

**The role of public art in the communicative practices on
university campuses in North America-- A case study of public
art controversies at a Canadian university**

by

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B.E., Shandong University, 2014

Extended Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of

Master of Arts

In the

School of Communication (Dual Degree Program in Global Communication)

Faculty of Communication, Art & Technology

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Summer 2016

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Abstract

Through the investigation of the organizational structures behind the decision-making process of university collections of public art as well as the controversies on campus in North American universities, this extended essay presents a case study of SFU Art Gallery and public art to examine how university art galleries and museums communicate their identities and values through their public art collection and play the role as modern national educational institutions to communicate values and ideologies through communicative practices.

Keywords: Public Art, SFU Art Gallery, Art Controversies, University Art Collections, Arts and Identity

Acknowledgements

In this year studying in Simon Fraser University, I owe great thanks to the many excellent professors, student peers, and the cohort.

I would like to give my deepest gratitude to my supervisor Jan Marontate for her full support, understanding and encouragement in my field placement and the writing process of the extended essay. Her thoughtful questions and comments inspire me a lot in my academic study and research in SFU. I appreciate a lot for her patient guidance and help.

I would appreciate those excellent professors who inspire me and enlighten my enthusiasm in critical academic research. Their open-minded and wise thoughts change my values and views on world. I would like to acknowledge Prof. Yuezhi Zhao, Prof. Alison Beale, Prof. Adel Iskandar, Prof. Zoë Druick and Prof. Katherine Reilly.

Also, I would like to express my appreciation to our TA, Byron R. Hauck. In this year, he contributed a lot of efforts in help us with the courses and extended essay. It is lucky for us to have him as our TA, who is such an excellent and “useful” person. I valued a lot his thoughts and advice on my research and life.

For my field placement in SFU, I would like to thanks SFU Art Gallery, especially the former coordinator Mandy Ginson. It is a valued experience for me to work with her and other colleagues in SFU Art Gallery. They inspire and help me a lot in undertaking my project of the translation of SFU Art Gallery Guide and I enjoy the time working on Burnaby campus.

Much thanks also go to my cohort, especially Qinwen Yu, Wanwan Sun and Ye Xu. They not only give me inspirations on my academic research but bring me a lot of support, joy and comfort in this year in Vancouver. I would always appreciate those happy time with you.

Finally I would like to thanks my family and my friends for your love as always. Your support gives me an unforgettable life of studying abroad.

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Chapter 1.

Introduction

Since 19th century, in North America, university art museums and galleries have played a role in higher education, research and public outreach. Beginning with the oldest university art museum in the Western hemisphere, Yale University Art Gallery, which was founded in 1832 after the university received a donation from an alumnus, more and more art museums and galleries were established in universities in North America as places to maintain, preserve and manage the art collections from endowments over long periods of time. University collections can be of national and international significance. Most university art museums and galleries have exhibition spaces that are open to their internal community of faculty, scholars, students and alumni and to the broader external visitors and local community (sometimes free, sometimes requiring an entrance fee). This extended essay examines how public art collections are used by university art galleries and university art museums to communicate dominant values and establish their reputation nationally and internationally as cultural institutions.

In the context of increasing globalization in political, economical, cultural and social fields, universities (as the vanguard of higher education) have emerged as focal points in ways that may strengthen the reputation of regions or Nation-States by serving as symbols of the competence of countries competing in the global capitalist market.

“World-class” and “excellence” become the core values that many universities claim in public discourse about their status and influence. In this process of transformation, university art museums and galleries function as a highly visible institutional organization useful for the public display of power and achievement.

University art museums and galleries can reinforce the message that universities are places of culture and learning which can be an effective means for the university to communicate with the wider world (King, 2001). As universities change to face new challenges, the roles and visions of university museums and galleries are also going through a shift to forge the connection with the university and the broader world in the context of globalization. From the traditional mandate of collecting, preserving and organizing exhibitions to the practical teaching and research programs as well as the increasing endeavor in the integration of art and university curricula, the shifting missions of the art museums and galleries reflect the transformation of university art museums and galleries’ focus on public education and knowledge creation.

With millions of visitors every year, university art museums and galleries have the potential to play a more and more significant role in the recognition (nationally and internationally) of the university. Through the reassessment of their missions, university art museums and galleries communicate values in a more global and distinctive way. The involvement of students, scholars, professionals, alumni, community and the world through art collection and programs bring university art museums and galleries to the frontier of public education, knowledge production as well as the challenges and controversies from different academic fields. In most universities, the acquisition of new objects is through gift, exchange, bequest and purchase. The acquisition of art works is a vital and selective process which is usually governed by the collecting policies of the

university. To some extent, the identities of university art museums and galleries are defined through the interventions and policies of the university and, sometimes, in response to other stakeholders (such as artists and communities, in types of situations which will be discussed later in this paper).

In North America, some old universities, such as Yale, Harvard and Princeton, have established a relatively complete and highly-recognized art collections while new universities are still in their infancy of art collection. There is a growing number and range of universities and colleges that have developed their art museums and galleries in 20th and 21st century. Inherited from the past, shifting through the development, there is no doubt that the university art museums and galleries will extend their public outreach and their relations with communities, educational institutions and both local and global audiences.

In this context, through a review of the history and development of university museums and galleries in North America, and a case study on a “new” university art gallery, this essay will first provide an overview of the shifting missions and strategic plans of university-based art museums, and then explore the relation between the university, their art museum/gallery and the public art on campus, and finally answer the question: how do universities use their public art collections to communicate values and establish their reputations as an cultural and educational institution in a modern nation-state?

Due to its growing influence in public education and art literacy, a number of academic disciplines, such as cultural studies, art and architectural theory and museum research have been drawn into the academic discourse as well as public debates about university art museums and their public art programs. Therefore, in Chapter 2, I will first review two

different perspectives of the research on university art museums and galleries and then shifts from this broad terrain to examine a few representative public art controversies that provide us with a critical view of the relations between public art and social dynamics.

In Chapter 3, I will introduce the historical context of the research. This is detailed in three parts:

1) Through the studies on the missions and strategic plans of ten North American universities, I will first give an introduction of the history and development of university art museums and galleries in North America;

2) Next I present an introduction to public policies relevant to this topic through a brief consideration of two different types of policy initiatives: the Massey Commission (Canada) and two government-sponsored public art programs - *Art in Architecture Program* (AIA) and *National Endowment for the Arts' Art in Public Spaces Program* (NEA) in the United States. Through these government policies and projects, I hope to examine how government interventions shape the cultural practices of university art museums and galleries.

3) Finally I introduce some of the challenges and controversies present-day university art museums and galleries face in a global capitalist context.

Following this background, in Chapter 4, I will focus on a singular case – SFU Art Gallery. Located in Simon Fraser University, which is a relatively new university founded in 1965, SFU Art Gallery was established in 1970. Compared with the earliest recognizable university art museums, as a new educational institution, the establishment

and shift of the gallery will offer us a channel to understand how new university galleries use their public art collection to seek recognition and stand out in the massive growth of art museums.

