

BILL ANTHES  EDGAR HEAP OF BIRDS



## EDGAR HEAP OF BIRDS



**EDGAR**



**HEAP OF**



**BIRDS**

**BILL ANTHES**

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

DURHAM & LONDON 2015

© 2015 Duke University Press  
All rights reserved  
Printed in the United States  
of America on acid-free paper ∞  
Designed by Amy Ruth Buchanan  
Typeset in Whitman by Copperline

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
Anthes, Bill.

Edgar Heap of Birds / Bill Anthes.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8223-5981-4 (hardcover : alk. paper)

ISBN 978-0-8223-5994-4 (pbk. : alk. paper)

ISBN 978-0-8223-7499-2 (e-book)

1. Heap of Birds, Edgar—Criticism, interpretation,  
etc. I. Title.

N6537.H383A58 2015

709.2—dc23 2015009508

Cover art: Edgar Heap of Birds, *Neuf* series,  
*Nuance of Sky* #3, 2012. Acrylic on canvas,  
36 × 44 inches. Artwork © Edgar Heap  
of Birds.

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS GRATEFULLY  
ACKNOWLEDGES THE CHEYENNE AND  
ARAPAHO TRIBES AND PITZER COLLEGE,  
WHICH PROVIDED SUPPORT TOWARD THE  
PUBLICATION OF THIS BOOK.

PUBLICATION OF THIS BOOK HAS BEEN  
AIDED BY A GRANT FROM THE WYETH  
FOUNDATION FOR AMERICAN ART  
PUBLICATION FUND OF THE COLLEGE ART  
ASSOCIATION.

*For Kelly and the girls*



## CONTENTS

**LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS / IX**

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS / XIII**

**INTRODUCTION / 1**

**1 LAND / 29**

**2 WORDS / 67**

**3 HISTORIES / 117**

**4 GENERATIONS / 163**

**NOTES / 181**

**BIBLIOGRAPHY / 195**

**INDEX / 201**





## ILLUSTRATIONS

- I.1 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Beyond the Chief*, 2009 2
- I.2 Elizabeth Sisco, Louis Hock, and David Avalos, *Welcome to America's Finest Tourist Plantation*, 1988 4
- I.3 Gran Fury, *Kissing Doesn't Kill*, 1989 5
- I.4 Sam Durant, *Proposal for White and Indian Dead Monument Transpositions*, Washington D.C., 2005 8
- I.5 *Beyond the Chief*, sign panel defaced in spring 2009 10
- I.6 Yard signs in support of *Beyond the Chief*, 2009 11
- I.7 Edgar Heap of Birds, *CPT*, 2002 16
- I.1 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Neuf Series #1*, 1981 30
- I.2 Juniper tree, Cheyenne-Arapaho Reservation, Oklahoma 31
- I.3 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Neuf series, Nuance of Sky #1*, 2012 42
- I.4 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Neuf series, Nuance of Sky #2*, 2012 43
- I.5 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Neuf series, Nuance of Sky #3*, 2012 43
- I.6 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Neuf series, Nuance of Sky #4*, 2012 44
- I.7 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Neuf* paintings at Acadia Studio, Bar Harbor, Maine, 1998 46
- I.8 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Neuf* series scarf, 1992 48

