

Through well known
painter of native
american imagery.

[Art & Culture](#), [Artists](#)



Through this essay I intend to explore the role of personal identity within the works of two artists. The first of these artists is Bernardo Oyarzún, a Chilean sculptor who uses his unique perspective and position to give insight into the problems faced by the communities he grew up in that are often overlooked. He is specifically interesting as an artist when looking at identities as he began his work only after an unfortunate run in with police, because of his physical traits they detained him unnecessarily and caused him significant psychological harm.

This experience caused his sudden turn into the art world where he works to improve the rights of the native Mapuche people of Chile. His goals as an artist are clear through the sculptures and photography works he makes, with police violence and tribal themes being prominent. My second artist is the painter Fritz Scholder, a well known painter of native american imagery. Scholder is one-quarter Luiseño and while he did not grow up as an American indian his life has given him a unique perspective that gives his work weight. His work looks at the way that dominant cultures absorb others and the guilt that this leaves the conquering cultures with, this is clear through his series of paintings 'Real Indian'. this series was a highly controversial set of oil paintings show images of native americans in traditional tribal clothing with American flags and other signs of U. S influence in their culture such as beer cans and sunglasses. The main aspect i want to take from his work is the cultural guilt caused by becoming a dominant culture and how this affects the people within the culture, the ways we try to preserve these subjugated ways of life and how that trickles down into mainstream life, through curios

and tourism and the salvage of art styles that is common within certain communities.

These artists have been chosen by me because they both have unique perspectives from their own communities, i will use the works and quotations from these artists to inform and shape the exploration of cultural appropriation and ways that dominant cultures act to salvage and preserve minority ways of life and if this is a act of guilt, if this belittles the subjugated culture or allows it space to form itself into a new culture that can in turn salvage components from its conqueror's own cultures. I will be looking at the positive and negative ways a society can view a minority people due to their historic cultures and ways, this impacts this had on art and these artists that i have chosen. In order to unpick the works of these two artists i will be using a related essay written by Joseph Traugott, this essay goes into great detail discussing the idea of culture and the ways dominant cultures interact with subordinated cultures in society. He discusses techniques and styles used by native American artists and his writings will be particularly useful to me as he also is using the artist Fritz Scholder as a main component of his essay, by using this work as a reference we will be exploring the influences and background of Scholder's works and looking at the ways his art was shaped by and has shaped public perception of native art. I will also be using a review " A Colonising Moment: A Review of Lisa Reihana: Emissaries" by Talei Si'ilata that goes into depth about the issues faced by post-colonial countries and the art works of the people that have to live with injustice and persecution by governments that would rather they Fritz Scholder was born

in 1937 in Minnesota and was taught by Oscar Howe, a well known native American artist and Scholder's early works were received very well and after he graduated he was offered the position of instructor in advanced painting and contemporary art history and it was during this time at the Institute of American Indian Arts that he created the series of works called 'real Indian'. These works were groundbreaking at the time, the images of Indians with beer cans and draped with American flags was shocking to an audience that was used to the more noble, positive and nostalgic symbol of the Native American. These works were controversial due to many aspects, up to this point there had been a very standard style and portrayal of Indians, Scholder's work through this all up in the air, the way he uses paint is similar to pop art but with abstract and expressionist elements, these techniques were something new when it came to native art and he led the way for other native American artists to break away from the traditional methods of portrayal. The way Scholder uses modern American imagery such as beer and sunglasses in his work is a product of his early life growing up away from his heritage as a Native American, this separation from the nostalgia that many other artists had for their native life allowed him to have a unique outside perspective on the people he was painting, this is clearly apparent in pieces like 'Indian With Beer Can' (1969) where he points out the controversial link between Native Americans and the alcoholism issues that their community was having problems with.

The style of painting he uses for these pieces adds to this shocking effect, he uses almost grotesque imagery that distorts the face of the figure and hides

his eyes behind sunglasses. This method of depicting the Native American is doubly effective when it is compared to the standard imagery of the times that showed them in a more noble light work that used more traditional methods. Works such as these tie in to the idea of cultural salvage that Joseph Traugott discusses in his essay, ' Native American artists and the postmodern cultural divide', this idea of cultural salvage suggests that when a dominant culture overcomes a older one they feel a need to salvage aspects of this way of life, examples such as trinkets and pots designed in the native american way, tourism and art works all suggest that they view the Native way of life with nostalgia and with a level of regret, mystery and guilt. It is this guilt that causes these people to work to conserve and record anything they can about the these people before it is lost. This is why the work of Scholder was so jarring for people at the time it was made, they were trying to protect the Native way of life, it could be said this was out of guilt and to have Scholder's works throw this back in their faces with examples of how the modern Native American was already a part of modern society, that they were no longer the people that modern Americans were trying to save was shocking to them. The artist Bernardo Oyarzún has also produced work that is relevant to these points, his recent exhibition, "Werken" is the one that relates most closely to the points raised by both Scholder and Traugott. The exhibition is an extensive collection of over 1500 Mapuche masks, these traditionally ceremonial objects serve to bring to attention the people of the mapuche minority in his home country of Chile. This country, like many others with native populations struggles with human rights issues and hatred against it minority groups, in contrast to in America

they do not have the same mainstream recognition and media coverage, while the public view in the U.