In SFU's history, the university has faced some controversies over the public art works on campus since 1980s, which raised questions about the foundations of some decisions and about the recognition of art collection. In this case study, I will focus on two well-known art controversies, one is called Innes Controversy and took place in 2002, the other is called Comfort Controversy that occurred in 2004. These two controversies both focus on the representation of First Nations in murals and involve debates and discussion from indigenous groups and the university administration. Because SFU campus is located on unceded Indigenous land belonging to the Coast Salish peoples, the offending images offer us a lens to examine how university public art collections may function as a way to promote dominant knowledge and ideologies in a modern nation-state but also as a forum for continuing discussion and public dialogue, thereby providing insights into cross-cultural communications through art.¹

¹ Unceded means that this land was never surrendered, relinquished or handed over in any way. Based on our current knowledge, this includes the territories of the Musqueam, Skwxwú7mesh (pronounced Squamish or Skohomish), Stó:lo & Tsleil-Waututh (pronounced: slay-wa-tooth, aka Burrard) nations (Source: Career Services (SFPRIG), 2014, "Truth-telling and Decolonization" <http://www.sfu.ca/olc/indigenous/sfpirg-truth-telling-and-decolonization>.)

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Due to the growing influence of university art museums and galleries in public education and art literacy, a number of academic disciplines, such as cultural studies, sociology of the arts, policy studies, art and architectural theory, and museum research have contributed to academic discourse as well as public debates about university art museums and galleries.

Reviewing these academic literature, there are two main research perspectives on university art museums and galleries that will be considered in this paper:

The practical perspective draws on literature in arts management and policy studies. The curators and directors of university art museums and galleries play an important role in conducting research for the management and strategic development of university art museums and galleries. In these areas of research, people who run the museums and galleries often focus on practices and service-oriented considerations. In these literature, some authors focus on the educational mandate of art museums and galleries within institutions of higher learning and ways university art museums and galleries provide supporting for teaching and research needs (Ezra, 2013; Manekin & Williams, 2016). Secondly, through all kinds of public cultural practices, university museums and galleries are also considered as a bridge between the campus and the public at large. Therefore,

some research emphasizes public relations and outreach missions of university art museums and galleries.

During the last years of the 19th century, in the United States, the “Museum Modernization Movement” redefined the roles of art museums from institutions serving a cultured elite of society to their role in reaching out to more general public (Carle & Metzener, 1991). Since then, more research has been conducted on ways of considering museums as public agents and the places of art collection in society. In this perspective, studies began to proliferate that considering art museums and galleries as institutions for public education and the dissemination of knowledge. For example, in *Managing University Museums* (2001), the papers reported in IMHE² seminar discuss issues over collection, programming, technology, fundraising and business planning of different university art museums and galleries. These papers are university-based, conducted by curators, educators and other people who work within art museums and galleries. They focus on how to make decisions in managing and developing university museums and galleries in a global context and express concerns about the challenges faced by university arts organizations in public relations and fundraising.

The other perspective is often found in critical frameworks concerned with organizational studies and policies. These studies first question the decision-making process in the administration of art museums and galleries. Facing the cutbacks of university funding, there is growing involvement from government and marketplace for the revival of art museums and galleries (McClellan, 2007). Rectanus (2002) argued that corporations exert influence on cultural production through sponsorship. When art

² Institutional Management in Higher Education

museums employ corporate strategies and alliances as a means of surviving, they achieve a public-private collaboration. As cultural producers, art museums and galleries produce cultural products which contribute to a convergence of interests marked by corporate and cultural entities. Even though the corporate strategies help museums achieve a financial stability, the sponsorship from marketplace contribute to the sponsored cultural practices, which reflect corporate interests and ruin the role of museums as public education institutions.

Also in the book *Post-critical museology: theory and practice in the art museum* (Dewdney & Walsh, 2013), today's art museums and galleries can be seen as institutions seeking a new social role and identity to negotiate government policy and market forces. Dewdney and Walsh's critiques look at the involvement of political power and commercialism in the decision-making process of museums' development, and how these factors subject the authority of art museums and galleries to interventions from political and commercial forces.

Another critique comes from some public cultural practices of art museums and galleries, such as their exhibition, art collection and public art projects. Scholars often ask "what and who are represented in these cultural practices" (Macdonald, 1996; Barrett, 2010). Considering these practices as culturally and institutionally constructed, the presence as well as the absence of representation of specific groups or issues in the narratives and practices should be questioned. These issues vary and include questions about the representation of gender, race, class and cultural diversity. Research in this perspective often draws on varied critical theories, such as feminist theory and some cultural studies critiques to challenge the exclusion of women and other marginalized

groups in the representation of artists and themes in art museums and galleries' collections.

Of all cultural practices of art museums and galleries, the critique about their public art collection strategies is a long-standing theme. Malcolm (1997) once described two of the main pitfalls of public art: its use as 'wallpaper' to cover over social conflicts and tensions and as a monument to promote the aspirations of corporate sponsors and dominant ideologies. These "pitfalls" locate public art in a network of related stakeholders. In this context, art museums and galleries function as crucial gatekeepers, cultural mediators and the producers of meanings and values, which have authority on the display of public art, and through this, participate in public communication of values. Therefore, asking "who make the decisions" becomes important in understanding what has been recognized through the commission of public art and what values have been prioritized.

Research on public art controversies outside of university contexts also reveals the relationship between public art works and larger social phenomena, social institutions and forms of material and symbolic power (Cartiere & Zebracki, 2016). Studying *The Tilted Arc* sculpture installed in a public square in New York City, Hoffman (1987) discussed the process of commissioning the art in public space. The commissioning process involves government sponsorship, policies over public art, public engagement and the artists. In the research of art controversies, there is no doubt that institutions have significant political, economical, social and cultural power over the commission and censorship of public art projects. In this case, the sculpture was removed after widespread public protests and engendered a lengthy legal battle with Richard Serra, the artist who created the sculpture. Class was a big issue in this controversy since the people who objected to the sculpture were mainly low-level office workers who felt the

sculpture ruined their access to an outdoor space they used to enjoy time outside the office while eating lunch or relaxing on breaks. From a critical perspective, the interaction between public art and the issues of class, culture and social identity themes offers us a deeper understanding of the power relations in the controversies.

From the academic analysis of debates about public art controversies like *The Tilted Arc*, we see that public art installations are somewhat different from the artworks within the museums and on gallery walls. Public art is more accessible and visible to members of the public who do not frequently visit arts institutions. Public art is also experienced more often in the daily life of ordinary people. In this context, the US government ran the Federal Art Project, a large-scale program that included commissioning art in architecture from 1935-43 as part of the Depression-era Works Progress Administration. One important public art initiative during the 1930s was the General Service Administration's Art-in-Architecture program which required new federal government buildings in the United States to use a percentage of their total building costs for art commissions. Although the program was suspended during wartime, it resumed after the war and continued to use public art as part of government outreach in civil society. Other government-funded Art-in-Architecture programs (for example in the province of Quebec) adopt similar models to support public art and use it to contribute to national identity formation in North America.

There has been a great deal of research on public art in such programs but comparatively little academic research on public art on campus, although many of the issues raised are relevant to the context of university and college campuses. Nonetheless there are some differences when studying university public art from public art commissioned for the street, federal buildings and community spaces. In North

America, university public art and art collections are often (although not always) managed by university art museums or galleries, and sometimes commissioned by them.³ According to many annual reports and strategic plans of university art museums and galleries, such as those at Harvard, Princeton, McGill and Yale, public art on campus usually functions as a lens for communities both on and off campus to experience art education in their daily life. Some highly recognized public art works also serve as a way for universities to seek recognition nationally and internationally as leading institutions of higher education and cultural authorities.

