

## 5. Nora Naranjo-Morse's 'Always Becoming': enacting indigenous identity on a museum stage

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In 2007, the Pueblo artist Nora Naranjo-Morse created 'Always Becoming', a group of sculptures situated in the grounds of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in Washington, DC. The figures Father, Mother, Little One, Moon Woman and Mountain Bird, all consisting of natural materials such as dirt, sand and clay, are meant to dissolve slowly with the seasons. While the sculptures were being crafted, the museum grounds became a stage for Naranjo-Morse and her team, and also for museum visitors and staff, tourists and locals, who all participated in the creation process. In this sense, the sculptures materialised through a performance art project with the dynamics being documented and archived in video recordings. The museum stage that framed<sup>1</sup> Naranjo-Morse's project is inevitably haunted by the cultural history of ethnological representation, of showcasing ethnicity to legitimise power claims. But what happens if in good postcolonial fashion the subaltern takes over the stage? Can Naranjo-Morse challenge the notion of the museum Indian or even subvert it?

In her poem 'When the Clay Calls', Naranjo-Morse gives a language to clay and revises the common assumption that it is the potter who gives shape to the material. The clay here has a 'life of its own' and the 'fluid forms ... instantly become a child's face, a woman's skirt, or her husband's smile' (1992, p. 24). The poem's protagonist wishes to be released from the clay and yet is claimed by 'This earth / I have become part of / that I also have grown out of' (ibid.). Identity here is a struggle with the self, a continuous negotiation, a process – not a result.<sup>2</sup> The sculpture project visualises this process in the particular case of indigenous identity – with all the ghosts of the past encountered along the way.

1 Here, framing is meant in the sense of the process of inclusion and exclusion, as used by Judith Butler in *Frames of War* (2010).

2 Identity is commonly understood as an act of performance (and thus as fluid), most famously by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990).

## 'Digging'

The poem 'Always Becoming', which Naranjo-Morse wrote for her sculpture project, begins with 'Digging' (2008, pp. 61–70), the process of claiming space and material to shape. In that process things may be uncovered, as digging also represents the start of the archaeological excavations established during the 19th century in an attempt to save the remains of a romanticised past. In that spirit, ethnographic museums had the effect of ensuring Western dominance by promoting anthropological ideas of cultural practices different from those of museum visitors (see Bennett, 1995). As houses of the emerging academic discipline of anthropology, these museums were thought to preserve and store knowledge in the form of 'authentic' material artefacts whose display illustrated a narrative of disappearing peoples with simple beliefs and practices. With their focus on objects and display, museums became part of what Tony Bennett calls the exhibitionary complex (1988), those emerging facilities that celebrated objects (and indigenous cultures) as commodities, 'organizing and institutionalizing visual experience' in the spirit of consumer culture (Shelton, 2006, p. 480).<sup>3</sup> Indigenous artefacts, together with a narrative of the primitive and the vanished, were not only circulated in educated circles but also in world fairs, theme parks, zoos and department stores, where they attracted the general public. These objects – even when rearranged – fostered essentialist ideas of cultures. For example, tipis as popular museum items illustrated the housing conditions of peoples living in a geographical area termed the 'North American Plains' by anthropologists and geographers. The gigantic, portable, buffalo-hide tents quickly became generalised and eventually iconised as the homes of North America's indigenous populations. Museum displays conjured up the romantic story of the brave hunter and warrior as projected by 19th-century anthropologists and novelists alike. Frozen in a fantastic past, such items have not only promoted a particular image of Native Americans but also manifested the possibility of materialising and exhibiting cultural practices.

This narrative became unacceptable over time, particularly in countries with significant indigenous populations, eventually resulting in challenges to curatorial practices that put cultures on display (see Phillips, 2005). With the Civil Rights Movement and the ensuing prevalence of identity-based discourses, scholars and the general public alike began to realise that indigenous cultures were (and are) neither static nor homogenous, and they certainly had not vanished. By the 1980s, it was obvious that museum objects had been collected in the first place to confirm, not develop, ideas about cultures (see

3 For further contextual information on 19th-century consumer culture see Veblen (1899) and the more recent source, Leach (1993).

