(IN)TANGIBLE: INDIGENOUS RESPONSES TO IN A DIFFERENT LIGHT AT THE MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY

by

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submitted by Amanda H. Sorensen in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
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Abstract

Collaborative museology aims to foster relationships between museums and relevant stakeholders. Reflective and reflexive conversations about exhibits with stakeholding audiences are rarely built into museum practice post-exhibit installation. This thesis is an exploration into how discussions about exhibit representations with these audiences can continue after exhibits go up. I examine curatorial decisions and Indigenous responses to the design and messaging of one exhibit in the Museum of Anthropology (MOA) at the University of British Columbia (UBC). Specifically, I consider *In a Different Light: Reflecting on Northwest Coast Art*, the inaugural exhibit for the Elspeth McConnell Gallery of Northwest Coast Masterworks. Through semi-structured interviews and self-guided exhibit viewings, I discussed the exhibit’s displays with the associated curators and with four Indigenous women, who are current students or recent graduates of UBC programs. The exhibit reviewers picked up on core themes of *In a Different Light*, including continuity, longevity, and the intangible meanings attributed to works displayed. The critiques they expressed point to two recommendations: 1) situate curators in relation to the exhibit topic; 2) continue to include nuanced, critical information that culturally contextualizes displayed works with their associated histories and stories. Challenging critiques raised important issues between how museums treat collections and how belongings are used within communities. I assert that it is a missed opportunity to treat installed exhibits as finished products, as representations that would not benefit from continued examination.
Lay Summary

This thesis examines an exhibit in the Museum of Anthropology (MOA) at the University of British Columbia (UBC), *In a Different Light: Reflecting on Northwest Coast Art*. I explore how discussion with relevant stakeholders about exhibits can inform future exhibition work and continue conversations started during exhibition development. Drawing on conversations with associated curators and four Indigenous women, I make two recommendations for future exhibits: 1) situate curators with short biographies that describe their relationship to the exhibit topic; 2) continue to include nuanced, critical information that contextualizes displayed works with their associated histories and stories. These Indigenous women expressed a few critiques that have no clear solutions. Identifying these critiques is the start of considering how to make exhibits less excluding for Indigenous audiences. I argue that it is a missed opportunity to treat installed exhibits as finished products, as representations that would not benefit from continued examination.
Preface

This thesis is an original intellectual product of the author, Amanda H. Sorensen. The fieldwork discussed throughout this document was approved by the UBC Behavior Research Ethics Board (BREB) under the title “Indigenous Representation ‘In a Different Light’: Young Adult Responses to a Museum Exhibition,” certificate number H18-00283.
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Dedication

for Kathy Sorensen, a strong-willed woman
Introduction: Discomfort and Decolonial Work

During our second interview about an exhibit on Northwest Coast art, Karen Rose Thomas, a səl̓ilwətaʔɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) archaeologist, broached decolonization: “We’ve all discussed how decolonization requires a certain amount of settlers feeling uncomfortable” (Thomas interview, January 17, 2019). Exhibits in North American museums typically do not ‘unsettle.’ In fact, they tend to confirm Euro-American/Euro-Canadian worldviews, reflecting a certain perspective back at settler1 audiences, which encourage feelings of security (Rounds 2006). Bernadette Lynch, a museum professional, argues that museums need to create structures that require and/or encourage reflective, reflexive thought (2011). I position this thesis as an exploration into how processes of reflection on installed exhibits with curators and stakeholding2 audience members can be implemented into exhibit practices. While uncomfortable, this work can make future exhibits more validating for audiences historically alienated from museum spaces.

Museums have been employing collaborative initiatives for several decades (Black 2013; Ames 1999; Lynch 2011; Sparrow, Wilson, and Rowley 2018). This thesis operates in dialogue with collaborative museology and decolonizing exhibit practices that critically consider who exercises authority in exhibits featuring First Nations cultural belongings.3 Four Indigenous women who are current students or recent graduates of UBC programs described and critiqued an exhibit, and I analyzed their critiques, considering possible solutions. These women examined In a Different Light: Reflecting on Northwest Coast Art, an exhibit in the Museum of Anthropology (MOA). MOA is located on unceded xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) territory and at the University of British Columbia (UBC) Vancouver campus. Three MOA curators developed In a Different Light in conjunction with 30 First Nations scholars, artists, and knowledge-keepers: Karen Duffek, Curator of Contemporary Visual Arts and Pacific Northwest; William McLennan, Curator Emeritus of the Pacific Northwest; and Jordan Wilson, a member of the Musqueam Indian Band and, at the time of exhibit

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1 I use the term ‘settler’ to describe non-Indigenous people, knowledge systems, and structures in North America. I use this term rather than ‘non-Indigenous’ as ‘settler’ “denaturalizes and politicizes the presence of non-Indigenous people on Indigenous lands,” referencing a relationship to colonialism whereby a settler is in a position of privilege (Flowers 2015: 33).

2 I use the terms ‘stakeholding’ and ‘stakeholder’ to describe people who can affect and/or can be affected by museum representations, initiatives, and policies.

3 I use the term ‘cultural belongings’ to talk about non-contemporary Northwest Coast art. MOA curators are increasingly using this term, and other museums and Indigenous scholars have started using this term (Kramer 2015; Collison and Levell 2018). ‘Belonging’ was proposed as an alternative during the development of MOA’s ʔəsənəʔəm: the city before the city and it underscores how Pacific Northwest Indigenous peoples used and owned the things currently in display cases. ‘Belongings’ and ‘art’ are not mutually exclusive terms.
development, a Canada Council for the Arts Aboriginal Curator-in-Residence. *In a Different Light* is the inaugural exhibit of the Elspeth McConnell Gallery of Northwest Coast Masterworks (the Masterworks Gallery). By virtue of its donor-selected name, this gallery is positioned within ‘masterwork’ exhibit histories that have privileged the aesthetic, formal aspects of ‘art’ (Duff 1967). *In a Different Light* emphasizes both tangible and intangible aspects of displayed belongings (McLennan, Wilson, and Duffek interviews, July 25 and August 24, 2018).

During exhibit development, the *In a Different Light* curators considered how ideas around displayed belongings, both their material and immaterial aspects, have changed over time and how multiple meanings can coexist. They attempted to convey a sense of objects-in-motion through text panel titles, audio, and video (Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018; Duffek, conclusions discussion, February 7, 2019). Those who contributed exhibit reviews to this research brought various meanings attributed to displayed cultural belongings, both tangible and intangible aspects, and examined how the exhibit supported or hindered those meanings. They also described affects elicited by the exhibit, which were rooted in collective and personal memories, and associated with past and present settler colonial structures (Tolia-Kelly, Waterton, and Watson 2017; Linke 2015). Each discussed specific belongings and displays, and referenced salient topics in museums studies: critiques of omnipresent curatorial voices (Ames 2005; Lorente 2015), the ways museums re-contextualize and value objects (Phillips 2011), the multiple meanings attributed to belongings (Townsend-Gault, Kramer, and Ki-ke-in 2013), museum authorities related to belonging interpretation (Shannon 2014; Lonetree 2012), and issues of preservation and ownership (Clavir 2002). This thesis encourages more thought about notions of “audience” and “collaborator” within museum practice and if these terms are meaningful (Kramer 2015).

I first situate this thesis within First Nations and Indigenous Studies and museum anthropology literatures (chapter 1). Then, I explore the curatorial intentions behind *In a Different Light* and describe this gallery (chapter 2). Next, I present the exhibit reviews of four Indigenous women in chronological interview order (chapter 3). The last section of this thesis places these interviews into conversation, exploring themes of authority, affect, memory, and belonging meanings. While the exhibit reviewers’ comments prompt consideration of where settler colonial structures persist, they also express successes that can be replicated and critiques that could be remedied in future exhibits. I assert that it is a missed opportunity to treat installed exhibits as finished products, as representations that would not benefit from continued examination.

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4 I use the term “exhibit reviewers” to refer to the Indigenous women who contributed their *In a Different Light* thoughts and critiques to this thesis.
Chapter 1
Literatures, Methodologies, and Positionalities

An institution is not an organism but an instrument, a tool. It may be a bloodied tool, but remember there are no clean tools, only those that still serve a purpose and those that don’t. Just because a tool was invented with one purpose in mind does not mean it cannot be repurposed and work just as well or better. - Anthony Romero (2019)

Broadly, I describe this research as an exploration of how continued discussion around exhibits after installation with relevant, stakeholding audiences can refine future exhibit designs and representations. In accordance with the 1992 report by the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples, collaborative exhibit development as a means of self-representation has been implemented into museum practice in collections institutions across Canada, contributing to authority shifts surrounding who interprets First Nations material cultures within exhibit spaces (Assembly of First Nations and the Canadian Museums Association; Phillips 2011; Black 2013). This thesis questions why discussion around exhibit representations with stakeholding audiences tends to halt at installation and what lessons we can learn by continuing these conversations. After installation, public programming events and presentations may occur, but typically, public programming does not provide avenues for thorough exhibit critiques. Further, presentations about exhibits or exhibit topics usually take place within academic circles. Larger museums may have staff dedicated to audience research, but this is not common. Lainie Schultz, a museum professional, asserts that exhibit viewers are usually left out of collaborative museology:

by pledging themselves to community-based collaboration, museums indicate their ongoing commitment to it as a form of social activism, reflecting their belief that its relevance extends beyond those immediately participating in the process. Such a belief implies the need for the visiting public to be a part of the process, a group that is frequently overlooked in discussions of collaboration (Schultz 2011: 1).

What happens when people who could be collaborators are exhibit viewers and what does this mean for our understandings of museum audiences and publics (Dawson 2016)? How can discussion with relevant Indigenous stakeholders about an exhibit displaying the cultural belongings of Pacific Northwest peoples inform future exhibition work and continue conversations started during exhibition development? Similarly to Emily Schmierer, a museum professional and scholar, I elicited the responses of stakeholding students and recent graduates to an exhibition that was developed with community participation (2014), attempting to probe deeper at issues of representation that can be learned after installation. Some of the critiques and considerations raised by both the curators and exhibit reviewers identified issues that were only noticed after the exhibit was installed. This research builds upon previous museum studies scholarship concerning
collaborative exhibition development (Shannon 2014; Lonetree 2012; Wilson 2016; Black 2013), and general audience perspectives on completed collaborative exhibitions (Schultz 2011; Krmpotich and Anderson 2005). I aim to build on these avenues of scholarship by considering Indigenous student and recent graduate perspectives on a MOA exhibit, *In a Different Light: Reflecting on Northwest Coast Art.*

I situate this thesis within First Nations and Indigenous Studies (FNIS) and museum anthropology literatures. Within FNIS theory, land is a part of pedagogy and learning (Coulthard 2014; Kovach 2009; Todd 2016; Simpson 2017). MOA and UBC, as institutions of settler knowledge production, are positioned on occupied xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) territory. The situated nature of this field site within colonial histories and ongoing settler structures speaks to the complexities of knowledge production within this place. North American museums have historically used Euro-Canadian and Euro-American worldviews to construct exhibits, privileging certain types of information and certain methods of information organization while occupying land from which Indigenous peoples are systematically dispossessed (Phillips 2011). Within these museum information systems, belongings are reinterpreted and valued, and subsequent exhibits reflect these processes of meaning making (Greene 2016; Turner 2017; Phillips 2011). Exhibits can prompt feelings of exclusion for peoples historically alienated from museum spaces, eliciting affects, and memories of personal and intergenerational experiences, which can stem from potentially violent histories (Crang and Tolia-Kelly 2010; Tolia-Kelly, Waterton, and Watson 2017; Million 2008).

Conclusions about a given exhibit space can be generated through a combination of “heart knowledge,” emotion, and “thought or intellect” (Simpson 2017: 28), illustrating notions of meaning-making that can be grounded in “felt” personal and historical experiences (Simpson 2017; Million 2008). Museums play a part in constructing knowledge about the past and present. They “serve as formal sanctioned spaces of memory,” within which personal and collective memories, and narratives of history interact and overlap in complex ways (Tolia-Kelly 2017: 1; Linke 2015). Few scholars are examining how peoples historically alienated from museum spaces experience exhibits, whether feelings of exclusion are based on language, financial barriers, (mis)representation, or a lack of representation (Tolia-Kelly 2017; Dawson 2014; Dodd et al. 2012; Frank 2000). This research responds to that gap, considering ways to make exhibits less excluding.

Following FNIS theoretical understandings of knowledge as situated, I see the perspectives of the exhibit reviewers as unique insights and observations that can change future exhibit designs and representations of Pacific Northwest Indigenous peoples (Simpson 2017). Each is also situated within broader social structures, influencing their positionalities and observations. Roland Barthes, a
French literary theorist, posited that there are multiple, but a finite number of readings that can be taken from a particular text (1973). Exhibits are no different. The exhibit reviewers each thought about *In a Different Light* a bit differently, grounding their ideas within respective academic, social, and cultural backgrounds. Their exhibit readings also explore understandings of how MOA and other contemporary museums operate, documenting various thoughts, experiences, and affects elicited by *In a Different Light.*

As an institution, MOA has a history of engaged practice and collaborative museology. Michael Ames, MOA Director from 1974-1997, contributed foundational texts to museum anthropology, specifically exploring how collaboratively developed exhibits with Indigenous stakeholders change subsequent exhibit experiences for these people (1992; 1999). MOA Director from 1997-2003, Ruth Phillips argues within *Museum Pieces* that Canadian museums are ‘indigenizing’ their practice, using many MOA programs and initiatives as examples (2011). Anthony Shelton is the current MOA Director and his scholarship continues MOA’s legacy as an institution of critical museology (Mayor, Shelton, and Brown 2009). Ranging from digital database projects (Rowley 2013), to collaborative exhibit development (Kramer 2015; Wilson 2016), notions of preservation (Clavir 2002), and Native art studies (Duffek and Townsend-Gault 2004), MOA staff and students have documented and reflected on museum practices within academic literature for decades. This thesis is a product and a part of MOA’s recent history as an academically engaged and practice-oriented institution. By critiquing an exhibit with Indigenous reviewers, I draw attention to exhibit installation as a moment when opportunities to reflect on exhibit development and subsequent representations with stakeholding audiences are often missed.