Public art which is located in the spaces open to the general public in universities reflect the implementation of cultural policy on public communication outreach activities and the institution's intervention in the field of cultural production. In some research, public art is dependent and highly controlled by university mandates and visions which are embedded in the institutional frameworks that govern university administrative units involved with the arts (Cartiere & Zebracki,2016). The institutional context controls to some extent how public art is created, exhibited, taught, acquired, commissioned and censored, which provides its legitimacy and recognition.

Therefore, to figure out how public art is used by university art galleries and museums to communicate values, and to assess the extent to which public art commissions or acquisitions reflect dominant values which correspond with institutions that have significant political, social and cultural power, we should first consider the institutional frameworks which play a crucial role in the process of commissioning public art. This will

³ Decisions about public art commissions are seldom made solely by the managers of arts institutions on campus and more typically involve committees composed of various authorities and stakeholders but the selection processes vary widely within different universities and colleges.

provide us a way to unveil the power relations behind the representation of public art on campus and how a university identify itself through its public art.

As cultural and educational agents in universities, art museums and galleries are considered also to perform the important public service of curating for general public at all levels. Therefore, in the next section, I will review the history and development of university art museums and galleries in North America, and introduce one government policy on public art development – the report produced by the Canadian Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, otherwise known as the Massey Commission, chaired by Vincent Massey (known as the Massey Report) and two public art programs in United States (*Art-in-Architecture* program and *National Endowment for the Arts' Art in Public Spaces* Program). The Massey Report was published in 1951 and I will focus on the two American public art programs after World War II. These initiatives have shaped foundational ideas about public art and still influence public art development and university education in North America. Finally, I will focus on the challenges university art museums and galleries confronting controversies over public art on campus.

Chapter 3. Historical Context

3.1. A history of university art museums and galleries in North America

University art museums and galleries play a significant role in the infancy of art museums in North America. Since the 19th century, they have been a part of higher education in North America (King, 2001). Founded in 1832, Yale University Art Gallery became the oldest university art gallery in the western hemisphere. In 1890s, Fogg Museum at Harvard University in Massachusetts, Princeton University Art Museum in New Jersey and The Redpath Museum of McGill University in Montreal, evolved in an era when art became part of education in institutions of higher learning. Following the pace of these old universities, more art museums and galleries have risen and thrived in “younger” universities in North America.

Besides the traditional role as a space to collect, preserve and interpret art works for scholars and the public (Mack, 2001), nowadays, art museums and galleries in universities have begun to focus more on their role as a teaching and research institution for higher education. As educational institutions, they identify themselves through their missions. Some excerpts from mission statements are listed as follows:

--“The Gallery stimulates active learning about art and the creative process through research, teaching, and dialogue among communities of Yale students, faculty, artists, scholars, alumni, and the wider public.”⁴

-- “We provide a compelling and distinctive collection of art of regional, national and international significance that will educate and inspire, engage and stimulate and enrich the campus experience for the university community, alumni, and the visitors.”⁵

--“The Harvard Art Museums bring to light the intrinsic power of art and promote critical looking and thinking for students, faculty, and the public.”⁶

These mission statements illustrate some of the core values and visions of present-day university art museums and galleries. An analysis of ten universities’ missions in the United States and Canada, (Yale, Harvard, Princeton, Brown, UBC, McGill, University of Toronto, Stanford, Columbia, University of Illinois) suggests there are three main missions for these university art museums and galleries:

- 1) Collect, maintain and preserve art collections of the university, interpret the objects to the public and engage in knowledge production;
- 2) Connect with the internal communities in university, engage students, scholars, faculty and alumni into public art programs to achieve teaching and research role ;
- 3) Build the visibility and cross-cultural connection to seek recognition in the external community of visitors, artists, local communities and public at large;

⁴ Yale University Art Gallery. <http://artgallery.yale.edu/about-mission>

⁵ UBC (Okanagan campus). <http://www.ubc.ca/our-campuses/okanagan/>

⁶ Harvard Art Museums. <http://www.harvardartmuseums.org/about/mission>

My analysis of these documents suggests that university art museums and galleries are increasingly extending their outreach to a larger spectrum of audiences and stakeholders. With a global vision of development, the curators and directors of university art museums and galleries seek to pursue excellence and leadership in art education locally, regionally, nationally and globally. From Yale University's "A global gallery for a global university"⁷ to Princeton University's expectation of using art museum's resources to maximize the university's impact quantitatively and qualitatively.⁸ Art museums and galleries are seeking recognition as good vehicles for the promotion of the universities to the world. Therefore, attracting a diverse and large audience becomes part of the role of university art museums and galleries. The public relations constructed through the discourse of art museums and galleries reinforce the image of universities as knowledge-producers and places of research and learning, which can be an effective means for universities to communicate with the wider world and perhaps seek students and donors.

This bridging role leads university art museums and galleries into a dependent relationship with government policies on culture and art as well as other priorities (such as engagement with various community stakeholders). The roles of university arts institutions have extended far beyond the wall of universities to become a modern efficient educational institution and vehicle for communication in service to the public at large. The establishment of the public role of university art museums and galleries involves a complex series of administrative, political, cultural and funding considerations. Political, economic and cultural factors within the university and outside thus also influence the practices of art museums and galleries. Therefore, to gain a deeper

⁷ Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin: "A global gallery for a global university" Jan, 2013

⁸ The Strategic Plan of Princeton University Art Museum(2014-2018)

understanding of government's authority on the development of public art programs at universities, I choose one government report from Canada and two well-known public art programs in United States to analyze how university art museums and galleries have developed different practices to negotiate with these governmental decisions and consolidate their images as national modern educational and cultural institutions.

3.2. Government's authority on art development in North America

3.2.1. Massey Commission in Canada

The Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, which is also known as Massey Commission (1949-1951), is widely seen to be Canada's most important position paper on national cultural policy (Druick, 2006). It was structured around a series of discussions on mass media, education, art, university, international relations and other issues related to national cultural development in Canada. The mandate of the report is: "Culture is that part of education which enriches the mind and refines the taste. It is the development of the intelligence through the arts, letters and sciences."⁹ This report was commissioned in a revival period of Canada after World War II, it showed the aim of Canadian government to put cultural development in a high position and integrate universities, museums, libraries and other education institutions into the construction of a recognizable Canadian national identity through culture and art.

The final report of Massey Commission, Chapter XII emphasized the educational role universities played in postwar Canada. "They are local centres for education at large and

⁹ Massey Commission: Chapter 1 , the Mandate from <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/2/5/index-e.html>

patrons of every movement in aid of the arts, letters and sciences. They also serve the national cause in so many ways, direct and indirect, that theirs must be regarded as the finest of contributions to national strength and unity.”¹⁰ This statement encouraged the university’s engagement in the sphere of art education in which Canadian universities could contribute to national spirit through their cultural practices. In another Chapter about Canadian museums, art collections in universities are also viewed as important resources in service of public education.¹¹

After Massey Commission was released in 1951, the report inspired the creation of several new institutions, including the Canada Council for the Arts and the National Library (Flaman, 2009). In 1952, the Redpath Museum in McGill University broadened its focus beyond the campus to become a museum open to the general public. Also from 1960s, the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery in UBC started to contribute to a national profile with exhibitions and presented works by artists who would establish Vancouver as a modern and international centre. As part of the legacy of the Massey Commission, the Canadian Federal Government started an airport art project in 1964 and acted as the patron of art production. The project was expected to represent Canada on a world stage through the art works in airport terminals. The artists who were commissioned and the locations of each art work were meant to create a sense of national identity and portrayed Canada as a modern and unified country.

