of *Sakahàn* was to create an exhibition that would show great aesthetic diversity.⁷⁴ So the goal of the exhibition wasn't to make one silent-connection-soup of artworks, but to show that Indigenous artists have asserted their artistic sovereignty and developed their expressions that maintains links to their heritage while also looking ahead to an innovative and new aesthetic.⁷⁵

It was some artworks at *Sakahàn* by the Greenlandic artist Pia Arke. One of these was a video work where she has a fit of “arctic hysteria” (appx.1 fig.2). This is a confrontational piece solely based in the raw sensation of her anger and despair one can feel through the screen. Arke herself developed the notion of ethno-aesthetic during her lifetime. It is described by Arke as an investigation into colonization of Greenland through contemporary art and “ that it refers to all of us non-Europeans, all positions, in some respect, beyond the borders of the West. Then, ethno-aesthetics must be the expression what we are not, of us not being westerners. In other words, ethno-aesthetics is a description of the west seen from the outside, from the point of view of the ‘other’, from point of view such as mine.”⁷⁶ In a way this ethno-aesthetic carries all of her and her feelings during her “arctic hysteria” and she presents the aggravation ‘the other’ feel through ethno-aesthetics. Ethno-aesthetics can thus be a term that covers a process of objectifying the once powerful objectifying Western gaze upon the ‘other’.⁷⁷

There were also several artworks at *Sakahàn* that displayed cosmototemic scenes, regardless of the Indigenous artist's local belonging. Cosmototemic is a combination of the word ‘cosmo’ that means ‘world’, and the word ‘totemic’ that points to natural and spiritual images of animals and/or birds, in addition it can have traces of shamnic depictions.⁷⁸ In *Sakahàn* one can see this common aesthetic in the Gond artist Suresh Kumar Dhurvs (b.1973) work *Liti Aur Chte (bird and the rat)* (2011) (appx.1 fig.3) and in the collaboration between the Anishinaabe artist Larissa Healey (b.1972) and the Hinda artist Corey Bulpitt (b.1978) in the

⁷⁴ Hill, Greg. “Afterword: Looking back to *Sakahàn*” in *Sakahàn* (ed. Greg A. Hill, Candice Hopkins, Christine Lalonde). (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2013). p.136.

⁷⁵ Hill, Greg. “Afterword: Looking back to *Sakahàn*”. p.137

⁷⁶ Arke, Pia. “Ethno-Aesthetics”, in *Tupilakosaurus; An incomplete (abal) survey of Pia Arkes Artistic work and research* (Copenhagen: Kuratorisk Aktion, 2012) p.335.

⁷⁷ Jørgensen, Ulla Angkjær. “Performing the Forgotten: Body, territory, and authenticity” in *sámi Art and Aesthetics*. (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2017). p.251

⁷⁸ Vizenor, Gerald. “Native Cosmototemic art” in *Sakahàn* (ed. Greg A. Hill, et al.). (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2013). p.42-52

work *Salmon cycle - the spirit within* (2013) (appx.1 fig.4). From prehistoric time we can see cave paintings, like the *Chauvet Cave* and *Lascaux*, that is cosmototemic in its expression.⁷⁹ The link between this prehistoric unfolding of creativity and Indigenous contemporary art can be seen in relation to *survivance*- a borrowed term from Native American studies and the scholar Gerald Vizenor. He explains that "Survivance is an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories (...)"⁸⁰ and that it "(...) defines a resistance to sentiments of tragedy and the legacy of victimry".⁸¹

There are other denominators in visuality in Indigenous contemporary art around the world, but most aren't exclusively common within Indigenous aesthetics. E.g. like situating the body like the Anishinaabe artist Rebecca Belmore (b.1960) and her contribution to *Sakahàn* was *Fringe* (2008) (appx.1 fig.5) and the Ladino artist Regina Jose Galindo (b.1974) work *Alud* (2011) (appx.1 fig.6). Both have the Indigenous female body in the center, a politicized body, but bodily horror in art is widely spread through space and time, within art of all mediums, that hold an artistic power that often reflects social political shifts.⁸² So, I would like to note that to find common denominators within aesthetics can be difficult because it is a quest for an artistic movement that may not be possible to determine. In a contemporary aspect it can prove to be especially difficult because one is determining something that often is established through a historical lens. Indigenous contemporary art is also, as all art, difficult to be seen as one group based on aesthetics. Because even though artworks are made within roughly the same time, they unfold very differently. To look for similarities based on a possibility of international Indigenous contemporary art can prove to be an unattainable task. In comparison it would be difficult to look for similarities in aesthetics in all contemporary art made by e.g. all non-indigenous people.

2.7 Common denominators in content

The togetherness within the term 'Indigenous' needs some distinguished frames to uphold the notion that international Indigenous contemporary art could be considered as a guiding

⁷⁹ David S. Whitley, *cave paintings and the human spirit: the origin of creativity and belief*. (Amherst, NY: prometheus Books, 2009).

⁸⁰ Vizenor, Gerald. *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (Lincoln: Nebraska, 1999).

⁸¹ Vizenor, Gerald. "Native Cosmototemic art". p.42

⁸² Davis, Davey. "The Future Of Body Horror: Can Our Art Keep Up With Our suffering?" in *The Rumpus* (2017). read 18.04.23 from <https://therumpus.net/2017/01/26/the-future-of-body-horror-can-our-art-keep-up-with-our-suffering/>

concept in exhibitions. So in this subchapter I will focus on possible common content within Indigenous contemporary art and present it with examples from *Sakahàn*.

In *God is Red* the Lakota philosopher Vine Deloria Jr. argues one of the most important existing differences between Indigenous people of the world and the West revolves around the central importance of land.⁸³ The notion of land is also a recurring theme in several Indigenous contemporary artworks, or to be more specific land as a reciprocal relationship for the Indigenous people of a specific territory.⁸⁴ Glen Sean Coulthard used the term ‘grounded normativity’ for this perspective on land; a perspective that involves not to own land or earn from it, but to be a part of it and prosper with it. The West has historically seen land as objects to be owned and not a source for this place-based knowledge. This is a contrast between Indigenous groups and the Western notion of land. The West has also subjected Indigenous people to these ‘rationalizations’ of the world, and this can threaten to erase this sense of place for several Indigenous groups around the world.⁸⁵ Some examples of land as a common denominator from the *Sakahàn* exhibition is Jeffery Gibsons, a Choctaw and Cherokee artist, artwork *This Place I Know* (2013). This work explores the notion of place and land and that idea of seeing land as an extension of one's own being (appx.1 fig.7) by usage of traditional material at the same time as using an abstract expression. *Legende III* (1999) and *Legende V* (1999) (appx. fig.8 and fig.9) by the Greenlandic artist Pia Arke shows pictures of faces on maps, something that can express the Coulthards ‘grounded normativity’- give a face to the land; humanize the land.

