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The Social Fabric: Deep Local to Pan Global

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Radical Access: Textiles and Museums

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Introduction

According to NASA, a black hole is “a place in space where gravity pulls so much that even light cannot get out. The gravity is so strong because matter has been squeezed into a tiny space. This can happen when a star is dying.”¹

This paper argues that museums are too often like black holes, where collections—including textile collections—are stored in crowded, if efficient, spaces where light barely penetrates and little gets out. Collections are surrounded by more than four walls, of course, they are surrounded by rules and prescriptions, traditions and paradigms. Unexamined and unchecked, these undermine the potential of museums to do little other than commemorate and mourn lost cultures, forgotten histories and dying stars.²

The Anthropocene has been defined as “the era of geological time during which human activity is considered to be the dominant influence on the environment, climate, and ecology of the earth.”³ In other words, the Anthropocene is concerned with how humanity is written into the very bedrock of this Earth⁴ effecting inequitable relationships not only with the earth but with each other and with other-than-human life forms. Though the term and its human-centred perspective is not beyond reproach, it offers critical insights related to museum practices far beyond the size of our environmental commitments or carbon footprints. It exposes anew the assumptions and privileges of contemporary museums—prerogatives that have direct impact on the textiles in our care.

Countering the effects of this age are efforts to examine the nexus of systems and theories that have contributed to this moment⁵ and offer alternatives. Among these, and particularly relevant to museum collections of textiles, are efforts to stress connectedness, continuity, and responsibility. In this paper, we propose considering a more radical approach to access—not one that throws open the storerooms to heaven knows what—but one that attempts to see beyond the dialectic of access versus preservation, reinvigorating the relevance of textile collections as well as museums on the ‘anthropocenic stage.’ It represents a collaboration of two different curators, working with two very different collections considering not only the contemporary relevance of museums but the consequence of textiles housed within museums.

¹ Smith, “What Is a Black Hole?”

² Recent critiques of museums have suggested prerogatives more often related to controlling and disciplining than synthesizing or generating. See: Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*.

³ “Anthropocene.”

⁴ Davis and Turpin, *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies*, 7.

⁵ Davis and Turpin, *ibid*.

Decolonizing Engagement

Resulting societal, cultural issues of the Anthropocene and have led some in the museum community to ask whether museums are “able to meet the expectations and needs of our planet and its inhabitants... [with recent] climate disruptions to human rights.”⁶ Robert Janes argues that “a new breed of museums grounded in consciousness of the world around them is urgently needed...”⁷ The movement towards a greater social justice role for museums in light of The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada has involved discussions about decolonization and reconciliation, particularly focused on engagement.⁸ While contemporary museology presents engagement as “a positive mutually beneficial way to improve and democratize representation,” the reality is much more complex.⁹

Inequitable relationships exist as the cornerstone of museums. Intimately linked with colonization, once-upon-a-time, museums sent collectors out searching for the most “authentic” and oldest objects to remove—unaware, or unconcerned with the impact of those removals on source communities. As Indigenous peoples in North America were displaced or infected by introduced viruses, traditional ownership practices were disrupted. Indigenous artifacts were presumably free for the taking.¹⁰

Thus, museums have long been complicit in the stripping of communities of their material culture. Many are also complacent in the ongoing erosion of culture through reluctance or inability to provide equitable access to collections. Museum staff are gatekeepers who determine who does or does not have access, how and when—a situation that effectively re-colonizes (or *disciplines*) members of originating cultures. Indigenous visitors' experience of museums is often diametrically opposed to that of settler audiences. The late Gerry Conaty, Glenbow's Director of Indigenous Studies, noted that

When First Nations people view artifacts at Glenbow they see their own memories. Sometimes these are memories of the individuals who saw the items being used and knew their owners or makers. Sometimes they are nostalgic memories of an imagined past when there were no museums to house the relics of their culture. Always, they are memories of the dominant culture imposing its own values, judgments and definitions over the self-identity of the First Peoples.¹¹

For Indigenous peoples, decolonizing engagement is vital to their self-determination and what Indigenous cultural theorist, Gerald Vizenor calls “survivance.” He demands an **active** survival, in which contemporary Indigenous peoples “go beyond merely subsisting in the ruins of tribal cultures to actively inheriting and refashioning those cultures for the postmodern age.”¹²

⁶ Janes, *Museums without Borders: Selected Writings of Robert R. Janes*, 5

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Onciul, *Museums, Heritage and Voice: Decolonizing Engagement*.

