

ambitious *permanent* installations at major museums (“The Peculiar Institution as Lived in New York,” *New York Times*, Oct. 7, 2005). It included expensive items such as immersive environments, sophisticated interactive computer programs, and minitheaters. High-profile donors, including JP Morgan Chase, the History Channel (whose logo was ubiquitous throughout the exhibition), Bear Stearns, Goldman Sachs, and Richard Gilder and Lewis Lehrman of the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, underwrote the expenses. As a trend-setter in production and fabrication, this exhibition set a standard that might be difficult for other history museums to follow with their own temporary exhibition programs. Its overall long-term impact on history museums in and outside the city is unfortunately likely to be limited.

But I have no doubt its far more important impact—as a paramount work of public history—will last in the minds of the museum-going public. Wandering the galleries on a clement Saturday afternoon in March, I felt like Isaac Jogues, the seventeenth-century Jesuit who in 1646 described the many languages he heard on the streets of New Amsterdam. Jogues counted eighteen. I possibly heard more. With all the distractions Manhattan has to offer, tourists and locals alike made “Slavery in New York” their destination of choice. To me, this is proof that good history cloaked in a varied and technically interesting environment that resists the gimmicks and toys of “edu-tainment” can still pack them in.

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“Crossing Cultural Fences: The Intersecting Material World of American Indians and Euro-Americans.” Museum of the Rockies, 600 W. Kagy Blvd., Bozeman, MT 59717.

Temporary exhibition, Nov. 25, 2005–Oct. 2008. Daily 8–8. Adults \$8, Montana State University students and children 5–18 \$4, 4 and under free. 800 sq. ft. Cindy Ott, curator; Beth Merrick, exhibition designer; Bill Yellowtail, research assistant.

Internet: exhibition description, school resources, upcoming events, public programs, and online store, <http://www.montana.edu/wwwmor/>.

Indian identity is a contested issue on and off reservations across America. Centuries of conquest, disease, intermarriage, religious conversion, cultural assimilation, land loss, and, in some cases, termination of federal recognition have taken their toll on the collective and individual identities of American Indians. More recently, successful battles to restore federally recognized tribal status, to revitalize reservation economies through the controversial gaming industry, and to seek restitution for treaty violations and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) mismanagement have ignited controversy in Indian communities and between white and Indian neighbors and governments. Any thoughtful observer must acknowledge that American Indian societies and cultures are in constant flux. Yet persistent stereotypes remain as to what constitutes “real,” “authentic,” and “traditional” Indians, and tourists flood western historic sites and museums every year to gaze at feathered headdresses, beaded moccasins, tipis, cradle boards, bows and arrows, and



The title panel from the “Crossing Cultural Fences” exhibition presents a Crow grass dance bustle (c. 1930s). The adjacent case features a feathered headdress and hat. *Photo by Michael Fox. Courtesy Museum of the Rockies.*

other artifacts of “traditional” Indian culture that reinforce the notion that real Indian life ended some time in the late nineteenth century.

The Museum of the Rockies, the museum of Montana State University, has plenty of those artifacts. But in the exhibition, “Crossing Cultural Fences: The Intersecting Material World of American Indians and Euro-Americans,” curator Cindy Ott has sought a different kind of Indian artifact and has used juxtaposition of objects and captions that direct questions to viewers to challenge ideas of what “Indian” means in contemporary America.

The first case that greets the visitor holds a spectacular Crow grass dance bustle (c. 1930s). In the center rosette of the feather bustle, surrounded by silver tinsel, is a black-and-white picture of a Euro-American man and woman kissing. The photograph was obviously cut from a magazine of the time and pasted onto the center of the bustle, presumably for its decorative appeal. The accompanying label describes the meaning of a powwow where the bustle would have been worn as well as the significance of the grass dance, and it also notes that the first movie theater in Hardin, Montana, the largest town near the Crow reservation, opened in 1915. By the time a male dancer made and wore this bustle in the 1930s, Euro-Americans had been attending powwows and Indians had been watching movies for decades. Centuries of trade between the two groups had established a long tradition of material interplay. The exhibition of the bustle is designed to give viewers a visual jolt and to prompt them to shift categories of thinking that place Indians and Euro-Americans exclusively on different sides of cultural fences.

The theme of the imprecise and permeable boundaries of “Indianness” continues in cases and wall displays that are always serious, but also playful. They cover children’s play, hunting, Indians as cowboys, the use of the American flag on Indian clothing, the place of animal products in Indian and Euro-American clothing, Indians in national parks, and Indians as U.S. servicemen. Artifacts and stories draw heavily from the Crow, with some from the Blackfeet, and there are photographs of other Plains and inland northwest peoples. Wall-mounted laminated flip-books allow visitors to investigate topics in more depth and to look at additional photographs.