There are several other common themes within Indigenous contemporary art around the globe, like identity and belonging, but these are themes that are also common within non-Indigenous artists. Still, these two themes are crucial, but they can often be connected to nationhood and territory as a consequence of the different colonizing politics around the world.⁸⁶ On that note, another common denominator is colonization. *Terra nullius*, the notion that settlers arrived in a territory that belonged to nobody⁸⁷, has hunted Indigenous peoples for centuries. It is impossible to understand the contemporary circumstances of Indigenous people in separation from the history of *terra nullius* that has resulted in what we today know

⁸³ Coulthard, Glen Sean. *Red skin, White mask*. p.60.

⁸⁴ Coulthard, Glen Sean. *Red skin, White mask*. p.62

⁸⁵ Coulthard, Glen Sean. *Red skin, White mask*. p.60-62

⁸⁶ Angkjær Jørgensen, Ulla “Performing the unforgotten”. p. 249.

⁸⁷ Finbog, Liisa-Ravna. “The story of Terra Nullius. Variations on the Land(s) of Saepmie that Nobody Owned” in *Indigenous art, knowledge and sovereignty* (ed. Liisa-Ravna Finbog, Katya Garcia-Anton, Beaska Niillas). (Valiz: OCA, 2022). p.4-11.

as colonialism. The global force of debates of all kinds in relation to Indigenous groups are responding to colonialism.⁸⁸ Colonialism is a system of rule, exploitation and control that appropriates Indigenous land and people.⁸⁹ Land and identity are both appropriated by colonizers based on the experience of being declared as something you don't define yourself as by the colonial aggressor and being deprived of the belonging one feels to a specific place. An example of an artwork from *Sakahàn* that can express this is the Sámi artist Marja Helanders (b.1965) photograph *Kärsämäki* (2010)(appx.1 fig.10) that is a part of a series called 'Darkness'. The photograph shows a darkened landscape of northern Finland with a lonesome gas station brightening the place with artificial lighting. The series presents several landscape pictures with objects that appropriate the land it is on. The gas station seems odd and insidious in the landscape, this can point out the colonizers presence and control over the land of the first people of this territory. So, Helander indirectly questions the state's place on this land.

The activism many artworks in *Sakahàn* wish to display has to be mentioned. Some want to raise their voice against their oppressor, often the state, that dominates their land, like Australian artist Vernon Ah Kee presented an installation that included shotgun-blasted surfboards (one of them wrapped in barbed wire) set to a throbbing heavy-metal video soundtrack (appx.1 fig.11 and appx.2 fig.8) and the video by Greenlander artist Pia Arke where the naked artist goes around her studio in a fit of "arctic hysteria" (appx.1 fig.1). All deliver hard-hitting takes on the traumas of colonial legacy. These artistic representations advance an implicit but political claim to land and self-determination. Indigenous contemporary art can thus be political in the most profound way. Indigenous can challenge more than legal and political norms, it also offers spectators a visual vocabulary that fundamentally reorient the prevailing political narrative.⁹⁰

I discussed in subchapter 2.5 that the creators of *Sakahàn* did not thematize the exhibition and rather let the visitor 'listen' to the works. If spectators were able to see connections between the international Indigenous contemporary art that was displayed I think they could find several continual themes, but the one continuing common denominator in content for Indigenous contemporary art today is colonialism. Because if it is one thing all Indigenous

⁸⁸ Samson, Colin, Carlos Gigoux. *Indigenous peoples and colonialism, a global perspective*. p.38.

⁸⁹ Hall, S. "When was the post-colonial? Thinking at the Limit" in I. Chambers and L. Curtis (eds.), *The post-colonial question: Common skies, Divided horizons*. (Routledge: London 1996). p.254.

⁹⁰ Bleiker, Roland and Sally Butler. "Radical dreaming: indigenous art and cultural diplomacy" in *international political sociology* (University of Queensland, 2016). p.57

groups have in common around the world is the colonization, often from the West, that has marked their history and is still affecting them today.

2.8 Strategic essentialism as a tool for visibility

In hindsight Greg Hill, one of the curators of *Sakahàn*, discusses the choices of a group exhibition with Indigenous artists. He expressed that he had concerns that this was an outmoded exercise of cultural essentialism and exclusion based on race. But with the benefit of hindsight, he expresses that it appears to be a non-issue.⁹¹ He refers to an essay by scholar Jolene Rickard where she points out that it was in fact essentialism at play in the exhibition *Sakahàn*.⁹² Rickard cited Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's idea of "strategic essentialism". This refers to "the ways in which subordinate or marginalized social groups may temporarily put aside local difference in order to forge a sense of collective identity through which they band together in political movements".⁹³ Of course, two artists will never have the same experience of colonialism or their Indigenous identity, and therefore not the same expression in their art. Still, the idea of strategic essentialism is to put differences aside to create a stronger voice, as it is done within international Indigenous contemporary art. This written contribution by Rickard on *Sakahàn* can also be seen in relation to Medak-Saltzman's notion to not see 'Indigenous' as a term, but a concept. To just look at 'Indigenous' as a term reduces it to a jargon and removes it from its vital context. By just being seen as a term it is limited in intellectual- and scholarly understanding of the "Indigenous". A dimension is lost on the basis of a narrow view on how Indigenous issues, experiences and histories can be expressed,⁹⁴ solely to fit it into a clear term, a definition, and not a concept.

After discussing possible denominators within aesthetics and content I would say it is difficult to assess if it is common aesthetics within Indigenous contemporary art around the world, but it is some common content that is rooted in land and colonization trauma. The notion of strategic essentialism in this case is also at play to recognize that what distinguish Indigenous groups (aesthetic, locality etc.) around the world from each other can be put aside to create a new identity, additional to the local identity, that will unify and make Indigenous voices become louder globally.

⁹¹ Hill, Greg. "Afterword: Looking back to *Sakahàn*". p.138.

⁹² Rickard, Jolene. "The emergence of Global Indigenous art" in *Sakahàn* (Greg A. Hill, Candice Hopkins, Christine Lalonde (ed.)). (National Gallery of Canada: Ottawa, 2013). p.53-59.

⁹³ Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. In other words: Essays in cultural politics. (New York: Methuen, 1987). p.205.

⁹⁴ Samson, Colin, Carlos Gigoux. *Indigenous peoples and colonialism, a global perspective*. p.14.

Chapter 3 - Possible structural perspectives on Indigenous contemporary art

In this chapter I will look at different perspectives that can give further insight into whether the very idea of Indigenous contemporary art as a guiding concept for an exhibition, and whether it is something that we can meaningfully refer to and talk about in the context of the global art scene. To look into if Indigenous contemporary art can be an international concept I will explore if deterritorialization of Indigenous contemporary art can be neglect of history and the local in an increasingly globalized world (here I will use some exhibition examples), or if this dispersion of Indigenous contemporary art can be seen as a diaspora. I will compare international Indigenous contemporary art with the African diaspora in the US, to see if international Indigenous contemporary art might have similarities to a diasporic identity. To get further insight about this essay's topic I will assess if exhibitions that present Indigenous contemporary art as an international concept depend on the view and understanding of our contemporary time as a globalized or postcolonial. After those two different propositions I will pick up the question that emerged in 2.5 when applying Wray's pointers towards Indigenous contemporary art by looking at a historical backdrop of the global art scene and art institutions of today. So, in subchapter 3.3 I will discuss the connections between colonialism and art exhibitions to understand further how we perceive exhibitions that present Indigenous contemporary art. I will look at how colonialism correlates to modernity and point out how modernity has molded art institutions to how they are today. In subchapter 3.4 I will ask whether Indigenous contemporary art should abstain from being associated with institutions that are rooted in colonialism? To answer this question I have looked to the 'Indigenous paradigm', as described by Rauna Koukkanen. Towards the end I will bring up decolonization of the exhibition space and art institutions by applying decoloniality pointers on exhibition examples.