⁹ Onciul, *Ibid*, 71.

¹⁰ Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*, 22.

¹¹ Conaty, “The Effects of Repatriation on the Relationship between the Glenbow Museum and the Blackfoot People,” 255.

¹² Vizenor, *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*.

And what are they inheriting and refashioning? Of particular importance in this active survivance are textiles—sacred bundles are wrapped in cloth, bodices embellished with beadwork, needlework abounds in clothing and on moccasins, and tipis are painted and celebrated in sacred ceremonies and erected at *Okan* (Sun Dance). Yet, these items have had their access restricted and engagement with them carefully supervised, lest damage occur. Survivance is a more active form of preservation, one which also sustains the cultural, spiritual and social integrity of the artifact, rather than its physical form. For Indigenous and non-Indigenous visitors alike, textiles become alive in the handling, the inspecting, the dancing, smudging and ceremony or performance of textiles.¹³

Siksika Clans course learning history and culture from a story robe. Credit: Joanne Schmidt.

Touching Engagement

Decolonizing Engagement may seem to focus on Indigenous visitors but it is relevant for many different groups who seek access to museums and their collections. There is, for example, a growing body of critical literature that examines the problem of access and museums. From the challenges of providing physical access to persons in wheelchairs, to ensuring equitable representation of persons of colour or LGBTQ⁺⁺ communities, to recognizing social, cultural and economic barriers to participation – access is a prevalent if somewhat diffused concept. It has more often been discussed in terms of enhancing access (accessible washrooms, legible text, more and better inclusion, cheap nights) rather than in terms of explicating the embedded reasons that have created barriers to participation¹⁴. Access to textile collections have, traditionally, been particularly contentious, given their susceptibility to light and physical damage.

¹³ Clavir, *Preserving What Is Valued: Museums, Conservation and First Nations*; Flynn and Hull-Walski, “Merging Traditional Indigenous Curation Methods with Modern Museum Standards of Care.”

¹⁴ Dodd et al., *Rethinking Disability Representation in Museums and Galleries*; Smyth, “‘Not for the Likes of You’ Phase 2–Final Report.”

Though touch, as Jessica Hemmings reminds us, is often given “something of a short straw in the optical priorities of our world today”¹⁵ it remains a critical mechanism of knowing—especially knowing textiles. Within museums, however, touch is generally restricted to the occasional inclusion of ‘touchables’ in exhibitions or education programs or highly mediated ‘handling sessions’ in collections areas. The fact remains that touch in museums is highly orchestrated and, in Candlin’s words, “palliative.” Samples and interactive elements in the galleries are ways of “negotiating and containing damage” more than as sources of knowledge.¹⁶

In 2010, a number of shirts, collected from the Blackfoot people of the Canadian Prairies in 1841, were brought to Glenbow Museum for a ‘visit’ from the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford. Blackfoot community members were given access to the shirts in the Glenbow’s conservation lab, prior to a short period of public display. Overseen by staff from two museums, interaction was highly mediated and white gloves, mandatory. While the event attempted to provide community access, many Blackfoot felt resentful and disappointed that the shirts did not remain in Alberta with their descendants.¹⁷ Access, here, was short lived, and while it included intellectual and physical access, it failed to take into consideration the needs of future generations of Blackfoot people or their survivance.

Blackfoot Shirts visit Glenbow in 2010. Credit: Glenbow Museum

Whether a museum has Indigenous collections or not, these issues are relevant. Behind the scenes handling opportunities typically offer participants little choice or control over what they interact with and how. Candlin suggests that what is “at stake here is not only the vulnerability of the collections but the professionalism and standing of the curatorial staff.”¹⁸ As gatekeepers,

¹⁵ Hemmings, *Cultural Threads: Transnational Textiles Today*.

¹⁶ Candlin, “Don’t Touch! Hands Off! Art, Blindness and the Conservation of Expertise.”

¹⁷ Joanne Schmidt personal communication with community members.

¹⁸ Candlin, *ibid*, 84.

they control who has access and how. With respect to the Blackfoot shirts, community access was granted by the museums involved, was mediated by museum professionals, effectively reasserting colonial control. If we are to legitimately decolonize museums and foster survivance, our authority, our privilege needs to be acknowledged and countered.