- 1.9 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Most Serene Republics, Native Bodies of Remembrance Murano Glass Vases*, 2007 48
- 1.10 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Native Hosts* series, Norman, Oklahoma, 2000 51
- 1.11 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Native Hosts* series, St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, 2011 51
- 1.12 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Apartheid Oklahoma*, 1989 53
- 1.13 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Day/Night*, Seattle, Washington, 1991 55
- 1.14 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Day/Night*, Seattle, Washington, 1991 55
- 1.15 Edgar Heap of Birds, *In Memory of Rainforest*, 1989 58
- 1.16 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Please the Waters*, Bronx, New York, 2009 61
- 1.17 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Please the Waters*, Bronx, New York, 2009 61
- 1.18 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Native Hosts* series, Claremont, California, 2013 64
- 2.1 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Public Enemy Care for Youth*, 1993 68
- 2.2 Sol Lewitt, *Wall Drawing #65, Lines not short, not straight, crossing and touching, drawn at random using four colors, uniformly dispersed with maximum density, covering the entire surface of the wall*, 1971 72
- 2.3 Lawrence Weiner, *A BIT OF MATTER AND A LITTLE BIT MORE*, 1976 73
- 2.4 Hans Haacke, *MoMA Poll*, 1970 74
- 2.5 Gran Fury, *The Government Has Blood on Its Hands*, 1989 77
- 2.6 Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie, *Don't Leave the Rez Without It! From Photographic Memoirs of an Aboriginal Savant*, 1994 77
- 2.7 Edgar Heap of Birds, *In Our Language*, Times Square, New York, 1982 79
- 2.8 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Imperial Canada*, Alberta, Canada, 1988 81
- 2.9 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Win of Birds*, 1978 83
- 2.10 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Fort Marion Lizards*, 1979 85
- 2.11 Bear's Heart, *Bishop Whipple Talking to Prisoners*, 1876 86
- 2.12 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Don't Want Indians*, 1982 89
- 2.13 Edgar Heap of Birds, *American Leagues*, Cleveland, Ohio, 1995 90
- 2.14 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Possible Lives*, 1985 91
- 2.15 Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (We Won't Play Nature to Your Culture)*, 1983 92
- 2.16 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Death from the Top*, 1983 94
- 2.17 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Heh No Wah Maun Stun He Dun (What Makes a Man)*, 1986–87 98

- 2.18 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Heh No Wah Maun Stun He Dun (What Makes a Man)*, 1986–87 99
- 2.19 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Heh No Wah Maun Stun He Dun (What Makes a Man)*, 1986–87 99
- 2.20 Edgar Heap of Birds, *American Policy*, 1988 101
- 2.21 Edgar Heap of Birds, *American Policy*, 1988 102
- 2.22 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Monetish*, 1994 105
- 2.23 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Cross for Diné*, 2009 106
- 2.24 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Cross for Tepoztlan*, 2009 106
- 2.25 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Its Just Paper Know Whats What*, 2004 108
- 2.26 Edgar Heap of Birds, *That Green Money You May Enter*, 2004 108
- 2.27 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Soft at Sea Soap from Pond*, 2004 108
- 2.28 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Indian Still Target Obama Bin Laden Geronimo*, 2011 109
- 2.29 Edgar Heap of Birds, plate from monoprint series *Secrets in Life and Death*, 2012 110
- 2.30 Edgar Heap of Birds, untitled gicleé print, 2004 111
- 2.31 Edgar Heap of Birds, installation of *Words, Trees, Chiapas*, 2009 112
- 2.32 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Blue Face Tomb Ready for Water*, 2009 113
- 2.33 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Good Luck Heart Lick War Paint*, 2010 114
- 2.34 Edgar Heap of Birds, selections from *Secrets in Life and Death*, 2012 115
- 2.35 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Point of Sword Who Owns History*, 2004 116
- 3.1 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Who Owns History*, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1992 118
- 3.2 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Building Minnesota*, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1990 123
- 3.3 Lawrence Weiner, *SOME LIMESTONE SOME SANDSTONE ENCLOSED FOR SOME REASON / SOME LIMESTONE SOME SANDSTONE INCLOSED FOR SOME REASON*, Halifax, England, 1993 129
- 3.4 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Mission Gifts*, San Jose, California, 1990 131
- 3.5 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Dunging the Ground*, Hartford, Connecticut, 1996 132
- 3.6 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Ocmulgee*, 2005 134
- 3.7 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Ocmulgee*, Atlanta, Georgia, 2005 136
- 3.8 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Wheel*, Denver, Colorado, 2005 140
- 3.9 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Wheel*, Denver, Colorado, 2005 140