As MOA and the contributing exhibit reviewers are uniquely positioned, so am I. While undertaking this research, I have considered my positionality as a settler museum anthropologist who grew up on the traditional territories of the Potawatomi and Miami peoples (Chicago suburbs) and is currently living on unceded Coast Salish territories (Vancouver). Based on my experiences in both these places, I have seen how museums are contending with their respective and ongoing colonial histories, engaging in collaborative work that centres voices that have been excluded from meaning making within these spaces. But I have also seen how those efforts are limited due to issues of funding and time, and how certain understandings of what museums ‘do’ from both within and outside of these institutions can impede decolonial shifts. As a scholar within settler systems that continue to dispossess Indigenous peoples from their lands and interpret associated material cultures within museum displays, it is necessary that I am critical of the institutions, museums and otherwise, of which I am a part. This thesis is an attempt to centre perspectives historically excluded from
museum spaces. Contributing exhibit reviewers saw this project as an opportunity to explore language use in MOA, observe my research process, and to critically discuss an exhibit, MOA in general, and other museums.

The information making up most of this thesis was generated through semi-structured conversational interviews and thematic analysis (Kovach 2009; Kovach 2010; Atkinson 2017; Bernard 2011). I interviewed the curators who developed In a Different Light to understand their intentions for various aspects of the gallery and why certain decisions were made. For example, I asked about decisions on the inclusion of certain cultural belongings, the development of photographic, audio, and text content, and overall exhibition messages, leaving opportunity for interviews to take directions determined by the participants (Kovach 2009). This discussion provided background on this exhibit, offering insight into whose decisions are represented where in the space and how negotiations between contributing First Nations scholars and artists, and MOA staff manifest in exhibit content and displays. Karen Duffek and Jordan Wilson were interviewed together and William McLennan was interviewed separately. I initially planned to interview the curators together, but conflicting schedules made this unfeasible.

I then discussed In a Different Light with four Indigenous women. They are currently students or recent graduates of UBC programs. Each drew on their respective academic backgrounds in anthropology, linguistics, archaeology, FNIS, and information studies when examining In a Different Light, at times citing relevant literature in their interviews. Their studies and professions also afforded them various degrees of familiarity with academic perspectives on material culture, representation, and critiques of settler colonial institutions, shaping their subsequent exhibit reviews. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson uses the term ‘method’ to describe her life as a kwe, a “woman within the spectrum of genders in Nishneebemowin,” an identity that influences the knowledge she generates with emotion and intellect, and through place-based, kinetics methods (2017: 29). The contributing exhibit reviewers generated knowledge influenced by their respective professional, personal, cultural, and social identities. Most of them saw themselves and/or loved ones represented in the gallery (Skxwú7mesh (Squamish), səl̓ílwətaʔl (Tsleil-Waututh), Tlingit). The exhibit reviewers are also part of other Indigenous communities through ancestry and/or membership in British Columbia and across North America. These women live in Vancouver, a multicultural, urban city, and have grown up in or near other big cities and towns that likewise, include people of diverse cultural and ancestral Indigenous heritage. As Anishinaabe legal scholar, John Borrows, argues, these women who have lived in places ranging from Alaska, Alberta, the Okanagan, and Burnaby

5 The exhibit reviewers each use various pronouns and all identify as women.
BC, and moved to unceded Coast Salish territories to study within UBC programs are physically and philosophically mobile (2016). Museum anthropologist, Cara Krmpotich et al. documents how a group of Anishinaabe and Cree women in Toronto worked with culturally plural collections, examining material made by Indigenous peoples across Canada (2016). Following FNIS understandings of knowledge as positioned and relational, I introduce each exhibit reviewer I worked with by situating them within place, relationships, profession, and specific tribal affiliations (Simpson 2017; Kovach 2009). However, following Borrows and Krmpotich et al., I attempt to avoid essentializing the exhibit reviewers by constricting Indigeneity to place, ancestry, and/or tribal affiliation (2016; 2016).

Prior to beginning this thesis work, I developed friendships and personal relationships with all the women interviewed through classes and work at a local radio station, CiTR. The exhibit reviewers learned about this research through brief presentations I gave during First Nations and Indigenous Studies courses in September 2018 and through flyers that were posted at the UBC Longhouse and libraries in October 2018. In addition, I sent flyers to people I knew who I thought might like to be a part of the project during fall term 2018. Those who I invited to participate discussed the research with me over coffee before going over consent forms. This approach to research recruitment was meant to forefront dialogue and relationship building, drawing on Indigenous methodologies and decolonizing approaches to research (Smith 2012; Kovach 2009; Simpson 2017).

After going through the consent form, each exhibit reviewer was asked basic, preliminary questions about their academic discipline, past museum experiences, and where they grew up. Then, I discussed the exhibit with each through recorded one-on-one semi-structured interviews. I initially designed this research drawing on focus group methods. I had intended to create group discussions with Indigenous students so that my voice as a settler would be in the minority, seeking to shift the power relations that exist between settler researchers and Indigenous peoples by creating an environment where contributors can steer the conversation more than within a one-on-one interview (Todd 2016). Ultimately, scheduling conflicts made this method unfeasible. Before the first interview, each exhibit reviewer saw In a Different Light on their own, with no time minimums or maximums. These contributors knew we were going to discuss the exhibit, but I provided very minimal framing for their trip to the gallery. Some reviewers chose to see other exhibits and galleries within MOA at this time and many compared In a Different Light to these other spaces. After viewing, we shared a meal and discussed the exhibit. Interview questions were designed to be open-ended, allowing contributors to describe their gallery experiences and take the interview to topics
they found important. This openness was another attempt to shift the traditional power dynamics embedded within interview methods and research conducted by settler scholars with Indigenous peoples (Todd 2016). Broad questions and shared food afforded a conversational tone (Kovach 2010; Kovach 2009), one that was intended to create a dialogic, flexible, informal, relational, and purposeful interview. This interview tone is grounded in an Indigenous Studies paradigm (Kovach 2010). One week to a month and a half after the first interview, I met with the exhibit reviewers again to see what from *In a Different Light* stuck with them and how their opinions had or had not changed. This second interview also included a meal and a short, optional self-guided viewing of *In a Different Light* to refresh the contributors’ memories after we had debriefed on what they remembered about their first viewing. For all of the interviews, I outlined questions surrounding exhibit content and media of presentation, but attempted to create flexibility in the interview for the exhibit reviewers to discuss topics they found important.

Following the interviews, I provided transcripts to the curators and exhibit reviewers who elected to make edits (Cavanaugh et al. 2014). The edited transcriptions were analyzed by highlighting themes across individual interviews and between multiple interviews. I root these themes in the individual experiences of the exhibit reviewers/curators and the stories/perspectives that they tell. I do this in an effort to resist the fragmentation of interviews into codes in a way that divorces the particular expression of each theme from consideration in the overarching analysis (Kovach 2009). Overall, I understand that “the goal of thematic analysis is to identify broad patterns of meaning” (Atkinson 2017: 95). Themes were generated using open coding with NVIVO software (Bernard 2011). Transcripts and a thesis draft were sent to participants for edits and to ensure permission and accuracy. Themes presented in the following analysis were picked based on prevalence (how often they were addressed, how much time was spent talking about a given topic). Quotes were chosen by searching for keywords or themes, and by selecting passages that succinctly stated overarching interviewee ideas. Initial conclusions were shared with curators and exhibit reviewers, who chose to attend my brief presentation, and they were then given the opportunity to provide feedback, shaping the subsequent conclusions and engaging in dialogic analysis. Through these methods of analysis, I discuss the curator and exhibit reviewer interview themes in the following chapters.
Chapter 2

In a Different Light as a Field Site: Gallery Descriptions and Curatorial Intentions

I think with our exhibition we don’t have a linear approach. There isn’t this master narrative and I feel like it’s a multi-vocal exhibit. (…) In some ways, the objects and the voices and the video are all in conversation with one another and we felt it was more of this experiential type of thing, allowing the visitors to relate to it in different ways. - Jordan Wilson (Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018)

He said, “Tom, it’s important that the place be protected. But the fact that it was a medicine place which once meant something to our people isn’t enough. It’s like an old basket on a museum shelf. You can’t preserve our culture that way. It’s using them things that are important. In using it, you understand it. That’s what our culture is. You protect it by using it. It’s the same with that place. What the people are really trying to preserve is our ways. If you are interested in preserving that place then you got to understand that. It’s our ways that need to be preserved, then that place can be protected because then it had a purpose to be protected. You got to learn about them things and pass it on to others.” I had known that our ways were important to continue learning because they were good, but I had never really been certain why else except that it was our way. I saw it in a different light then. – Jeannette Armstrong Slash

In a Different Light: Reflecting on Northwest Coast Art opened June 21, 2017. The development of this exhibit began when MOA received a donation from Elspeth McConnell and the Doggone Foundation to construct a gallery. McConnell also bequeathed her collection, 400 plus Northwest Coast contemporary and historical artworks and cultural belongings to MOA (Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018). Three curators, Jordan Wilson, Karen Duffek, and William McLennan, developed this exhibit in conjunction with 30 First Nations artists, curators, scholars, and knowledge-keepers. Karen Duffek is a settler Curator of Contemporary Visual Arts and Pacific Northwest at MOA. Her research focuses on documenting cultural belongings and working with contemporary art and artists across disciplines (Duffek and Townsend-Gault 2004; McLennan and Duffek 2000). William McLennan is a settler Curator Emeritus of the Pacific Northwest. He worked at MOA in various positions from 1976 to 2013, and has curated exhibits on Northwest Coast art for over a decade. Throughout his career, he has used photographic technology to redefine contemporary understandings of painted Northwest Coast art (McLennan and Duffek 2000). Jordan Wilson is a member of the Musqueam Indian Band who earned an MA in anthropology at UBC and is currently a PhD student at New York University. While working on this exhibit, he was a Canada Council for the Arts Aboriginal Curator-in-Residence at MOA. His publications focus on collaborative exhibit development and conversation within Indigenous methodologies (Wilson 2015; Wilson 2016).
In a Different Light frames displayed Pacific Northwest belongings as ‘art,’ referring to the materials a work is made of and the associated artist(s). This exhibit also contextualizes belongings within the perspectives of contributing First Nations scholars and artists who were each interviewed by the associated curators, communicating how the displayed belongings are art, but also have other meanings. Museumgoers can hear and read quotes from these interviews throughout the gallery. Speaking to broader interview themes, each display case and associated text panels are framed by a gerund verb title, such as ‘Indigenizing’ and ‘feasting.’ Historical and contemporary photos associated with certain cultural belongings are included on text panels. Film footage shows contemporary contexts for Northwest Coast art, including footage of people dancing masks and weavings, people holding and studying the belongings on display and making contemporary works, MOA collections storage facilities, and local scenes of water and forests. Individual museumgoers can engage with two ‘idea chairs,’ which have speakers in the headrest that are activated when someone sits. These chairs are strategically placed adjacent to display cases that feature associated belongings. For example, one chair plays content about basketry and women’s experiences, including selections from Rena Point Bolton, a Sto:lo matriarch and basket maker, Sharon Fortney, a Coast Salish curator, and Molly Billows, a spoken word poet from the Xwémalhkwu (Homalco) Nation. This chair is placed next to some of the displayed baskets. Likewise, the second chair is situated next to a Nuxalk mask and plays Clyde Tallio’s recording about his family’s reflections on the history of Q’umukwa, the Chief of the Undersea. Clyde Tallio is a Nuxalk knowledge-keeper, ceremonialist, and speaker.

The design of In a Different Light and the Masterworks Gallery is minimal and modern. Termed the “grey box” by Erika Balcombe in her M.A. thesis on the design of this gallery, the exhibit features a grey colour palette, except for the bright red idea chairs (2018). Display cases are sleek and shiny with non-reflective glass and metal trim. Object mounts suspend many belongings, allowing audiences different viewing vantage points. Similarly, few display cases are placed against walls allowing museumgoers to walk around cases and access multiple viewing angles. Lighting is diffused. Ceiling lights are programmed with a custom chip that reads the natural lighting conditions of the day, mimicking the outdoor lighting intensity and colour within the gallery (MOA 2017).

In a Different Light and the Masterworks Gallery are a part of the history of engaged and collaborative practice at MOA. Within this context, it follows that exhibit development, particularly surrounding the use of the term ‘masterworks’ in the donor-selected gallery name, elicited critical thought and some anxieties: “our initial impressions were that in a way this was an outdated or a very dated term” (Wilson, Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018). Wilson in particular
expressed how this gallery name made selecting belongings more complicated: “I think we all kind of shared this anxiety that by selecting objects to put in this exhibition, it’s like this declaration that this is a masterwork. We didn’t want to be the people making this decision, because what invests us with that authority or who invests us with that authority to make those decisions?” (Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018). In addition to thinking about the belongings to be displayed, time was spent considering how *In a Different Light* fit into the history of Northwest Coast ‘masterworks’ exhibits and how that would inform the messaging of *In a Different Light*. Duffek referenced the *Arts of the Raven* exhibit, which showed at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1967:

> one of the things about the history of masterworks exhibits is the focus is on the object and the materiality and the artistry of that thing. And one of the main points of the *Arts of the Raven* exhibit, fifty years ago, was that we can look at these great works as art because we can separate them from the “ethnology”: from the culture, in other words, and just appreciate that beautiful thing. That rupture between the people, the land, the living society, and the thing itself was really essential to that moment (Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018).

Curated by Bill Reid, a Haida artist, Bill Holm, an art historian at the University of Washington, and Wilson Duff, an anthropologist at UBC, *Arts of the Raven* put forth the proposition that Northwest Coast belongings can be aesthetically appreciated as ‘art’ only by separating these items from culturally contextualized meanings and uses (Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018). Duffek describes how reflecting on *Arts of the Raven* influenced the direction of *In a Different Light*’s development: “we needed to demonstrate that in fact, no, we can look at these great things and not demand a disconnect, but in fact show the connections” (Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018). At first, Wilson, Duffek, and McLennan considered directly referencing notions of the ‘masterwork’ within *In a Different Light*. However, this idea was eventually scrapped: “we turned away from examining this idea of what is or is not a masterwork and if it’s a term that really makes sense. It wasn’t really a priority in our conversations with people” (Wilson, Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018). Curator contemplation on the term ‘masterworks’ and what this gallery title means for *In a Different Light* marked the beginning stages of exhibit development.