The Massey Report promoted the significance of the roles of Canadian educational institutions and agencies in the development of art and culture and influenced cultural production, especially public art production in Canada. More importantly, it represented a

¹⁰ Massey Commission: Chapter XII titled “the Universities”

¹¹ Massey Commission: Chapter VIII titled “Museums”

decision by the Canadian federal government to embrace modernism and nationalism in cultural practices to promote a regional and national identity.

3.2.2. AIA and NEA in United States.

Soon after the Commission of Massey Report in Canada, in 1960s, two public art programs flourished in the United States and influenced civic art development in North America (both programs are still in operation now). They were both established to commission artworks for public space. One was *Art-in Architecture program (AIA)*, commissioned by GSA (the General Service Administration) that resumed a program for support for public art in 1963, which had begun during the 1930s but had been suspended after the US entered World War II in the 1940s. The other was *the National Endowment for the Arts' Art in Public Spaces Program (NEA)*, which was established as an independent federal agency in 1967.

As a government-sponsored program, AIA was established by administrative order and aimed at incorporating art works in new federal buildings nationwide. It was also considered as an important part of Public Affairs and Education for the General Services Administration (GSA). In this program, GSA endeavoured to ensure the introduction of art works to the public through various outreach activities, such as public exhibition, media coverage, educational brochures and other means.¹² The emphasis of this project was on the art works by living American artists and it was designed to assure local involvement which reflected the government's expectation for the promotion of public awareness of cultural production through public art works.

¹² AIA Policies and Procedures, Statement 7.1

However, when the Johnson Administration was planning to cut down the government's expenditures, the program was suspended between August, 1966 and Feb, 1972. After 1973, the revived program started to collaborate with NEA to legitimate the artists for AIA program. NEA program was designed to enhance public places through the artworks of American artists and assist communities in their efforts to increase public awareness of contemporary art (Balfe & Wyszomirski, 1986). The patrons of the community public art projects could be government, art agencies, universities or Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs). It emphasized local initiatives and their decision-making authority on art works in public space.

These two American public art programs reflect the involvement of government in the commission and promotion of public art. Art in public space has much greater visibility and is more accessible to a great many more people than the art in the traditional museum context. Therefore, it makes public art a tool in the service of establishing national identity and educating the public. Such types of public art practices can be critically engaged but they are also subjected to the outside forces : they work in relation to dominant ideologies and may draw attention to wider social and political problems or serve other ends (Rendell, 2006). Historically, American governmental agencies have commissioned art to achieve commemorative or other purposes. Public art works were commissioned not only for art's sake, but were sought as a means of establishing authoritative narratives, or broadening public policies and institutions (Balfe & Wyszomirski, 1987).

Echoing the messages of the Massey Commission in Canada, these two public art projects in United States also reflect the government's decision-making authority in matters such as cultural practices and cultural policy-making. In these cultural and art

projects in North America, public art works served in part to satisfy the needs of the political system. The policies and programs not only control the form and content of the works, but also allow government agencies to act as patrons in the process of production and representation. These policies and programs consolidated the power of those authoritative agencies to impose ideas about what is legitimate art and who are legitimate artists.

3.3. Challenges and controversies.

Looking at the annual report (2014-2015) of Princeton University Art Museum, the university provides only 32% of the annual expenses of its art museum, while a larger funding comes from endowment (46%).¹³ This situation is not unique. In a study of the funding sources of 35 universities in United States, King (2001) found that on average, universities only provide about 41% funding for their museums, compared with 76% in 1986. Other budgetary sources include contributions from government, individuals, corporations, foundations and the earned income from the membership and stores.

Limited funding from the university is not enough for university arts institutions to survive. Therefore, when we review the missions of the museums, attracting a diverse audience is not only a goal for public relations, but it is also a way to gain national and international influence and attract more endowments from contributors off campus. Inevitably, financial considerations put university museums in a marketplace, in which a “customer-provider” identity risks becoming easily and widely accepted (Boylan, 1999). Does an audience-oriented university museum conflict with its public role as an educational and cultural institution? Will the market strategies influence scholarship and

¹³ Princeton University Art Museum Annual Report (2014-2015)

educational missions of the university museum? These concerns put university art museums and galleries in a controversial position in a neo-liberal context.

Another controversial issue related to university art museums and galleries focuses on the nature and practices related to their public art collections. Public art on campus which is managed and preserved by art museums and galleries has the potential to communicate strong aesthetic, cultural, political and social messages both within and outside the university. Contemporary public art not only occupies public space, but may also draw the public into intelligent discourses and debates (Gerin & McLean, 2009). For university art museums and galleries, new acquisitions from gifts, bequests, transfers or purchases may fill the gap and contribute to the development of university's art collection. However, the public art works on campus are also involved in disputes about selection and subject to censorship. Because the decision-making involved in art acquisition and exhibition is usually a top-down process, when an art work appears in public space or a public art program starts, sometimes, these events provoke unexpected controversies.

Considering university art museums and galleries function as commissioning agencies or are involved in initiatives to promote public art on campus, the controversies also raise questions about power and authority over the production, justification and transmission of knowledge in initiatives that use art as a means of communication of values. Playing the role as the gatekeepers of art world, university arts institutions thus have the potential to play a critical role in the processes of production, distribution, and reception of the arts and values inscribed in the art collected. An examination of the selection and justification of art works unveils the works of art in the highly controlled institutional frameworks (Cartiere & Zebracki, 2016). Therefore, controversies over public art on campus not only focus on the contents and forms of the art works, but

reflect a deeper and complex relationship between political, economic and cultural practices and a larger social context constructed by social institutions, that exercise symbolic power and convey ideologies.

Also because of financial pressures, more and more university art museums and galleries have started to cooperate with corporations. The increasing involvement of stakeholders from commercial institutions weakens the status and the authority of university art museums and galleries as intellectual leaders on decision-making and future-planning. This recalls more general criticisms of the transformation of universities,

“With the increasing involvement of government and corporations in the governance of university, contemporary university is busily transforming itself into a bureaucratically organized and relatively autonomous consumer-oriented corporation.” (Readings,1997)

In the past, university art museums and galleries communicates their visions through their art collections and sought recognition from peers in the museum field. Now, in a more pragmatic way, some corporations rate the museums on their potential for securing large audiences and visibility for the corporation. University art museums and galleries have started to adopt communication strategies that resemble marketing strategies to get larger audiences as well as the donors.

University museums and galleries have occupied an important position in intellectual exchanges and have had a growing influence in higher education in North America. In the next Chapter, I will present a case study of a Canadian university art gallery - the Simon Fraser University (SFU) Art Gallery to explore some specific examples of the ways controversies communicate values. Compared with the “old” university art museums and galleries discussed above which have developed large collections and

have achieved high recognition nationally and internationally, SFU Art Gallery has a much shorter history. It was established in 1970 and at that time, the Massey Commission had already exerted its influence on national art development. In this context, this case study provides an opportunity to explore questions about how mid-twentieth century policies and programs have shaped newer institutions : how did a young university art gallery seek to establish its identity through public art collection? And what roles do university art galleries play in the promotion of national spirit and the communication of dominant ideologies? Through the analysis of two controversies over public art works on the SFU campus, I mainly apply Gramsci's critical framework of hegemony and seek insights into the power relations behind these controversies.

Chapter 4.