3.1 Proposing a diaspora - the dispersion of Indigenous contemporary art

In this subchapter I will explore if international Indigenous contemporary art might have similarities to a diasporic identity. I am looking into this because when Indigenous contemporary art is placed in an international context it can be looked upon as diasporic based on that it has been taken out of the environment, the locality, that so clearly defines the art. An example can be the case of the *Sakahàn* exhibition when art that is closely related to its locality, but it is presented in an international setting. I will look into the parallels of international Indigenous contemporary art and the cultural identity within the African

diaspora in the US. First, I have to clarify that a diaspora can be described as a dispersion of a people from their original homeland.⁹⁵ The African diaspora in the US emerged through that forcefully displacement of people from all over the continent of Africa to the US.⁹⁶ Out of this forced locality between people that were new to each other, and had different cultural backgrounds, became a new diverse and rich culture that today can be described as a African diaspora.⁹⁷ This diaspora is broad, but I will focus on how this diaspora manifests in visual art. There are of course several groups around the world that have a common cultural identity regardless of the origin of a specific common land, e.g Jewish culture, but in this subchapter I will compare the African diaspora with international Indigenous contemporary art. The goal by doing this is to get better insight to if an international Indigenous contemporary art can be seen as a concept to be used/referenced in exhibition presentation.

Both international Indigenous contemporary art and the African diaspora share a number of key features. Both cultural identities are constructed in the absence from their original homeland. Also, in the 1990s Indigenous movements became a central point of resistance to the forces of cultural homogenization- this can refer to the parallel emergence of the black diasporic identity.⁹⁸ S. Hall identified this parallel, in this case between international Indigenous contemporary art and the African diaspora, based on the notion that cultural identity is a dynamic process of creation based ‘not (on) the rediscovery but the production of identity. Not an identity grounded in the archeology, but in the re-telling of the past’.⁹⁹ This notion of cultural ‘identity production’ can be linked to diasporic identities. Through the lens of “production of identity”, as Hall describes it, I will look into the African diaspora and see if it can draw similarities to the concept of international Indigenous contemporary art. Because since the 1960s Indigenous people have been retelling their own stories in public and private.¹⁰⁰ This wording is similar to the concept of ‘Radical Dreaming’ within Indigenous art. ‘Radical Dreaming’ implies telling or retelling stories of past, present or future within

⁹⁵ Brubaker, Rogers. “The ‘diaspora’ diaspora” in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28,1. (Taylor & Francis Group, 2005). p.1-19

⁹⁶ Carter, Donald Martin. *Navigating the African diaspora : the anthropology of invisibility*. (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, cop.2010). p.143-171.

⁹⁷ Carter, Donald Martin. *Navigating the African diaspora : the anthropology of invisibility*. p.1-35.

⁹⁸ Samson, Colin and Carlos Gigoux. *Indigenous peoples and colonialism, a global perspective*. p.179

⁹⁹ Hall, S. “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (ed. J. Rutherford). (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990). p.224.

¹⁰⁰ Samson, Colin and Carlos Gigoux. *Indigenous peoples and colonialism, a global perspective*. p.179.

Indigenous art practices.¹⁰¹ This indicates a long tradition for this way of expressing oneself within the arts in Indigenous cultures. This retelling, or taking back one's own story is a shared key feature between international Indigenous contemporary art and the African diaspora. There are terms within both these entities that have the common feature of imagining one's own futures and telling one's own stories. A somewhat equivalent to 'Radical Dreaming' within Indigenous art can be the artistic expression of afrofuturism within the African diaspora. The term afrofuturism refers to approaches to the intersections of race, culture, and technology within the arts. This makes the arts a constant source of inspiration and discussion for those interested in abstract narratives within black culture.¹⁰² An example of afrofuturism as an creative exploration in contemporary visual art and contemporary curating is the exhibition *Before Yesterday We Could Fly: An Afrofuturist Period Room* at the Metropolitan Museum in New York.¹⁰³ The exhibition draws inspiration from classical period rooms that are often presented in museums that are supposed to recreate historically accurate rooms from a specific time. The difference in the case of this period room is that it is not a replica of an accurate historic time period. As mentioned the exhibition is in the spirit of afrofuturism, but it is also inspired by Seneca Village that was a African-American community from the 1820s to the 1850s before they demolished it in 1857 to make space for Central Park in New York City.¹⁰⁴ So this period room is a fabrication of what a structure within Seneca Village could have been today (appx.2 fig.1). Thus they are envisioning and presenting what could have been, by having historical elements from Seneca Village placed with contemporary art made by African-American artists - they are retelling a story about the past and the present where African Americans had more decision power over their own story.

The concept of afrofuturism can also be similar to the concept of Indigenous futurism, a term that was coined by scholar Grace Dillion. Her proposal is that Indigenous futurism has emerged as a common movement globally between Indigenous people. The term Indigenous futurism is used to describe a form of storytelling and creating work where Indigenous

¹⁰¹ Bleiker, Roland and Sally Butler. "Radical dreaming: indigenous art and cultural diplomacy". p.57-58.

¹⁰² Rambsy, Kenton. "Afrofuturism" in St. James Encyclopedia of Hip Hop Culture. (Gale Literature Resource Center/Gale eBooks: 2018), p.8-11.

¹⁰³ The Met, "Before Yesterday We Could Fly: An Afrofuturist Period Room Virtual Opening". <https://www.metmuseum.org/perspectives/videos/2021/11/afrofuturism-virtual-tour> (last seen 28.02.23)

¹⁰⁴ Encyclopedia of African American Society (ed. Gerald D. Jaynes). "Seneca Village". <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412952507>

peoples use speculative fiction to challenge colonialism and envision Indigenous futures.¹⁰⁵ Here it is important to mention that although speculative fiction is storytelling of the future it is different from the genre of sci-fi. Speculative fiction is focused on sociological speculation rather than on future technological advancement.¹⁰⁶ Another key feature that is similar is afrofuturism and Indigenous futurism is that both are examples of marginalized groups that have used this artistic expression to take control over what often has been determined for them by the main body, that often has been an oppressor. So, The parallels between afrofuturism and Indigenous futurism is the visualization of the future and retelling of own stories.