- 3.10 Red Grooms, *Shoot-Out*, 1982 143
- 3.11 John D. Howland and Jakob Otto Schweizer, Colorado Soldiers Monument, 1909 144
- 3.12 Frederick MacMonnies, Pioneer Monument, Denver, Colorado, 1911 144
- 3.13 Edgar Heap of Birds, banner at Marco Polo International Airport, Venice, Italy, installed as part of *Most Serene Republics*, 2007 152
- 3.14 Paolo Salvati, *Buffalo Bill Cody and Native American Performers Touring Venice, Italy*, 1889 153
- 3.15 Edgar Heap of Birds, panels along Viale Garibaldi installed as part of *Most Serene Republics*, Venice, Italy, 2007 155
- 3.16 Edgar Heap of Birds, signage in the Giardini Reali installed as part of *Most Serene Republics*, Venice, Italy, 2007 155
- 3.17 Edgar Heap of Birds, tote bag created for *Most Serene Republics*, 2007 157
- 3.18 Edgar Heap of Birds, placard for *vaporettos* (water taxis) created for *Most Serene Republics*, 2007 157
- 3.19 Lothar Baumgarten, *AMERICA Señores Naturales*, Venice, Italy, 1983–84 160
- 4.1 Edgar Heap of Birds, *25 Million Red Indian Lives Lost!*, London, 2012 164
- 4.2 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Reclaim, Purchase*, New York, 1988 166
- 4.3 Liam Gillick, *Post Discussion Revision Zone #1–#4 / Big Conference Centre 22nd Floor Wall Design*, 1998 167
- 4.4 Edgar Heap of Birds, *South African Homelands*, Cleveland, Ohio, 1986 169
- 4.5 Gordon Hookey, *New Growth*, 1994 170
- 4.6 Edgar Heap of Birds poses with Cheyenne and Arapaho youth for art program, 2013 173
- 4.7 *Digital Natives*, broadcast on electronic billboard, Vancouver, British Columbia, 2011 175
- 4.8 Temporary signs installed on a Burrard Street traffic median in protest of censorship, Vancouver, British Columbia, 2011 175
- 4.9 Edgar Heap of Birds, mural in Canton, Oklahoma, 2013 177
- 4.10 Edgar Heap of Birds, mural in Canton, Oklahoma, 2013 177
- 4.11 Edgar Heap of Birds poses with his artwork at the dedication ceremony in Canton, Oklahoma, 2013 179

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In completing this book, I am indebted to many individuals and organizations who supported my work over the past five years, materially, intellectually, and psychically. In particular, I would like to thank Edgar Heap of Birds and his wife, Shanna Ketchum-Heap of Birds, and their family. Without their generosity and hospitality, this book would not have been possible. An award from the Creative Capital | Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant Program supported early work on the project, and faculty research awards from Pitzer College helped sustain the writing process. Pitzer College and the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma also contributed subvention funds toward publication. Thanks to Dean of Faculty Muriel Poston of Pitzer College and to Cheyenne and Arapaho Governor Eddie Hamilton for their support.

Ana Iwataki provided invaluable research assistance at an early stage, and this project has also been enriched by dialogue with my students at Pitzer and the Claremont Colleges. In Claremont I have also enjoyed an ongoing conversation with a diverse community of supportive colleagues and friends including Ahmed Alwishah, Brent Armendinger, Michelle Berenfeld, Tim Berg, Bruce Coats, Jud Emerick, Ciara Ennis, Paul Faulstich, Sarah Gilbert, George Gorse, Todd Honma, Kathleen Howe, Carina John-

son, Alex Juhasz, Tim Justus, Brian Keeley, Juliet Koss, Tarrah Krajnak, Jesse Lerner, Ming-Yuen Ma, Milton Machuca, Mary MacNaughton, Leda Martins, Stu McConnell, Jessica McCoy, Kathryn Miller, Lance Neckar, Harmony O'Rourke, Susan Phillips, Frances Pohl, Katie Purvis-Roberts, Brinda Sarathy, Andrea Scott, Dan Segal, Katrina Sitar, Erich Steinman, Ruti Talmor, Andre Wakefield, and Kathy Yep.

