

**No Small Work: Anthropology, Art, and Children**  
**Andrea Naomi Walsh Department of Anthropology, University of Victoria**

Paper read at the Canadian Anthropology Society meetings  
May 09, 2003, Halifax, Nova Scotia

Citations from this paper should reference the VMC Inkameep Day School site  
and page number of PDF document.

A significant part of the anthropology of art has been directed at visual culture of non-Western peoples. To this end, issues of context and content, form and function, aesthetics and quality, and processes and critiques of representation have occupied much 20<sup>th</sup> century inquiry. Despite the broadening of anthropological research about art, little scholarly work has engaged children's visual culture. In this paper I aim to situate the production, circulation, and consumption of drawings created by Okanagan children between 1931 and 1942 at the Inkameep Day School near Oliver, B.C. into scholarly and artistic study by anthropologists and art historians of this same period. I am particularly interested in drawing links between modernism's interest in children's art and how this period provided a fertile environment for the agendas of artist educators such as Franz Cizek in Vienna during the interwar period.

A modern anthropology of art finds its foundations mortared with the use and subsequent critique of the term primitive art, as well as multiple theoretical and methodological models for considering aesthetics and ethnoaesthetics. Complicating these early discussions were critiques of the broad usage of Western-based terminologies such as 'art' and 'aesthetics' that implied notions of beauty, excellence and pleasure. In spite of the growing critical awareness of the anthropological study of art inquiry was, as Nicholas Thomas notes, almost solely directed toward "certain tribal or formerly tribal peoples, in other words to those formerly identified as 'primitive'" (Thomas 2001:1). In his book with Christopher Pinney, *Beyond Aesthetics* (2001), he notes that the emphasis on non-Western art forms in anthropological research remains evident. I would add that such long-term inquiry into art by anthropologists has with few exceptions focused on work produced by adults.

This broad-based anthropological inquiry of art influenced the manner in which First Nations visual culture has been discussed. Throughout the majority of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, spirituality, religion and magic were topics of study that received much attention at the level of the individual and of society. In the latter half of this period, native art as a category was called into question and notions of quality and artistic merit debated. It is upon this critique that Charlotte Townsend Gault questioned, "What is the point of perpetuating a category called 'Native art,' when the work is irreconcilably diverse and the category restrictive or discriminatory? It is not an art category at all, but the outcome of a socio-political situation" (Townsend-Gault 1998). A break from equating native art with primitive art is exemplified by Patterson in 1973 when she states, "Today there is a desire

to recover the sense of the sacred which fills much native art; this art is no longer seen as the expression of a childish faith, but a mature spirituality” (Patterson 1973:2). The connection between primitive art and the child is a point to which I will return in a moment.

Art historians and scholars have engaged the relation between art and children and/or childhood in a more specific manner than that of Anthropology from the beginning to the mid point of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I refer here to Modernism’s interest in primitivism and its linkage to art by children, as well as to the specific attention paid to the development of child artists by artist educators. Artists such as Klee, Miro, and Picasso all revelled in the sensual or emotional qualities of immediacy, spontaneity, purity, and indeed innocence they felt to be essential to both the art of non-Western peoples, termed primitive in the language of the day, and were intrigued by finding what they felt to be similar admirable qualities in art by children. In this manner, select art by children was appropriated for adult use and positioned to be antithetical to the calculated art forms from which modernist artists sought to free themselves. As Susan Hiller writes, “In borrowing or appropriating visual ideas which they found in the class of foreign objects that came to be labelled ‘primitive art’, and by articulating their own fantasies about the meaning of the objects and about the peoples who created them, artists have been party to the erasure of the self-representations of colonized peoples in favour of a western representation of their realities” (Hiller 1991:2). Primitive art and children’s art were also linked by arguments that they appeared visually similar. An important point made through the 1999 Australian exhibition *Childhood’s Past* was to expose the manner in which children’s art is often devalued as a cost of defending and valuing art formerly labelled primitive. The curators quote Sally Price from her book *Primitive art in Civilized Places* (1989) where she accuses those who relate primitive art with that of children as racist. Price writes, “The view of Primitive Art as a kind of creative expression that flows unchecked from the artist’s unconscious is responsible for comparisons between Primitive Art and the drawings of children, and its racist foundation is rather transparent” (Price 1989:48). In sum, the exhibition addresses “the problematic relationship between Modernism, Primitivism and children’s art” and “call into question our motives for admiring and collecting the arts of other cultures and the art of children” (ibid.).

