

within society, we must not divorce it from its socio-cultural contexts nor from the everyday realities by which individuals create personal meaning through cultural practice. Therefore, future examinations should consider the entire system of body adornment (production, distribution, consumption) and a wider range of forms and participants (from average to extreme).

#### Notes

1. At the time my review was authored (January 2006), the exhibition could be accessed online at: [www.museum.upenn.edu/new/exhibits/online\\_exhibits/body\\_modification/bodmodintro.shtml](http://www.museum.upenn.edu/new/exhibits/online_exhibits/body_modification/bodmodintro.shtml).

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#### ***Drawing on Identity: Inkameep Day School and Art Collection. An online exhibition of the Osoyoos Museum and the Virtual Museum of Canada.***

AMBER RIDINGTON

As a relatively new display medium, online exhibitions are providing small and out of the way communities with new opportunities, previously available only to larger centers, to display their cultural history and present themselves to a worldwide audience. *Drawing on Identity: Inkameep Day School and Art Collection* is an example of a collaborative project between a First Nations community, an anthropologist, a local museum, and a web design team. These respective parties (The Osoyoos Indian Band in British Columbia, Canada, Dr. Andrea Walsh of the University of Victoria, the Osoyoos Museum Society and Unlimited Digital Communications) worked together to collect, document and present a piece of significant cultural, political, educational and artistic history to the public. The process of collecting their history and

interpreting it for the exhibit is also helping to revitalize the cultural pride of the Inkameep people of the Osoyoos Indian Band and is spurring on their efforts to provide culturally relevant educational curriculum for their community.<sup>1</sup>

Using a multimedia format, the exhibit tells the story of a maverick educator, Anthony Walsh, who taught at the Inkameep Day School for Okanagan Indian children from 1932 to 1942 and the artwork produced there during Walsh's tenure. The story details how Walsh's progressive education techniques honored traditional Okanagan language and culture and encouraged the students to depict their everyday realities, which were a mixture of Okanagan traditions and stories, old and new ways of life, an evolving agricultural economy, and North American popular culture in art and plays.<sup>2</sup> This story of a teacher celebrating and encouraging a First Nation's culture is in stark contrast to the more prevalent First Nations' educational experience in Canada at that time, when many Native people were being stripped of their cultures at residential schools and punished for speaking their Native languages and practicing traditional customs. I found it inspiring and hopeful to learn about this exception to a dark part of Canada's colonial history.

With the content divided into eight main sections (The Story, The Teacher, The Artists, Galleries, Historical Timeline, Media Catalogue, Contemporary Research, Education), the exhibit mixes video clips of interviews with Inkameep Day School students from Walsh's teaching era, the current Chief of the Osoyoos Indian Band, and visual anthropologist Dr. Andrea Walsh with digital images of artwork produced by the Inkameep Day School students, interpretive text, and a few rare archival recordings of song and theatre performances by the Inkameep Day School students, as well as an interview with Anthony Walsh collected before his death in 1994. The "Galleries" section presents the artwork in the following categories: Daily Life, Other Peoples, Traditions, Animals, Plays and Legends, Francis Baptiste (a student who went on to get formal art school training and achieved acclaim as an artist), and Thunderbird Park.

While the mediums are very different, an audience's visit to a virtual exhibit follows a similar pattern to that of a physical installation. Most users read the headings, look at the pictures and then move on. The text in this exhibit is presented in an

essay format. Breaking it into smaller chunks and including sub-headings, as well as integrating the audiovisual clips and images into the body of the text, would make it more accessible to all users. As it stands, only those particularly interested in the topic are likely to read the narrative and benefit from the rich textual interpretation.

Although the exhibit ingeniously combines curation methods used in art exhibition, museum displays and digital archives, interpretive text was restricted to three of the eight sections (The Story, The Teacher, Galleries). Within the “Galleries” section it was often hard to link the interpretive text with specific pieces of art. Biographical information about the students in “The Artists” section was non-existent and would have provided significant insight into the images presented there. Similarly the entire Inkameep Day School art collection is available for viewing in the “Media Catalogue” but here the artwork is accompanied only by the following image description headings: “Image, Artist, Name, Medium, Size” and would benefit from further interpretation. From the perspective of a folklorist interested in the context and stories associated with pieces of art, the classic exhibit format of letting art pieces speak for themselves is disappointing. Not because the art cannot stand on its own, but because its meaning could have been enhanced by local interpretation(s).