Cole, 1985).<sup>4</sup> Narratives of loss and victimhood subsequently became as taboo in many museum environments as the notions of the exotic that previously so vividly inhabited the exhibition halls. Native American cultures were suddenly no longer a phenomenon of a distant past but instead part of a lively present; they were not geographically far away but in the midst of museum visitors, as Gerald Vizenor's concept of 'survivance' suggests with its insistence on an enduring and dynamic indigenous existence (1994).

While 19th-century anthropology has now been extensively cross-examined (see Fabian, 1983; Clifford and Marcus, 1986), its dusty outcome in museum halls was, until recently, still badly in need of radical reshaping. The most significant tendencies in the process of reshaping the ethnographic museum have been: an acknowledgement of contemporary culture (often done by contrasting past and present or by solely exhibiting present cultural practices); recognition of aesthetic expression (which had been denied previously and dismissed as primitive); and active involvement of indigenous participants in all processes of curation and museum administration. While the latter step has been taken in an attempt to minimise possibilities of offensive exhibition outcomes,<sup>5</sup> it is often mistaken for a renewed claim for authenticity. This perception results from a long tradition of exhibiting indigenous peoples in a spectacularised manner to 'authenticate' exhibits of their artefacts. The spectacle, in this context, is 'a series of social relations mediated by images' tying 'individuals into an economy of looks and looking' (Taylor, 2003, p. 13). Museum spectacles proved to be effective in the 19th century in authenticating (and advertising) the exhibited artefacts, especially when an indigenous person was shown making these objects. This particular history of museum performances is still very present in today's museum settings and difficult for performers to challenge.

## 'Planting'

In September 2004, the NMAI opened its doors to the public. Its location on the Mall in Washington, DC, its architecture by Douglas Cardinal and its approach to the exhibition of indigenous cultures were designed to celebrate contemporary indigenous lives on the public and politically significant stage

- 4 The term 'culture' here is used in the early anthropological sense of referring to closed entities, whereas the contemporary and more appropriate expression would be 'cultural practices', which stresses identity formation (and description) through non-static shared practices.
- 5 The best illustration of this point is the controversial exhibition, 'Into the Heart of Africa', curated by Jeanne Cannizzo, which opened in November 1989 at the Royal Ontario Museum in Canada, sparking numerous ongoing discussions. While the exhibition was intended to question Canada's colonial practices and attitudes ironically, the display was extremely offensive to African visitors (see Schildkrout, 1991).

of the capital city. Keeping in mind the previously mentioned expectations connected to old-style ethnographic museums, the NMAI openly tries to subvert any longing for the romantic stereotypes and adventure stories of the past and instead aims to educate visitors about a heterogeneous present. The canonical object of the tipi, for example, is clearly embedded in the historical narrative of a single community, and the classic pair of bow and arrow has been replaced by art installations of machine guns and pre-historic arrowheads.<sup>6</sup> The museum not only reverses common expectations but also challenges visitors to question their epistemologies (see Isaac, 2008). To further complicate this process, visitors are expected to pick up interpretive clues themselves, combining them during their tour by not only engaging with the exhibits but also experiencing the museum's retail facilities, the library, the café, the theatre and the building's surroundings.

While this concept was not particularly popular initially, the playful challenge to expectations soon set new standards for ethnographic museums. Yet the NMAI continues to labour under the established tradition of freezing cultures behind glass, a tradition probably most evident in the form of dioramas featuring static figures with racialised physiognomies frozen in a specific moment of time. Born in the late 19th century, together with panoramas and ethnic shows, the diorama satisfies the voyeuristic need to observe without being observed, to encounter without ever meeting. Originally part of natural history museums, the diorama allowed the representation of indigenous communities as part of their environments and thus as part of nature as opposed to civilisation. This mode of representation is a particular trap in the case of Native Americans whose connection to nature is perceived to be distinct and essential.<sup>7</sup>

