

# *Experiencing Native North America*

## Art Installation as Experiential Pedagogy

Principle artist and organizer- Dr. Bernard C Perley (Anthropology)  
Co-organizer for language contributions- Dr. Margaret Noodin (English)  
Co-organizer for history components- Dr. Cary Miller (History)  
Co-organizer for pedagogy components- Sommer Drake (Education)  
Oneida and Menominee language contributions- Milwaukee Indian Community School

In the spring of 2015 UWM American Indian faculty came together to conceptualize how their research and advocacy can transcend the disciplinary boundaries the faculty continually negotiate. The *Experiencing Native North America* installation underscored the value of the installation for collaborative pedagogy and the transportability of the experiential learning environment. The installation continues to adapt to the context and concomitant constituency at each of the public presentations, but it also travels to new contexts and addresses new constituents. One additional benefit of the experiential learning environment was the ability of the components to take on lives of their own such as an Anishinaabemowin prayer of giving thanks in the form of a coloring book.

The key reason for coming together was to rethink and challenge academic and experiential boundaries and to emphasize the coauthors/participants' common experience in their capacities as members of their respective American Indian communities. They were aware that their experiences do not neatly fit into academic categories as defined by the disciplines. The goal for the collaboration across disciplines was to share common experiences, knowledge, and concerns for creating greater understanding of American Indian experience in the colonial United States. Dr. Cary Miller provided historical contextualization as well as lists of recommended reading for exploring the traumas associated with traumatic historical periods. Dr. Margaret Noodin coordinated the translation of the Maliseet prayer of giving thanks into Anishinaabemowin and coordinated with the language teachers at the Milwaukee Indian Community school translations of the Maliseet prayer into Oneida and Menominee. Drake Sommer coordinated the pedagogical sessions for the workshop during the Wisconsin Indian Educators Association conference and the Educators Network for Social Justice conferences. Dr. Perley designed the history panels to reflect the teaching and learning goal of the installation and coordinated the design of the interior prayer panels to reflect the prayer translations into Anishinaabemowin, Oneida, and Menominee. The completed installation was unveiled at the Milwaukee Indian Community School because the school was hosting the ENSJ conferences (April 25, 2015<sup>i</sup>, 2016<sup>ii</sup>).

### *Welcome to Native North America*

The central idea behind the pedagogical aspect of the installation was its celebration of Milwaukee Wisconsin as ancestral sacred land. The interior panels reproduce a map of Lizard Mound State Park just north of Milwaukee. Milwaukee lies at the heart of the Effigy Mound Culture. Perley selected Lizard Mound State Park for the axis mundi as American Indian sacred space for the installation. All participants in the collaboration reinforced the central organizing principle by contributing local historical knowledge, local American Indian languages, and emphasized Milwaukee and Wisconsin are Indian words. During the public presentations, the

co-presenters celebrated the richness of the American Indian ancestral and historical presence by welcoming the audience/participants to native North America. This is a key conceptual anchor on the part of the coauthors/participants because colonial/settler society has erased American Indian presence while using Indian words for place names. Indian place names serve as semiotic tombstones to reflect absence rather to acknowledge presence. The coauthors/participants deliberately made it a point to acknowledge Milwaukee, Wisconsin as Indian land. It was not an exclusionary claim. Rather, the coauthors/participants argued for inclusive recognition so that American history does not start at 1492. American history is much longer and richer than 500-plus years. Place names are not semantic abstractions severed from history and experience. The coauthors/participants invited all constituencies, viewers, and participants to share in the deep-time history of native North America.

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<sup>i</sup> *Experiencing Native North America: Intersections of History, Language, Landscape, and Spirituality*

Margaret Noodin, Bernard Perley, Cary Miller, Sommer Drake

Session participants were asked to think about space and spirituality from an indigenous perspective. Artist Bernard Perley created visual essays to inspire discussion about empire building, manifest destiny, capitalism, globalization and indigenous language revitalization. The session explored ways to present these ideas in elementary, middle school and high school classrooms.

<sup>ii</sup> *Critical Collaboration: Repatriating Indigenous Knowledge Systems*

Bernard Perley, Margaret Noodin, Gary Miller, Sommer Drake