Hannah Donnelly wrote in the essay “Indigenous Futures and Sovereign Romanticisms”:

“Indigenous futurism can be off country, on country and of country, and in a settler colonial context, the historical and continuing displacement and disconnection within our own communities is still relational to country. Futurism can prioritize rebuilding relationships that have been eroded by colonialism.”¹⁰⁷

This underlines the wish to rebuild something lost through storytelling, and this is something that can manifest in visual art. This quote also brings up something that gets recurring several times in this essay; colonialism. It underlines that colonialism is a part of Indigenous people history and they want to claim their land that forcefully has been governed by their oppressor. So in a sense the experience of colonialism is that it has taken their land from them, not necessarily moved them from it physically, but alienated them from it, and this can be experienced for Indigenous groups diasporic. An example where a Indigenous group can have experienced this disporation from their land is the Sámi people in northern Sweden in the city of Kiruna. Here, mining extraction has taken over the area and the traditional livelihoods have been made impossible for the Sámi people of this region.¹⁰⁸ This can show that diasporas can relate to dispossession in many ways, not just forced relocation.

¹⁰⁵ Dillion, Grace. “Imagining indigenous futurism” in *Walking the Clouds: an anthology of indigenous science fiction* (ed. Grace Dillon). (Tucson, AZ: university of Arizona Press, 2012). p.1-14

¹⁰⁶ Donnelly, Hannah. “Indigenous futures and sovereign romanticisms” in *Sovereign Words*. (Amsterdam/Valiz: OCA Norway, 2018). p.261

¹⁰⁷ Donnelly, Hannah. “Indigenous futures and sovereign romanticisms” . p.267

¹⁰⁸ Ween, Gro B. “Refleksjoner om dekolonisering: Intervju med Tom Svensson” i *Norsk antropologisk tidsskrift*. Vol.22, Utg.1. Pp. 49–60. Published 30.05.2011 at <https://doi.org/10.18261/ISSN1504-2898-2011-01-04>

The distinctive similarity I would like to point out with the African diaspora and international Indigenous contemporary art is that both can be placed in Hall's "production of identity" phrase. Both have been alienated in different ways from their origin, if it is from physical land or cultural practices on their land. Also, both have created a space within visual art that is based on retelling stories of past, present or future from their own perspectives, that is afrofuturism and Indigenous futurism.

The identity of African Americans within visual art, as afrofuturism can represent, is a created identity just as a concept of international Indigenous contemporary art would be. Both are based on different cultures emerging together and creating a new identity. In many ways the example *Before yesterday we could fly* is curating identity that has been lost and retelling an imagined story of the present from an afrofuturistic perspective. It can seem like the earlier mentioned exhibition *Sakahàn* wanted to create something similar- a common identity for Indigenous groups. However, the difference between *Sakahàn* and *Before yesterday we could fly* is the latter exhibition is based on a cultural diaspora that emerged through physical relocation. The physical relocation is a key difference between an international Indigenous contemporary art and the African diaspora in the US. Even though there are several similarities through "production of identity" and other key features the African Americans were physically moved from their homeland and to a new world and were grossly exploited in this new environment, and therefore the African diaspora in the US emerged. While Indigenous groups in the world have been exploited to, they have never been physically placed together. On a local level many Indigenous groups have been alienated from their land or physically moved, but this is exactly my point - on a local level. Indigenous groups around the world have common issues and struggles, but they have never shared the exact same locality and therefore do not share the same stories.

At the same time, forging diasporas has been done before. By this I mean that diasporic cultures join in an togetherness based on similarities and common struggles. Afro-Cubans and African Americans reached across cultural and linguistic differences to develop cultural exchanges and construct political solidarity¹⁰⁹ - similar to strategic essentialism. These interactions were based on the idea that they all belonged to a "colored race", rooted in a shared history of enslavement, and that they both are in everlasting negotiations, through

¹⁰⁹ Gurdy, Frank Andre. "Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow". (USA: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010). p.2-4

intertwined processes about social and political rights, with the US.¹¹⁰ So in a way they forged diasporas to mobilize against the US. To reference back to Dillion's notion; this is what Indigenous futurism does as well. Because she saw Indigenous futurism as a common movement globally.¹¹¹ This statement can match the forge of different Indigenous identities to mobilize against colonialism internationally. I have already mentioned that a diaspora can also relate to dispossession of land, not just forced relocation. So when dispossession of land is common for Indigenous groups locally they can mobilize against colonialism. In this way one can sustain the notion that the unity of Indigenous groups, through contemporary art all over the globe, can be presented in an exhibition together, through international mobilization.

Still, there are some that oppose the understanding of the term diaspora as an idiom and something to be claimed. Rogers Brubaker insinuates in his essay "The 'diaspora' diaspora" that the use of the term 'diaspora' has escalated since the 1990s, and through this the term's meaning has been stretched in various directions. Brubaker assesses claims made by theorists regarding diaspora about a radical shift in perspective in the social world that treat the term 'diaspora' as an idiom, stance and claim rather than a bounded entity.¹¹² Brubaker is not alone in the critique of the frequent usage of the term 'diaspora'. In 1996 the editor of the journal *Diaspora*, a central influence for the proliferation of academic diaspora discussion, noted in the journal that the term 'diaspora' "is in danger of becoming a promiscuously capacious category".¹¹³ This skepticism towards the use of the term, within the field itself, is important to note. So, international Indigenous contemporary art can be difficult to categorize as a diaspora based on this skepticism. Anyhow, by perceiving international Indigenous contemporary art as a diaspora one can expand the knowledge of what this possible concept can withhold and how it can be presented in context of exhibitions. Because it has some similarities to other artistic expressions that originated from a diaspora such as visualization of the future, retelling the past and present, international mobilization and the alienation from one's origin land.

¹¹⁰ Guridy, Frank Andre. "Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow". p.2-4

¹¹¹ Dillion, Grace. "Imagining indigenous futurism". p.1-14

¹¹² Brubaker, Rogers "The 'diaspora' diaspora". *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 28, no.1.(2005). p.1-19

¹¹³ Tololyan, Khachig. 'Rethinking diaspora(s): stateless power in the transnational moment' in *Diaspora*, vol. 5, no. 1, (1996) p. 3 and 36

3.2 A globalized or postcolonial world?

In the same way I have discussed if international Indigenous contemporary art can be seen as diasporic I will now look into if it can be deterritorialized in exhibition setting when presented in an togetherness regardless of local differences.