A Case Study of SFU Art Gallery

4.1. A public art gallery in an “ instant university ”

When Simon Fraser University (SFU) opened the door to accommodate 2500 students in September 1965, a report from *Saturday Night* magazine called it an “Instant University”¹⁴. It just took two and a half years from original decision to create a new university to its first enrollment (Johnston, 2005). When we review the history of higher education in North America, SFU is a rather “new” university. However, it has sought recognition in Canadian universities for its radical image for the unprecedented freedom and independence people enjoyed at SFU in Canadian higher education as well as for its emphasis on interdisciplinary education, academic autonomy and innovative pedagogy since its foundation.

Since the first art gallery in SFU was commissioned in 1970, with the consideration to be part of the world-class university in cultural engagement and join the ranks of key North American art galleries and museums, SFU started to put more efforts in the development of art galleries on all its campuses. Now, there are three distinct galleries in SFU: SFU Gallery on the Burnaby campus (established in 1970), the Teck Gallery at Harbour Centre in Vancouver (established in 1989) and the Audain Gallery at the Goldcorp Centre for the Arts in Vancouver (established in 2010). In this case study, I will

¹⁴ “Instant University,” *Saturday Night*, March 1964, 18

focus on SFU Gallery on the main (Burnaby) campus and the public art on display on the SFU Burnaby campus. As the first art gallery in SFU, its history and development reflect the evolving process of SFU Art Galleries and the dynamic relationship between art collecting, the university, the internal and external communities, and the public.

The SFU Art Gallery was established as a public art gallery in 1970 by SFU President Kenneth Strand upon the recommendation of the President's Works of Art Committee. It was formalized under the direction of James Felter, who was the first director and curator for the Gallery. SFU Art Gallery was located in the South Academic Quadrangle Concourse and placed under the administration of the Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies, as part of the Centre for the Arts. At the time the Gallery was built, it was regarded as "a space for educational, as well as aesthetic enhancement of the university."¹⁵

However, in 1984, because of an intensive cutbacks at the university, SFU Art Gallery was moved from the Centre for the Arts to the Office of the Vice-President for Development. The management of SFU Art Gallery was undertaken by unpaid faculty. Even though Dr. Edward Gibson, who was a professor of Geography and also the director of the Gallery maintained a regular exhibition program and continued the acquisition for the art collection, the shortage of staff and funds led to slow growth of SFU Art Gallery from late 1980s till 2006.¹⁶

In 2002, Gibson submitted a proposal for a new, multi-faceted University Art Gallery, which was known as Gibson Report. This Report played an important role in integrating SFU Art Gallery into the development of the university. In 2004, President Michael

¹⁵ James Warren Felter, "History of the Simon Fraser Gallery and President's Art Collection". June 2, 1998 from SFU Archive.

¹⁶ SFU Art Gallery Strategic Plan (2007-2017)

Stevenson initiated SFU Art Museum Working Groups to review Gibson Report and plan for the future of SFU Art Gallery. President Stevenson identified cultural development among his top three priorities for the university over the next decade. The Working Group members contributed to the revival of SFU Art Gallery. They promoted the establishment of a coherent administrative gallery structure and a focused curatorial plan. In 2006, an Advisory Gallery Committee was organized to work with the Director of SFU Art Gallery.

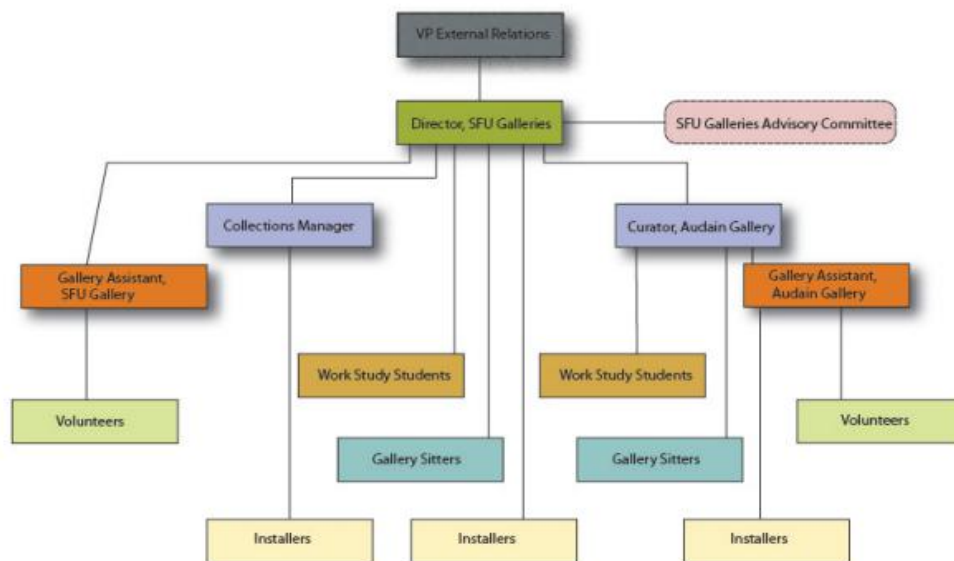


Figure 1. SFU Galleries Advisory Committee Structure and Members ¹⁷

The graphic above clearly shows the plans for the relationship between SFU Art Gallery and university administration. The Advisory Committee advises on the issues related to gallery development such as funding, programming, collecting, communication and planning with the Director, and their discussions and plans will be reported to the VP

¹⁷ SFU Art Gallery Strategic plan (2014-2019)

External Relations which is in charge of building the relations between university, internal communities, locals and broader world to promote SFU's reputation as the leading engaged university nationally and internationally.¹⁸ Having formed a stable administrative structure, the current SFU Art Gallery inherits the provisions of Gibson Report and the strategic plans of previous directors to engage itself in community interaction and public art education.

4.2. Public art at SFU

In the strategic plans of SFU Art Gallery, (2007-2017, 2014-2019) caring for the university art collection is a vital part of its missions and future planning. The SFU Art Collection was established in 1965, before the building of SFU Art Gallery. Now, it consists of over 5600 works of art from regional, national and international artists. The works of art from the collection are used in exhibitions, public spaces and offices on campuses. According to *SFU Public Art Guide*, there are approximately 1000 works of public art located on three campuses of SFU.¹⁹

The public art on campus is probably the most visible and accessible artistic resource used to communicate values and achieve recognition for the gallery and the university. The works are open and free to the public and play a prominent educational role in the public spaces of the campus.

¹⁸ <https://www.sfu.ca/vpexternal.html>

¹⁹ SFU Public Art Guide

https://www.sfu.ca/content/sfu/galleries/collections/PublicArt/_jcr_content/main_content/download/file.res/SFU%20Public%20Art%20Guide.pdf

The acquisition, selection, interpretation and exhibition of the public art is a process of decision-making and censorship following university policy. According to the *SFU Gallery Acquisition Policy*, the SFU art collection should be representational on an international as well as national basis. From the early years of the SFU Art Gallery until now, most acquisitions are art works created by distinguished Canadian artists, notably works by living artists thus emphasizing Canadian contemporary art collection. There are four main collections in SFU Art Gallery: the Inuit Collection, the Native North American Collection, the Canadian Collection and the Pacific Rim Collection. Meanwhile, artists who have ties to the history of British Columbia and Canadian art history are also regarded as a target for the collection.²⁰

In the university's acquisition and collection policy, national and local artists and art works are given priority for SFU Art Gallery collection. It also echoes the *Massey Report's* initiative to appreciate, identify and convey "true Canadianism" to Canadians and the world through artistic representations. When we review the *SFU Public Art Guide*, it shows a selection of public art works that located on SFU Burnaby campus. There are many art works created by indigenous artists in the collection.²¹

SFU is located in the Canadian Province of British Columbia, where the relationship between First Nations and Western people has long been a sensitive issue generally and in controversies related to public art, especially in connection with some historical narratives portrayed in art works. SFU campus is located on unceded Indigenous land

²⁰ SFU Galleries Acquisitions Policy for the SFU Art Collection, 5.2 Collecting Area

²¹ SFU Public Art Guide

https://www.sfu.ca/content/sfu/galleries/collections/PublicArt/_jcr_content/main_content/download/file.res/SFU%20Public%20Art%20Guide.pdf

belonging to the Coast Salish peoples.²² Public art, as a form of cultural and artistic representation, it is a way for public to form the ideas about history and gain knowledge. Also as cultural practices, the presence and representation of a certain public art work is highly controlled in an institutional framework and has, in some ways, the status of an authoritative form of communication of values held by the institution and dominant ideologies in society more generally. The selection and cases of censorship of artists and their art works provide insights into how public art on campus is recognized, accepted and legitimated by the art gallery and other agents involved with acquisitions.

