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### National Museum of the American Indian Reflection Paper

On Wednesday, February 15<sup>th</sup>, I attended the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in NY with some friends. I have never been to this museum and what excited to see what I would learn and take away from this experience about native American Indians. Their mission statement of sharing a human experience through the informed understanding of native people and their culture had me intrigued.

The NMAI is a museum in the United States dedicated to the culture of the indigenous peoples of the Americas. In 1989, it became part of the Smithsonian Institution group of museums and research centers. I visited the George Gustav Heye Center (GGHC) in New York City which houses exhibitions, research, educational activities, and performing arts programs. Mr. Heye traveled throughout North and South America collecting native objects. His collection was assembled over 54 years, beginning in 1903. He started the Museum of the American Indian and his Heye Foundation in 1916. The Heye Foundation's Museum of the American Indian opened to the public on Audubon Terrace in New York City in 1922 and became part of the Smithsonian in June 1990. As they were looking for a new place, they found available two floors of the Alexander Hamilton U.S. Custom House in Lower Manhattan. It is a designated National Historic Landmark and a New York City landmark. The center's exhibition

and public access areas total about 20,000 square feet and has a variety of exhibitions, film and video screenings, school programs and living culture presentations throughout the year.

The first exhibit I wanted to see was Jeffrey Veregge: *Of Gods and Heroes*. This exhibition features a narrative creation by the Salish artist known for his bold blend of Northwest Coast formline and pop-culture figures. This Native American artist loves comics and Sci-fi and his work includes an epic battle between Marvel characters and aliens invading the streets of New York City. I also love comics and Marvel superheroes and so this huge mural exhibit was interesting to me. The colors of the exhibit were bright, bold, and vibrant and he mixes his Native American motifs with Marvel superheros. As he states, “he is a storyteller and is doing what his ancestors did hundreds of years ago.” What I learned that sets his work apart is his use of formline. Formlines are lines that swell, contract, bend, curve and join to outline the form an artist wishes to represent. You can see the passion in his art with his graphic and imaginative work which you can tell that the people at the museum enjoyed greatly.

I also found the *Native Photographers in the Field* photo essays very informative and stimulating. These essays by three Native photojournalists explores issues that is of deep personal interest to them and that touches the lives of Native people in a specific community. What I took away from their photo essays is that they each share the same desires to break down stereotypes of Native peoples and to portray the diversity and complexity of their contemporary lives. All three provide thoughtful insights into the present-day lifestyles of the Native American people and viewpoints on an American experience that is generally invisible to mainstream society.

The NMAI provided me with a better and informed experience of the understanding of Native American people and their culture. I never really thought of New York as a Native place

but was surprised to learn that Through first-person accounts, historical narratives and compelling original illustrations, this region is more compelling than just myths and stereotypes.

Finally, I ended the trip at the Museum store where I was able to look and shop for authentic Native American merchandise such as apparel, art, literature, and jewelry.