An exhibition that got critique regarding herding Indigenous artists into the international art scene, through accidental deterritorialization, was *Magiciens de la terra*.¹¹⁴ *Magiciens de la terra* opened in 1989 at the Center Georges Pompidou & Grand Halle de la Villette in Paris, and is a well known exhibition both accredited and critiqued.¹¹⁵ The exhibition presented artworks from all over the world, but foremost the goal was to display artists from the West beside artists from outside of the mainstream art scene, this included several Indigenous artists. One example is the work *Yam Dreaming* by aboriginal-australian artists, Paddy Japaljarri Sims, Paddy Japaljarri Stewart, Neville Japangardi Poulson, Francis Jupurrurla Kelly, Paddy Jupurrurla Nelson, Franck Bronson Jakamarra Nelson, Towser Jakamarra Walker, in relation to *Red Earth Circle* by Richard Long (appx.2 fig.7).¹¹⁶ The critique on this exhibition is based on the ahistorical approach to the presented art.¹¹⁷ It is naive because it wanted to celebrate the “new” and globalized world, but it neglected the fact that it is a postcolonial world for many of the participants of the exhibition. In this way one can say they tried to avoid politics, but the surrounding world politicized the exhibition for them. Earlier museum history can indicate that museums were looked at as autonomous, but with today's museums reports, that contains goals, demographic audience, aim for diversity, social responsibility etc, reflect that art institutions are no longer denoted autonomous.¹¹⁸ Whereas, the already mentioned exhibition *Sakahàn* needs to be accredited for the transparency of its positioning. The clear constructed idea of an international Indigenous contemporary art seen in a togetherness was deliberately and declared by curators.¹¹⁹ At the same time, in *Sakahàn* they propose the existence of international Indigenous contemporary art, by placing them together with no clear theme, as discussed in 2.5 when applying Wray. The disadvantage is the use of strategic essentialism without sustaining a common theme within Indigenous

¹¹⁴ Altshuler. *Exhibitions that made art history: Vol 2: biennials and beyond: 1962-2002*. (London: Phaidon, 2013) p.283-294

¹¹⁵ Altshuler. *Exhibitions that made art history: Vol 2: biennials and beyond: 1962-2002*. p.283-294

¹¹⁶ Altshuler. *Exhibitions that made art history: Vol 2: biennials and beyond: 1962-2002*. p.283-294

¹¹⁷ Meijers, Debora J. “The museum and the ‘ahistorical exhibition’”. Thinking about exhibitions (ed. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, Sandy Nairne). (London/New York: Routledge, 1996) p.15-15.

¹¹⁸ Eriksen, Anne. *Museum, En Kulturhistorie*. (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 2009). p.11-23.

¹¹⁹ McLaughlin, Bryne. “Curator Q&A: How Indigenous Art Took Centre Stage in Sakahàn”.

context that justify the use of strategic essentialism. There is no reason to present Indigenous contemporary art together if one has nothing to say about what actually is their common denominator- e.g land or colonialism. Therefore I will say that *Sakahàn* and *Magiciens de la terra* misses a crucial point; the globalized world the international art scene operates within, is a postcolonial world for many. So to not have a cohesive understanding of incorporated works and artists presented in an exhibition with international Indigenous contemporary art can seem like an empty political gesture.

An example of an exhibition that accommodates what I have pointed out is lacking within *Sakahàn* and *Magiciens de la terra* is an exhibition called *Water Memories* (2022-2023) that is an exhibition at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. This exhibition explores water's significance to Indigenous peoples in the United States. Firstley, *Water Memories* does not place all the weight of the entirety of the political injustice of Indigenous people around the globe has endured in one exhibition. To borrow a term from Indigenous methodology; they are using a nationalist perspective.¹²⁰ This means that they use a perspective that only looks to the Indigenous people within one country, in this case the US. Here also one has to look beyond local differences within culture, but they have gathered through a collective theme of water. This exhibition has done something that *Magiciens de la Terra* and *Sakahàn* didn't; having a clear theme. As Wray mentioned, a theme is beneficial, so the visitors can follow and experience through the art that is presented. They have implemented the theme of 'water' and displayed contemporary art by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists together (appx.2 fig.4 and fig.6). It's also incorporated both modern and historical artworks; from traditional clothes and contemporary videoworks (appx.2 fig.5). They have set it up in four thematic sections: Ancestral Connections, Water and Sky, Forests and Streams, and Oceanic Imaginations. The exhibition takes a look at how water is the most crucial, intimate and vulnerable natural resource through the necessity of it for nature, survival and a spiritual aspect.¹²¹ A nuanced perspective on the theme takes shape by talking to contemporary Indigenous community members that provide individual interpretations and share their personal associations with water. In this way the exhibition shows that water provides nourishment and sanctuary for some, but it can also erupt conflict and protest for others.¹²² These measures make the exhibition avoid an empty political gesture. It actually

¹²⁰ Gaski, Harald. "Indigenous Aesthetics: Add context to context". p.221 and Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies Research and Indigenous Peoples*. p.19-37.

¹²¹ Met Museum, "Water Memories" (2023). <https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/water-memories>. (seen 18.05.23).

¹²² Met Museum, "Water Memories".

does the opposite, the theme in *Water memories* makes it graspable for visitors to see the political at the same time as the visual. The hollow political gesture emerges when there is no theme to see the artworks in context with.

3.3 A backdrop - modernity and colonialism and how it is affecting the exhibition space

To see international Indigenous contemporary art as a concept within exhibition presentation I have throughout this essay discussed land and colonialism as common denominators within content. The latter denominator, colonialism, isn't just possible common content in Indigenous contemporary art, it is also something that has shaped and defined art institutions, and therefore also exhibition presentation. So now I will shift focus on colonialism as common content in Indigenous contemporary art to looking at how this structurally has affected understanding and context within exhibition presentation.

The persistence of coloniality in our society is rooted in the inseparable relationship between colonialism and modernity, claims Shahid Vawda.¹²³ Modernity refers to the social, economic, and political conditions that emerged in the wake of the industrial revolution and the Enlightenment that has shaped the modern society we live in today.¹²⁴ As mentioned in subchapter 2.7 *terre nullius* was a prominent thought by philosopher Immanuel Kant during the Enlightenment. *Terra nullius* refers to that land that wasn't 'owned' by anybody, and was therefore seen as 'up for grabs' according to Kant.¹²⁵ This justified taking land as property that people already lived on, and this affected first people that had no necessity of owning land in the same way as the West did. This coloniality of power was strongly associated with a coloniality of knowledge (or of imagination) as well.¹²⁶ Often articulated as rationalization of the world as philosophy proposed in the early days of modernity. This was predicated on a belief that knowledge, in a similar way to property, ought to be considered 'as a relation between one individual and something else'.¹²⁷

¹²³ Vawda, Shahid. "Museums and the epistemology of injustice: from colonialism to decoloniality". 71:1-2, 72-79. Routledge, 2019. p.74

¹²⁴ Gillen, Paul and Devleena Ghosh. *Colonialism & Modernity*. (Australia: University of New South Wales Press, 2007). p.8-26.

¹²⁵ Finbog, Liisa-Ravna. "The story of Terra Nullius. Variations on the Land(s) of Saepmie that Nobody Owned". p.4-11.

¹²⁶ Bhabra, Gurinder K. "Postcolonial and decolonial dialogues." 115-121. 2014. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2014.966414>. p. 117-118. and Quijano, Aníbal. 'Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality'. *Cultural Studies* vol.21 (2007). pp. 168-178. published online 03.04.07. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601164353>. p.173.

¹²⁷ Bhabra, Gurinder K. "Postcolonial and decolonial dialogues." p 173.