While carefully avoiding old-fashioned dioramas, the NMAI stresses the elements of landscape and environment as part of the museum concept.<sup>8</sup> Guided tours around its grounds highlight the importance of the landscape<sup>9</sup> and a number of museum publications are entirely devoted to this issue (see, for example, Blue Spruce and Thrasher, 2008). The Mall provides only limited space for each of its buildings, particularly those created more recently. Therefore, the garden and its significance can easily be overlooked because it is

6 For further discussion of the displays mentioned here see Isaac (2008).

7 Ryan Redcorn's fantastic performance commentary on the museum is recommended, see the 1491s YouTube video: 'Ryan Redcorn takes a traditional Native American bath' (2012).

8 While not the focus of this chapter, the close connection made between indigeneity and environmentalism needs to be analysed as a construction of global markets, see Sissons (2005).

9 During my fieldwork in the NMAI (2006–10), I joined several tours outside to explore the grounds and found that while each tour guide had his or her own style, all stressed the grounds had higher educational value than the exhibition halls.

so small compared with the vastness of the Mall. And yet the museum garden unites different natural environments such as the wetland, meadow and forest – each of them more a fragmentary reminder of the landscape represented than an actual scene. So-called grandfather rocks and monumental direction markers create a ceremonial space, inscribing the land around the museum with spiritual symbolism. Furthermore, croplands have been added to cultivate traditional plants such as tobacco, squash and corn.<sup>10</sup> Planting and harvest ceremonies are performed publicly, and in summer other events such as poetry readings or music performances, all of which transform the garden into a stage showcasing indigenous identities.

### **'Always Becoming'**

Soon after the NMAI opened, it became clear that the landscape needed the imprint of a Native artist to illustrate different stages of human involvement with the environment (although as far as the museum grounds are concerned, human beings have already artificially shaped every single part of the landscape for exhibition purposes). While the scenery symbolises nature untouched, the croplands stress a symbiotic relationship to the land. The art project was to make yet another statement about humans and their environment when over 50 artists from all over the western hemisphere answered the call for proposals for a permanent installation. Nora Naranjo-Morse's suggestion for an ephemeral artwork called 'Always Becoming' was unanimously selected and work on the Washington site began during the summer of 2007.

A Pueblo poet, filmmaker and sculptor, Naranjo-Morse had previously been involved in a number of monumental sculpture projects (including the crafting of her own house), with her preferred materials usually being clay and bronze. Her suggestion for the NMAI grounds involved five sculptures called *Ta dah* (Father), *Gia* (Mother), *Hin Chae* (Little One), *Po Khwee* (Moon Woman) and *Ping Tse Deh* (Mountain Bird) – tipi, mould and mountain-shaped structures reaching for the sky. Made of organic material – clay, dirt, water, straw, wood, stone and sand – the sculptures are meant to change and dissolve over time. This act of transformation was especially designed to contrast with the permanence of Washington's concrete and steel central memorials, made to outlast time.<sup>11</sup>

10 Involving the grounds of a museum in its exhibition concept is not a new idea. The Museum of the American Indian, for example, created by George Gustav Heye in New York in 1916, cultivated the landscape surrounding it, croplands included (see Jacknis, 2008).

11 Indigenous ephemeral artworks have their place in the public western European consciousness, particularly in the case of the wooden Northwest Coast totem poles which, when positioned outdoors as intended, dissolve over time.



Figure 5.1. View of *'Always Becoming'*, 2009. Photo: Andrea Zittlau.

While much could be said about the symbolism of the characters Naranjo-Morse created, and also about the shape in which they appear, this chapter is devoted to the process of creation, which I perceive as an act of performance and a crucial museum event. Not only was the artist herself involved in the creation process, but her family and friends, as well as the general public, helped her on location. The creative process was staged, meant to be watched and jointly executed; everyone was invited to become part of *'Always Becoming'*. As such, it was an act of community building. In the podcast following the construction process, several team members frequently refer to themselves as family and emphasise the uniting effect of the artwork.<sup>12</sup> A sense of belonging also grew from the obvious fact that the result, the final sculpture, had become less important than the building process, since with time the five clay characters will disappear while the memory of their creation will be shared, living on elsewhere. There was nothing static about the sculptures – at any time.