Nickle Galleries does not have collections of ‘ethnographic’ or Indigenous textiles. We have a collection of Asian textiles—mostly carpets—far removed in space and time from the women and the communities who produced them. Unlike collections of Indigenous textiles—these were likely made in workshops and intended for trade. While these textiles may have circulated more willingly, this does not mean the producers were not subject to exploitation or that issues related to access are moot. Carpets are among the largest and often most valuable textiles to be collected, and where what counts as collectible, what counts as knowledge is highly prescribed.¹⁹ Often dismissed by carpet aficionados (if not textile collectors), Afghan War Rugs, burst onto the market in the last two decades of the 20th century. The Nickle was donated a collection that is frequently used in teaching and learning. While initially imagined as ‘gateway rugs’—fostering interest in more classical carpets, they have been useful in decolonizing museum practices and countering all-to-familiar stereotypes of Muslims.

Grade 5 student considering an Afghan war rug at Nickle Galleries. Credit: Dave Brown, LCR Photo Services

The workshops I facilitate with the war rugs are intended to facilitate inquiry-based learning, haptic engagement, and enhanced awareness of fibres, weaving, skilled labour, and the lives of Afghan people following the Soviet Invasion in 1979. By inviting participants to touch (gently), to experience the carpets socially and collaboratively, occasionally within the collection’s storeroom—I aim to (at least) bracket my authority as gatekeeper and expert. Every once in a

¹⁹ Hardy, “Swept under the Carpet: Subtle Tales from the Back Room.”

while, a student is able to read the Dari or Pashtu text woven into some of the carpets and share insights or personal memories of Afghanistan. What this experience does is shift authority to those with direct knowledge and promote a more empathetic understanding of the Islamic cultures represented by these artifacts.

Upping the ante, so to speak, another workshop involves handling of selected textiles with the opportunity to create textiles. This program considers the relationships between peoples of the Eurasian Steppes, their environment, lifestyle and textiles. Several artifacts are arranged on tables (at child height and with magnifying glasses), the children are asked to touch gently and look carefully while answering open ended questions. Adjacent to the artifacts I provide a carpet fragment they are encouraged to deconstruct (to understand structure and labour). On the other side of the classroom, children have the opportunity to try wet felt making. Yes, the activities were kept well segregated and carefully monitored. Although the workshop involves a number of adult helpers, the children's actions are not over-prescribed. They work collaboratively, creatively, socially (it is not a quiet event) embodying the connections I introduce and leave with a profound new awareness of how they are in the world as compared to how others are in the world.

Preserving textiles in darkened rooms, keeping them in artificial, culturally empty spaces inhibits their potential to foster understanding and empathy.

Grade 5 student considering a Turkman chuval at Nickle Galleries. Credit: Dave Brown, LCR Photo Services

Knowing and Access

Amy Lonetree notes that decolonizing museums “involves more than moving museums away from being elitist temples of esoteric learning and even more than moving museums toward

providing forums for community engagement.”²⁰ It requires taking a hard look at the colonial imperatives of museums and acknowledging historic and contemporary privilege. Museum textiles—particularly those collected from Indigenous and other small-scale cultures around the world—are in our care precisely because of privilege—because we in the West have travelled the world, purchased, bartered or stolen precious textiles to fill museum collections dedicated to enjoyment, edification and research. Normand has suggested that museums are global isolators who de-animate objects by recontextualizing them within museums.²¹

For some cultures, including some Indigenous cultures, these textiles may actually be animated. For some Indigenous cultures, textiles are not simply inert objects that can be removed from one place and discretely stored somewhere else. Museum artifacts, including textiles, may be ancestors or even living entities who require periodic ritual feedings, ceremony or offerings.²² Not merely an inconvenience to museum conservators, these perspectives expose and challenge the very foundations of museums.

Museum textiles are often exhibited as aesthetic objects with limited contextual information. Text panels and labels offer information that is typically filtered through the interpretive lenses of museum curators, designers, and educators or other inside-traders. While efforts have been made to include the perspectives of members of originating cultures (and we acknowledge the efforts Glenbow has made in this direction)—how honest are we really? Do we speak of the murky trades and trails that lead to our storerooms? Do our labels describe the effects of globalization and neo-liberalization on the original producers of textiles? Do we share the tragic histories behind the appearance of certain textiles thrust onto the market (wars, famines, poverty) or the effects the loss of those textiles have on source communities? What secrets do museums keep so that our authority, our public face remains untarnished?