Seeing modernity and colonialism as two sides of the same coin in relation to culture was first proposed by Aníbal Quijano, and later developed by Walter D. Mignolo. Mignolo refers to how the history and culture of the modern world can be understood through the relation between colonialism and modernity. Because modernity is viewed as an epistemological frame that is bound to colonialism where Europe was the instigator.¹²⁸

This can also have been transferred to institutions that display art through the historical accumulation of almost 600 years of European modernity and their perception on what constitutes knowledge is also rooted in this; who has knowledge, and who does not, and who can be incorporated into ‘modernity’s goods’.¹²⁹ This can be reflected in curating by looking at art institutions permanent versus temporary exhibitions. Art institutions leave their permanent exhibitions, often their collection, more or less intact, but supplement with new temporary exhibitions as a response to demands by those who have been historically silenced.¹³⁰ The point is that art institutions still hold the privilege of the dominant view and are ‘modernity's goods’ by beholding the ‘right knowledge’, while the ‘people with no history’ are relegated to temporary exhibitions.

This visual bias, which is at the core of art institutions, is eurocentric. Despite the claim to universality in many large scale museums. An example of this is when The Metropolitan Museum’s renovation of the Marcel Breuer building in 2016 to make space for more modern and contemporary art. It was highly anticipated and it was promised a more global vision of art history. When it opened many were disappointed based on the visual bias of the western gaze. This could be seen in the then second-floor exhibition, which displayed works of South Asian modernist Nasreen Mohamedi.¹³¹ Mohamedi works are somewhat minimalistic and conceptual (appx.2 fig.3). The art critic Hrag Vartanian had this to say about the Met's choice within their global initiative:

“Mohamedi’s art only reinforces established hierarchies of taste and art, while only offering a geographically expanded version of them. Mohamedi fits almost too neatly into established art historical narratives, allowing the Met to avoid questioning the functionality of the narratives themselves. (...) This is a show that reinforces the

¹²⁸ Mignolo, W. (2007) ‘Delinking: The Rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of de-coloniality,’ *Cultural Studies*, 21 (2): 449-514.

¹²⁹ Vawda, Shahid. “Museums and the epistemology of injustice: from colonialism to decoloniality”. p.77

¹³⁰ Vawda, Shahid. “Museums and the epistemology of injustice: from colonialism to decoloniality”. p.75

¹³¹ The Met, “Nasreen Mohamedi, Exhibition Overview”. 2016. <https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2016/nasreen-mohamedi> (seen 02.06.23).

rightness of Eurocentric narratives and justifies the established hierarchies, which dovetail with the global art market. Mohamedi could've been included in the Met's galleries at any time — we didn't need a reboot for that to happen.”¹³²

Vartanian argument is connected to the point I am making in this subchapter; that the western gaze and the eurocentric visual bias that roots in modernity permeates the knowledge of art as a discipline. 600 years of modernity with the so-called 'right knowledge' and visual bias of art has made art institutions fundamentally European and Eurocentric self-examination. This monopoly of taste has some roots in Europe as an instigator within colonialism, because through colonialism the creation of art hegemony was created. As bell hooks refers to it: acquisition of the 'white lenses'.¹³³

Based on the arguments above regarding the correlation of modernity and colonialism we can see that art institutions are imprinted by colonialism. Because, one, art institutions have been in heated discussions in the past based on spoils from several marginalized groups Europe oppressed through colonialism.¹³⁴ Two, is the link between art institutions and colonialism based on the fact that the art institutions, as we see it today, were established in a time of modernity.¹³⁵ The latter mentioned link between modernity and colonialism is maybe reaching further than just art institutions being a modern colonial power. Modernity is not something that has just affected art institutions of today, it has also pushed the eurocentric mindset of internalized colonialism. Through globalization I will propose that this has affected the entirety of the international art scene. Because the international art scene is also embossed with an 'insider' mentality of the western praxis.¹³⁶ Western values, ways of thinking and world views dominate art institutions and the international art scene.¹³⁷ Today, in an era of so-called postcolonialism, the powerful colonial institutions, whether educational, social or economical, have colonized people's minds, and this is internalized colonialism.¹³⁸

¹³² Vartanian, Hrag. "The Metropolitan Museum Is Still Very Eurocentric and Conservative" in *Hyperallergic*. Published 01.03.16. <https://hyperallergic.com/279679/the-metropolitan-museum-is-still-very-eurocentric-and-conservative/>

¹³³ hooks, bell. *Black looks: Race and representation*. (Toronto: Between the lines, 1992)

¹³⁴ Samson, Colin and Carlos Gigoux. *Indigenous peoples and colonialism, a global perspective*. p.181-183

¹³⁵ Gillen, Paul and Devleena Ghosh. *Colonialism & Modernity*. p.133- 156.

¹³⁶ Wajid, Sara and Rachel Minott. "Detoxing and decolonising museums" in *Museum Activism* (ed. Robert R. Janes and Richard Sandall). (London/ New York: Routledge, 2019). p.27-29

¹³⁷ Kuokkanen, Rauna. "Towards an 'indigenous paradigm' from a sámi perspective" in *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*. vol.2. pp.411-436. (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 2000.) p.412-417.

¹³⁸ Kuokkanen, Rauna. "Towards an 'indigenous paradigm' from a sámi perspective". p. 412.

An exhibition that wanted to disrupt these ways of seeing and thinking in art institutions was the exhibition *The Past is Now* (2017- 2018) at Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery (appx.2 fig.2). This was an exhibition that looked at the impact of colonialism in modern day and how Birmingham and the United Kingdom played a key role in reproducing colonial thoughts.¹³⁹ This was a temporary exhibition in a museum with mostly a eurocentric collection. Still, at the same time *The Past is Now* didn't shy away from commenting on this through the exhibition presentation. They had a clear aim to point out that art institutions are sustaining, and sometimes fueling, colonial mindset. By approaching the exhibition presentation like this they also in a way refused the position of a temporary exhibition as a supplement in response to the lack of diversity in the main collection of the museum. They rather used this temporary exhibition to give a decolonial view of the museum.

3.4 Claiming the exhibition space by re-centering Indigenous contemporary art

Based on what I have discussed in the previous subchapter it seems colonialism is unavoidable within art institutions and the international art scene. In subchapter 2.5 I applied the perspective of Wray's "Taking a Position" on *Sakahàn* and through this a question took shape when assessing art exhibitions avoidance of the subject of colonialism. The question was "How can emancipation of sense-making take place in an institution that is built upon and has facilitated the opposite mindset of the art they are showcasing?". The roots in the colonizers mindset is deep based on what I have presented as a backdrop in the previous subchapter. The previous subchapter acknowledges a backdrop that can prove important in some exhibition presentations, like the exhibition example *Magiciens de la terra* that underestimated the historical and structural context of history and its contemporary time. Even with this bleak backdrop previous sources used in this essay I will underline that abstinence from participation in art institutions and the global art scene, based on the fact that they behold so many of the qualities that earlier has suppressed them, is not a solution. Gaski argues for the cosmopolitan perspective based on the benefits it can have for Indigenous art being situated in an international context. It can make a space for trends to occur and develop and then nourish local cultures at the same time.¹⁴⁰ The scholar Rauna Kuokkanen agrees with this argumentation on the basis that distancing oneself is not the answer for a more decolonised culture. Through the concept of the Indigenous paradigm Kuokkanen argues that

¹³⁹ Wajid, Sara and Rachel Minott. "Detoxing and decolonising museums". p.27-35.