12 Ten short (approximately three minutes each) podcast episodes document *'Always Becoming'*. They focus on different aspects of the sculptures such as *'Materials'* (2), *'The final coat'* (7) or *'The Earth/La Tierra'* (10). The episodes form a chronology contextualising the project within a linear narrative. For reference to community building, see episodes 3–6: *'Family'*, *'Community'*, *'Dialogue'* and *'Gathering'*.

Apart from contrasting with (and implicitly criticising) the surrounding eternal manifestations of politicians and events, the sculpture project also critiqued the stasis of museological representations, making the obvious statement that cultures and everyday practices are, by nature, changeable. By choosing shapes that were both familiar and unfamiliar to the museum visitors, expected and yet unexpected, Naranjo-Morse engaged actively with the curatorial discourse in which she and her team were participating. Yet her performance also revealed the powerful haunting of inappropriate museum practices (such as static and distanced representations of typified others) and the difficulty of actively challenging these practices on a meta-level. Eventually, Naranjo-Morse became part of an ethnographic museum, a notion she could not escape.

### **'With life of its own'**

In *Spectres de Marx* (*Specters of Marx*) (1994), Jacques Derrida developed his concept of hauntology (*hantologie*), which is almost a homonym of ontology. Hauntology basically assumes that besides being encompassed by the visible world, humans are also surrounded by the invisible world, populated with spectres, which also have a history, but work more as signs, reminders mainly, within that history because they keep coming back (from the past or the future). Hauntology is the sense of this invisible world, the notion of being observed but being unable to trace the observer, and revises the idea of the voyeuristic gaze. The mannequins of the diorama seem to be looking back at the museum visitors, although rationally the visitors know this to be impossible. Derrida argues that this strong discomfort in being watched is the spectre haunting us and that it should be given more attention. And once acknowledged, the ghosts turn out to be everywhere. They are the revenants, shadows of past and future actions that we dismiss by focusing only on the visible world.

In her book *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Diana Taylor applies Derrida's concept of hauntology to the field of performance studies. Not only are the spectres Derrida speaks of closely connected to spectators (as Taylor points out, both words have their root in the Latin *specere* – to see), they both only exist because of each other. Taylor suggests that ghosts appear in the act of performance and, more so, that act can be a method of making them visible and thus available for critical analysis. 'My view of performance', she states, 'rests in the notion of ghosting, that visualization that continues to act politically even as it exceeds the live' (2003, p. 143):

The way I see it, performance makes visible (for an instant, live, now) that which is always already there: the ghosts, the tropes, the scenarios that structure our individual and collective life. These spectres, made manifest

through performance, alter future phantoms, future fantasies ... The power of seeing through performance is the recognition that we've seen it all before – the fantasies that shape our sense of self, of community, that organize our scenarios of interaction, conflict, and resolution. (ibid.)

The NMAI's ghosts are deeply rooted in the history of dispossession, exploitation and repression that has underpinned the existence of ethnographic museums, a history disguised by the contemporary practice of replacing dioramas with recent indigenous aesthetic expressions, thus creating blank spots in Western epistemologies. Such absences conceal the troubled process of knowledge production and the uncanny moment when our gaze is irritated by the darkness of those voids. In other words, the cultural history of ethnographic museums allows for a large population of spectres since colonial history is not challenged in contemporary displays, but graciously avoided. Somehow museum visitors sense that history, even though it is not visible, and this is the moment when the ghosts start haunting them to be avoided or ignored – or openly challenged. Hauntology marks the always 'unsettled relationship between what we see and what we know', as Avery Gordon reminds her readers (2008, p. 24). By appearing on the museum stage, Naranjo-Morse engaged with ghosts that she believed long gone.