The recognition of the value of art by children and the possibility of creating the Child Artist was the impetus behind the work of early 20<sup>th</sup> century artist educators such as Franz Cizek in Vienna, Marion Richardson in Britain, and Frances Derham in Australia. I shall focus here on Franz Cizek because of his relevance to the Inkameep drawings and research. Born in 1865 in Leitmeritz, now the Czech Republic, Cizek studied painting in the 1880s at the Vienna Academy. He began to teach children in 1885, and in 1897 opened his school for drawing and painting. In 1906 Cizek’s school was integrated into the School of Arts and Crafts as an experimental school where he was appointed teacher. From 1910 onwards he specialized in teaching a separate Children’s Art Class. As an artist and educator, Cizek was strongly influenced by the modernist art of the day, and its expressionist agenda. He is often credited for discovering “Child

Art” and in the very least developing its teaching methods premised upon self-expression (a controversial goal with Victorian ideas of children and society lingering). Cizek encouraged his students aged 5-16 to discover their own natural abilities, and he insisted that he accomplished this by ‘not teaching’ the students through formalized lessons. Rather, students drew what they wished and were encouraged to work with their own ideas and concepts of art. In 1942 at the end of his career, Cizek stated, “Children have their own laws which they must need obey. What right have grown-ups to interfere? People should draw as they feel” (Cizek in Viola 1936:32). Criticism around Cizek’s art and education philosophies revolve around his insistence of the existence of ‘natural’ art and its ability to be developed. As Philip Meeson as noted, the idea of natural must come from a comparison to what is unnatural, and that definition arose from Cizek’s, not the child artist’s experience and knowledge. In his research on Franz Cizek, Philip Meeson correctly states:

“What children learned from the novel teaching methods of Cizek was not how to express their ideas in a manner devoid of adult values, although that was the intention behind his methods, for although there was not formal art teaching on traditional lines there was considerable encouragement to think in a manner conducive to the production of the kind of art which Cizek favoured. Cizek was the first teacher to use art to affect the thinking of children by using the practice of art as a vehicle for projecting society’s changing view of childhood back onto the child” (Meeson 1985:366).

Concurrent with the latter years of Cizek’s Child Art movement, and modernism’s interest in the art of children, a teacher by the name of Anthony Walsh came to teach at the Inkameep Day School near Oliver, B.C. in 1931. He stayed at the school for 10 years, living in conditions of near poverty in a one-room teacherage next to the schoolhouse. Walsh’s residency at the school produced both a practice and a philosophy of teaching and learning through artistic endeavour that was progressive for the time. His news articles and scholarly essays demonstrate his belief that racial tolerance and democracy could be achieved through the production and exchange of artistic efforts. Walsh encouraged his students to produce art that honoured and utilized traditional Okanagan culture. However, he also recognized that the children’s knowledge and identity were being shaped by their increasingly Westernized lifestyles. He encouraged such layers of identity by having the children sign their art with either or both their Indian and Western names. The principle areas in which the students worked were two-dimensional drawing and painting, singing, dancing and theatre.

The art programme at the school began with the recognition by Walsh and his students that the Okanagan peoples had a rich visual history. The Inkameep Reserve was surrounded by hills on which the evidence of early rock paintings was found. “There were days’, wrote Walsh, ‘after the closing of the school when pupils and myself would ride off and sketches would be made of these designs, and then transferred to the top of the blackboards of the school.’ Then further sketches were made of the designs on bags and moccasins” (Walsh 1974:14).

The students of Inkameep created plays based on their understanding of Okanagan history and stories and held frequent exhibitions of their work. The events at which the children performed were attended by both native and non-native audiences and were often held to raise money for charities such as the Canadian Red Cross. The children also raised money toward the purchase of a Spitfire plane on behalf of the B.C. Indian Spitfire fund that had been established by B.C. Indian Chiefs in the province, and they sent their works to London, England to be auctioned off for the war effort (raising in one instance \$800.00).

From 1936 to 1942 Walsh entered the drawings done by his pupils at the school in the Wartime Drawing competition for children held by the Royal Drawing Society of London, at which Inkameep students' work competed against art by thousands of other children of the Empire. Many of his students won awards, most notably in 1938, when Sis-hu-ik (Francis Baptiste) won a silver medal and Thith-hak-key (Johnnie Stelkia) won two bronze stars. That year, Sis-hu-ik's drawing on buckskin was viewed by Queen Elizabeth and purchased for the King Edward and Queen Alexandria Memorial Collection. This drawing was the first Canadian piece purchased for this Collection. The art work of Walsh and the Inkameep students was also exhibited elsewhere in Europe, in cities such as Paris, Dublin, Glasgow, Vienna and Prague. Nationally their art was sent to exhibitions and competitions in Ottawa, Montreal, Toronto, Edmonton and Winnipeg. In British Columbia their drawings were seen throughout the Okanagan region in Summerland, Penticton, Oliver and Kelowna, and on the coast in Vancouver and Victoria. The children in 1941 began correspondence with Mr. Walt Disney and at least one piece of this correspondence is documented in a 1941 Christmas card.