¹⁴⁰ Gaski, Harald. "Indigenous Aesthetics: Add context to context". p.221-223

it is important to decolonize Indigenous minds by re-centering Indigenous values and cultural practices.¹⁴¹ Within the Indigenous paradigm this requires placing Indigenous peoples and their issues into dominant, mainstream discourses.¹⁴² This could include exhibitions within art institutions and the global art scene. This indicates that to withhold Indigenous contemporary art from exhibitions, according to the Indigenous paradigm, is not an answer. That art institutions have their colonized mindset based on eurocentric ideas rooted in modernity is knowledge we have to acknowledge to move forward with decolonizing art institutions and the international art scene. It is also important to place Indigenous contemporary art in these spaces because decolonizing Indigenous minds is also central. Because Indigenous minds are also affected by modernity's imprint on our society and art institutions. Kokkanen sees decolonizing of the mind as necessary measures to be made, both for the West and Indigenous people, because both have been fostered into a colonial mindset.¹⁴³ In this way displaying Indigenous contemporary art is a way of trying to re-centering and take back Indigenous culture and practice.

However, the modernist* promise of a singular world, which I mentioned back in the first chapter of this essay, can threaten cultural diversity if Indigenous contemporary art is displayed as one unit in exhibitions. The modernist promise is based on a globalized world where improvements are described as increasing standard of living, but it does not do this for Indigenous people when these 'improvements' come at the cost of cultural meaning and purpose¹⁴⁴ E.g. as the earlier mentioned example of the Sámi people of Kiruna and the mining extraction that comes at the expense of cultural practices. Because this singular world doesn't necessarily help maintain distinctiveness in a world that many see moving towards cultural homogenization.¹⁴⁵ At the same time, the 'promise' of homogenization through globalization can seem threatening to Indigenous contemporary art, but the risk can seem even greater by not participating within international art discors by abstaining from art

¹⁴¹ Kuokkanen, Rauna. "Towards an 'indigenous paradigm' from a sámi perspective". p. 412.

¹⁴² Castillo, M. A. "Implementing indigenous paradigms: the paradoxes of actualizing *Sumak Kawsay*" in *Administrative Theory & Praxis*. Vol. 44. Issue 4: Special issue: Beyond Administrative Sovereignty. 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10841806.2022.2138196>. p.355.

¹⁴³ Kuokkanen, Rauna. "Towards an 'indigenous paradigm' from a sámi perspective". p. 412- 416.

*The source (144) uses this wording. It is not a source from the field of art history, but in context of the source it is meant to be in relation to modernity, not modernism.

¹⁴⁴ J. Pretty. "the consumption of a finite planet: Well-being, convergence, divergence and the nascent green economy" in *Environmental and resource economics* 55 (4). 2013. p.475-499

¹⁴⁵ Samson, Colin and Carlos Gigoux. *Indigenous peoples and colonialism, a global perspective*. p.197.

institutions and the international art scene. By abstaining, the colonial mindset that has stained art institutions and the international art scene won't be challenged and the risk of being 'out of sight out of mind' is greater. Also, colonialism is a denominator that makes sense for all Indigenous groups to possibly join together within the art scene, through international mobilization such as described in the mentioned concept of *strategic essentialism*. So there are some benefits of being seen and valued in the international art scene and art institutions, even if it is as a group.

Still, this makes me return to subchapter 2.5. Here Wray's arguments when applied on the exhibition *Sakahàn* points out the lack of theme and content through the curatorial.

Kuokkanen argues that a 'Indigenous paradigm' can happen by placing Indigenous peoples and their issues within mainstream discourse, such as exhibitions like *Sakahàn*, but at the same time the Indigenous paradigm includes the criticism of the Western indoctrinated perspectives.¹⁴⁶ And the latter is something *Sakahàn* avoids through not thematizing the exhibition. This choice by *Sakahàn* can also fit into what Shahid Vawda has remarked as presenting an exhibition in a non-decolonial way in his essay "Museums and the Epistemology of Injustice: From Colonialism to Decoloniality". One way to present an exhibition in a non-decolonial way according to Vawda is to "Create and reproduce colonising power-conceptual relations".¹⁴⁷ This can correlate with what I have earlier in this essay argued the arbitrariness of placing all Indigenous contemporary art in an international exhibition, like *Sakahàn* does, based on the herding of all Indigenous groups into one, like Europe has herded them to "the Other" through the eurocentric lens of modernity and coloniality. At the same time, Vawda also points out in his essay what decolonization can be in exhibition presentations: "decolonization means taking the concept of 'sharing' seriously, allowing for the multivalent voices and multi-authorial possibilities to emerge (...)".¹⁴⁸ This can point to the earlier mentioned (in subchapter 3.3) uneven juxtaposition of permanent exhibitions, often eurocentric, and the temporary exhibitions that sometimes 'allow' a space for marginalized voices. Vawda also noted that "museums provide an emerging decolonial space to address unjust practises of the past and present (...)" the latter is something *Sakahàn* avoids through not thematizing the exhibition, by not addressing issues all Indigenous people around the world face today and what they have as common denominator. But the earlier

¹⁴⁶ Kuokkanen, Rauna. "Towards an 'indigenous paradigm' from a sámi perspective". p.412-416

¹⁴⁷ Vawda, Shahid. "Museums and the epistemology of injustice: from colonialism to decoloniality". p.78.

¹⁴⁸ Vawda, Shahid. "Museums and the epistemology of injustice: from colonialism to decoloniality". p.78.

mentioned exhibition *Water memories* did this by presenting Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists in a themed exhibition about water and the impotence and issues that comes with it within the American trans-indigenous community. *Water memories* also place Indigenous peoples and their issues into dominant, mainstream discourse through the exhibition, like it is mentioned within Kuokkanens Indigenous paradigm.

3.5 The importance of context

This arbitrariness of presenting Indigenous contemporary art in exhibition spaces that are rooted in colonialism can make the issue of exhibition curating within this matter difficult. Because having a tokenistic approach can create an illusion of inclusion. Diversity of art doesn't mean diversity in thought and context. Like the example of the critique by Hrag Vartanian about The Met's global initiative through the artist Nasreen Mohamedi. When scholar Kavita Singh was asked in an interview by MoMa what she thinks of negotiating between canonical art historical narratives and local specificities she took issue with the fact that it is a canonical view at all. Singh claims that it is very natural to be focused on one's own location, and see the world from this perspective.¹⁴⁹ So Singh discusses that it is normal to be eurocentric in the West. She doesn't connect the eurocentric view to colonialism like I have done in this essay, so we see it from different angles. Even though our angles are different she means that artworks are meaningful based on the understanding of the context of which it was made within.¹⁵⁰ So, something both of us acclaim is that location where art is made and presented is central to the understanding of its context. This can be linked to deterritorialization, because placing, in this case, Indigenous contemporary art in an international context can alter the perception of the art. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari described in their book *Kafka: towards a minor literature* that when one reads a book written by a minority, but on the majority's language, and vice versa, this will become a factor in how one interprets the work.¹⁵¹ If we apply this way of thought over to the visual art sphere, and through the topic of this essay, the minority in question are Indigenous groups, the majority's language is the western standard for exhibition, and the "reader" of the artworks is spectators. This clash, deterritorialization, of perspectives will be seen as political, even if it is or not

¹⁴⁹ MoMa. "Global Perspectives". Interview with Kavita Singh. Video, 2015. Seen 01.06.23
https://www.moma.org/interactives/moma_through_time/2010/decolonizing-the-canon/

¹⁵⁰ MoMa. "Global Perspectives". Interview with Kavita Singh. Video, 2015.

