



# Indians Playing Indian: Multiculturalism and Contemporary Indigenous Art in North America

*Monika Siebert*

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Contemporary indigenous peoples in North America confront a unique predicament. While they are reclaiming their historic status as sovereign nations, mainstream popular culture continues to depict them as cultural minorities similar to other ethnic Americans. These depictions of indigenous peoples as “Native Americans” complete the broader narrative of America as a refuge to the world’s immigrants and a home to contemporary multicultural democracies, such as the United States and Canada. But they fundamentally misrepresent indigenous peoples, whose American history has been not of immigration but of colonization.

Monika Siebert’s *Indians Playing Indian* first identifies this phenomenon as multicultural misrecognition, explains its sources in North American colonial history and in the political mandates of multiculturalism, and describes its consequences for contemporary indigenous cultural production. It then explores the responses of indigenous artists who take advantage of the ongoing popular interest in Native American culture and art while offering narratives of the political histories of their nations in order to resist multicultural incorporation.

Each chapter of *Indians Playing Indian* showcases a different medium of contemporary indigenous art—museum exhibition, cinema, digital fine art, sculpture, multimedia installation, and literary fiction— and explores specific rhetorical strategies artists deploy to forestall multicultural misrecognition and recover political meanings of indigeneity. The sites and artists discussed include the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC; filmmakers at Inuit Isuma Productions; digital artists/photographers Dugan Aguilar, Pamela Shields, and Hulleah Tsinnahjinnie; sculptor Jimmie Durham; and novelist LeAnne Howe.

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