The installation of *Native Hosts* in Claremont in 2013 was funded by art+environment, a four-year interdisciplinary program at Pitzer College, supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Thanks to Larry Burik, assistant vice president of campus facilities, and his staff, Jim Stricks of the Office of College Advancement, and President Laura Skandera Trombley for their support. My Pitzer colleagues Tessa Hicks-Peterson, Gina Lamb, Scott Scoggins, and Erich Steinman worked to connect the project to local indigenous groups. Tongva educator Julia Bogany worked closely with us on the project, and Lorene Sisquoc opened her classroom at the Sherman Indian School in Riverside for a workshop with Edgar and her students. Simultaneously, at the Pomona College Museum of Art, Kathleen Howe, Steve Comba, and Terri Geis (with research assistance from Pomona undergraduate intern Ben Kersten) organized *Nuance of Sky: Edgar Heap of Birds Invites Spirit Objects to Join His Art Practice*. I am very grateful to all those who helped connect my work with Edgar to the broader community.

My career as a scholar of Native North American art has been deepened by many years of my participation in networks of other scholars and artists, including the Native American Art Studies Association, but extending beyond that organization to emerging groups focused on indigenous arts in global perspective. The readings of Heap of Birds's work and the broader ideas that animate this book have evolved in conversations and collaborations with colleagues and friends including in particular Kathleen Ash-Milby, Janet Berlo, Chris Dueker, Candace Greene, Jessica Horton, Elizabeth Hutchinson, Carolyn Kastner, Kate Morris, Ruth Phillips, Dean Rader, Jack Rushing, Karen Kramer Russell, Damian Skinner, Charlotte Townsend-Gault, Norman Vorano, Mark Watson, and Mark White.

I presented a preliminary version of some of the ideas developed in chapter 1 to the Department of American Studies and the Native American Initiatives program at the University of Notre Dame in January 2011. Thanks especially to Laurie Arnold, Annie Coleman, Brian Collier, Erika Doss, and Sophie White for their engaged conversation. An early version of

chapter 1 was published as “Ethics in a World of Strange Strangers: Edgar Heap of Birds at Home and Abroad” by the College Art Association in the fall 2012 issue of *Art Journal*. Thanks to Katy Siegel and Joe Hannan for their facilitation and support. Some material in chapter 3 was discussed in different form in my article “Contemporary Native Artists and International Biennial Culture,” published in *Visual Anthropology Review* in fall 2009. I first presented this material at the College Art Association Ninety-Seventh Annual Conference, Los Angeles, in February 2009, in a session organized by Kathleen Ash-Milby and Kate Morris. My copresenters, Jessica Horton, Jolene Rickard, and Paul Chaat-Smith, offered important feedback and perspective. Other parts of chapter 3 were presented at the 2013 meeting of the Native American Art Studies Association in Denver. Thanks to my copresenters Netha Cloeter, Alex Marr, and Kate Morris for their collegiality.

Several individuals and organizations assisted in supplying images for his book, including Kathleen Ash-Milby of the National Museum of the American Indian; Nancy Blomberg, Eric Berkemeyer, and Liz Wall at the Denver Art Museum; Andrea Felder at the New York Public Library; Cat Kron at the Paula Cooper Gallery; Catherine Belloy at the Marian Goodman Gallery; Ron Warren at the Mary Boone Gallery; Jessica Lally and Bettina Yung at the Casey Kaplan Gallery; Steve Comba at the Pomona College Museum of Art; Hannah Rhadigan at Artists Rights Society; Robert Warrior in the American Indian Studies Program at the University of Illinois; Melissa VanOtterloo at History Colorado; Coi E. Drummond-Gehrig at the Denver Public Library; Gordon Hookey of the Boomalli Artists Collective in Sydney, Australia; Nicole Wittenberg; Elizabeth Sisco; Louis Hock; David Avalos; Veronica Passalacqua; Lorna Brown; and Sharon Irish.

From our first conversation, Ken Wissoker at Duke University Press saw the importance of a book on Heap of Birds’s critical art practice, which has been insufficiently recognized in the contemporary art world. I am very appreciative of the diligent work and advocacy of Ken and his staff, especially Jade Brooks and Liz Smith. Jane Blocker offered welcome encouragement and particularly helpful suggestions about framing Heap of Birds’s work vis-à-vis the historiography of contemporary art. Her comments and those of another anonymous reader helped shape the present book, and it is much better for their insightful criticisms.