Considering the term ‘masterwork’ from an audience perspective, McLennan expressed how complicated this term is to work with, but also how it can build expectations for an audience. He posits that using ‘masterworks’ in the title can encourage ‘close looking’: “I don’t find it inappropriate and it doesn’t bother me at all because I think it makes people think and look harder because they’re looking at masterworks. They should look. They should know what they are” (McLennan interview, August 24, 2018). For McLennan, it is important to encourage museumgoers to look closely at Northwest Coast art and appreciate it as such. McLennan’s, Wilson’s, and
Duffek’s thoughts hint at tensions in current discourses in art history and anthropology about the meanings Indigenous peoples attribute to Northwest Coast art, and the role of stylistic and formal analyses in Northwest Coast art studies that can divorce belongings from cultural contexts (Ki-ke-in 2013). Through critical discussion, *In a Different Light* began to take shape as an exhibit demonstrating how Pacific Northwest Indigenous peoples connect with things that are art, but are not just art.

Throughout the curator interviews, Wilson, Duffek, and McLennan presented distinct, but interrelated ideas about *In a Different Light*’s messaging. Speaking to the content of the gallery, Duffek describes a core message: “these works of art are more than art, and that contemporary Indigenous people connect with them in very diverse ways – and let’s look at those ways” (Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018). Wilson uses the term ‘intangible,’ referring to the content of *In a Different Light* and how it was meant to get audiences thinking about Northwest Coast art differently, beyond visual, aesthetic appreciation: “I think it was bringing in this intangible aspect. As Karen was saying, these objects are so often presented for their aesthetic value. Part of my broad generalization or assumption is that visitors come here to admire Indigenous art in an aesthetic way” (Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018). In addition to presenting ‘intangible’ aspects of displayed pieces, Wilson asserts how *In a Different Light* also shows how belongings in museums and private collections are important to contemporary First Nations peoples and communities: “it was really about trying to demonstrate to a museum audience that despite the fact that these are old things or historical things in museum cases that have been in a museum collection for a hundred and fifty years, or a private collection, that they still resonate quite strongly with people today” (Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018). Duffek’s and Wilson’s comments speak to how this exhibit features First Nations perspectives on the belongings displayed, highlighting that these belongings are part of legal, governance, economic, and social systems within Indigenous ways of knowing.

McLennan echoes Wilson’s and Duffek’s statements about *In a Different Light*’s content, but he also proposes that this exhibit is about cultivating appreciation for First Nations cultures in the present and the past: “The base message is that First Nations people are alive and well, (…) The other part, which is always there, but more subtle through the whole museum, is the amazing history and culture of Northwest Coast peoples and seeing it in a respectful way and acknowledging that this was and still is an amazing culture” (McLennan interview, August 24, 2018). In addition, McLennan understands *In a Different Light* as an opportunity to encourage aesthetic appreciation: “I think for me it’s more about giving people the opportunity to look closely and appreciate it and hopefully they do and then start asking questions and see answers being given by First Nations people” (McLennan
interview, August 24, 2018). Within this statement, McLennan reinforces the importance he places in looking closely and how this can be valuable for museumgoers. Overall, these three curators present interrelated goals and messages with which they designed *In a Different Light*, hoping to convey ‘intangible’ aspects of displayed belongings, how contemporary Indigenous peoples connect with these belongings, and to encourage appreciation of Northwest Coast art and cultures. Taken together, their thoughts about *In a Different Light*’s messaging underscore the ways this exhibit explores both material and immaterial aspects of displayed works.

With these messages, Duffek, Wilson, and McLennan considered MOA audiences throughout exhibit development and this informed the gallery design. Within their interview, Duffek and Wilson described how choosing to focus on non-contemporary works was a difficult decision, but it was a decision made in order to increase collections access for Pacific Northwest Indigenous artists, scholars, and knowledge-keepers. Duffek speaks to this decision: “The historical is what so many of the artists and the other community members want to see, especially things they haven’t had access to ever or for a long, long time” (Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018). Duffek indicated that the historic photographs were included, partially due to McLennan’s interest in them, but also because Indigenous artists want to see them: “When we’re showing people, the contemporary artists, they gravitate right away to those [historic] photos” (Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018). Choices made throughout the development of *In a Different Light* were practical, considering curator interests and priorities, the strengths of Elspeth McConnell’s collection, and which belongings from McConnell’s and other collections were accessible. But decisions were also made with people in mind, specifically thinking about access and how to create an exhibit that can serve as a resource for Indigenous scholars and artists.

In addition to considering these scholars and artists, Wilson discusses curatorial thought about anyone and everyone who may enter *In a Different Light*, and how the content of the gallery could meet the needs of those audiences. He describes choices made in order to ‘strike a balance’:

Of course someone like Ron Hamilton,⁶ who’s a historian and scholar in his own right, his knowledge base in this material is massive. We spent five hours talking to him. Obviously, he’s going to want more, but we’re also dealing with tourists from Germany, or Michigan, or wherever, people who have very, very little understanding. Also, I think this speaks to your project, there are also Indigenous people who come to the museum. Trying to strike a balance between all these imaginary audiences in a way that connects to these decisions that we’re making about the cases and the mounts. Community members and artists, they want to be able to see these things from many different vantage points to be able to learn from them and this very much

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⁶ Ki-ke-in (Ron Hamilton) is a Nuu-chah-nulth historian, poet, and artist.
speaks to the type of glass that we ordered for the cases and the physical arrangement of the cases (Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018).

Decisions about how to mount belongings, how to arrange display cases, what content to include, were made by thinking about these ‘imaginary audiences,’ their background knowledge about Northwest Coast art, and their potential priorities. For example, the glass used for the display cases allows museumgoers to see minute details of belongings. Considering these audiences also meant thinking about the representations put forth within the gallery and situating how these representations would be different from previous ‘masterwork’ exhibits: “The classic Northwest Coast show is Haida, Tsimshian, Tlingit work by male artists, which dominate so many collections of historical work, including the McConnell collection. We needed to make sure that we were bringing in some fabulous examples from the southern coast as well from different sources other than the McConnell collection” (Duffek, Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018). Just as the curators were mindful about how the choice to display cultural belongings and historic photographs could create an implicit message situating depicted peoples and cultures in the past rather than the present, what is the implicit message if male, northern artists are privileged? The curators intentionally chose to include more work by women artists, and more women’s perspectives, than are usually included within Northwest Coast art exhibits.

Consideration of audiences and implicit messaging extended to the organization of information and belongings within the gallery. Object groupings within display cases were not explicitly decided by contributing First Nations scholars and artists, but based on the way these people were talking about pieces. Wilson describes this further: “Marianne Nicolson talked about this headdress in a specific way in terms of connecting it to governance and politics or (...) as a legal document. What are other objects in the collection we’re considering, how do they also potentially speak to that theme, for example? We grouped it in that way and spoke about it in that way” (Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018). Based on these interviews, themes emerged and object groups were created: “that’s maybe one aspect of our curatorial voice: is working with all the increasing amount of input we were getting from the people we were interviewing, and then trying to do something with it that came out of our heads, like thinking of attaching verbs as a theme for each case to suggest this idea of objects in motion or ideas transforming” (Wilson, Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018). Cases throughout In a Different Light are associated with these theme words and they are written as gerunds. Highlighting how museum displays are generally very static, Duffek describes how these gerund theme words were intended to convey motion: “We thought [verbs] might help to give a sense of something moving, in action” (Wilson and Duffek interview,
July 25, 2018). Wilson reflects on their intentions for these verbs, considering audiences: “We felt like even if just those verbs inform how people look, maybe that would be useful” (Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018). The gerund titles, as an organization technique, were meant to oppose the static nature of museum displays and link displayed belongings to action and change. Wilson speaks to these groupings further: “The other somewhat unconventional approach was that we didn’t group things culturally, which we debated quite a bit as well, because, again, we wanted to try a different approach and speak more to the connections or commonalities between these objects from the Northwest Coast” (Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018). Case groupings and themes are meant to show similarities across Northwest Coast material cultures and ways of knowing, while also conveying a sense of action and transformation.

Similar descriptors, like change, are used to define how the film footage functions within this gallery. McLennan describes the messages communicated in the film content: “Again, this constant battle this museum has and others, First Nations peoples are still here. They’re adapting. They’re changing. Tradition is something that changes all the time” (McLennan interview, August 24, 2018). He explains how filmed scenes were intended to convey messages of change and continuity: “you wanted to show those changes and the best way of doing that is video: showing the dance group or someone carving or someone tattooing. If they see it in video, you don’t have to tell them all that yes, this is now, because it’s video and they didn’t shoot it 150 years ago” (McLennan interview, August 24, 2018). The curators thought strategically about how to communicate information to the public effectively, exploring what the best media were for a particular message. Echoing intended messages of continuity and change, Wilson explains how the film footage is one piece that creates a human presence: “we knew we wanted to have that contemporary human presence, but we also wanted to do it in a way that was somewhat unconventional. We didn’t want to have the classic interviewing someone, documentary approach, I guess. Again, it developed organically, but we wanted to have that sense of motion and activity in the space and do it more poetically” (Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018). Duffek discusses the film footage further and how it accompanies the belongings displayed: “It became another way of wrapping this historical work in contemporary voices and perspectives. So even though those videos are basically silent, you see contemporary makers making, from graffiti to tattooing to weaving. (...) But it was meant to be another component, so although we only have historical pieces in the show, they are framed in contemporary voices and experiences” (Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018). Adding to the quotations communicated via audio and text, the film footage projected in the gallery is one component conveying a sense of continuity, change, motion, and action.
In addition, these film sequences were meant to prompt consideration of the social lives of displayed belongings (Appadurai 1986). McLennan further describes what the film scenes communicate: “I think what it does is it allows people to see and think that these things didn’t live in cases all their lives. They lived in a community and whatever that community wants, that’s the important thing” (McLennan interview, August 24, 2018). Scenes of people touching, making, and using things, the same things or ones that are similar to those displayed, were intended to prompt consideration of object lives, how belongings within display cases have other uses, other purposes.

Like the film footage, the audio is meant to elicit more critical consideration of the belongings and their associated meanings. Duffek explains how the title of the gallery with its inclusion of the term ‘masterworks’ can create an expectation, which they hope to challenge through the audio: “In that way, the title of the gallery could be seen as a positive, because it sets up, possibly, in the viewer a certain expectation. And then when you go into that space, our hope was that would be upended to a certain extent, because you hear the voices of people talking about the things in quite different ways” (Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018). Throughout our interview, Wilson and Duffek describe how the audio was intended to act as an intervention, interrupting how audiences typically engage in exhibits: “let’s not hide this voice. Let’s make it have a real presence, because we wanted those voices to interfere in the visitor’s experience” (Duffek, Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018). Duffek speaks to this interference further: “Sometimes there’s people saying “look at that fantastic way that’s carved,” so they’re really looking at the detail, the material thing: and other voices are saying that we have to look at these things as more than art, as governance and things like that. We were hoping that would embody this idea of looking at things in a different light and you might go in with this idea and encounter something different” (Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018). The audio projected throughout this exhibit was intended to create a human presence, to interfere with and alter how people view displayed works, and prompt critical thought about the meanings associated with belongings and cultural continuity.

In addition to these purposes, the audio also functions to increase the amount of information given about a belonging, specifically communicating meanings Pacific Northwest Indigenous peoples attribute to these things. McLennan describes one of the idea chairs which projects a twenty-two-minute history about Q’umukwa, the Chief of the Undersea, and his mask told by Clyde Tallio, a Nuxalk knowledge-keeper, ceremonialist, and speaker: “The one of Clyde Tallio speaking, that’s a brilliant one and I don’t know how many people get that. That’s basic label information for that mask, which would go on for paragraphs and paragraphs. In a museum, you do this tiny little snippet. There’s the label and there’s no correlation to the reality of that piece, what we call a mask,
but that sculptural thing and the history that’s imbedded in there” (McLennan interview, August 24, 2018). The various meanings and stories associated with a belonging cannot effectively be conveyed in the short panels that museum professionals usually write. For example, Jisgang Nika Collison, a Haida woman and executive director and curator at the Haida Gwaii Heritage Centre, describes short text panels as not possible: “You can’t do that with Haida!” (Collison and Levell 2018: 65).

Duffek explains how information during exhibit development is cut, but also how this can be seen as a loss:

> With any exhibit, it’s such a process of elimination, because you can’t overwhelm people. Although Ron Hamilton, a Nuu-chah-nulth artist and historian who we interviewed, said, ‘I would just cover the walls in labels, like cover them.’ He would want words surrounding you, because he’s very frustrated when we trim his three-page description of how this rattle is used and what it means and where it was used and everything to nice little eighty words. For him, that’s this huge loss, and so he would stick it on the wall. We know from experience that people don’t usually stand there and then read these reams of texts (Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018).

As described by McLennan, the idea chair with audio about the Nuxalk mask functions to mitigate this loss expressed by Ki-ke-in (Ron Hamilton) to Duffek. It provides a greater amount of contextualizing information that situates the associated mask within Nuxalk knowledge, using Nuxalk style of oratory and many Nuxalk terms. Furthermore, it does so in a way that does not ‘overwhelm’ audiences with reams of text. This method of display takes into account the accommodations of various audiences, and provides a culturally grounded understanding of the displayed Nuxalk mask, one that is given more nuance than is typically allocated within text panels.