The exhibition ranges from the late nineteenth century to the present, focusing on the twentieth century. An early case examines the use of the American flag on Indian artifacts in the nineteenth century, a seemingly puzzling design for peoples often at war with the United States. The label asks viewers to think about why Indians would employ such a symbol. The accompanying flip-book then discusses Indian use of the imagery to “usurp its imagined supernatural powers for their own strength, to placate American troops and . . . to display their successful encounters against the enemy.” Another case examines Euro-American use of Indian symbols in Camp Fire girl clothing, where “each bead and color represents ‘attainments, relationships, ideals and hopes of the owner.’” The issue of Indians’ relationship to the United States reemerges in the last case, devoted to Indians who served in the U.S. armed forces. A key object is the beaded insignia of D Company of the 163rd Infantry Regiment of the Montana National Guard. Black-foot women made badges for Indian and non-Indian members of the unit during World War II. The complexity of Indians’ military service is illustrated in the story of Carson Walks Over Ice, who was denied a security clearance while serving in Vietnam because his great-great-grandfather “had taken up arms against the U.S. government”—in 1879 during the Indian wars. Like many other Indian men, Walks Over Ice used his U.S. military service to fill Indian warrior roles. The museum text relates an often-told Montana story of how Walks Over Ice touched an enemy without hurting him, stole an enemy’s weapon without harming him, and led a war party. Unable to capture any enemy horses, he did capture four elephants.

“Crossing Cultural Fences” works best with topics closely tied to material culture. In the displays of clothing, the exhibition does an excellent job of provoking the viewer to think about how people assign symbols to everyday objects and how far all peoples go to be fashionable and to preserve tradition. The juxtaposition of an eagle feather headdress and a Euro-American woman’s hat decorated with a stuffed bird is accompanied by the question, “What can hats tell about shared attitudes toward nature and our own attitudes toward culture?” A discussion follows concerning the overhunting of wild birds and the development of protective legislation, which currently permits wild bird feathers to be used only in American Indian ceremonial regalia. Yet even in that case, close examination reminds one of the long history of adaptation of material goods by Indians and Euro-Americans. The headdress first catches the eye because of its eagle feathers, but a close look reveals a string of rhinestones above the headband made of trade beads. One case displays an elk tooth dress and a fur coat, both high-status symbols in their respective cultures because of the rarity of the key materials. Labels reveal that many elk teeth were manufactured from bone or synthetic materials, and the coat on display is early faux fur: silk plush.

The method of juxtaposing objects and asking a few thoughtful questions about them works less well with big, amorphous topics, such as religion or land use. Two small cases on the Native American Church and New Age spirituality are too thin to convey the complexity of those cultural phenomena. A larger display devoted to national parks conversely attempts to address too many different issues, and the artifacts do not have the compellingly paradoxical nature that many others in the exhibit possess.

Overall, “Crossing Cultural Fences” succeeds in challenging viewers to reexamine their preconceptions about the divides between Indian and Euro-American cultures. The exchange of goods and the reciprocal use of Indian and non-Indian manufactured prod-



Representing the importance of material culture in the “Crossing Cultural Fences” exhibition, the “Dressed for Success” case shows natural and faux materials used in Indian and non-Indian clothing. *Photo by Michael Fox. Courtesy Museum of the Rockies.*

ucts dates to the earliest encounters between natives and newcomers. This exhibition takes that as an opening premise. It raises larger questions of how people employ material objects and imbue those artifacts with cultural significance, asking viewers to ponder the complex meanings of both everyday and extraordinary goods that refuse to be categorized as “belonging” to only one culture.

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“Ours to Fight For: American Jews in the Second World War.” Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, 36 Battery Pl., New York, NY 10280.

Temporary exhibition, Nov. 11, 2003–Dec. 31, 2006. 7,000 sq. ft. Louis D. Levine, project director; Ivy Barsky, deputy project director; Bonnie Gurewitsch and Jay Eidelman, curators; Frieda Wald, project manager; Jamie Hardis, registrar; Leslie H. Patten and Associates, interpretive planning; Sears and Russell, exhibition design; Rainmaker Productions, video production; Art Guild, Inc., fabrication and installation; Deborah Dash Moore, academic adviser.

Ours to Fight For: American Jewish Voices from the Second World War. (New York: Museum of Jewish Heritage, 2003. 176 pp. Cloth, \$35.00, ISBN 0-9716859-1-6. Paper, \$19.95, ISBN 0-0716859-0-8.)

Internet: interactive exhibition, teacher’s guide, veterans’ stories, and directions, <http://www.ourstofightfor.org/>.

As a lieutenant commander in the U.S. Navy who survived Nazi and kamikaze attacks, Robert Morgenthau, who chairs the Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust board, wanted the museum’s new Morgenthau wing to tell the story of American Jews who “heed[ed] their nation’s call to arms.” “Ours to Fight For: American Jews in the Second World War” was conceived as a chance to honor Jewish veterans and to provide a space for many American Jews to see their own families’ experiences reflect-