Kelly Newfield read and offered important comments at every stage of



the writing process, was there for pretty much everything, and, as always, did so much more than was required.

My royalties for the book are being donated to a Cheyenne and Arapaho scholarship fund named for Edgar's father, Charles Heap of Birds, who died in 2013 at the age of eighty-four. I am particularly grateful to Edgar and his family, who hosted Kelly and me in Oklahoma when we attended the Earth Renewal Ceremony in 2010. In writing this book, I enjoyed an ongoing conversation with Edgar over the course of several years. The final product has benefited enormously from his input and openness to my inquiries, as well as his attentiveness to checking my drafts for errors of fact and protocol. Any lapses that remain are mine alone.

## INTRODUCTION

### Making a Puncture

In 2009, Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds (b. 1954, Wichita, Kansas), a contemporary artist and enrolled citizen of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma, installed a temporary public artwork titled *Beyond the Chief* on the campus of the University of Illinois in Champaign. Heap of Birds's artwork comprised a series of twelve commercially printed steel panels, each eighteen by thirty-six inches, deployed around the campus and looking very much like official signage posted by the university's administration. *Beyond the Chief* was based on Heap of Birds's signature series of public installations, *Native Hosts* (begun 1988), which name the displaced indigenous nations that once enjoyed sovereign ownership of the lands now claimed by settler nations such as the United States and Canada. *Beyond the Chief* greeted visitors to the campus: "FIGHTING ILLINI" (in backward type) "TODAY YOUR HOST IS" followed by the name of a tribe with traditional territories in Illinois, including Peoria, Kickapoo, Myaami, Meskwaki, Kaskaskia, Potawatomi, and six others. Today there are no federally recognized Indian tribes residing in Illinois; nations listed on the panels in *Beyond the Chief* had been relocated to Indian Territory—present-day Oklahoma—and other far-flung places in the nineteenth century.



1.1 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Beyond the Chief*, 2009. Twelve commercially printed steel panels, 18 × 36 inches each. Installed at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana. Photo: Durango Mendoza. Artwork © Edgar Heap of Birds. Heap of Birds was invited to create *Beyond the Chief* by the university's American Indian Studies Program, which collaborated with other campus organizations including the African American Cultural Center, La Casa Cultural Latina, Asian American Cultural Center, Department of African American Studies, and Asian American Studies. The installation included panels with text in English, Spanish, and Chinese, with the names of twelve Native tribal nations with traditional territory in what is now the state of Illinois.

Heap of Birds has been an influential presence in the contemporary art world for over three decades. Based in Oklahoma, where he is a professor of Native American studies at the University of Oklahoma, he is sought after as an artist, lecturer, and visiting critic. Since completing his art studies at the University of Kansas, the Tyler School of Art at Temple University in Philadelphia, and the Royal College of Art in London in the late 1970s, he has traveled the world producing site-specific artworks and gallery exhibitions including numerous locations in the United States and Canada; Sydney, Australia; Derry, Northern Ireland; Cape Town, South Africa; and Hong Kong, China. He has participated in major international art exhibitions such as Documenta 8 in Kassel, Germany (1987), and the Fifty-Second Venice Biennale in Venice, Italy (2007). He has maintained a

disciplined practice in multiple genres: public art installations, both temporary and permanent, in multiple media; the abstract landscape paintings of his ongoing *Neuf* series; large-scale, text-based drawings; and prints and multiples. Taken as a whole, his body of work comprises a trenchant and thoroughgoing critique of the loss of land and autonomy endured by Native North Americans under the heel of settler colonial expansionism. His art also embodies a distinctly indigenous epistemology as regards place, nation, and identity.<sup>1</sup>