In 2016, I invited the Calgary artist Laura Vickerson to show her textile-based work at the Nickle. Laura asked if she might incorporate carpets from the Nickle’s collection into the installation. Wanting to foster new approaches to showing carpets and new ways of looking at them, I agreed. Laura and I selected almost 100 carpets from across Asia to cover the four walls surrounding her installation. It was (and still is) a challenge to suspend my fears and allow the Nickle’s carpets to be shown in different ways. Typically, art museums show artifacts as if each one is a singular object—meant to be viewed and appreciated individually, as Art. With Laura’s *The Between* massed carpet artifacts are juxtaposed with a canopy stitched of white, recycled clothes. The installation alludes to invisible labour, consumption and the global movement of cloth and bodies—most recently and dramatically those of Syrian refugees.²³ The installation’s success was due in no small part to how affective and visceral it was, transforming viewers into participants with a new level of access to the collection. It also shifted, incrementally the museum’s tendency to over-determine, to prescribe and re-inscribe its power.

²⁰ Lonetree, *ibid*, 6.

²¹ Normand, “In the Planetarium: The Modern Museum on the Anthropocentric Stage.” 67.

²² Flynn and Hull-Walski, *ibid*, 31-40.

²³ Hardy, Kelly-Frère, and Vickerson, *Laura Vickerson: The Between*.

Laura Vickerson's exhibition The Between (2016) featured a canopy of recycled clothing and carpets from Nickle Galleries' collections. Photo Dave Brown, LCR Photo Services.

Onciul states that for “Indigenous people museums can be viewed as culpable bodies of former colonial oppression who continue to keep cultural material beyond source community reach.”²⁴ We would go further and argue that museums keep textiles not just beyond reach, but beyond control and are not yet “former colonial institutions.” For example, words frequently associated with museum textile collections—‘study,’ ‘appreciation,’ ‘empowerment’ and ‘preservation’—are indicative of privilege and power. Study of what, for whom, to what ends? Appreciation and empowerment on who’s terms? And preservation at what cost? While we have focused here on physical access—no less important is intellectual, emotional, and other forms of access. Intellectual access has to mean access not only to the products of our museum research (exhibitions, catalogues, digital databases etc.) but the actual primary sources and raw data. Access here has to mean transparency in the acts of interpretation and access to the means of knowledge creation. It means, where possible, engaging community members—particularly Indigenous people—in all aspects of the care, preservation, interpretation, and exhibition of their material heritage.²⁵ And it means acknowledging that engagement can be emotionally fraught and challenging.

Creating Survivance

Are our collections merely salvaged from dying cultures, disappeared into black holes of our museum making or are they productive? Generative? And of all the objects in our collections, what is the role of textiles? Rather than being saved as relics or aestheticized—how can they be used as sources of knowledge and for community building? How can they be used to help refashion cultures for the postmodern age?²⁶

²⁴ Onciul, *ibid*, 26.

²⁵ Ruth Phillips has noted that one of the benefits of repatriation is the reciprocal sharing of knowledge produced through repatriation research. See: Phillips, “Re-Placing Objects: Historical Practices for the Second Museum Age.”

²⁶ This refashioning is related to attempts to “repair a peculiarly vicious consequence of genocidal attacks on natives of the Americas: an inducing in them of their destroyers' view that they are mere survivors. By accepting this white definition of themselves as victims, natives psychologically complete the not-quite-entirely-successful physical genocide.” Kroeber, “Why It’s a Good Thing Gerald Vizenor Is Not an Indian.” 25.