Upon establishing a connection between the Inkameep School and the Canadian Red Cross, a recent trip I made to the National Red Cross archives in Ottawa revealed that the Inkameep students were registered as an official "Junior" group of the Red Cross, and that in September 1934 Walsh submitted an article on the students art work as part of their education and service to the Red Cross. During the next four years, the Inkameep Juniors sent updates and artwork for publication in the Junior Red Cross Magazine. In February of 1936 an ad appears advertising a book on Child Art by Franz Cizek. I have little doubt that Walsh saw this ad, and it influenced his agenda at Inkameep. In a separate archive search of the BC Archives Red Cross records, it is noted that the Inkameep Juniors have sent their work in a portfolio to Vienna for professor Cizek's evaluation. The research also revealed that the international exhibition of the Inkameep art was often carried out through the Canadian Red Cross agencies in Europe, and that Vienna was the site of one of the exhibits.

A similar critique and analysis given to Cizek's work by Philip Meeson may also be aimed at that of Walsh in two respects. First, the art created at the Inkameep school was first and foremost derived from each child's own vision of their reality. Indeed the emphasis on using Okanagan art, culture and language can be read as developing the child's native (read: natural, pure, innocent) abilities and personhood. In as much as the art was produced and inspired by the children's experience and knowledge, it was circulated by Walsh in a very

strategic manner through the Red Cross magazine which was primarily a journal promoting the health of young bodies and from there, the health of a young nation of dutiful citizens. Second, the consumption of the art may be theorized in a similar way to Meeson's notion that Cizek used art "as a vehicle for projecting society's changing view of childhood back onto the child" as per the interests and agendas of aspects of modernism (Meeson p. 366). I would argue that Walsh in turn used the Inkameep art as a vehicle to propose alternative views of aboriginal children, identity and citizenship to those held by the majority of Canadian society at the time, back onto the child artists.

It is within this latter point that the children's art and drama intersects with adult political agendas around citizenship and equality and perhaps becomes most meaningful when contemplating a modern anthropology of art. At the time of these exhibitions, Indian Act legislation dictated that the place of aboriginal people in Canadian society was only to be gained through assimilation. Policies such as involuntary enfranchisement (1933) and law against non-Native fundraising to support land claims (1927) created logistic and legal barriers to active lobbying for aboriginal citizenship that maintained aboriginal rights. In the late 1930s Mr. Walsh and his supporters (notably a non-Native society started in 1940 called the BC Society for the Furtherance of Indian Arts and Crafts) worked around such barriers by holding children's art exhibitions and dramatic performances in aid of the WWII war effort. The members of this society aggressively lobbied provincial and federal governments of Canada as well as foreign governments and dignitaries to improve health and education situations on Indian reserves. Their advocacy work extended into legal and political realms. This was demonstrated through their goals to have aboriginal peoples recognized as Canadian citizens (this did not occur for all aboriginal people until 1960). The members also fought for the recognition of private property rights on reserves. In 1944 just after Mr. Walsh left Inkameep Reserve, the Okanagan Society he helped organize submitted a brief to the Prime Minister of Canada entitled *Native Canadians - A Plan For The Rehabilitation Of Indians*, a document that grounded itself in the practice of art as education developed by Walsh. This submission was included in the briefings to a Special Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons, which was to examine and reconsider the Indian Act.

The exhibitions of Inkameep work acted as vehicles through which Mr. Walsh and society members could display exemplary acts of citizenship by the Okanagan students at Inkameep. Acts of citizenship were signified by the students' financial support and personal concern for the future of Canada. If it were impossible to lobby for aboriginal peoples' land and resource rights, it was possible to push a civil rights agenda through the circulation of children's art. Finally, the exhibition of work as part of the Royal Drawing Society exhibitions for view by British monarchy established a symbolic tie between these children of the colony and the Empire.