*Beyond the Chief* exemplifies Heap of Birds's practice in many ways. The sign panels installed throughout the campus were not labeled as artworks. There were no explanatory plaques or didactic text other than the credit line "Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds 2009" at the bottom of each panel. The panels were left to be encountered by passersby, like other official notices and directional signs. Heap of Birds has explained that he intends for his artworks to create a "puncture." His public projects are not explicitly identified as art because, as he explains, he is interested in making psychic inroads before a viewer has time to cordon off the experience as just an artwork. The intervention has already commenced its work as the viewer begins to wonder about the unfamiliar message she has just read. As Heap of Birds explains, "The idea of it being art or not being art . . . well it's too late to worry about that."<sup>2</sup> His works are less a political statement than a platform for discussion; they need to be completed by an engaged public. These unannounced interventions into shared spaces, he hopes, will engender a critical conversation and allow new understanding to emerge.

Heap of Birds first appeared in the contemporary art world alongside a cohort of radical artists such as Elizabeth Sisco, Louis Hock, and David Avalos, who installed advertising placards reading "Welcome to America's Finest Tourist Plantation" on public buses in San Diego during the Super Bowl in January 1988, introducing the issue of labor exploitation in the border city's hospitality industry; or the artist-collective Gran Fury, whose public posters sought to raise awareness of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s. *Welcome to America's Finest Tourist Plantation* played the part of an unlikely local chamber of commerce campaign of truth telling; Gran Fury's well-designed productions appropriated the look of public service announcements in the years before government and the nonprofit sector took action to address the growing epidemic.



1.2 Elizabeth Sisco, Louis Hock, and David Avalos, *Welcome to America's Finest Tourist Plantation*, commercially silk-screened posters mounted on one hundred San Diego Metropolitan Transit buses, January 4–31, 1988. Photo: Elizabeth Sisco. Sisco, Hock, and Avalos created a site-specific and time-specific public art ambush that exploited the relationship between two notions of public space: physical space (the streets of a city) and informational space (the mass media). As intended, during the month of San Diego's first Super Bowl, the bus posters provoked enough political and media controversy to enable the artists to gain access to informational space and stimulate dialogue and debate about the exploitation of Mexican immigrant labor by the city's tourist industry.

The stern appearance of *Heap of Birds*'s panels masks their subversive intent. His public artworks have avoided the slick look of advertising, instead adopting a bare-bones layout and text set in Helvetica or Avant Garde—typefaces favored by government agencies and other bureaucracies because they convey essential information transparently, without calling attention to their artifice, their presumptiveness. Such objects speak with an authority that appears natural, partaking of the anonymous authority of the state and institutional power that art historian Benjamin Buchloh, describing an earlier generation of conceptual artists, termed the “vernacular of administration.”<sup>3</sup> An official-looking sign hails viewers, enlists them



1.3 Gran Fury, *Kissing Doesn't Kill*, 1989. Color postcard, 8½ × 4 inches. Gran Fury Collection, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations. Gran Fury's postcard, an easily circulated multiple, depicts the 3 × 12-foot posters that the group installed on buses in New York City, Chicago, and San Francisco.

as obedient subjects. Information presented in this format seems beyond question; signs announce that we are on the campus of the University of Illinois, for example, or that parking is prohibited between the hours of eight and ten in the morning. There is, apparently, no reason to question such simple directives. But whereas institutional signage demands compliance, Heap of Birds's projects aim to provoke critical thinking. As he explains of his choice to assume the mode of official signage: "People tend to believe a sign. I ask them to also learn to question other 'official' signs, which they may see in the future. All signs, laws, and histories are editorials."<sup>4</sup>

*Beyond the Chief* also exemplifies the serial nature of Heap of Birds's practice. In Illinois, he adapted the format of his ongoing series *Native Hosts*, much as he has produced abstract paintings and text drawings in new situations and varied locations throughout his career. While the formula is spare and simple, unchanging in layout and design, each installation is attentive to its context, requiring time on the ground for research with local informants and other resources and collaborators. *Beyond the*

*Chief* differed from previous installations of *Native Hosts* in important details. In other locations Heap of Birds has used place names, generally states or provinces—"NEW YORK" or "BRITISH COLUMBIA," always in backward type—to address passersby. In Illinois, in collaboration with students and faculty, Heap of Birds chose to break from this pattern and make an artwork that engaged with the university's recent decision to retire Chief Illiniwek, a costumed performer whose half-time dances in ersatz Plains Indian regalia had made the University of Illinois's Fighting Illini sports teams (named for a powerful regional confederacy of indigenous nations in the upper Mississippi valley) the subject of some controversy.