Artists have a long history of ‘mining’ museum collections in order to probe the deeper truths of Western intellectual traditions. While Fred Wilson’s *Mining the Museum* at The Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore in 1992²⁷ is perhaps the best-known intervention—there are many other artists who have critically interrogated museum collections. Earlier this year, I was approached by two artists from the Alberta College of Art and Design who wanted to work with some of our Turkish carpets. Martina Lantin, a ceramicist and Bryan Cera, a media artist, selected a 17th century Star Ushak carpet to conduct an experiment in transduction—in their case conversion from analogue to digital and back to analogue. The experiment involved Martina carefully tracing carpet motifs with a digital pen, manipulating the designs, then applying them with a digital slip extruder to a clay body. The research is ongoing but promises to foster ways of working with, of looking at, and creating from museum textile collections in innovative and unprecedented ways.²⁸

Indigenous communities want to preserve their material culture, but their understanding of preservation is a much deeper and more complex concept than the traditional museological one. For Indigenous peoples, for example, textiles are implicated in effecting diplomacy, building cultural resiliency, healing and spiritual responsibility. Moreover, preservation may include reproduction, replacement or even destruction. Sacred bundles, swaddled in cotton cloths include items that can be replaced as they age without destroying the integrity of the bundle. Beaded panels on garments can be removed and transferred to other garments without it being thought of as “old” or second-hand. At Okan, textiles are tied to the lodge poles and although seen as sacred objects, they are allowed to succumb to the elements—in fact this is the hope that they will go back to the land and to the creator. Once they return to dust, they become part of the life cycle. Becoming part of the land they sustain the plants that sustain the bison that sustain the people.

Glenbow has established collaborative relationships with Indigenous communities—relationships that acknowledge their right to handle their own cultural and intellectual property with few barriers. Visits are organic as are rules regarding the preservation of textile collections. When elders come in, many recognize their own work in the collections—should we then ask them to wear gloves while handling them? Visits are richer, more authentic, more equitable and more respectful when community access includes handling and engaging with textiles directly rather than observing from a distance.

Sending objects out into Indigenous communities as often as possible has become critical. They help reconnect Indigenous communities with cultural practices and reverse the damage done by assimilationist policies such as those which led to the establishment of residential schools. Textiles, even those considered core, have been loaned for community displays despite short timelines or venues that do not always meet museum standards.

²⁷ Wilson and Halle, “Mining the Museum.”

²⁸ *Digital Gesture / Analog Object*.

Bertha Big Plume visits her belts at Glenbow. Credit: Joanne Schmidt

Community needs and healing trump museum policy in most situations. Additionally, ceremonial objects are loaned to communities indefinitely using a modified loan agreement which does not include typical museum demands such as ensuring the integrity and condition of the items upon return, or that they be kept in specific environmental conditions. By abandoning rules for removal, the cultural authority of communities over these sacred textiles is acknowledged and given precedence over museum “ownership”. Furthermore, these loans are granted by a group of ceremonial knowledge keepers from the community where the ceremony will be held—the curator acts only as a liaison. Preservation and care thus prioritize cultural, spiritual and communal values rather than physical integrity as is typical of traditional museum conservation.

Indigenous Children in Foster Care—Supporting and Facilitating Intellectual, Cultural, Creative and Physical Access

Our strength comes from the traditions we learn from our elders. Our hope comes from our young who possess the power of a million new ideas.

Ojibwe elder, Wewinabi (Arthur Gahbow), 1988.²⁹

²⁹ The quote was used as a first-person introduction to a Mille Lacs Indian Museum exhibition. Cited in, Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*, 50.

Allowing textiles out of the museum into the community for active use without restrictions is clearly an unusually high level of access, but using textiles in the museum as a vehicle for healing, reconciliation, and resilience building had the potential to transform Glenbow's social justice role in a dramatic way.

Since 2013, Glenbow has invited Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) foster children into the collections along with their foster parents and case workers. Indigenous children are overrepresented in the Foster care system. Most of these children are removed from their culture and placed in non-Indigenous homes—a crisis that has been compared to the removal of Indigenous children to residential schools³⁰. Once in the system, invisible political and bureaucratic barriers are erected around the children, further isolating them not only from their birth families, but culturally, emotionally and spiritually³¹. Led by an elder these children came into Glenbow's collections areas to view and handle our extensive textile collections, practice ceremony and forge connections to their biological families by handling objects which they had made.

In 2018, the program was extended to include art making workshops led by artists who were Sixties Scoop Survivors,³² in addition to Glenbow staff and community artists. Called the “subalterns of the art world,” textiles made an ideal vehicle for self-expression and resilience building for these foster children, who are themselves marginalized in society.”³³ Additionally, it has been noted that unlike other art forms, which “drag a white male identity with them,” textiles,³⁴ are a more accessible and less fraught art form. Contradicting my “Western” fears, even the boys committed to the process as in Blackfoot tradition both men and women conceptualize textile designs, stitch, sew and bead.