The controversies surround the public art works are equally important in particular for gaining an understanding about what is being symbolized through the art works themselves or contested. Controversies about art works provide opportunities to observe continuing discussion and public dialogue, thereby providing insights into cross-cultural communications through art. Therefore, it should be determined what triggers a controversy and leads to the removal or de-accession of the art works. In the next section, I will critically analyze two controversial public art works on SFU Burnaby campus to reflect upon the relations between art representation and communication about social and political issues in public discourse.

4.3. The commissioning process of public art on campus

When we talk about public art on campus, the institutional contexts in which the art works are created, exhibited, interpreted, taught, and acquired are important.

²² Unceded means that this land was never surrendered, relinquished or handed over in any way. Based on our current knowledge, this includes the territories of the Musqueam, Skwxwú7mesh (pronounced Squamish or Skohomish), Stó:lo & Tsleil-Waututh (pronounced: slay-wa-tooth, aka Burrard) nations (SFPRG 2014).

Acquisitions of public art often are related to political, social and cultural expectations for the commissioning agencies. Different from the private ownership of art, there are more diverse collective interests among stakeholders and decisions which reflect power relations involved in the commissioning process of public art on campus. In SFU, there are three major parties in this process:

1) Commissioning institutions, which are responsible for the acquisition, management, commission and de-accession of the permanent or long-term public art on campus. At SFU, the Art Gallery and the Gallery Advisory Committee currently function as the gatekeepers of the art world on campus but the SFU Vice President of External Relations plays a decisive role in the acquisition of art collection.

2) Artists, who as the creators of the artworks, may express freedom and seek recognition in aesthetic expression. However, when we put it in an institutional framework, the works of arts are highly controlled by the commissioning institutions. As discussed before, to support the national and provincial art development, SFU Art Galleries select and collect more artworks from local artists to meet the political and cultural expectations which are outlined in SFU policies.

3) The public is the third major stakeholder. On the Burnaby campus of SFU, because of the geographic isolation and funding limitations, the majority of the audience is composed of members of university communities, which include students, faculty, visitors, scholars, alumni and residents of the Greater Vancouver communities who reside close to the campus. In most contexts, they just participate in the appreciation and reception of the public art works and do not have much power in the commissioning

process. At most times, the public art is commissioned by the Gallery for the public, not by the public.

The interests of stakeholders involved in public art commission in SFU are themselves diffuse and sometimes contradictory, therefore, when their interests diverge, the controversies over particular public art works may occur. Public controversies about art are often sparked by outrages over offending images. In a theoretical discussion of why images offend, historian W.J. Mitchell (2001) proposed that there are three common points of offending images:

“First, offending images are radically unstable entities whose capacity for harm depends on complex social contexts ... [It is a process of social interaction between the objects and the audience] .. Second, the offending images do not all offend in the same way... [depending both on the representation of the image and the reception of the public] ...Third, if an image offends many people, it will invoke the law and along with it judges, legislators, policymakers, media and even the police.” (Mitchell, 2001:119-121)

In his analysis of offending images, Mitchell emphasized that it is important to address who is offended, by whom, what and how. And when a controversy grows and enters the public arena, there will be increasing participants with different interests who join in the discussion, such as policymakers and the media. Therefore, from this perspective if a controversy is to be productive, it could provide the potential to make public art a site for broader public exchange of ideas and social transformation.

4.4. Two controversial murals on campus

In 2004, a highly recognized mural titled *British Columbia Pageant* was installed in the north concourse of Academic Quadrangle on Burnaby campus. It is a 21-metre

long mural created by Charles Comfort, who was a well-known Canadian artist and activist in the 1930s and 1940s. The mural was originally commissioned by Toronto Dominion Bank for their branch at the corner of Granville and Pender in downtown Vancouver, BC. After the bank branch was closed, the mural was donated as a gift to SFU.

A controversy arose due to the representation of indigenous people in the mural. For First Nation Students Association (FNSA), the mural depicted the events and narratives about the founding and settlement of the province which portrayed colonization from the point of view of the “colonizers” and devalued the history and experience of First Nations peoples. Since its installation, the mural has been the subject of controversy and protest by First Nation artists, student activists and intellectuals in SFU. They called for the removal of the mural and argued that the mural promoted a “retrograde history” of Canada.²³



Figure 2. British Columbia Pageant

²³ SFU Public Art Guide

https://www.sfu.ca/content/sfu/galleries/collections/PublicArt/_jcr_content/main_content/download/file.res/SFU%20Public%20Art%20Guide.pdf

In response to failing to achieve the removal, student-led activists organized a series of anti-colonial panel discussions, lectures, performance and an art contest.²⁴ The winning art works were exhibited right in front of the Comfort mural, and included some pieces of works from internationally recognized First Nations artists. One of the winners of the anti-colonial art contest, Edgar Heap of Birds argued that, “First Nations people need to be properly included in the theme of any artistic interpretation of British Columbia’s past. It is inappropriate to simply have First Nations People garnish culture.”²⁵ The sponsor of the anti-colonial art contest, Sasha Hobbs, who was also the director of the First Nations Student Centre in 2005 considered this controversy as a critical expression of awareness of colonialism. “Through the anti-colonial art contest, the Cedar Table series is seeking to raise awareness of what colonialism is and its impact on individuals, institutions, and society.”²⁶

In this controversy, the mural offended people because of its misrepresentation of the history of colonization and indigenous identity. Those who insisted upon removal of the mural (among them, indigenous students, activists and artists) argued that First Nation’s identities and values in Canadian history were degraded and on the representations of the mural legitimate and justify the early colonizing process in an artistic way. In this controversy, the discursive representation is not only the matter of aesthetic expression of the artist, but reflects the power of institutions to decide who or what is absent or represented.

²⁴ Between September 2004 and February 2005, students organized a number of panel discussions (Cedar Table Series), lectures and performances and hosted a contest for Anti-Colonial Art, the winners of which were displayed in the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology.

²⁵ SFU Archive. http://www.sfu.ca/archive-sfunews/sfu_news/archives/sfunews01270508.shtml

²⁶ SFU Archive. http://www.sfu.ca/archive-sfunews/sfu_news/archives/sfunews01270508.shtml

In SFU's history, in addition to the Comfort controversy that took place in 2004-2005, there was a controversy over another series of paintings which were created by John Innes. These paintings were on a 25-year loan to SFU from the Native Sons of B.C. in 2002.²⁷ Native Sons of B.C. was a heritage society made up of descendants of B.C. 's first colonial settlers. The first post of it was organized in Victoria in 1899, and between 1899 and 1960, the society established thirteen posts in the densely populated districts of South Eastern Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland. The historical activities of this society made a significant contribution to the preservation of popular historical sites and the promotion of provincial identity. However, it was also criticized for its opposition to the Asian immigration and the attitude on aboriginal people. Reimer (1995) argued that the society was an extremist organization founded primarily upon racist principles.