Through its various components, *In a Different Light* displays cultural belongings that are framed with contemporary First Nations perspectives, and the meanings and stories/histories these belongings elicit. This exhibit was designed to convey a sense of motion and cultural connection, presenting multiple ways of understanding displayed pieces. As Duffek states, “these works of art are more than art” (Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018). They are associated with law, economics, governance, social relationships, histories, and contemporary issues within Pacific Northwest Indigenous ways of knowing, and *In a Different Light* highlights these ‘intangible’ aspects of belongings that go beyond material and aesthetic qualities usually privileged within art galleries. For McLennan, this exhibit functions to encourage appreciation of Northwest Coast art and cultures. The distinct, interrelated *In a Different Light* messages discussed by Wilson, Duffek, and McLennan speak to the ways the belongings within this exhibit can evoke consideration of the material aspects of works, tangible attributes, and the ways these belongings can be associated with intangible meanings, concepts, and structures. The following exhibit reviews further these thoughts, examining connections between displayed works and immaterial concepts.
Chapter 3
Exhibit Responses and Readings

Through self-guided exhibit viewings and interviews, I worked with four Indigenous women who live and work in the Vancouver metropolitan area. They are current students or recent graduates of UBC programs. Karen Rose Thomas is səl̓ílwətaʔɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) and an archaeology graduate student. Kay Collins is Indigenous and a recent alum of UBC’s Information School. She was born and raised in British Columbia, and she is a part of her partner’s Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) family. Heather Burge is Mohawk adopted Tlingit and a linguistic anthropology graduate student. Autumn Schnell is a Gwich’in, Inuvialuit, and Dene second year undergraduate studying within the First Nations and Indigenous Studies program. Throughout their interviews, the exhibit reviewers explore various topics: exhibit themes, meanings attributed to displayed works, affects and memories, past and present settler colonial structures, and museum authorities.

Karen Rose Thomas: Resiliency Narratives

I think that most of the objects are art. I called them sensational pieces. They’re all very showy, beautiful silver carved jewelry, beautiful blankets, beautiful masks. – Karen Rose Thomas (Thomas interview, December 4, 2018).

Karen Rose Thomas’s interviews drew on a number of themes relating to her understanding of In a Different Light, such as resiliency, continuity, and longevity. First and foremost, she maintained throughout our interviews that In a Different Light is about the resiliency of Pacific Northwest Indigenous peoples: “I feel like the exhibit does really well to showcase the resilience of Indigenous peoples on the Northwest Coast and I appreciate that because it’s in contrast to the usual narratives of resurgence and revitalization, which I generally am uncomfortable with” (Thomas interview, December 4, 2018). Thomas finds that ‘resiliency’ captures continuity, as ‘resurgence’ and ‘revitalization’ imply loss. Her reading of this exhibit also drew on themes of continuity: “I feel like so many discussions of Indigenous cultures from the Northwest Coast, culture is interrupted by contact and I think by showcasing contemporary works of art and highlighting individual people from contemporary Indigenous communities allows us to acknowledge that line of inheritance and continuity” (Thomas interview, December 4, 2018). Thomas attributed some of her interest in this exhibit and its narrative of longevity to her identity both as an archaeologist and a səl̓ílwətaʔɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) woman who likes to think about the people who made displayed belongings: “The point of the Masterworks Gallery is to showcase art and artistic traditions and I think honouring the longevity of artistic traditions and imagining the first person to say ‘hey, this formline idea is pretty cool’ or
someone refining their technique of ovoids” (Thomas interview, January 17, 2019). Thomas describes *In a Different Light* as an exhibit about the resiliency, cultural continuity, and longevity of Pacific Northwest Indigenous peoples over time, expressing a positive reception to this exhibit.

Thomas’s observations highlight how she places herself into *In a Different Light*’s narrative of continuity. She states, “I guess, marveling at craftsmanship is really neat. Looking at those small baskets and seeing each of those stitches and I can imagine how difficult that was. I have dabbled in Salish wool weaving and cedar basket making. I know my work is crude, comparing it to those works inside that exhibit, but it’s still a continuity” (Thomas interview, January 17, 2019). Echoing McLennan’s goal of encouraging close looking within the gallery, Thomas expresses how this goal was realized through her attention to ‘craftsmanship,’ while also placing her work within associated exhibit narratives of continuity and longevity. Her understanding of *In a Different Light*’s messages also describes differences between exhibits displaying ‘art’ and those displaying ‘artifact,’ delineating how certain methods of display communicate belonging status as one or the other.

Throughout our first interview, Thomas thought about how she was ‘supposed’ to interact with the gallery in order to trigger the audio. Her questions about how to interact with exhibits extended to comparisons between *In a Different Light* as an exhibit focused on aesthetics and the *Multiversity Galleries* as an exhibit displaying more ‘utilitarian’ things within visible storage cases, which allow museumgoers access to a larger portion of the MOA collection through drawers. Describing *In a Different Light*, Thomas discusses which cultural belongings are displayed and how they are displayed: “I feel like all the pieces that were selected for the exhibit are all intentionally sensational (…). An archaeologist is excited about blanket pins and fishhooks and the reason I know [the Multiversity Galleries] drawers so well is because we look at them a lot. We also talked about accessibility and how you really work for things in the *Multiversity Galleries*” (Thomas interview, December 4, 2018). Thomas draws contrasts between how MOA displays belongings traditionally regarded as ‘art’ and those traditionally regarded as ‘artifacts’ within art world perspectives, highlighting how it is easier to access items considered ‘art’ rather than items considered ‘artifacts.’ These observations speak to how belongings are re-contextualized through museum processes of accession, interpretation, and display. Thomas describes how belongings are given certain meanings within *In a Different Light*: “I think everything is contact, proto-historic period and I think that just speaks to the way the settler art world transforms objects, I guess, from utilitarian objects to art to be appreciated” (Thomas interview, January 17, 2019). Paying attention to how belongings are displayed, Thomas defines notions of ‘art’ and ‘utilitarian object’ operating within these two exhibits and this influences how she interacts with each based on how readily accessible the displays are.
Thomas’s comments about the differences in how MOA displays items and how this influences her interactions with MOA exhibits inform her understandings of *In a Different Light*. She discusses subtler messages running throughout the exhibit: “[Those outside academic circles] don’t talk about the ways that art was born out of a utilitarian thing that someone needed. I think the *In a Different Light* exhibit gets at it a little bit” (Thomas interview, January 17, 2019). Thomas highlights how there are multiple messages running through *In a Different Light*, some subtler than others. She draws attention to how items made by səl̓ílwətaʔɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples, created for utilitarian purposes, are now considered art: “These baskets were used for things and then the skills were refined and the purposes were evolved and look at this tiny basket that’s the pinnacle of artistic talent or how crests were used to identify people’s houses. Now it’s also art. It’s hinted at, but it’s not directly, glaringly” (Thomas interview, January 17, 2019). Marilyn Jones, a Suquamish curator, echoes this comment: “Carvings were made not as art, but to be used, and each item had a purpose. (…) Now carvings and woodworking are often done to earn money” (2006). Thomas speaks to how settler perspectives on art ‘transform’ belongings and how this feeds into her idyllic and cynical readings of the gallery:

Idyllic Karen would like to believe that by highlighting individual artists, it’s showing continuity, it’s showing the inheritance of teachings, but it also could be intended to sell things in the gift shop and that’s not even really cynical either because I know artists who have work in the gift shop and I hope they get exorbitant prices for their work (Thomas interview, January 17, 2019).

Thomas describes how the settler art and museum world can constitute and re-contextualize belongings, things which may have intangible aspects, into commodities for the art market, which is primarily concerned with the formal and aesthetic qualities of these belongings (Kramer 2006). There are pieces in this gallery that were made specifically for the art market and there are pieces that were not. Thomas’s comments directly relate back to the gallery where *In a Different Light* is located: ‘The Elspeth McConnell Gallery of Northwest Coast Masterworks.’ Understandings of a ‘masterwork’ come from the settler art and museum world and can carry significant baggage, as this term has historically evaluated art based on tangible attributes, distancing items from intangible meanings attributed by səl̓ílwətaʔɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) and other Coast Salish knowledge systems. Thomas’s observations highlight the ways that belongings are given meanings within museum systems, meanings that may not reflect those attributed by the peoples who made them. Ki-ke-in echoes her thoughts about settler art and museum world perspectives: “They have helped to create a new setting, where much of the richness and many of the complex meanings faded away, the superficial details are stressed, and decoration seems to be the focus” (2013: 686). In contrast,
McLennan considers the audience that engages with MOA exhibits: “nobody is going to go in The Gallery of Mediocre Works, because who cares?” (McLennan interview, August 24, 2018). From his perspective, the term ‘masterworks’ builds an expectation for a museum audience and can further encourage close looking. When considered with Thomas’s and Ki-ke-in’s thoughts, the multiple meanings attributed to cultural belongings discussed in the previous chapter are further delineated, showing various understandings of the pieces displayed, how traditional settler systems for analyzing art tend to value certain pieces over others based on aesthetic, visual attributes, and how In a Different Light attempts to present belongings as art, but also show the non-aesthetic meanings and connections attributed to these belongings (Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018).

During the second interview, Thomas reconsidered a statement she made during the first interview about the exhibit message and content. Her comments speak to how settler perspectives, similar to those bearing on art analysis described above, may or may not be unsettled by In a Different Light. In our first discussion, Thomas critiqued the limited inclusion of settler colonial violence in the exhibit, describing how the curators ‘danced’ around it. She posited that this inclusion would add to the resiliency narrative of Pacific Northwest Indigenous peoples presented in the exhibit content. However, upon further reflection, Thomas refined her opinion: “I think that too much emphasis on settler colonial violence is out of place for the exhibit, because people are not going to see that. They’re not going to be unsettled. (…) I think an exhibit like In a Different Light is not designed to unsettle and it would probably feel uncomfortable without [the settler’s] consent. That’s a whole other topic, but something like Lawrence Paul’s exhibit, people are prepared to be challenged” (Thomas interview, January 17, 2019). Her reading of In a Different Light included the degree to which this exhibit challenges narratives of history that mitigate settler peoples’ culpability in colonial violence in the Pacific Northwest, echoing historian Amy Lonetree’s proposition that museums can be decolonized by speaking ‘hard truths’ (2012).

Using similar terminology as Thomas, but speaking to the audio projected throughout In a Different Light, the curators expressed some intentions to ‘unsettle.’ Wilson describes these intentions: “despite the fact that we weren’t grappling directly with this idea of masterworks, I think we had that idea that we’d try to unsettle the viewer or to challenge the viewer to look at things differently. It was our hope that the community voices would intervene in a way in terms of how people, like how museum visitors, look at and relate to the object” (Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018). These quotations highlight differing approaches to unsettling settlers within exhibits and explore to what extent and how the settler status quo is challenged by In a Different Light. Thomas’s opinions and observations about how this exhibit does not directly describe settler colonial
violence in a way that reflects an unsettled narrative impacts how she interacts with the exhibit when accompanied by family, particularly her daughter.

Thomas’s experience of *In a Different Light* is influenced by whom she is seeing the gallery with. In our first interview, Thomas described how she experienced the exhibit alone, but since she saw the gallery with her daughter (elementary-school age) over winter break, she focused on her exhibit experiences with company in our second interview. She reflected on how inclusion of settler colonial histories and violence would change her experience with her daughter: “I think if [settler colonial violence] were represented it might change my visit with [my daughter], because it would be external validation of the shit that mom rants about” (Thomas interview, January 17, 2019). Some of the audio discusses settler colonial violence, but encountering these recordings can be a matter of timing. Thomas’s imaginings about the inclusion of this content within the Masterworks Gallery speak to how she encounters these histories and reminders of ongoing settler colonial violence even if they are not explicitly included in exhibit text panels. Thomas further describes how she facilitates her daughter’s exhibit viewings with discussion about colonialism: “I try to tactfully talk about colonialism in a way that doesn’t make her angry. I remember being a very angry child. (…) I probably overload her when I talk about injustice and the Canadian climate of racism and things like that. For example, there’s that angel in the Masterworks Gallery and she’s fascinated with mythological creatures, fairies, vampires, mummies, angels” (Thomas interview, January 17, 2019). Thomas’s childhood influences how she facilitates her daughter’s exhibit experiences and the ways *In a Different Light* discusses religion through an angel figure are tied to broader histories of residential schools, forced assimilation, and genocide. Her child’s questions broach how museums, education, and religion are implicated in settler colonial structures: “I think the only thing that’s stuck with her about residential schools is the taking away of the children and school and education and how intrinsically against instinct it is to send her to public school. I think she gets some of that. The fear. (…) This is all tied up in my thoughts about residential school so her asking if angels are real, it’s all very thick” (Thomas interview, January 17, 2019). Thomas’s experiences of *In a Different Light* with her daughter can draw on the interconnected nature of residential schools, religion, and government programs within processes of settler colonial genocide. Her observations speak to the ways experiences of violence related to past and ongoing colonial structures can be brought to the forefront within museum spaces, elicited through memories positioned within broader histories (Linke 2015). According to Thomas, *In a Different Light* is about the resilience and strength of Pacific Northwest Indigenous peoples, and Thomas’s family is a part of that narrative.
Thomas’s interviews draw on various themes relating to family, settler colonial violence, the ways that museums define/display ‘art’ and ‘artifact,’ and exhibit messages that illustrate the resiliency of Pacific Northwest Indigenous peoples. Throughout both interviews, she expressed a positive reaction to this exhibit and the way that it frames the cultural belongings displayed with quotes from First Nations scholars and artists. Her comments also speak to broader issues discussed within anthropology and art history academic circles about the role of settler art-world analyses, questioning if these perspectives have a place within literature that increasingly expresses intangible meanings and interpretations of Northwest Coast art (Townsend-Gault, Kramer, and Ki-ke-in 2013).

**Kay Collins: Relational Exhibits**

Like I said, one thing that I always struggled with was there are things you can learn from the item you’re looking at, but there’s this glass in front of you so it was interesting how there was this negotiation between we have to keep (…) the glass up to a certain extent, but it was an interesting way of taking it away. - Kay Collins (Collins interview, January 18, 2019).