Banners, flags and pennants have historically been a way to send messages, present identity or represent group identity. Children in this workshop created pennants with siblings from whom they had been separated, working both independently and collectively. Participants focused intensely on creativity and design and, inspired by the collections, stitched their personal and cultural identity. Finding their voice, many also expressed their hopes in deeply reflective ways which drew attention to their plight as part of a system in which they have little control. as they are destined for exhibit, they will also become vehicles for truth-telling, sharing and commemoration to an audience which is often unfamiliar with this national crisis³⁵.

Foster parents, staff, children and their siblings, artists and even some biological parents all came together in the communal and therapeutic act of healing through stitching. According to my colleagues with Kainai Child and Family Services, the children let go of their reservations and anxieties, found unexpected levels of creativity and self-expression, and even made exceptional

³⁰ Joanne Schmidt personal discussions with several Sixties Scoop artists.

³¹ Joanne Schmidt personal interview with Kainai Child and Family Services staff.

³² Sinclair and Dainard, “Sixties Scoop.” The “Sixties Scoop” refers to the large-scale removal or “scooping” of Indigenous children from their homes, communities and families of birth from the 1960s through to the 1980's. Children were routinely adopted into predominantly non-Indigenous, middle-class families across the United States and Canada, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/sixties-scoop>

³³ Reichek in Hemmings, *Cultural Threads: Transnational Textiles Today*, 23.

³⁴ Ibid, 23.

³⁵ Commemoration and truth-telling is one of the key principles presented in “Final Report: Truth and Reconciliation Summit.”

leaps in self-confidence and empowerment as the day progressed. One child who stitched two pennants with her foster parent was essentially non-verbal, yet suddenly found her voice. Additionally, to the amazement of staff, she actually helped herself to solid food for the first time they could remember after being tube-fed for most of her six years. In just a few hours, textiles became a site resilience building, healing and transformation for not only this child, but a whole roomful of children—one of their “artist statements” stated: “I stitched the whole thing myself...It took me three hours but I didn’t quit!”

Healing and resilience building are desperately needed by Indigenous communities and this project illustrated that Glenbow has the means to facilitate this journey one child at a time through textiles. As stated by Duran in *Healing the Soul Wound*, “through the healing of individuals, the groundwork can be laid for the greater healing of the community...if even a small critical mass of healing can be generated in a few people, this will create a snow balling effect that can encompass the community in positive healing.”³⁶ Textiles in this workshop, started these young individuals on a healing path.

Left: One of Flag Banner workshop participants at Glenbow learning how to stitch. Credit: Joanne Schmidt.

Right: Flag Banner workshop at Glenbow. Credit: Glenbow Museum

³⁶ Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound: Counseling with American Indians and Other Native Peoples*.

Conclusion

Museums have a long history of “vivisection and quarantine,”³⁷ of isolating culture from life and nature from humanity. With respect to collections of textiles, museums have tended to privilege preserving physical artifacts at the expense of the cultures who made them. Museums have tended to privilege textiles as precious relics to be contained and venerated rather than used to build vibrant communities and create sustainable relevance for textile collections. The situation is most urgent with collections of Indigenous textiles, but is no less critical with other collections. Some might argue that this is what museums are—that they save things in perpetuity for the ‘greater good.’ What we are suggesting is less about throwing caution to the wind—more about considering incremental even micropolitical acts that shift the balance of power between museums and source communities and enable shared meaning making or abrogating that right. It is about embracing an ethic of care of the present and future as much as the past; of generating, not just commemorating culture.

We have discussed a variety of recent initiatives at Glenbow and Nickle Galleries—programs and exhibitions that respond to postcolonial and Anthropocentric criticisms of museums. A number of contemporary artists are responding to the latter with works that emphasize connectedness, continuity, and responsibility—qualities intimately associated with many textiles. Textiles are, by nature, tactile products of skill and time and precious materials that cannot be appreciated fully without touch or without acknowledging the communities who produced them. Textile collections hold the unique potential to connect people, to foster community, empathy, understanding, and encourage survivance.

We want to encourage saying yes, facilitating (not ‘giving’) access, facilitating choice, giving time, acknowledging privilege and investing in creative solutions.

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