¹⁵¹ Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *Kafka: towards a minor literature*. (Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 1986 (2006)). p.16.

intended as so.¹⁵² This can refer back to what I recurrently mentioned in subchapter 2.3 about *Sakahàn* neglect of the local and 3.2 about *Magiciens de la terra* dismissal of context in exhibitions that presents an international view on Indigenous contemporary art. The art is deterritorialized in these presentations; weakened in meaning when only the artworks are imported and not the understanding of them.

Even though Singh claims that it is very instinctive to be focused on one's own location, she is not endorsing a colonial mindset. Singh notes that many art institutions that try for decoloniality are actually just 'rewriting' history through an additive process where one has the main storyline intact, but will add on little from 'here and there'.¹⁵³ This is often what is done when including marginalized voices to a temporary exhibition space as a part of a 'diversity' initiative, but 'diversity' and 'decolonizing' isn't the same. Here the mentioned exhibition *The Past is Now* is a good example of an exhibition that refused to just be just another temporary exhibition based on diversity initiatives, but rather a contributing voice of decoloniality for the museum and the local environment it was situated within. Only looking at material manifestations and not the context makes a weak political import, because the understanding that comes with the artwork is not imported with it. Artworks are meaningful based on the understanding of the context of which it was made within.¹⁵⁴ This argument can be seen in relation to *Sakahàn* and *Magicians de la Terra*, because none of them managed to import this context in their exhibition. One of the curators of the *The Past is Now*, Shaheen Kasmani (artist, curator and producer), has after the exhibition ended in 2018 pointed out that after this exhibition finished other institutions and organizations have 'jumped on the 'decolonial' bandwagon'.¹⁵⁵ To this she says that many of them seem not to understand what 'decolonial' means or entails. They rather conflate it with tokenistic 'diversity and inclusion' initiatives. Kasmani claims that "Decolonisation has been colonised and commodified."¹⁵⁶ Sumaya Kassim, another curator of *The Past is Now*, has also stated:

"Decolonization is deeper than just being represented. When projects and institutions proclaim a commitment to 'diversity', 'inclusion' or 'decoloniality' we need to attend to these claims with a critical eye. Decoloniality is a complex set of ideas - it requires

¹⁵² Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *Kafka: towards a minor literature*. p.16.

¹⁵³ MoMa. "Global Perspectives". Interview with Kavita Singh. Video, 2015.

¹⁵⁴ MoMa. "Global Perspectives". Interview with Kavita Singh. Video, 2015.

¹⁵⁵ Kasmani, Shaheen. "The Past is Now". 2018). <https://www.shaheenkasmani.com/the-past-is-now> (seen 07.05.23).

¹⁵⁶ Kasmani, Shaheen. "The Past is Now".

complex processes, space, money and time, otherwise it runs the risk of becoming another buzzword, like ‘diversity’.”¹⁵⁷

Both of these statements show a critical perspective on how decoloniality is used within art institutions today. Because, still, if institutions try to include new voices through temporary exhibitions it doesn't really disrupt the system as a whole. The dominant, eurocentric, white view still defines the ‘right knowledge’, also when presenting international Indigenous contemporary art as we can see in the *Sakahàn* and *Magicians de la Terra*.

This reflects on the power curators have over perception of the spectator. That a spectator thinks they are viewing a decolonial perspective, but in actuality it is just a tokenistic diversity that has just included **a artwork** not **the context** that comes with it. This power is indirectly a power of presenting someone's identity, and therefore it is important to recognize where one stands as a curator and the history of art institutions and the international art scene.

To take this back to the topic of this essay, if international Indigenous contemporary art can be presented as a concept in exhibitions, I would point out that this herding Indigenous contemporary art in an exhibition presentation is not a decolonial presentation just because it is a diverse exhibition presentation, like the exhibition examples *Sakahàn* and *Magicians de la Terra*. If it is not contributing to the change of the colonial mindset we perceive the art within, the beneficiary element regarding international Indigenous contemporary art as a possible concept is taken away; The international mobilization against colonial imprint on art and our minds. The deterritorialization of Indigenous contemporary art, by being placed in an international context, will be perceived as political for no pointed out reason, and this could put spectators in stray. Because the understanding of the work, its context, is often not imported when Indigenous contemporary art, with such different local context from each other, is being herded into one, internationally.

¹⁵⁷ Wajid, Sara and Rachel Minott. “Detoxing and decolonising museums”. p.29

Conclusion

In the introduction I connected the emergence of international Indigenous contemporary art to exhibition presentations. More specifically the very idea that international Indigenous contemporary art can be seen, or be considered, as a guiding concept for an exhibition. We can refer to international Indigenous contemporary art as a concept within a global art scene when seen in relation to common content in artworks like land or colonialism and international mobilization through strategic essentialism, as mentioned in chapter two. As mentioned in chapter three, looking at Indigenous contemporary art as a forged diaspora creates a possibility for it to be an international concept as well. With these findings said, I would argue that many misuse the idea of international Indigenous contemporary art in exhibition presentation, as seen through examples I have used in this essay. Often they don't address what actually could bound Indigenous contemporary art together, regardless of local differences. As *Sakahan* shows; the use of strategic essentialism was mentioned in an article that was published in relation to the exhibition by Jolene Rickard, but *Sakahan* don't use it to what Spivak described: As a way marginalized groups can, temporarily, put aside local differences to forge a collective identity to mobilize in an political movements.¹⁵⁸ *Sakahan* don't actually use strategic essentialism, because they have avoided being political. Then the idea of strategic essentialism, to create a stronger voice, loses its point when the silence on issues that are actually bound together, like land or colonialism, is so loud. Several exhibitions that are mentioned in this essay have not realized their own place within the history of colonialism, as I describe in chapter three, and therefore many exhibition presentations can seem to have reduced 'Indigenous' to a buzzword under the focus of 'diversity'. But without wanting to bring anything related to politics, like decoloniality, to the table. This creates an empty political gesture. By presenting Indigenous contemporary art within no context in an exhibition presentation it becomes deterritorialized rather than join together in a diaspora within the global art scene. This reduces what international Indigenous contemporary art can be. This shows the power curating can have, to determine understanding of art that needs context and awareness not 'just be represented'. As I resonated above I would say yes to if 'Indigeneuse' is a buzzword for exhibition presentations, but it doesn't have to be. Because 'Indigenous' isn't just a buzzword or a term, it is a collective concept, and it makes sense to refer to and discuss Indigenous contemporary art within a global art scene and in exhibitions, when done with awareness and context.

¹⁵⁸ Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *In other words: Essays in cultural politics*. p.205.

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