### **'This Earth / I have become part of'**

The creation of 'Always Becoming' was haunted by an archive inscribed with layers of cultural memory. To craft the sculptures, Naranjo-Morse employed some cultural practices of communities in the Southwest, drawing from traditional techniques practised in the construction of houses, with clay, dirt bricks and particular styles of art being used to coat the walls. These crafting techniques were not staged exclusively *for* museum visitors (as still often occurs when such displays are mounted) but were part of the creation process. The performance had memorial potential in remembering all the Southwest builders who came to life in Naranjo-Morse's artistic endeavours. The sculptures are likewise embedded in blessing ceremonies, since the creation process was completed with a blessing ritual, in this way providing another archive.<sup>13</sup> However, being part of a museum, the sculpture project is inevitably haunted by the history of indigenous people being put on display in human zoos, ethnological shows and Wild West events. The performance is implicated in the history of staging the other while looking for the self, the history of encounter without ever meeting. Quite a powerful history to be haunted by. Quite a difficult revenant to engage with.

13 The idea of the archive is primarily a textual one and yet a project such as the one under discussion shows that performance itself forms an archive, as Diana Taylor points out (2003).

By being part of a museum's grounds and insisting on the public performance of indigenous techniques in crafting the sculptures, Naranjo-Morse was recalling museum Indians like Ishi, who transformed into a living object on a museum stage. Ishi appeared at the beginning of the 20th century, a refugee out of the Californian wilds. He sparked the interest of local anthropologists who believed him to be the last of the Yahi Indians and thus a valuable subject for study.<sup>14</sup> In an act of charity, the University of California's Museum of Anthropology, Berkeley offered rooms to Ishi, where he performed crafting techniques, constructed a shelter and told lengthy traditional stories. And he was not alone. At the turn of the century, the basement of the American Museum of Natural History, located in New York City, was populated by six Inuit from Greenland who provided local anthropologists with valuable insights into human nature. These museum Indians represented the extremes of 19th-century popular ethnology. Culture was understood to be embodied and decodable by means of close observation and the museum seemed the perfect space for this kind of scrutiny. In the guise of creating a neutral ground within the museum, the exhibition halls were loaded with anthropological interpretations of the world that are still infusing ethnographic museums today.

By creating her sculptures in the museum grounds, Naranjo-Morse became a museum Indian herself, a process made obvious by some disappointed spectators' frequent accusations that the artist was not being Indian enough. Apparently, she was not meeting these visitors' visual and stereotyped expectations, and her project was hence deemed inappropriate in the museum setting (Naranjo-Morse, 2009). Others, to whom the clay structures looked like shelters, expressed interest as to who might inhabit them in the future (*ibid.*). Did these observers expect a population of museum Indians to arrive in the near future?

Naranjo-Morse was reminded of her own past as an Indian princess in a tourist scenario, an episode she recalls in her 2009 blog in an entry entitled 'Imagery and self-image reversals in a post-victim Indian'. It describes her work for the owner of a curio shop and motor lodge at the south end of Taos, New Mexico, which sold cheaply manufactured artefacts that would be perceived aesthetically as Native American. Each summer he ran an evening show for tourists and locals, during which indigenous men from the Taos Pueblo community performed war and hoop dances. At the end cowboy hats (!) were passed around to collect a tip for the dancers. Then Naranjo-Morse took to the stage in velveteen-pleated 'squaw skirts and shirts', as she writes, to advertise the products: 'This was one of my first and among the most informative experiences

14 The perception of Ishi as a valuable object of study is evident in publications by Robert F. Heizer and Theodora Kroeber, especially Kroeber (1961) and Heizer and Kroeber (1979). Theodora's husband, Alfred Kroeber, was the leading anthropologist of that time.

as a Native person and all I can clearly remember is that I felt exposed' (2009). This sense of exposure has haunted her on various other occasions and she has responded to it critically in her texts.<sup>15</sup> The creation of 'Always Becoming' had not been intended to involve inquiries into those discourses, yet she found herself unexpectedly confronted with a set of performance strategies that translated her artistic processes into articulations of indigenous identity. The questions and comments posed to Naranjo-Morse were as much part of the performance as her work.<sup>16</sup> They were haunting invitations provoking her to negate them consciously, reminding her of 'how America[ns] developed their perception of the American Indian. Interactions like the Jack Denver show [the show she describes] added to romantic notions of what a Native person should be and these perceptions persist in the American consciousness' (2009).