Drawing on her academic background in information systems and FNIS literature, Kay Collins expressed positive interpretations and understandings of *In a Different Light*, specifically commenting on themes of continuity and ‘collaboration’ as exhibit messages. During both interviews, Collins understood the exhibit as a mutually beneficial endeavour for contributing First Nations peoples: “It seems more like a partnership, a collaborative, and maybe not just what the museum wants to get out of it but okay, what’s beneficial for you folks” (Collins interview, December 6, 2018). Throughout her trips to *In a Different Light*, Collins found evidence of Pacific Northwest Indigenous scholar and artist participation in the knowledge produced within the exhibit. Collins uses the term ‘collaboration,’ but the term ‘participation,’ following Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson’s ‘collaboration continuum’ (2008), more accurately reflects *In a Different Light*’s development as described by Wilson, Duffek and McLennan. I use ‘participation’ to describe how the curators discussed belongings with First Nations scholars and artists to generate exhibit content, because this was the extent to which these scholars and artists were involved in exhibit development, a choice based on limited time (Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018). Picking up on evidence of this participation, Collins highlights how MOA is maintaining relationships with Pacific Northwest Indigenous peoples and using their institutional resources to bring cultural belongings back, ones that were scattered through colonialism: “I noticed that not everything belongs to MOA so it’s nice to see that they’ve been communicating with places as far as Manitoba and the island to bring these items back and I could tell from the photographs that the folks who are speaking and are
quoted had moments to interact with the pieces and learn from them and talk about them” (Collins interview, December 6, 2018). Collins understands *In a Different Light* as a ‘collaborative’ exhibit that brings cultural belongings back to the Pacific Northwest so that local Indigenous peoples can access and produce knowledge with them.

Collins picked up on exhibit themes of continuity. She echoes Thomas’s comments about longevity: “When I went over to the section on ‘feasting,’ one of the pictures was from 2015 and that was great because I feel like there’s this theme of putting everything into a historical context and bringing some of these old items forward and saying, they’re still current” (Collins interview, January 17, 2019). Collins describes how cultural belongings are contextualized in both the past and the present with photographs and the perspectives of contemporary Pacific Northwest Indigenous peoples: “These things are still happening and being cared for, and it’s part of a history when these things were being erased or trying to be taken away or snuffed out and so being in the exhibit was great, because it highlighted how these things are still taking place - feasts are still happening - instead of seeing all of these old photographs” (Collins interview, January 17, 2019). Her thoughts about settler colonial violence, but also continuity and longevity, speak to themes of resilience. Like Thomas, Collins details where *In a Different Light* portrays how contemporary Pacific Northwest Indigenous people continue to use similar belongings and engage in similar practices, communicating underlying messages of resilience.

Collins’s comments during our first interview underscore how the curators’ messaging intentions are realized, specifically messages about how displayed belongings are art, but are also imbued with non-aesthetic meanings within Pacific Northwest Indigenous knowledge systems (Duffek, Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018). Collins speaks to this theme: “something that is ceremonial is also a part of governance, is also part of artwork, also part of family and history. It’s all bound up in one another, but generally it seemed like each piece was something that was removed from the community through colonization” (Collins interview, December 6, 2018). Collins highlights how within Pacific Northwest Indigenous knowledge systems the displayed cultural belongings are enmeshed in networks of meaning. Drawing on background knowledge about decolonizing museums, archives, and information systems, Collins touches on how she imagines the exhibit content was created, specifically how Indigenous scholars and artists engaged with certain belongings: “it does seem like each person would talk about when they have this belonging in front of them, what’s significant and what’s speaking to them about it and what’s coming forward to them through it. I think that’s the overarching theme versus just things that the museum has that are just in an exhibit” (Collins interview, December 6, 2018). Her imaginings are correct.
Discussion about Collins’s interpretations of the Masterworks Gallery during our first interview led to thought about display and design, and how these aspects of In a Different Light feedback into the broader goals of the exhibit. Collins comments on how the contextualizing information included by associated cultural belongings makes her feel like the display case glass is not in the way: “Each one of these pieces is a form of information and to connect that information to the people it belongs to, that’s the point of it right? The glass is in the way – but even though the glass is still there, it doesn’t feel in the way, because you’re seeing the photographs and you’re hearing the people talking as they’re with it, and they’re talking about what they’re learning each time they come into the museum” (Collins interview, December 6, 2018). Her observations about how contextualizing information connects things to the people they belong to, and how this content makes it feel like the display case glass is not in the way, speak to a perceived barrier between herself and a given item. Similarly, Xwalacktun (Rick Harry), a Skxwú7mesh (Squamish) and ‘Namgis artist, references how belongings are a ‘form of information’: “Art was used to help pass on messages and stories” (Squamish Nation n.d.). This exhibit content focusing on the information that cultural belongings communicate seems to decrease the barriers Collins feels between herself and a culturally contextualized understanding of the displayed belongings.

Similarly, Collins uses this idea of the glass ‘not being in the way’ to discuss how cultural belongings are mounted within display cases. She was struck by the way the Nisga’a weaving is displayed and from one interview to the next, this mount stuck with her: “I think the big one was the Chilkat robe, because whenever I’ve seen them, they’re always flat against the wall and to have it that way. I read the plaque: ‘I want to flip it. I always want to flip it so I can see how it’s been made.’ Then I looked up and I was really happy that I could see inside this robe. Things like that, those little touches” (Collins interview, December 6, 2018). Collins describes how the boxes are mounted in a similar way as the weaving: “You pick up the box and you turn it and flip it. How everything was displayed was with this examining and looking and interacting” (Collins interview, December 6, 2018). Collins’s quotation speaks to how the mounts within this gallery facilitate audience engagement with the displayed items, encouraging visual interaction as intended by MOA curating staff (Duffek, Wilson, and McLennan interviews, July 25 and August 24, 2018).

In addition, Collins touches on how focusing on contemporary engagements between museum collections and Indigenous peoples makes her consider the displayed belongings within past and present cultural contexts, making the temporal distance seem peripheral between when a belonging was made and now. Collins describes her exhibit experiences: “while you’re looking at it and doing that, there’s audio and signs as you’re reading that says this is what it was used for and
this is what it meant and this is how we use it. I think that that’s why time didn’t seem like an issue” (Collins interview, December 6, 2018). She asserts that because the gallery focuses on contemporary engagements between Pacific Northwest Indigenous peoples and museum collections, the temporal distance between when a belonging was made and the contemporary collections engagements documented in the exhibit is not significant in her exhibit reading: “As soon as people start throwing dates out to me, I’m not paying attention. I won’t remember, but even then, it seemed like all of it was still relevant to everyone, to all of the folks involved in it. I don’t know if time seemed to matter at that point” (Collins interview, December 6, 2018). Collins expresses that because all of the displayed belongings are relevant today, she finds the time periods represented by these belongings do not provoke a past-oriented exhibit reading, as the curators may have feared.

Collins’s perspectives speak to decisions made by the curators. During interviews, Duffek described how difficult it was to focus on non-contemporary works: “you don’t want this idea that it’s all in the past” (Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018). For Collins, Duffek’s fears about past-oriented representations were not realized. Collins further describes the gallery’s content and how it communicates contemporary meanings attributed to pieces: “It wasn’t this historical thing. It was people interacting with it now in various ways and pointing out that this is a legal document for us. This is the way I interact with it and this is what I learn from interacting with it. This is what this means. This is what I was taught. This is something my grandma told me. They come alive in a different way” (Collins interview, December 6, 2018). Within this quote, Collins reinforces her understanding of In a Different Light as an exhibit focused on contemporary Pacific Northwest Indigenous interpretations of and engagements with cultural belongings, underscoring the continued relevance of these pieces and how they ‘come alive’ when accompanied by elicited histories and stories. Indigenous contemporary engagement with cultural belongings now in museums and private collections is a focus of In a Different Light, as per curatorial intent (Wilson, Duffek, and McLennan interviews, July 25 and August 24, 2018). Although the passage of time between when cultural belongings were made and the contemporary Indigenous engagements documented in the exhibit is not the primary focus, time is wrapped up in In a Different Light’s messages of continuity and connection. Recognizing scholars and artists who contributed to this exhibit, Collins describes affects, emotions related to seeing this exhibit, and generates knowledge based on “felt” experiences and histories (Million 2008).

Collins discussed affects in relation to both her personal networks and the format of the audio content. She recognized people who contributed to the exhibit and referenced her memories of these people. This afforded a ‘communal’ feeling: “There’s Larry Grant who I’ve seen at the Longhouse
lunches. There are other people who I’ve seen, like I went to see Andrea Gibson who I went to see two or one year ago. And the slam poet, Molly, I went to see her. There’s something very communal about it even though I haven’t met this person in person. That was really nice to see” (Collins interview, December 6, 2018). Listening to the ways these people see the belongings also provoked affects. Collins describes feeling vulnerable when listening to audio content: “You’re also trying to listen to how this other person sees it as well, this is probably just a personal thing, that can make me feel quite vulnerable” (Collins interview, December 6, 2018). Audio, rather than text, also communicates tone, adding to the emotions she describes: “I think a lot gets communicated in your tone as well so text, you lose that a bit. I think that recordings were really important. When I was alone, it was emotional. You could hear how people were healing as they talk about something” (Collins interview, December 6, 2018). Being able to hear tone provoked affects for Collins, as text cannot always communicate all that voice does. Furthermore, much of the exhibit audio content discusses traumas associated with loss of knowledge through settler colonialism, and these subjects contribute to Collins’s exhibit experiences.

The affects she describes relate to both the role museums played in settler colonial violence, and how Collins sees MOA engage in exhibit projects with people she knows. She expresses sadness at loss of cultural knowledge: “Sometimes if I look at something and I don’t know the meaning, it becomes this sadness. That complication, it’s just there. I think the big takeaway, it just seemed more collaborative with folks in mind, top to bottom” (Collins interview, December 6, 2018). Memory, with its groundings in broader histories, and affect are entwined, and both can be elicited by things, specifically “the experiential landscapes of monuments, places and spaces where we preserve an account of the past for ourselves and others” (Tolia-Kelly, Waterton, and Watson 2017: 5). In this case, a lack of memory elicits emotion, referencing settler colonial violence and damage to cultural knowledge transmission. Despite sadness, Collins references how In a Different Light engages First Nations scholars and artists, speaking to how this exhibit draws on the knowledge of those whose ancestors made the belongings included in this gallery. She also speaks to affects associated with changes in MOA’s practice, which she has seen throughout her lifetime: “It’s nice to see exhibits like that because as a person that comes to MOA and has come to MOA even when I was young, it’s great to see that those shifts are happening and to have spent enough time on the coast and in Vancouver and around Musqueam territory and everyone else’s territory and to start to recognize faces and see people. It’s overwhelming” (Collins interview, January 17, 2019). For Collins, In a Different Light is part of the history of collaborative museum practice that she has witnessed, highlighting how, over time, MOA has increasingly been working with contemporary Pacific
Northwest Indigenous peoples. Visual reminders of how MOA exhibit development has changed and is increasingly collaborating and building relationships with people she knows complicate her *In a Different Light* experiences.

Collins described her experiences within this gallery as positive. Her interviews reflect on themes of continuity expressed by *In a Different Light* and they pick up on messages that are very close to curatorial intentions. Collins focused on cultural belongings and audio components within the first interview, and during our second interview she focused more on the audio, specifically Molly Billows’s spoken-word piece about ‘rebellious daughters.’ Many of Collin’s comments highlight the relational, personal aspects of *In a Different Light* that draw on her social networks, memories of these people, and how these aspects fit into broader settler colonial histories and changes in museum practices. For example, Collins’s quotes speak to the ways the exhibit was emotionally potent for her, both in terms of the content about settler colonial violence, but also the tones expressed and how these contributors, some of whom she knows, are part of collaborative and participatory museum practices. These broader themes within Collins’s interviews are focused on her social networks and memories elicited by relational aspects of the exhibit, and changes within museum practices that are more socially and ethically responsible.

**Heather Burge: (Dis)Embodiment**

[T]his double-edged sword where [the exhibit] wasn’t intentionally forcing you to think about a place, which would then force you to think about why those things weren’t in that place. But it swung the other way where it was so removed from place that that was jarring, at least, for me. - Heather Burge (Burge interview, January 18, 2018)

It is very art gallery. I guess, Tony Stark’s\(^7\) house or something, like minimalism, but minimalism that costs a lot of money. It’s almost like a movie when you see those fancy art gallery shows in a movie where you should be sipping champagne and everyone is in ridiculous high fashion, like Hunger Games shit. - Heather Burge (Burge interview, January 18, 2018)

Heather Burge began our first discussion with thoughts about how *In a Different Light* specifically, but also how museum exhibits generally, evoke a sad and peaceful feeling, which she associates with church. Peaceful in the sense that she was around belongings that were made before colonialism, pretty belongings: “It’s peaceful to see what people were doing back then and what they are still trying to do. (…) There’s something peaceful about being around pretty things.” (Burge interview, December 18, 2018). At the same time, she also expressed how sadness is wrapped up in

\(^7\) Tony Stark is the main character of *Ironman*, a movie released in 2008.
this peaceful feeling: “I’m sure not every object was stolen from a grave and put on display, but some of them really were and so all of them could be that thing. There’s a certain sadness to having them here and not having them where they would have been one hundred years ago” (Burge interview, December 18, 2019). Her descriptions of this peaceful sadness illustrate how museum histories and structures implicated in colonialism and cultural genocide influence her trips to exhibit spaces. These affects also reference how museum spaces are enmeshed in webs of associations, which are rooted in memory and positioned in broader settler colonial histories and structures (Tolia-Kelly, Waterton, and Watson 2017). This peaceful sadness described in both interviews set the tone for Burge’s experiences within this exhibit.

With our discussions and after multiple viewings, Burge proposed that In a Different Light was meant to get audiences thinking about Northwest Coast art, echoing the intentions of the curators explored in chapter 2. However, she thought that in some ways this objective was not realized: “Despite the fact that it was ‘reflections on Northwest Coast art,’ it seemed much less about Northwest Coast art than it did about reflection or the space” (Burge interview, December 18, 2018). Burge described the space as ‘distracting’: “like [the curators] were trying, but then their trying became more distracting to what they were trying to do” (Burge interview, December 18, 2018). She attributed this distraction in part to the exhibit design, specifically the way in which belongings were displayed and, at times, suspended, which was meant to facilitate multiple viewing angles. While recognizing the curators intended for the exhibit to be about the belongings, Burge attributed these distractions to the ‘sterile’ design of the gallery: “I did appreciate that the exhibit was trying to make it about the pieces themselves and not about the exhibit as a whole, but at the same time, what I struggled with was, in attempting to make it just about the pieces, it seemed very sterile and I think of fancy art gallery, modern” (Burge interview, January 18, 2019). Describing the space with terms like ‘minimalism,’ Burge found herself focused on the art exhibit aesthetic of the gallery rather than the belongings included within the displays.

