12pm, Tuesday, February 9, 2016  
Museum of Northern Arizona  
Facilitated By Daisy Purdy, NAU, Native American Student Services  
ATTENDANCE: 51

Based on the Museum of Northern Arizona exhibit of the same name, “You Are On Indian Land.”

**Traditional Native Opening**

Dr. Purdy framed this discussion by encouraging us not to think of the question “You are on Indian Land” as being true or false, but instead, exploring different concepts of land “ownership.”

**Why is the term “Indian” Contestable?**

- One reason it is contestable is that it is factually inaccurate. India lies several thousand miles west of here.
- Another reason we might object to “Indian land” is that Native lands are specific to a tribe. We are on Hopi land. Or we are on Navajo land. We are not on a generic “Indian Land.” Native youth were not raised to self identify as Indian but to self identify with their tribe, for example, Yavapai Apache and Navajo.
- On the other hand, maybe the whole country, or the whole continent, is Indian land.
- Some felt the term is contestable because its earliest uses were derogatory.
- Others felt the term is not derogatory, and that it is associated with pride. The view was that Indian was a good word because it does not focus on our tribal differences, but rather how we are united as Americans.
- Taken together, these different perspectives raise the issue of who gets to decide what the label is, and who gets to decide whether that label is positive or derogatory.
- Ed Kabotis, an artist who is featured in the exhibit, explained how the term “Indian” tends to refer exclusively to the U.S., and artificially separates American Native culture from adjacent Native cultures in Mexico and Canada.

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**Who is on Indian Land?**

- This raises complexity with identity. Who belongs? Who is allowed? How is membership determined? Some tribes use bloodlines, even though there are worries associated with this because it has overtones of eugenics.
- One of the artworks in the exhibit challenges the idea of asking Natives to assimilate into Anglo cultural traditions, rather than asking Natives to assimilate.

**How do we conceptualize land “ownership”**

**On what authority?**

Some Natives did not have this conception of land ownership. Different Native people conceptualize land in very different ways. Some Alaskan Native tribes have a very clear sense of boundaries.

- Perhaps it is nobody’s land. Perhaps it is everyone’s land.
- We have to address injustices that have occurred on the basis of land ownership.
- Some people felt that the artwork encouraged them not to fragment Native cultures. It imparted spiritual values of the people. This person saw a call for integration rather than fragmentation.

Overall, this phrase “You Are On Indian Land” is a huge opportunity to unpack a number of social, political and artistic issues.

Sometimes being a Native artist makes it difficult to be a contemporary artist. Exhibits like this work against tokenizing Native artists. This exhibit allows us to challenge the art establishment as a whole.

**Full Circle Questions:**

- For whose benefit?
- At whose expense?
- Where do we go from here?

If manifest destiny becomes the dominant narrative we tend to accept it whether it is morally justifiable or not. Native peoples are sovereign nations. They have legal status as sovereign nations.

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