In 1924, John Innes was commissioned by the Native Sons of B.C. to produce a series of eight paintings depicting historical events in British Columbia. A controversy erupted at the university at the time it was hung in the north concourse of the Academic Quadrangle (a central building on campus). The paintings presented European explorers as sovereign authority figures while the aboriginal participants served only as witnesses to their actions. Among the eight paintings, two of them

²⁷ These eight paintings are part of the SFU art collection where all but two hang in the hall of art in the Quadrangle ("Captain George Vancouver Meets Spaniards off Point Grey", "Hudson's Bay Company Fur Brigade Passing Lake Okanagan", "Governor Douglas Takes Oath of Office at Fort Langley", "Overland Expedition on Way to Cariboo", "Simon Fraser Following the Great River to the Sea", "The Building of Fort Victoria", "Alexander Mackenzie Records his Great Achievement", "Discovery of Gold at Williams Creek, 1861). Due to the controversies, "Hudson's Bay Company Fur Brigade Passing Lake Okanagan" and "Alexander Mackenzie Records his Great Achievement" listed above had been removed and put in storage.

raised particular concerns-- *Alexander Mackenzie Recording His Arrival at the Pacific, A.D. 1793* and *James Douglas Building the Hudson's Bay Post at Victoria, A.D. 1843*.



Figure 3. Alexander Mackenzie Recording His Arrival at the Pacific, A.D. 1793

These two paintings depict the expeditions of Alexander Mackenzie and James Douglas, who were fur-trading explorers during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. It is obvious to see the misrepresentation and absence of the contribution of aboriginal people in the recorded “British Columbia history”. The first explorers are the focus of the image while the aboriginal people are shown below them, looking up to the explorers claiming of the land. First Nation students argued that the paintings did not accurately reflect history and asked for the removal of these two controversial paintings. “Give back the Eurocentric fantasy history displayed in the paintings to the “Native Sons of BC”, to whatever king loon wants to claim them. No recognition is better than false recognition.”²⁸ As the communication representative from FNSA, Rick Ouellet also argued that “Most students are not aware of Canadian history. Public art

²⁸ Rick Ouellet, “First Things First,” Peak, 4, November, 2002

can sometimes be the only source for this information or misinformation.” As a result, the students and faculty successfully lobbied the university to remove these two paintings.

The creators of the paintings --Charles Comfort and John Innes-- were both highly recognized artists in Canada and well-known for their reputations in mural painting. From 1860s to 1930s, mural paintings started to be promoted as a means of glorifying the salient features of Canada as a modern nation-state (McKay, 2002). Because of its relatively larger size, association with the artistic tradition of grand narratives and the attachment with architecture, a wall mural occupies the public space and is used as a tool for memorializing historical events and narratives. (Large-scale paintings may function in similar ways.)

In these paintings, some of the glorification of being a modern nation-state is embodied in the depiction of the material progress of capitalism, the expression of national identity as well as the degradation of non-Western cultures and values. Just like the representation of the modern city skyline, technology and the development of the capitalist industry in the Comfort mural, the images uphold the salient features of the modern nation-state. Through the suppression of other knowledge and the dichotomy of Western and non-Western as modern/tradition and science/superstition, indigenous knowledge as well as the knowledge of other subaltern groups are marginalized or excluded (Santos, 2007).

Historically in Canada, it has been popular for educational institutions to decorate their public space with murals, such as in Canadian public libraries. After the public libraries opened around 1885, the installation of mural paintings had become a way to

support Canada as a modern nation-state (McKay, 2002). Such murals acted as a type of public education, they provide access to a broader public, they were commissioned not only for art's sake to develop aesthetic welfare for society, but functioned as a means in service of establishing national identity, fostering social cohesion and promoting the impact of public policies and institutions.

In our daily life, dominant ideologies and knowledge are transformed into a shared system of meanings and represented through the everyday cultural and artistic practices that influence and regulate our understanding of the world and our communicative practice (Cartiere & Zebracki, 2016). These two controversies over murals at SFU both focused on the issue about the representation of First Nations in the history of British Columbia. Another common thing is that they were both originally commissioned by patrons in commerce (in one case) or in a cultural organization associated with “anti-Asian vitriol and stereotyped depictions of Aboriginal peoples” (Pass, 2006). *British Columbia Pageant* was commissioned by Toronto Dominion Bank while John Innes' eight paintings were commissioned by Native Sons of B.C.. They conform to traditions of mural paintings in commercial buildings, such as banks, shopping malls, stock exchanges by celebrating commercial success, and in a broader view, they also present positive representations of colonial ideologies of material progress and capitalism in Canada that are not values shared by everyone.

After these murals were moved to SFU as gifts, they drew the public into intellectual discussion and debate. A main part of the public controversy concerned the commissioning agencies of the artworks. Moving from commercial sites or contentious heritage displays to the wall of a publicly funded university, the shift of the sites led to the shift of the role of the murals and implied support from an academic

institution for the ideas expressed in the paintings. In their previous sites, the murals were more considered as a marketing tool for business or for advocates for a disputed Caucasian-centric view of BC heritage, however, on the campus of the university, public art is expected to play an educational role in the cultivation of the diversity, advancing knowledge and serving the public good.

The controversies were unexpected when SFU acquired these murals. When we review the acquisition of the two murals from the perspective of SFU Art Gallery, these contributions of highly-recognized art works had the potential to help SFU gain recognition through its public art collection in Canada and enhance the significance of the Gallery in the ranks of North American art galleries and museums. From the strategic plan of the Gallery, we can also see that this was linked to the Gallery's efforts to integrate the Gallery into university development activities and establish itself as a significant cultural contributor and resource locally, nationally and internationally to enhance its future prospects.

In Canadian history, it is uncontested that higher education plays a significant role in the promotion of Canada as a modern nation-state. As the *Massey Report* states, universities are “local centres for education at large and patrons of every movement in aid of the arts, letters and sciences. They also serve the national cause in so many ways, direct and indirect, that theirs must be regarded as the finest of contributions to national strength and unity.”²⁹

In Gramsci's theory of hegemony, the underpinnings of the political structure in civil society is through institutions which help to create in people certain modes of behaviour

²⁹ Massey Commission, Chapter XII, “The Universities”, 132

and expectations consistent with the hegemonic social order (Cox, 1983). As an increasingly important feature of educational institutions, installed in sites that commanded authority and being free and open to the public, civic art has the potential to construct and support the dominant features of the presence of university art galleries may thus contribute to the underpinnings of the hegemonic knowledge and ideologies by acting as authorities on what constitutes appropriate or valued public art in modern states (McKay, 2002). In a post-colonial world, there is the belief that social “truth” is established through the production of knowledge, norms, customs and values. Through the representation of the values, knowledge, cultures of a hegemonic class, race, gender and population, the dominant features of a modern nation-state usually stand out by emphasizing the dominant state’s superiority with respect to other modern nation-states and non-Western societies.