This virtual exhibition was developed after drawings from the Inkameep Day School had been curated in an exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery in Vancouver, Canada in 2003. This exhibit was part of a larger installation that incorporated First Nations art entitled: *Drawing the World: Masters to Hipsters*. This earlier art exhibit context, as well as Anthony Walsh’s initial promotion of his students’ work through art competitions in the 1930s and 40s is likely to account for the lack of interpretation explicitly linked with each individual piece in the virtual exhibition.<sup>3</sup>

I first heard about the Inkameep Day School art collection through a radio story promoting it before the 2003 Vancouver Art Gallery exhibition (a year before the web exhibit was produced). I was pleasantly surprised to find that this radio piece, as well as other promotional materials, had been incorporated into the virtual exhibition. These audio and video resources add a lot to the contextual history of the artwork displayed in the exhibit and provide

an alternative interpretive medium for audiences not interested in reading the text. Additionally, the inclusion of video clips of interviews from previous Inkameep Day School students; the current Chief of the Osoyoos Indian Band; and the academic coordinating the research provides interpretation from multiple perspectives and voices.

Overall this web exhibit presents an intriguing story of a First Nations community relishing the opportunity to express, through artwork, the realities of their culture in a time of cultural change and adaptation. It is clear that the process of reconnecting the community with the art produced during a more respectful period of colonial experience is equally as important as displaying the artwork itself.

The exhibit will appeal to those interested in First Nations history, art history, popular culture, education and exhibition practices. Of particular interest to educators will be the education unit that includes four lesson plans that can be adapted to elementary and secondary school levels. More and more, museums are fulfilling their mandates to conserve and display for the purposes of education, enjoyment, and research through the development of virtual exhibitions. Virtual exhibitions often provide the impetus to digitize and preserve collections, and serve both the public and researchers by making their collections accessible over the Internet.

This exhibit is notable not just because of its intriguing story and its display of interesting art but also because of its clean, attractive design and ease of navigation. The quality of the graphics, audio and video is consistently good, and two different format options are provided for the user to choose from for viewing the audio and video clips, assuring usability for all. Alison Brown has written about the development of collaborative curation methods with source communities as one of the “most striking themes in contemporary museum practice,” and this exhibit certainly hits the mark in this regard (“Nitsitapiisinni: Our Way of Life” *Museum Anthropology* 25(2)(2002):69–75, p. 69). Indeed the Osoyoos Indian Band themselves were the instigators in the collaboration and have taken charge of their cultural representation. As the exhibit explains, it was the Osoyoos Band who approached the museum professionals and ethnographers to work with them on researching, documenting, interpreting and exhibiting the Inkameep Day School artwork and its

cultural legacy. This project stands out amongst other Virtual Museum of Canada exhibitions in terms of graphic design and effective use of multimedia, as well as quality and integrity of research. The sponsors list indicates that the research and development of this project was achieved through the coordination of a number of funding agencies and this cumulative support coupled with a collaborative approach was surely an asset for this virtual exhibit. I am certain that it will serve as a model for future community oriented exhibitions to draw inspiration from.

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1. At the time this review was authored (January 2006), the website under consideration could be accessed at: [www.virtualmuseum.ca/~inkameep/english/index.php](http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/~inkameep/english/index.php).
2. The "Progressive Education" movement emerged in the 1870s and was based on a desire to democratize education through the incorporation of family, community life and arts into classroom curriculum. It tailored instruction more and more to the different kinds and classes of children who were being brought into the school system and acknowledged individuals from within a culture as

experts and teachers. This philosophy is currently being rekindled and incorporated into many teaching environments. For a discussion of this educational philosophy in the context of traditional cultures, see Jan Rosenberg's essay "Reflections on Folklife and Education: Is there a Unified History of Folklore and Education?" (*AFS Folklore and Education Section Newsletter*, Spring 2004, p. 2) consulted online at: [www.afsnet.org/sections/education/Spring2004/](http://www.afsnet.org/sections/education/Spring2004/), October, 26, 2004.

3. The student art competitions organized by Walsh were very well received, with some students winning considerable acclaim through them.

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