The complexity these social relations that surround and move through the children's art makes Alfred Gell's theory of art and agency (1998) relevant to this research. I am conscious here of the fact that I am only using Gell's ideas in a

superficial manner, but I think that it is worth making mention. Using Gell's terminology, the Inkameep drawings stand as indexes – or material entities, that stand for a “variety of relations to prototypes, artists, and recipients” (Pinney 2001:4). The status of the Inkameep children as Child artists makes them “causally responsible for the existence and characteristics of an index, “ and yet they are also simultaneously “vehicles of the agency of others, not the self-subsistent, creative agents of Western commonsense ideas and art-world theory” (Pinney 2001:5). Gell's theoretical stance also provides opportunity for the never-ending re-visioning and re-positioning of the drawings in contemporary contexts, which is where I will conclude my thoughts.

Upon Mr. Walsh's departure in 1942, the dynamic art program at the Inkameep School collapsed and eventually children were sent to residential school at Cranbrook. In 1943 the replacement teacher burnt much of the children's art; claiming Mr. Walsh's practices to be backward and detrimental to the process of civilizing the children. Some of the art was salvaged, but languished in a box under the bed of one of Mr. Walsh's supporters for 20 years before it was donated in 1963 for the opening of the Osoyoos Museum. The drawings were pegged to a display board in the museum, where they remained for over 40 years. This June through September of 2003, 39 drawings from the day school are on exhibition as part of the Vancouver Art Gallery's feature summer exhibition titled: Drawing the World: From L.A. Hipsters to Italian Masters. The exhibition features drawings from L.A., Rome, Verona, Baker Lake, Calcutta and Osoyoos dating from the 15<sup>th</sup> century to the present. The present-day exhibition of these drawings 60+ years after their creation, attests to their on-going importance as objects with agency for Okanagan as well as Canadian identity as understood by the rest of the world, and that these changing ideals and values continue to reflect back onto the Child artists of Inkameep.

#### References Cited:

- Becker, Howard. (1982) *Artworlds*. Berkely, Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Berlo, Janet and Ruth Phillips. (1998) *Native North American Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Berlo, Janet (ed). (1996) *Plains Indian Drawings 1865-1935: Pages from a Visual History*. New York: Harry N. Abrahms, Inc. in association with The American Federation of Arts and The Drawing Center.
- Brody, J. J. (1971) *Indian Painters and White Patrons*. Santa Fe: University of New Mexico Press.
- Bush, Janet. (1997). *The Handbook of School Art Therapy: Introducing Art Therapy into a School*. Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas Publishers.

Clifford, James. (1988) *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, London. Harvard University Press.

Dunn, Dorothy. (1968) *American Indian Painting*. Santa Fe: University of New Mexico Press.

Gell, Alfred (1998). *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Hiller, Susan. (1991). *The myth of primitivism: Perspectives on art*. London:Routledge. p.2

Kindler, Anna M. (ed). (1997) *Child Development in Art*. Reston, Virginia: National Art Education Association.

Malchiodi, Cathy. (1998). *Understanding Children's Drawings*. New York: Guilford Press.

Marcus, George E. and Fred Myers. (1995) *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London. University of California Press.

McMaster, Gerald and Lee-Ann Martin (1992) *Indigena: Contemporary Native Perspectives*. Hull: Canadian Museum of Civilization.

Meeson, Philip. (1985). "In Search of Child Art" in *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 25, no. 4, Autumn. Pp. 362-371

Nemiroff, Diane, Robert Houle and Charlotte Townsend-Gault, (eds) (1992) *Land, Spirit, Power*. Ottawa. National Gallery of Canada.

Pinney, Christopher, Nicholas Thomas (eds) (2001). *Beyond Aesthetics: Art and the Technologies of Enchantment*. Oxford, New York: Berg Publishers.

Price, Sally. (1989). *Primitive art in civilized places*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. P. 48

Rushing, Jackson III. (1999) *Native American Art in the Twentieth Century*. London and New York: Routledge.

Viola, Wilhelm (1936) *Child Art and Franz Cizek*. Austrian Red Cross: Vienna.

**Walsh, Andrea N.** (2002a) "Visualizing Histories: Experiences of Space and Place in Photographs by Greg Staats and Jeffrey Thomas" in *Visual Studies*. Pp. 47-58 vol. 17 no.1

\_\_\_\_\_ (2002b) "Complex Sitings" in On Aboriginal Representation in the Gallery. Lynda Jessup with Shannon Bagg. Pp. 347-270. Hull: Canadian Museum of Civilization.

Walsh, Anthony (1974) "The Inkameep School" in J.E. Fry (ed.), The Thirty-Eighth Annual Report of the Okanagan Historical Society. Kelowna, BC.