4.5. Discussion of the case study

In these two cases of controversy, we can see the debate between different interest groups. One group is comprised of the commissioning agencies, which include both the original commissioning agency of the murals – TD Bank and the Native Sons of B.C. and the university administrative authorities with SFU Art Gallery serving as a mediator to facilitate their exhibition on the campus. The other group mainly consists of indigenous people and engaged academics critical of hegemonic depictions of colonialism, who are in positions that are relatively subordinate to the more powerful positions occupied by the corporate sponsors and dominant institutional authorities in the senior administration of the university.

In one presentation to the BC Civil Liberties Association,³⁰ Michael Stevenson, then president and vice-chancellor of SFU reviewed the history of the acquisition and pointed out that when SFU Art Gallery acquired this mural, the Advisory Committee thought the content of the work gave an “abstract coherence to the linear, realist and figurative depiction of BC history”. For the university, this mural “was described by experts as one of the foremost examples of mural art in Canadian art history and was given a very high, six figure, valuation by recognized appraisers” (Stevenson, 2005). These indications of the worth reflected the main considerations of the university at the time of the acquisition of public art works that is their historical importance and artistic value in establishing the reputation of the university and the Gallery.

However, when we consider opponents to the display of celebrations of colonial history in these controversies, opponents who found these art works offensive, their attitudes reflected the public rejection of this art work in public space. For them, what is represented and what is absent in the murals matter more than the economical or the aesthetic value of the art. Echoing Mitchell’s analysis on offending images, whether a image would be offensive depends on the complex social context and its interaction with audience.

With a history of transforming itself into a modern nation-state, the representation of Indigenous history and cultures is usually dominated by Western-centric knowledge production. Historically, Western privilege and supremacy has been consolidated and informed through education, in this process, university and other educational institutions

³⁰ “Threading the Needle: Academic Freedom and Offensive Behavior”, a presentation to the BC Civil Liberties Association, Vancouver, BC.
<https://www.sfu.ca/pres/president/speeches/20052.html>

have played a prominent role in the establishment of social “truth”. In this context, the way that colonialism is culturally and artistically practiced and represented in the public art on university campuses is one way in which hegemony has been entrenched in institutions of higher learning in ways that support established dominant ideologies.

Therefore, the controversies become the lens to understand the public education role the university art gallery plays in institutions of higher learning in a modern nation-state. The communicative intentions of the gallery shape and are also reflected in the art collection as well as public art projects. From this perspective, looking at the debates and resistance to representations that celebrate historically institutionalized racial discrimination illustrated the communicative power of public art presented in universities as well as ways public art provides us a focus to critically reflect on the gallery’s and, more generally the university’s support of widespread cultural practices.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

5.1. Conclusion and implication

Let us look back at the question I posed in the beginning: how is public art collection used by university art museums and galleries to communicate dominant values and establish their reputation as national education institutions? The case study of SFU Art Gallery gives a partial answer. Even though SFU is a rather new university in North America, it has gone through a lot of shifts in its growth and in its strategies for seeking recognition within and outside Canada. In this process, the university is increasingly influenced by the power from capitalist marketplaces and government policy, which put institutions of higher education in a position that can provoke controversy and critiques. The role of the university art museums and galleries in public discourse and education has not provoked much academic research but it is a promising area for studying critical concerns about the power of art in local and global communication.

Universities were among the earliest public institutions to develop art museums and galleries in the modern nation-state in North America, and they have played an increasingly important role as participants in the public communication of values and vehicles for establishing authority. In this context, research on university art museum/gallery collections deserves greater attention and needs to consider how their works engages with issues of power and hegemony. The debates inspired by

controversies over public art are embedded in all kinds of cultural practices and beliefs that relate to important issues in our daily life. There is no doubt that the display of public art on campus has the potential to contribute to the promotion of hegemonic knowledge, culture, value and ideology but it can also provide a space for resistance and demands for change.

How has the power and impact of dominant structures (such as government policies and capitalist marketplace) influenced the communicative practices of the university art gallery? Through the case study of the controversies over murals, we can see that historic colonial manifestations of hegemony were celebrated in the representations and the decisions about the display of these works of public art on campus, perhaps because of the reputations of the artists in art historical evaluations. However, both the commissioning agencies and the public are situated in the centre of power-knowledge relations in society in the controversies. These controversies engage with social, political and economic forces rather than being simply a matter of aesthetics. The intent of the art works, the social or political agendas of the participants, the educational strategies and public engagement of the university art museum/gallery on campus all suggest that critical analysis of the controversies can give us insights into ways universities communicate values through their art collections.

5.2. Limitation and Prospects

While I working on this extended essay, I have confronted with some difficulties in the research about the history of SFU Art Gallery. The following lists some of the constraints that have limited my research possibilities:

1) The lack of historical documents. In my analysis of the mural controversies, it was hard to find official university documents or academic discussion about the decisions to acquire the works or the controversies. The documents I use about the history of the controversies are reports from media, such as newspapers (for example, the student newspaper *The Peak*) and some local newspapers and a press release from the President's office. The primary source documentation is rather limited and inadequate to support a deeper study of the historical context from the perspective of all of the original participants at this time (since some of these archives are still inaccessible). Also, because of the removal of the two murals by John Innes, there are even fewer documents about the Innes controversies and the representation of the murals for the analysis.

2) A limited range of comparisons with other North American academic institutions. In the introduction of the background of the museum development, I mainly choose ten highly recognized galleries in North America to study on their missions and developments. Most of them have been well developed and sought both a local and international recognition. However, there are many more art galleries in North American universities, even though some of them are still in their infancy, and they still play a important roles in public education on campus in diverse ways. I have not included these new galleries in my review of North American universities because of the limitation of the space and time, but they still deserve a particular concern for the later academic research.

3) Changing mandates and organizational structures affecting the operation of the SFU Art Gallery. Another limitation is the lack of detailed information about the precise history of decision about the acquisitions of the artworks featured in the case studies, in

particular as to the precise role of the SFU Art Gallery. Both controversies involved works of art acquired during a period prior to the re-organization of the SFU Art Gallery (which only occurred in 2006).

4) Questions about the relevance of history (even recent history) for current and future developments related to public art at SFU. Finally, it is important to recognize that this is based on historical events and SFU has undergone major changes since the controversies explored here. The cases examined occurred over a decade ago. Further research is needed on more recent trends. In 2015, SFU opened the Bill Reid Centre for Northwest Coast Studies. The centre is named in honour of an acclaimed First Nations artist and seeks to support “community and academic conversations regarding the visual culture of Northwest Coast First Nations”, and “promote public understanding and respect for the First Nations of the Northwest Coast past and present”.³¹

As for the future prospects suggested by this study, I believe that there will be more critical research on university public art that concern how universities engage with (or fail to engage with) critical issues, such as gender, race, class and power relations. While public art could be seen as a wallpaper to cover the conflicts and tensions in the society, the representations embodied in public art and the choices of which artists and what type of art is included could also be viewed as a way to study what is dominant, for what reasons and how some ideas prevail. Even though the controversies over SFU mural representations involved a small scale of local public and media, these two cases still present compelling examples that demonstrate how art engages with

³¹ <https://www.sfu.ca/brc.html>

broader issues in the history of Canada, that is the conflicting relations between First Nations and colonial settlers.

Meanwhile, through the case studies on a particular university art gallery and the controversies surrounding works of public art, I hope to show in a variety of historical and regional contexts, how artists and public art has had to compromise with institutions that have significant political, social, or cultural power in the past. In research on controversies about cultural practices that address dominant values, culture and ideologies, we should always critically reflect on the many (and diverse) hidden meanings embedded in these communicative practices.

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