Burge described specific portions of the exhibit as ‘disembodied.’ Thinking about the design of the gallery and the display cases, Burge employs this descriptor: “[the belongings] were suspended in air by this wire, disembodied. It made me think of these disembodied cultures, these artifacts of culture in the same way they put those bugs in cases,” (Burge interview, December 18, 2018). Her use of this term, ‘disembodied,’ highlights the double-edged sword of the curators’ intentions. In order to offer multiple viewing vantage points from which to look at belongings, these pieces are suspended on minimal mounts that allow audiences to see as many surfaces of a belonging
as possible (McLennan, Duffek, and Wilson interviews, July 25 and August 24, 2018). Burge found these mounts created a disemboding effect, distracting her from looking at the belongings.

A portion of the film footage projected throughout the space elicited a similar response: “[w]hen it switched from dancing, and a lot of the dancing, it didn’t show anybody’s faces, it was just their bodies and I thought of the person who filmed that. Did they do that on purpose or was it unconscious? Again, a disembodied experience” (Burge interview, December 18, 2018). She connected this footage to the quotes printed on text panels and audio projected throughout the exhibit: “How did those blurbs come about? What were they in response to? Again, they were also kind of disembodied” (Burge interview, December 18, 2018). Burge’s curiosity about how the quotations came about, what those sentences were in response to, draws attention to both how information is displayed and communicated, but also the extent to which curators have to make choices about what to include and what to exclude.

Burge felt that curatorial overviews printed on the large text panels were also ‘disembodied’ to a certain extent, as these texts did not situate the writers in relation to Vancouver and the people here. She speaks to the omnipresent voice that she frequently encounters in museums: “are the curators of the gallery from here? Do they have Northwest Coast connections? Have they been here for a while? Are they from someplace else? Where is that place? Again, this disembodied – ” (Burge interview, December 18, 2018). Burge’s observations contrast understandings of place-based knowledge as ‘embodied’ with knowledge disconnected from place as ‘disembodied,’ drawing on anthropological perspectives about embodiment (Massumi 2002), and Tlingit knowledge systems that understand people and things as belonging to place and vice versa (Thornton 2000). She juxtaposes traditional settler museum approaches to knowledge production within Tlingit ways of knowing: “you have this unconscious understanding that somehow knowledge is just transferable to any old place and when you’re talking about really embodied, place-based things, like these objects or like language, or like First Nations culture in general, the dissonance between those two things can be pretty big” (Burge interview, December 18, 2018). Her comments highlight how settler understandings of knowledge production are communicated within In a Different Light’s curatorial text and her associated discomfort: “maybe that’s this uncomfortableness, because I don’t have answers to any of these things. I don’t have a sense of rootedness and I don’t know where these people are from. I don’t know where these things are from. It’s hard to connect with them in a meaningful way” (Burge interview, December 18, 2018). Museum exhibits usually do not position curators aside from a credit panel listing the names of contributing museum staff. Burge identified this omnipresent curator voice as a site where settler ways of knowing are expressed within In a
Different Light and how they conflict with Tlingit theoretical understandings of knowledge, things, and people as situated and relational (Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer 1990). She used this term ‘disembodied’ most during the first interview, but she also used it during our second, indicating how this feeling endured.

Burge drew another contrast. She described the intended uses of a few displayed belongings, a Nisga’a weaving and a chest of spoons, and how these belongings currently reside in cases, static. Her comments speak to the ways that museums treat belongings and how these belongings would be treated by Pacific Northwest Indigenous communities: “If someone brought out a giant chest of spoons like that, I would die. It would be amazing, but they’re just sitting in the same way the robe is just sitting - the Chilkat robe - and it’s big in a way that I imagine it would have been worn so it wasn’t laid flat, it had it on a mannequin” (Burge interview, January 18, 2019). Even though the Nisga’a robe is mounted on a mannequin, positioned as it would have if it was worn, Burge focused on the tassels of this weaving, highlighting how Pacific Northwest Indigenous peoples made these robes to be danced, to be in motion (Samuel 1982; Christodoulides 2012): “Just looking at the tassels: even if it’s worn by a person, just the fact that their breathing would have had it moving a little bit and it’s not moving. You’re not going to put it on a rodeo horse, like that’s weird, but always being reminded of what things were supposed to be used for and what they’re doing now” (Burge interview, January 18, 2019). Within Tlingit and Nisga’a language, the term for these weavings specifically “refers to the flowing warp fringe which sways about the body when the robe is worn in a dance” and “dancing blanket” respectively, reflecting how movement is central the meaning and purpose of these robes within Tlingit and Nisga’a knowledge systems (Samuel 1982: 22; Christodoulides 2012). Burge’s contrast highlights differences between how museums display belongings statically within cases and how Pacific Northwest Indigenous peoples have and continue to use similar belongings for specific events. This Nisga’a weaving may still be danced, but Burge has no way of knowing this.

Burge’s comparisons between maker intended uses of belongings and how these belongings are currently being used within the Masterworks Gallery did not always result in a contrast. She enjoyed her experience listening to the idea chair with the Q’umukwa history told by Clyde Tallio: “I like the audio in the sense that it was going full in on that one mask and I could sit and look at that mask while he was telling me a story and I felt like I got a sense of where the mask came from and what he was trying to say. So in that sense, having that connection was really unique in a sense” (Burge interview, December 18, 2018). Burge describes how this story told with the displayed mask made her feel ‘connected,’ as it gave her a sense of how Tallio understands his relationship to the
mask within Nuxalk ways of knowing. The contrast Heather draws here was between this specific display and other displays she has encountered in museums: “At many museums you’ll put your headphones on and they’ll lecture about, ‘this came from ___ in the 1940s,’ whereas this was a story and the way that I imagine that if that mask had been brought out and the language had been used to introduce that mask” (Burge interview, December 18, 2018). Based on a sense of ‘connection,’ Burge describes listening to Tallio and this history as a more ‘embodied experience’: “It was a story about that object, but not just any: it was a story about what that mask was representing and the story behind that mask. I personally felt more connected to that particular object knowing that story. It’s more than just ‘oh, that must have taken a lot of work,’ but this is what it is, this is what it was supposed to be, and this was the cultural context it came from. I liked it” (Burge interview, January 18, 2019). Having that cultural context afforded Burge a more ‘connected’ and ‘embodied’ experience, as the mask was put in relation to place and people, echoing McLennan’s point that Tallio’s recording should be ‘basic label information.’ When accompanied with this recording, this Nuxalk mask is doing what it is ‘supposed to do’: “if the mask was brought out, that’s how it would have been introduced. It would have been this whole performative story about not just the mask, but what it was representing. It’s more of what it was meant for. It was meant to tell some sort of story. For me, I felt much more connected to that, because it was doing what it was supposed to do” (Burge interview, January 18, 2019). The idea chair with Tallio’s recording positioned adjacent to the displayed Nuxalk mask afforded an experience Burge described as ‘connected,’ because it acknowledges associations between people, place, and belongings, echoing Collins’s comments on how displayed belongings are enmeshed in networks of meanings and associations.

Burge’s comments were slightly less critical during the second interview. I think this shift occurred because she saw exhibits in San Diego over winter break, which she compared to In a Different Light (Burge interview, January 18, 2019). Even so, she maintained similar opinions about the Nisga’a weaving, the idea chair featuring Tallio’s recording, and the gallery feeling ‘disembodied.’ Her thoughts about the curation of the contributor quotes speak to space, page, and time limitations within museum and academic work, and how these limits can disconnect information and things from place, relationships, and fuller narratives. Like the written and spoken quotes within In a Different Light, the quotes in this thesis are curated. Burge’s comments overlap with Ki-ke-in’s (Ron Hamilton) thoughts described earlier, examining how limitations can create an incomplete, ‘disembodied’ picture that disconnects information, people, things, and place.

Burge also raises issues about curator positionality. She touches on an important issue: “museums have typically preferred the Wizard of Oz technique: exhibits present the anonymous
voice of authority, while in reality texts are constructed by one or more curators hiding behind the screens of the institution” (Ames, 2005: 48). Burge’s ideas suggest that panels listing the names of contributing museum staff and their role in developing an exhibit are not enough. Following art historian J. Pedro Lorente’s observation that “a fundamental plea of ‘critical museology’ is to acknowledge that all interpretations are subjective” (2015: 124), how can those pleas be answered without more prominent panels that position curators and their knowledge? How can settler exhibit makers be situated in ways that do not centre their voices, but rather centre those voices presented within the exhibit content (Duffek thesis edits, March 26, 2019)?

**Autumn Schnell: Resurgence and Liveliness**

[T]here was another *In a Different Light* quote that stuck out to me. One was talking about living and breathing pieces and that speaks to being alive. – Autumn Schnell (Schnell interview, January 22, 2019)

When asked about their initial reflections on *In a Different Light*, Autumn Schnell thought about where loaned belongings are coming from and how this illustrates power imbalances. Schnell turned our discussion to Montreal and the Elspeth McConnell collection during both interviews, highlighting the colonial roots of collecting: “I just noticed where all of the pieces were borrowed from and it made me mad. These pieces should be at home. They shouldn’t be in Montreal” (Schnell interview, January 22, 2019). Schnell attributed their attention to loans and collection locations to their experiences in a previous MOA exhibit, *The Fabric of Our Land: Salish Weaving*, which brought blankets residing in museums across North America and Europe home to Coast Salish territory through loans. Schnell’s thoughts highlight the ways in which museum structures can continue to limit access to cultural belongings. They made some concessions to MOA, commenting on how professionals at this institution “let community members touch [pieces] before they go into cases” and how “MOA is better at this than some museums” (Schnell interview, January 22, 2019). However, Schnell focused on the ways that many museums continue colonial practices, like touch/use restrictions. They also drew attention to power imbalances in museum relationships with Indigenous peoples: “They’re borrowing them to come back and visit home which is nice, but you wish that they could be home and basically how these pieces are diaspora. (…) And how these communities couldn’t gain access to these pieces unless it was through another museum” (Schnell interview, January 31, 2019). Collins also noticed from where belongings were coming, specifically other museums. They saw this as MOA bringing belongings back to the Pacific Northwest so Indigenous peoples can access them without having to travel great distances. Schnell saw continuing power differentials between museums like MOA and Pacific Northwest Indigenous communities
that usually do not have the resources to accept loaned materials. Even as institutions like MOA leverage resources to assist Indigenous communities in meeting their goals, there are still deep power imbalances between institutions loaning and accepting loans, and Indigenous communities. There are Indigenous Nations and communities that have the resources to accept loans, but this is definitely not the norm.

Schnell commented on object preservation and cultural preservation during both interviews, arguing for focus on the latter. They state that “[i]f people are alive -- and maybe they don’t have any more of these baskets left -- the culture would be better preserved allowing these cultural specific items to be used, instead of kept behind this case because you don’t want them exposed to too much light. Basically how colonial it is that they’re kept behind glass cages, with specific lighting requirements” (Schnell interview, January 22, 2019). Schnell contrasts object preservation with cultural preservation, describing how museum practices historically tend to favor the former over the later. They speak further to how museums use collections and how the same belongings are used within Indigenous communities: “These pieces should be at home being used because they would be way better preserved as a culture rather than as just a visual identifier” (Schnell interview, January 22, 2019). Schnell expresses thoughts echoed by Miriam Clavir, a former MOA conservator, who compared the preservation priorities of museums and First Nations peoples, and the focus of each on tangible and/or intangible attributes of belongings (2002). Schnell asserts a priority for cultural preservation over object preservation, as “there were some, specifically totem poles, that weren’t meant to be preserved. They can just fall and die at the end and that’s fine, but museums, they just keep doing the thing. (…) I would rather learn from [the Gwich’in boat] at home and learn how to make it because that’s better cultural preservation than the little artifact in a museum behind glass” (Schnell interview, January 22, 2019). Like Clavir, Schnell delineates differences in preservation priorities, referencing issues of ownership and politically charged understandings of ‘the museum.’

Schnell expressed annoyance and anger with other museumgoers encountered in MOA. They found within the In a Different Light audience comment book a line about how this exhibit focuses on the past: “The other thing that struck me was the book that they have everybody sign or write your thoughts about it. Somebody said ‘it really talks about the past.’ It’s funny because maybe it started talking about that, but I noticed with the placards and the guiding things that as much as it was talking about the past, it also was talking about the present and the future” (Schnell interview, January 22, 2019). Schnell had a different understanding of this exhibit. They remembered this annoyance and expressed this point about certain museumgoers not ‘getting it’ in both interviews:
like one of them was talking about residential schools and I thought ‘yes, this spoke to residential schools, but it also spoke to more than that and how people can exist and exist from that.’ (…) That’s a part of the story, but a main part of why that’s part of the story is because that can speak to how strong and resilient these people are. I remember being annoyed at that (Schnell interview, January 31, 2019).

Their experience within the Masterworks Gallery was marked by how other museumgoers understood the exhibit, specifically those who did not express any understanding of In a Different Light’s themes.

While describing their understanding of this exhibit, Schnell situated themself in relation to both the other museumgoers who may fall short in their understandings of In a Different Light, and the Nations represented in this exhibit. When encountering misinterpretations of the exhibit messages in the comment books, Schnell asserted that seeing Pacific Northwest belongings is not their entitlement: “I think that’s when it hit home that I don’t need to be seeing these pieces. I could be completely misinterpreting them and it’s not my entitlement. I feel entitled to see Gwich’in and Dene things, because that’s where I come from, but I don’t need to see things from the Kwakwaka’wakw Nation or the Tlingit Nation” (Schnell interview, January 22, 2019). Schnell positioned themself as Gwich’in, Inuvialuit, and Dene, as someone who does not have as much of a place or as much jurisdiction to discuss how things are represented within In a Different Light, but as someone who can comment on aspects of the gallery that reflect colonial structures and assert the importance of returning belongings to home contexts: “Not that I don’t have any jurisdiction to talk about it. It’s less my place. Unless they’re specifically Gwich’in, Inuvialuit, or Dene, I don’t feel like what I say has a lot of sway, but generally [I feel I can comment on] the stolen objects and [the importance of] bringing pieces home” (Schnell interview, January 22, 2019). They positioned their comments and thoughts by expressing ancestry and commented on aspects of museum practice that can reflect continuing power differentials.