Every museum performance of indigeneity is haunted by such perceptions and their history. The ghosts lurk in the background, especially in places that feed on them, like museums. The human zoo, the ethnic show, the Wild West spectacle and the museum Indian are just embodiments of these perceptions. They illustrate and confirm fantastic narratives of the cultural other and help to transform ethnographic museums into exotic dreamlands. Naranjo-Morse not only created a work of art but also interacted with these histories of museum performance.<sup>17</sup>

### **'That also / I have grown out of'**

In keeping with the common (Western) practice of explaining works of art, the spectators are guided in their search for the meaning of this work. Museum material about 'Always Becoming' explains that the sculptures are grounded in Santa Clara Pueblo cultures, Naranjo-Morse's community. Their size and the materials used to construct them are listed in the Western tradition of classification that has become so crucial in discourses about art: 'They [the sculptures] range in height from 7.5 to 16 feet tall, and are made entirely of natural materials' ('Always Becoming' leaflet distributed by the NMAI). In addition, the NMAI website positions this complex artwork as a static result connected to a single creating source:

Artist Nora Naranjo-Morse (Santa Clara Pueblo) is making history as  
the first Native American woman to create an outdoor sculpture in

- 15 See, for example, several of the poems included in *Mud Woman* (1992), e.g. 'The Living Exhibit under the Museum Portal' (pp. 28–30) and 'Tradition and Change' (pp. 31–3).
- 16 This is usually the case in performance art. The comments James Luna received while performing 'The Artifact Piece' in 1987 in San Diego's Museum of Man continue to be used in his installations.
- 17 The museum-as-stage, with its hegemonic representation of indigenous communities, has been a major theme in the works of performance artists like James Luna, Guillermo Gómez Peña and the collective La Pocha Nostra.

Washington, D.C., titled *Always Becoming*. Built on site during the summer of 2007, the family of five clay sculptures is made of organic, nontoxic materials. Intended to erode over time, these ever-changing works of art will together reflect messages of growth, transformation, and Native peoples' relationship with the land.<sup>18</sup>

The museum announcement situates the work within Western discourses about how to see art (via artist/material/meaning) – an important framework in this case since indigenous art is still often presented to the public as mimetic expression.<sup>19</sup> Yet the attributed meaning of growth and transformation, connected to an apparently natural indigenous relationship with the land, again misses the art's complexity and denies the crucial process of its performative creation, reducing it to local concerns and thus only making it accessible ethnographically.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the descriptions merely repeat visual impressions (as frozen moments in time). Readers are told, for example, that Moon Woman 'features hand-molded clay spheres representing moon-phases' to underline the importance of the lunar circle (NMAI leaflet). The wood-pole (*viga*), created by Naranjo-Morse's parents in the 1950s and placed in the centre of the tipi-shaped Father sculpture, represents the ones who came before us. Although still concealed by the clay walls surrounding it, the pole will eventually become visible when Father's exterior structure slowly dissolves; hence, the description anticipates a visual impression of the future. The hole in the Mother figure is said to be a window, pointing to the southern cardinal direction marker (NMAI leaflet), perhaps indicating the never-changing phenomena that exist while the sculptures and the world around us fall apart.