S turned towards preservation and of patronisation towards it natives, Chilean natives are treated with hatred and are viewed as outsiders. this issue has come to a head more recently as tensions over the return of previously Mapuche owned lands and Oyarzun uses his platform as a successful artist to bring the struggles and violence his people have and are currently facing in their fight for better treatment and the reintroduction of their culture back into social acceptability. The name of Oyarzun's exhibition "Werken" shows the idea that he wanted to convey with these works, werken is the Mapudungun word for " messenger", this series of works is showing the Mapuche people to the world, he aims to remind the people of Chile and wider world that the Mapuche are still a relevant culture, that they can still influence their countries future, his use of Mapuche surnames is a call to his fellows that they have a past that they can be proud to display and these names are a part of the new future that Oyarzun wants to see and that these names are symbols of resistance against the society that wanted to push them out of existence. the art that Oyarzun creates is strongly themed towards displaying the issues that he feels strongly about, his past experience at the hands of the police have left him with a very strong leaning against the police brutality that many others of his fellows have suffered because of the way they look. pieces such as " bajo sospecha", translated to ' under suspicion' this piece contains 154 black and white photographs taken of his family members, this is related to his own mug

shots that he had taken when he was unfairly detained. He uses a description of himself to imply the reason he was treated so badly was because of his facial features, the description reads : “ black skin, like an atacameño, hard hair, thick, overpowering lips, broad chin, narrow forehead, as if without a brain”, he then contrasts this description with the 154 photographs of his extended family, this highlights the similarities between their faces and the Mapuche features they all share. A Colonising Moment: A Review of Lisa Reihana: Emissaries by? Talei Si'ilata is an article that discusses the the 57th La Biennale di Venezia that Oyarzun's piece “ Werken” was a part of, “ What each of these exhibitions has in common is a deep understanding of the nuances between contemporary art, indigeneity and the state.

“, This quote shows that the issues that the artists raise when they show work like Oyarzun's is very difficult for the societies to ignore, the institutes that wanted to slowly push the Mapuche people out of existence have failed, now that this art has brought their struggles to a wider audience and made this more consumable to the public the state has to find some sort of solution to these human rights violations. “ Werken is a thus a gesture of solidarity and continued defiance.” Both these artists use their art to raise issues that they find in their communities, the works of Scholder works to dispel the myths that surrounded native americans in the 1960's, this worked to allow other artists to break away from the standard native art and really explore what their culture meant to them, they could work their

traditional art into a more modern setting and be seen as more than tourist curio makers.

His position as an artist that grew up apart from his native heritage sets an example for other people, showing that while he never fully re-connected to his roots you can take aspects of other cultures to enrich your art work and use this as a tool to tackle issues within a community. He took a cliched image of the American indian and worked his pop-art influences into it to bring new angles and shine new light onto controversial subjects, he knew that the romanticised image of the noble, handsome and wise was obscuring the issues like poverty and alcoholism. pieces like " Super Indian number 2" are an example of this, some people were shocked by this image of an exhausted native american man eating an ice cream in his ceremonial clothing, but it is images like this that humanised these people that were viewed as tourist attractions and he captured their lives in modern society. He used a love of colour and politically charged imagery to bring The American Indian Movement of the 1970s, discrimination and racial tensions to a new and wider audience. Oyarzun also uses his work to dispel connotations associated with the Mapuche people, he shows that they are still alive as a community and their culture is growing in popularity with the youth, only 3 percent of the population identify as Mapuche but there are many others who hide their heritage out of fear and to try and avoid discrimination. But it is due to people like Oyarzun that the rights and lands of his people are being discussed.

“ it is essential that the language and rituals continue” this point is important to him as a person and can be seen in the “ Werken” exhibit, he grew up trying to avoid his grandmother’s way of life and its associated dangers but now he understands the importance of preserving and reviving this culture, not just so that people can view these rituals as tourist attractions but as a serious people with a rich and vibrant history and a future where they can play a part in returning their lands and integrating themselves into the Chilean population to challenge the negative stereotypes associated with people of Mapuche descent.