Drawing on their academic background within UBC’s FNIS program, Schnell read the core message of In a Different Light as one of resurgence, resisting colonial impositions. Through both interviews, they described how In a Different Light uses story, starting out with histories and then moving to contemporary, culturally contextualized meanings attributed to displayed belongings: “The information and the layout and I felt like it told a story. (…) I felt like in the beginning it was talking about historical aspects and potlatch and button blankets and then by the end it was talking about resurgence and these art pieces aren’t just art, they’re law” (Schnell interview, January 22, 2019). Moving through the gallery space, they used the verb panel titles for each case grouping to navigate their way through the associated story, using the quotes, both written and spoken, to situate themself:

I saw Marianne Nicolson’s quote and it said that they want the public to know that these are legal documents and I think that hit really hard. It’s really cool to see
traditional governance and the ways art was the pinnacle of that. It made me think of back home how we always have traditional pieces of regalia that will let other people know which nation you’re from or just easy identifiers or how there are specific bead patterns that you use and how that was a way of governance. And it let people know which Nation you belong in and specifically within your Nation who had governing power and who didn’t. It also said, ‘we need to reconstitute these objects and their meanings back to our political actions,’ and I guess that really hit that it was resurgent (Schnell interview, January 22, 2019).

Paying attention to quotes expressed within the gallery and how a given quote relates to their experiences as a member of the Gwich’in Nation, Schnell framed *In a Different Light* as an exhibit about resurgence, echoing Thomas’s exhibit reading, but with different word choice. Schnell also focused on topics presented within the quotations, both written and spoken, which resist colonial impositions and overlap with their knowledge about Indigenous feminisms: “the little placards, but specifically the ones around the matriarchy and traditional governance (…), how they resist colonial impositions of patriarchy and the Indian Act and of Enfranchisement Acts and how they were so very sexist in their nature and how this exhibit is explicitly opposing that” (Schnell interview, January 22, 2019). Schnell’s reading draws on the ways that the *In a Different Light* curators created a contemporary Indigenous presence through spoken and written quotations. Schnell’s reading of *In a Different Light* as a story references settler colonial histories extending to the present, attuned to Indigenous assertions of sovereignty.

Schnell appreciated the way media was incorporated and expressed this during both interviews. They described this gallery as more immersive than other exhibit spaces and, similarly to Collins and Burge, how these more immersive aspects of *In a Different Light* afford an experience that feels less distant: “There was the touch thing. I like that thing. I like the videos and I also like how the audio was all the way around the gallery, which was really nice. I liked the chairs with the audio in them. I felt that it was way more immersive. In lots of galleries you feel distant because you have these glass things that are keeping you away from the objects and you can just read the little words” (Schnell interview, January 22, 2019). Schnell comments on how museums tend to privilege the visual, text and cultural belongings, and contrasts this with the way *In a Different Light* engages other senses. Their thoughts describe a sense of distance between self and belonging and how these more ‘immersive’ portions of the gallery lessen this distance. Schnell discusses the idea chair with the associated Nuxalk mask and Tallio recording: “I found it really great, because even though you were still far from the object you could feel a little closer and you were at least learning about it from someone who knew about it and it was still from the culture that it was made (…), instead of just reading” (Schnell interview, January 22, 2019). The interactive aspects of *In a Different Light* that
engage other senses besides vision helped lessen the distance Schnell felt between themself and the belongings. Learning about this mask from Tallio, a Nuxalk knowledge-keeper, contributed to feelings of closeness rather than distance. Schnell’s perspectives echo Burge’s comments about this specific idea chair as a display that uses the associated Nuxalk mask as it is supposed to be used, facilitating ‘connection’ and a more ‘embodied experience.’ Schnell’s thoughts are also similar to Collins’s ideas about how culturally contextualizing information on displayed belongings mitigates the extent to which glass feels like a barrier. The history Tallio tells should be basic label information for the associated mask (McLennan interview, August 24, 2018). At twenty-two minutes long (and with raw recordings at two hours), this speaks to the extent that information is cut during exhibit curation in order to maintain MOA’s audience, as long panels can overwhelm museumgoers (Duffek, thesis edits, March 26, 2019).

Drawing on FNIS perspectives and their own experiences as an activist, Schnell focused on loans, the extent to which other museumgoers ‘get it,’ exhibit messages of resurgence that resist colonial impositions, and the immersive aspects of the gallery conveying culturally contextualized information that lessens the distance felt between self and an understanding of a given belonging. Their opinions did not change between the two interviews. Overall, Schnell describes aspects of In a Different Light that resist colonial impositions and ones that operate within ongoing power differentials rooted in settler colonialism, framing their exhibit reading with associated understandings of ‘the museum’ and assertions of Indigenous sovereignty.

Across interviews with the exhibit reviewers, impressions of the gallery surrounded themes of resilience, resurgence, continuity, longevity, liveliness, community participation, and a focus on belongings and how they are more than art. These readings reflect many of the messages intended by the curators. Each described how settler colonial histories and persisting settler structures impacted the exhibit viewings, eliciting associated memories (or lack thereof) and affects (Crang and Tolia-Kelly 2010; Tolia Kelly 2017). The exhibit reviewers also connected their thoughts to salient, broader issues in museum studies, ranging from the way museums re-contextualize belongings (Phillips 2011), critiques of the traditional, omnipresent curator voice (Ames 2005; Lorente 2015), authority shifts related to the interpretation of cultural belongings (Shannon 2014; Lonetree 2012; Black 2013), issues of ownership and preservation (Clavir 2002), and various meanings attributed to belongings (Townsend-Gault, Kramer, and Ki-ke-in 2013), dissecting how aspects of In a Different Light draw on certain meanings and not others.
Chapter 4
Various Readings, Future Curation

Across the interviews and perspectives explored, two broader themes emerged about how the exhibit reviewers understand and experience *In a Different Light*: 1) shifts in museum authorities related to colonialism and use of collaborative museum practices; and 2) degrees of felt ‘connection’ and contrasts between various meanings attributed to belongings. *In a Different Light* is a site where the exhibit reviewers are negotiating and/or contrasting various understandings of displayed belongings and the degree to which those understandings are supported by the exhibit displays, revealing frictions with roots in colonialism that continue to manifest themselves in exhibit representations and museum processes. This exhibit presents ‘intangible,’ non-aesthetic meanings associated with the belongings displayed while facilitating aesthetic appreciation. The exhibit reviewers each explored the degrees to which the exhibit design and information convey certain belonging meanings and not others. They describe their exhibit experiences, examining the memories and affects it elicits, and how their various knowledge bases surrounding museums and settler colonial structures apply to the displays.

*Museum Authorities: Colonialism, Participation, and Anthropological Constructs*

Indigenous peoples asserting their rights to determine exhibit representations in museums has accelerated the increasing use of community participation and/or collaboration within exhibit development, as well as many other museum processes (Black 2013; Assembly of First Nations and the Canadian Museums Association 1992). With assertions and subsequent museum actions that relinquish power comes shifts in authority about who has the right to interpret and to what extent. The exhibit reviewers described affects related to past and contemporary shifts in museum authorities. They commented on the ways that MOA and other museums have implemented and are continuing to implement collaborative projects, and how these, at times, draw on the exhibit reviewers’ social networks. These affects are grounded in 1) museum, settler colonial roots, and 2) how anthropological knowledge creation about Indigenous peoples has created misrepresentations, contrasting understandings of past and present museum practice.

While seeing *In a Different Light*, all of the exhibit reviewers described affects related to museums’ role in settler colonialism. Burge expressed a sad/peaceful church feeling that she experiences in museums. She attributed this peaceful feeling to being around connections to a time before the larger impacts of settler colonialism, and being able to access belongings now. She also described how museums acquire things:
There’s one object in there that even said nobody knows how it went from one place to wind up here. The collections and the exchanges that it went through, that history of that object is gone. Being a Native person can sometimes still be shitty, thinking well, was it stolen? Was it sold? But was it sold because they didn’t have enough money to feed their family? Just the fact that there is no historical documentation, your mind runs wild (Burge interview, December 18, 2018).

For Burge, this sad and peaceful feeling is about settler colonial violence and how museum and private collections may include stolen items and others acquired under duress. Thomas considered settler colonial violence based on her daughter’s questions about angels. She described how these questions are ‘thick,’ illustrating the interconnections between education, religion, and settler colonial structures, and associated fears that mark her experience as a parent with a child in public school. Schnell expressed happiness regarding the loaned materials, as Indigenous peoples can access their cultural belongings more easily, but these loans also evoked anger, as loaned belongings often have to return to other institutions (Schnell interview, January 22, 2019). They connected this anger to cultural preservation through use, communicating that belongings are important in continuing and learning about practices within Indigenous communities, and that ongoing disruption of cultural transmission can continue when museums and private collectors do not allow belongings to be used within a given event or practice. Thinking about changes in museum practice over time, Collins commented that it was overwhelming to see people she knows contributing to the knowledge presented in the space, and overwhelming to see decolonial shifts, referencing her memories of seeing MOA throughout her childhood. For these exhibit reviewers, understandings of historical collecting and exhibiting practices, the questions certain belongings evoke, issues of ownership, and collaborative museology and subsequent shifts in museum authority elicited affects, which are tangled with settler colonial histories. These histories, some of which may or may not be validated in exhibit spaces like *In a Different Light*, contribute to and overlap with personal and collective memories mentioned by the exhibit reviewers (Linke 2015; Crang and Tolia-Kelly 2010).

The contemporary presence of First Nations scholars, artists, and knowledge-keepers within this exhibit references historical and contemporary shifts in museum authority. All the exhibit reviewers described how knowing *In a Different Light* was created with the involvement of First Nations scholars and artists, or recognizing these people and hearing them speak created a ‘personal,’ ‘communal,’ ‘more meaningful,’ and generally, a more positive experience. Collins discussed how recognizing Larry Grant, Molly Billows, and Clyde Tallio made the exhibit feel ‘very communal.’ Burge expressed a similar sentiment: “Knowing that people that I know had at least some involvement in completing the gallery together made it a bit more personal” (Burge interview, December 18, 2018). Seeing the acknowledgements panel and knowing some of the people who
contributed also afforded a positive experience for Thomas: “I like that there is a long list of acknowledgements. I think that’s fabulous and knowing people on those lists is cool, too” (Thomas interview, January 7, 2019). Recognizing people who contributed knowledge to the exhibit elicited positive responses. Schnell commented on how In a Different Light is better than other exhibits because these contributors were involved: “I think it’s something else we talked about in that class, when they collaborate with these Nations, it makes it much better. At least they have agency in how they are portrayed. (…) That’s specifically what I see with In a Different Light” (Schnell interview, January 31, 2019). For Schnell, reading and hearing contributor quotes signaled ‘collaboration,’ reflecting increasing and accelerating shifts in museum authorities over the last several decades.

The exhibit audio evoked emotion. Burge expressed how audio differs from text: “having this narration and these people who are themselves artists and creators and are from this culture talking about their own personal relationships to just art in general and to creation in general just made the exhibit that much more meaningful, in a way that just reading a plaque that may not evoke that amount of emotion” (Burge interview, January 18, 2019). Hearing the way exhibit contributors were talking about displayed belongings made the information more meaningful. Collins described tone, hearing “how people were healing as they talk about something” (Collins interview, January 17, 2019). Tone and speech were an important part of Collins’s and Burge’s In a Different Light viewings. Recognizing contributing First Nations scholars, artists, and knowledge-keepers, and hearing the tones and inflections they used within the interviews was an emotionally potent and positive experience for Collins and Burge. Describing the audio component of In a Different Light, Wilson expresses the contemporary First Nations presence the curators intended to create: “for it to not be this formal talking head documentary type of approach, we wanted to bring in a presence in a different way” (Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018). For the exhibit reviewers, the audio was successful in creating a ‘more personal,’ ‘communal’ presence that referenced the involvement of First Nations scholars, artists, and knowledge-keepers.

As indicated earlier, Burge, Schnell, Thomas, and Collins described affects referencing the role of museums in settler colonial violence. These affects are related to requests for more nuanced information about specific groups, reflecting certain histories and information that In a Different Light does and does not cover. With colonialism in the Pacific Northwest, anthropological constructions were created that grouped peoples and/or circumscribed geographic locations. Burge and Thomas comment on how settler constructed categories obscure diversity. Thomas describes how these geographical or cultural categories, reflecting anthropological thought, become ingrained in the ways people think: “If you talk about a thing enough, it becomes a thing. The culture areas:
‘Northwest Coast’ is a culture area, but it doesn’t speak to the diversity of Indigenous peoples on the Coast” (Thomas interview, January 17, 2018). Also thinking about the term ‘Coast Salish,’ Thomas speaks to how this anthropological term can hide distinctions and relationships between xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səl̓ilwətaʔɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples:

I feel like they could highlight (…) the relationships between Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh beyond Coast Salish Nations, because talk about how ‘Coast Salish’ is this sociological, anthropological term, like a bucket term for a geographical region, and how, I guess Sharon talked a little bit about it in her narrative, about how teachings change through marriage, because people move between communities. They could have highlighted those relationships more (Thomas interview, December 4, 2018).

Referring to Sharon Fortney, a Coast Salish curator, and her recording on one of the idea chairs, Thomas underscores where information about distinct Nations is included within the gallery, but also indicates that she would like to see more information of this depth. The information provided impacts how Thomas facilitates her daughter’s museum experience: “We have discussions on why does this all say ‘Coast Salish.’ Why doesn’t it say ‘Tsleil-Waututh’? (Thomas interview, January 17, 2019). The words used in exhibit texts impact the ways Thomas views MOA exhibits with her daughter, particularly how terms like ‘Coast Salish’ have roots in anthropological knowledge that has historically been used to build catalog information that exists within displays today (Greene 2016; Turner 2017; Phillips 2011). Museum documentation may not include this information, making it difficult to be specific about Nations on object labels. Including nuanced, detailed information about the diversity that lies in these broad, anthropological terms is important for Thomas and her MOA trips with her daughter, as it reflects how səl̓ilwətaʔɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) people see themselves in relation to other Coast Salish Nations.