Heap of Birds's project in Champaign, Illinois, also resonates with what art historian Miwon Kwon has termed "site-oriented" art, in that it operates outside the gallery and art's conventional institutional spaces, outdoors in public spaces. The content of the work merges with the physical site itself—the university and its charged history—revealing voices and perspectives that have been obscured by official public representations.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, this and all of Heap of Birds's public works have been exemplary of what artist Suzanne Lacy has termed "New Genre Public Art," a movement that might best be described as a social interventionist practice, in which artists use varied forms to engage diverse audiences about the meaning and function of shared spaces, and the often turbulent histories of those spaces, as well as the notion of the "public" itself.<sup>6</sup> Hailing passersby as "FIGHTING ILLINI" (backward) implicated all who viewed the piece in the university's troubled culture of sports fandom. The public placement and deliberate address encouraged viewers to think about the complex history of a shared space, as well as their own investment in and attachment to the institution and state.

Addressing the viewer in backward text is one of Heap of Birds's signature artistic strategies (along with his use of commercially printed signage), and it has several effects. Critic Jean Fisher has written that the "use of mirrored English words . . . disrupts legibility, forcing us to relinquish our mastery over language and read it 'otherwise.'" Lucy Lippard locates an indigenous precedent: "The reversed words," she writes, "also recall the historical 'Contraries'—Tsistsistas [Cheyenne] warriors who rode their horses backwards, said hello for goodbye, and washed in the mud."<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, this links an indigenous trickster practice to a warrior tradition—which has relevance for what Heap of Birds calls his "insurgent messages."<sup>9</sup>



For his part, Heap of Birds describes the use of reversed text as an embodiment of an imperative that viewers and readers learn to see and think historically—an injunction against cultural amnesia and forgetting. Indeed, it is not just the address to the viewer—a proxy for the occupying state or offending institution—that is reversed. Heap of Birds’s text also reverses expectations. It is commonplace to speak of indigenous peoples in the past tense—as an artifact of a lost culture, denizen of the historical museum—but *Beyond the Chief* is insistent in its use of the present tense: “TODAY YOUR HOST IS POTAWATOMI.” Here the *Native Hosts* live beyond the chief, outlasting the obsolete colonial stereotype, demanding recognition and deference. But as the reception of *Beyond the Chief* would demonstrate, not everyone in Champaign was willing to take up Heap of Birds’s challenge to think historically. The backward text in this case might be seen as a metaphor for irreconcilable viewpoints.

Heap of Birds’s historical imperative links his practice to other contemporary artists who share what art historian Hal Foster has termed “an archival impulse.” Foster describes a number of artists, including Thomas Hirschhorn, Tacita Dean, Sam Durant, and others, whose projects since the 1990s have explored historical experiences that have been forgotten or actively suppressed, offering “counter-memories” that might offer salutary “points of departure” in the present.<sup>10</sup> Heap of Birds’s projects, including *Beyond the Chief*, which make available a history of indigenous struggles for homeland and sovereignty and provide historical background for a dialogue about the uses of images of Native peoples, might be seen to offer such a point of departure—an occasion for critical conversation about the burden of the past and the power of representation. If the artists Foster describes as embodying an archival impulse have explored alternative histories in a moment when the notion of a shared historical inheritance seems outmoded or reactionary, Heap of Birds’s work, which makes use of indigenous knowledge and oral traditions, challenges ideas of what comprises history and who claims the right to define it—what histories matter, as it were.

The controversy over the use of Indian names and images bespeaks a deep divide between Native Americans and non-Native people—a fundamental and incommensurable disagreement about the meaning of history and the right to use and control symbols and Native American heritage. Heap of Birds has argued that “no human being should be identified as