Naranjo-Morse's messages are not so dramatic as this, however. To her, the sculptures are a family and building them created an extended family uniting the people who helped in the process. We are always changing and adapting, she says in one of the podcasts available for 'Always Becoming'. This is a clear message subverting the powerful assumption that indigenous cultures are static and locked in the past. By refusing to constitute a static artwork, the sculptures also question our concept of art as being focused on enduring results. They are haunted by perceptions such as those that appear in the museum leaflets. They are not significantly different to those Naranjo-Morse engaged with

18 See the 'Always Becoming' website video.

19 The Ethnographic Museum in Berlin, Germany, recently mounted a temporary exhibition, 'Native American Modernism' (March–October 2012), in which paintings were arranged according to the geographical origin of the artists (Plains, Northwest Coast and so forth). Individual works were described solely by ethnographic assumptions about their communities. See the catalogue (Bolz and König, 2012).

20 This notion is in the process of changing; however, contemporary indigenous art is often still placed at the end of ethnographic exhibition narratives as apparently the only source available of valuable aesthetic and cultural expression (see, for example, the First Peoples Hall in Ottawa's Canadian Museum of Civilization).

in her performance. 'Always Becoming' reveals memory (and its common representations in the form of monuments) as a performative process because it is a changing act unfolding on a public stage. By performing the creation of a non-static work of art, Naranjo-Morse fundamentally questions our focus on results instead of processes. While at one level she remains a museum Indian on the ethnographic stage, she nevertheless powerfully engages with the ghosts that have haunted that stage to reveal the potential embedded in change, but also its slowness.

The introduction of the poem, 'Always Becoming', acts as an alternative way of approaching and framing the work of art. It speaks of the work's builders as children who come from all four directions to dig, to plant, to cover, to press, to wrap and to layer (Naranjo-Morse, 2008, pp. 61–3). It speaks of space as it changes at 'the crossroads of asphalt and fertile ground' (p. 70). It speaks of stories that weave into the clay (p. 67), of 'an idea made from passion' (p. 66). The sculptures and their builders are in continuous dialogue with each other, and with the past and the future. They are not newly created – they have always been there. The metaphor of planting dominates the theme – the clay does not matter – and as the sculptures gain shape, their community grows. The title 'Always Becoming' is in no way metaphorical. But it lacks the subject and object of its clause. What is transforming? And into what?

### **'Keep breathing as you become'<sup>21</sup>**

Naranjo-Morse's performance became part of the ethnographic discourse that haunts the NMAI, but also openly challenged this discourse. Not because the artist refused to be commodified (because she did not). Not because she refused to be a spectacle (because she did not). But because her performance was no longer about the sculpture or the museum or about spectators and expectations. It ended up being a ritual for and about herself:<sup>22</sup>

At its best, experiences like this (the creation of 'Always Becoming') can be grand opportunities that demand we define ourselves, not to an audience, but to ourselves. Like the sculptures, I was being molded, so that previous misconceptions were discarded and a sense of my true self was reclaimed. Anchored and empowered because of this grand opportunity, I became fearless. (2009)

In this sense, the project both visualised and enacted change at a profoundly personal level.

21 The final line of the 'Always Becoming' poem.

22 In that context Naranjo-Morse's work is similar to Roxanne Swentzell's sculptures, which also feature prominently in the NMAI.

Ghosts and apparitions we cannot ignore continuously point to the past and the future, replaying conceptions and misconceptions of cultures as trivialised commodities and classifiable specimens in the troubled history of museum representations. But instead of ignoring the ghosts, or refusing to see them, or hunting them, we should no longer be afraid. We should simply learn to live with them, Naranjo-Morse's manifesto concludes. After all, to be haunted one has to sense and identify the spectres first. If haunting is the uncanny feeling of being watched, to look for the observer, the source of that sensation, means one no longer has to hide. Naranjo-Morse succeeds in answering the gaze. She looks back. Her sculpture project is a statement haunted by exhibition narratives of the past. And yet she deconstructs those narratives, refusing to be on display and instead animating the visitors themselves to become actors in focus. Ta Dah, Gia, Hin Chae, Po Khwee and Ping Tse Deh are not commodity objects to take home; they are not to be separated and not to be turned into dusty icons of indigenous exoticism. Even as they remind us of past curatorial practices, they are pointing to the future of indigenous self-representation.

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