Like Thomas, Burge made a comment during her interviews about balancing broad and specific terminologies that can hide or acknowledge difference in meaningful ways:

this idea of pan-Indianism or pan-Northwest Coast, that can be really unifying as Northwest Coast people. We do have similar art styles and these similarities in culture and material culture so In a Different Light brings on that, but it’s from all these different nations. And part of the reason I’m really hesitant, again I didn’t know where the Tsimshian objects were, because even though the art style can be quite similar, they’re distinctive people. They’re a distinctive Nation. Their languages are different, and sometimes when I think about Indigeneity and Nativeness, finding the balance between talking in really broad terms about Indigenous people or First Nations people and being very specific about who we’re talking about and in what place we’re talking about, it can be really challenging. Multiversity, you know which culture you’re interacting with, what place you’re interacting with in a sense. Whereas In a Different Light, you don’t have that (Burge interview, January 18, 2019).
These broad and more specific terms that Burge discusses are applied within MOA exhibit spaces reflecting many groups of people or just a few. *In a Different Light* explores broader terms, like ‘Northwest Coast,’ that can show commonalities between Nations and material cultures. Burge contrasts this with the *Multiversity Galleries* that group belongings by culture and geographic region, making it easier for her to understand different Nations’ belongings. She sees this as a balance, as both broad and more specific perspectives have their benefits and their drawbacks.

One focus of *In a Different Light* as described by Wilson is about the ‘commonalities’ and ‘connections’ between Pacific Northwest Nations through case groupings that speak to conceptual themes drawn from interviews with contributing First Nations scholars and artists (Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018). He also references intentions that maybe these broad terms would be unsettled by *In a Different Light*: “While there is this idea of the Northwest Coast or Northwest Coast art to begin with, which is in some ways an anthropological construct, and I think we thought of ways in which we might unsettle that category, too. Maybe not super successfully” (Wilson and Duffek interview, July 25, 2018). Based on the interviews with the curators, it seems that curating an ‘unsettling’ exhibit was not a main priority. It is difficult to curate ‘unsettling’ exhibits when designs and discourses in these spaces signal dominant ‘art’ discourses (Schildkrout 2004). These comments from Wilson, Burge, and Thomas speak to the ways that both the curators and these exhibit reviewers negotiate terminologies, some of which are anthropological constructions created during colonialism, which may not reflect the ways that Pacific Northwest peoples see themselves. An exhibit cannot cover all of the differences and all of the similarities between Pacific Northwest Indigenous Nations, but it is important to recognize these terms, and their use was of note to Burge and Thomas.

*In a Different Light* surfaced exhibit reviewer affects and memories associated with settler colonial violence, and its past and contemporary relationships with museums and anthropology, speaking to the ways personal and intergenerational experiences of settler structures are “felt” (Million 2008). Experiences creating and viewing this gallery space speak to negotiations between broad terms with roots in settler knowledge systems, like ‘Coast Salish’ and ‘Northwest Coast,’ which can hide diversity that reflects important differences. Overall, the reviewers thought about historical and contemporary shifts in museum authority, and the degrees to which museum structures have changed, are changing, and are also not changing.
‘Connection’: Degrees and Contrasts

Throughout the interviews, the exhibit reviewers made a number of contrasts: between various meanings attributed to belongings, and between various aspects of the exhibit that afforded degrees of ‘connection’ or ‘distance’ felt toward a particular belonging. These contrasts reflect degrees, negotiations, and/or tensions between the various perspectives brought to this gallery, the knowledge systems that those perspectives are rooted in, and the ways in which the exhibit displays do or do not mirror one’s understandings of the gallery and the belongings within it.

Encountering various meanings attributed to belongings within *In a Different Light*, Schnell, Collins, and Burge used terms like ‘distant,’ ‘connection,’ and how much the display case glass is ‘in the way’ to indicate how contextualizing information included in displays impacts feelings of closeness or distance in relation to a particular belonging. The term ‘connection(s)’ or the verb ‘connect’ has been used within museum audience research to explore how people make cognitive leaps between different ideas associated with a displayed object and exhibited concepts (Schulz 2011; Sandell 2007; Simon 2010). Burge, Collins, and Schnell apply this term to the cultural belongings of oneself, those of loved ones, or those of people who have also experienced settler colonial violence. In this context, ‘connection’ and ‘distant’ seem to take on a separate but related meaning, one that is rooted in how a display presents culturally contextualizing information and uses a belonging as its makers intended it to be used. This word choice is also rooted in the ways both affects and intellect inform interviewee’s exhibit experiences, producing degrees of “felt knowledge,” knowledge grounded in personal and collective experiences (Simpson 2017; Million 2008: 272).

Schnell, Burge, and Collins all made positive comments about the idea chair with Clyde Tallio’s recording. Schnell found that this idea chair created a more ‘immersive’ experience, making her feel less ‘distant’ than if she was only provided with text. Likewise, Collins described how when accompanied by Pacific Northwest Indigenous knowledge and the voices of contributing scholars and artists, the glass between herself and a displayed item did not seem as much of a barrier. Burge used the term ‘connection’ to describe how ‘disembodied’ or ‘embodied’ knowledge influenced her *In a Different Light* viewings. Also referencing this idea chair, she used the term ‘connection’ to discuss how Tallio’s recording situated and contextualized the associated mask:

It’s the same with the mask. I’m not from that particular culture. I have little understanding of that culture, but just someone and hearing that narration and them having a strong connection to that story and that mask, now I have a connection to that, too. And I’m never going to be from there, but now I have a better understanding
of where that’s coming from, what place that’s coming from. In that sense, it does become more about the object than the exhibit itself (Burge interview, January 18, 2019).

Knowing a history associated with that mask within Nuxalk knowledge systems created a sense of ‘connection’ for Burge as it links the mask to a history that this mask is supposed to elicit. By contrast, Burge expressed confusion about the organization of the display cases. Without knowing the logic of the display case groupings, she “had a hard time then developing a connection” (Burge interview, January 18, 2019). Even though the groupings of each display case are based on the way contributing First Nations scholars and artists talked about belongings during interviews with the curators, not understanding the logic of those groupings created disconnection. For these three people, the knowledge presented or the media in which it is presented made a difference. These senses of distance and closeness reflect the degrees to which the exhibit reviewers feel like the displays do or do not support the type of engagement with belongings they would like.

Collins, Burge, and Schnell contrasted the following: 1) perspectives on how displayed belongings should be used and how these things are currently treated differently within museum spaces, 2) degrees of felt distance or connection as based on the information presented or the media in which it was presented. The contrasts and degrees described by these exhibit reviewers speak to the ways that In a Different Light displays prompt these women to consider belonging meanings that are not congruent with their own.

**Takeaways: Conclusion Debriefing Event**

Frictions between and amongst various understandings of the displayed belongings came to light during the final stage of this research when I presented initial conclusions to both the curators and exhibit reviewers. Jordan Wilson and Autumn Schnell were not available to attend, but everyone else was at the event and we all shared food. I created a mind map of my thesis draft at that point and presented the themes that I was writing about, how I was interpreting the interviews, and where I was drawing comparisons and contrasts. I expressed hesitation at the end, hedging my conclusions as preliminary. I did not situate the exhibit reviewers as I do in this document, but simply included their names or pseudonyms. I ended with some broader feedback that can be incorporated in future exhibits, like situating curators and including nuanced information in ways that do not overwhelm audiences with reams of text. This event was an effort to be transparent with my analyses and I also hoped that my thoughts would elicit some discussion about the exhibit reviewers’ critiques and possible solutions. I had explained my intentions for this event during the consent process, but did
not reiterate these plans. Reiterating them might have resulted in more discussion amongst curators and exhibit reviewers.

I started the presentation without prompting introductions from those present, a decision that some of the exhibit reviewers were happy with, as it afforded a level of anonymity and distance from their particular critiques. This decision also made it difficult for everyone to understand the positionalities of both curators and exhibit reviewers, and what knowledge each brought to their reflections and critiques of *In a Different Light*. After I gave my overview of the research, McLennan asked the first question about how I recruited the people who reviewed the exhibit. I responded saying that I asked certain people whom I already knew, people who I thought would be interested in talking about museums, and some of the reviewers approached me about being a part of the project for various reasons. The exhibit reviewers present interpreted McLennan’s question as asking from whom are these critiques coming. But ultimately, the exhibit reviewers could make the same comment as McLennan, and Burge did. She critiqued how the framing curatorial texts felt ‘disembodied’ as the curators were not situated in relation to place and people. She wants to know who is curating the belongings within the space. Speaking about museums and libraries in general, Collins expressed the illusions of neutrality and objectiveness that have been associated with these institutions for hundreds of years: “Nothing is neutral. Let’s just all be really upfront about our own biases and what we’re bringing to the table and then we can have a conversation” (Collins interview, December 6, 2018). Perhaps this is where the discussion broke down: it was hard to understand the knowledge and perspectives everyone was bringing to discussions on *In a Different Light*.

Further, when I described how some exhibit reviewers were looking at the loans, where things were coming from, Duffek explained that they had wanted to include a panel about general collecting histories, but it was cut for space reasons. Exhibit reviewers briefly considered this decision after the event, thinking about what this panel would elicit and from whom. They left with questions they had wanted to ask the curators, but had forgotten about during the event. Reflecting, I should have better prepared everyone, reminding them who was invited, and explaining how I was designing the presentation and discussion so that everyone could come ready with questions, if they felt so compelled.

Tensions were based on what belongings within this exhibit and MOA in general are ‘supposed to do.’ Should these things prompt settler audiences to think about collecting histories and settler colonial violence through more explicit exhibit text and audio as Thomas discusses? Should they stay in a case until an Indigenous community dances a given belonging before returning it to the museum, and in what ways does that relationship reinforce power differentials? MOA has a long
history of collaborative museology, but there are still tensions related to this kind of research and the discomfort that it creates (Ames 1999; Rowley 2013; Kramer 2015; Wilson 2015).

One of the first text panels *In a Different Light* features pictures, names, professions, and the Nations of all the Indigenous scholars and artists who contributed knowledge to the exhibit. I understand that this panel functions to thank those who contributed to the exhibit and to reinforce for audience members from whom the written and spoken quotes are coming. The panel listing the curators and museum professionals who contributed their thoughts to the gallery is placed on the opposite end of the exhibit. It is much smaller, listing names, professions, and for Wilson, a community affiliation. What does this arrangement imply? Could it be read that contributors need to be situated and the curators do not?

There are concrete takeaways generated through the exhibit reviews. Curators should be situated in relation to place, people, and belongings so audiences know where presented knowledge is coming from. All four exhibit reviewers had positive things to say about the idea chairs and the nuanced, critical knowledge that the recordings include. They also had positive experiences with the exhibit audio. For Schnell, Burge, and Collins, some of the content and/or the media through which this content was communicated facilitated feelings of ‘connection’ or closeness rather than distance.

Some of the other feedback is more complicated. What happens when someone is confronted with a belonging that is static within a case when its meaning is closely tied to motion, and it is unclear if this piece is still being danced? Deana Dartt, a Chumash museum professional, posits that when museums interpret and display Indigenous cultural belongings in ways incongruent with the knowledge of their owners, these institutions perpetuate traumas rooted in settler colonialism (2019). The interaction Burge’s describes with the Nisga’a weaving only reinforces that a given belonging is in a glass case rather than within its originating cultural context, evoking thought about collecting histories, settler colonial violence, and cultural genocide. There is not a clear solution for these critiques about dissonance in belonging treatment, but even so, identifying these dissonances is the start of considering how to make exhibits less excluding for Indigenous audiences who may see their belongings, the belongings of those they love, or the belongings of other peoples who also experienced settler colonial violence within displays.
Concluding Thoughts: Reflective, Reflexive Exhibits

Drawing on settler and Pacific Northwest Indigenous knowledge systems, *In a Different Light* presents messages about how displayed belongings are art, but also have other ‘intangible’ meanings. The exhibit reviewers’ impressions of *In a Different Light* surrounded themes of continuity, longevity, resilience, resurgence, liveliness, Indigenous participation, connection, and how the displayed belongings are more than art, intersecting with curatorial messaging intentions. Burge understood the intended message as focused on Northwest Coast art, but she found the gallery design distracted her from focusing on the pieces displayed. Each exhibit reviewer brought various meanings to bear on the displayed belongings and considered to what degree the displays support or conflict with those meanings. They also connected their exhibit readings to salient issues considered within museum studies literature, at times referencing affects associated with personal and collective memory, and/or settler colonialism. The exhibit reviewers’ critiques can be incorporated into future exhibits, like situating curators. They also point to successes, specifically the gallery wide audio and how the idea chairs include nuanced, in-depth information. Some comments, specifically Burge’s about the Nisga’a weaving, prompt consideration of where and how certain critiques do not have obvious solutions. Her focus on the static nature of exhibit displays shows how the curatorial approaches meant to convey a sense of movement through the gerund text panel titles and film was not successful in her exhibit reading. This thesis prompts more critical thought about museum publics, interrogating if divisions between “audience” and “collaborator” are meaningful or if they hide overlap between these two groups and their subsequent museum experiences (Kramer 2015).

Bernadette Lynch argues that museums should implement structures that prompt staff reflection and reflexivity (2011). Conversations about exhibits post-installation are one instance where this reflexive thought can occur. Continuing these conversations with relevant stakeholders can prompt museums to more critically think about exhibit representations, what exhibits are meant to communicate and to whom, what exhibits mean for those involved in development (Sparrow, Wilson, and Rowley 2018), and in what ways museums can support audiences and stakeholders within exhibit design and content. These discussions can make exhibits more validating for those historically alienated from museum spaces. It is more common for curators to examine exhibit topics after display development through publications and/or public programming rather than examine exhibit displays with stakeholding publics. I assert that it is a missed opportunity to treat installed exhibits as finished products, as representations that would not benefit from continued examination.
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