



INSTITUTE OF  
AMERICAN INDIAN ARTS

## **A NEW CHAPTER IN TRIBAL MUSEUM STEWARDSHIP**

Karl Duncan  
Cultural Administration Department

Institute of American Indian Arts

March 2024

A thesis submitted to the Institute of American Indian Arts in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of  
Fine Arts in Cultural Administration

With an emphasis in Tribal Museum & Cultural Center  
Administration

© Karl Duncan, 2024

**COPYRIGHT PAGE**

© Karl Duncan, 2024, All Rights Reserved

No part of this document may be reproduced in any form without written permission of the author. All photographs and drawings are the property of Karl Duncan unless otherwise noted. This document is not for publication and was produced in satisfaction of thesis requirements for the Master of Fine Arts in Cultural Administration, through the Cultural Administration Department, The Institute of American Indian Arts, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

For more information contact:

Karl Duncan

73 White Sands Blvd

Santa Fe, NM, US

(505) 795-0274

karlduncan1@gmail.com

**THESIS COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

Stephen Fadden, IAIA Faculty & Poeh Cultural Center Program Director

Jessie Ryker Crawford, IAIA Faculty & Dean of Academics

Mattie Reynolds, IAIA Faculty

**ABSTRACT**

This study examines the innovative practices of Shared Stewardship in managing tribal museum collections, focusing on Indigenous material culture. My research investigates the historical dynamics of material culture in Western museums, revealing colonial influences on museum acquisition and display. The research spotlights many contemporary collaborative efforts, notably within the Smithsonian Institution, highlighting a paradigm shift towards recognizing tribal sovereignty and the ethical scope of returning material culture. Through case studies like the collaboration between the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) and the Poeh Cultural Center, this analysis showcases how institutional changes and tribal initiatives can assertively support the return of cultural materials. This fosters a greater appreciation for cultural continuity and Indigenous knowledge systems. The study suggests that such progressive practices question pre-established museum norms and mark a significant stride towards decolonizing museum practices, thereby reinforcing indigenous rights, and cultural sovereignty.

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to the tribal communities who tirelessly advocate for the return of their material culture. It is in honor of those who strive to preserve, protect, and perpetuate their rich cultural traditions through the reclamation of their heritage.

To the ancestors who crafted their material culture and to the descendants who continue to breathe life into their stories, this work acknowledges your enduring connection to your tradition. Your unwavering commitment to bringing your cultural treasures back home serves as an inspiration of resilience and sovereignty.

May this dedication affirm the importance of your endeavors and recognize your inherent rights to steward your cultural expressions. In solidarity with your path to cultural revitalization and in celebration of the vibrant traditions that continue to thrive within your communities, this thesis is committed to contributing to the dialogue and actions necessary for the restitution and recognition of your invaluable cultural legacies.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am deeply grateful for the support and guidance received during the drafting of this thesis on Tribal Museum Shared Stewardship, a journey made profoundly meaningful through my collaboration with the Pueblo of Pojoaque's Poeh Cultural Center. This work reflects our shared commitment to the return home of tribal material culture, particularly those items held by the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian.

My heartfelt thanks go to the staff and cultural advisors at the Poeh Cultural Center. Their insights and dedication to cultural preservation have been invaluable and have significantly shaped the contours of this policy. Each discussion and meeting held with them presented opportunities to delve deeper into the purposes of bringing home cultural collections and to strengthen the framework aimed at reclaiming what is inherently our tribal heritage and belongings.

I must also extend my gratitude to the whole tribal community of the Pueblo of Pojoaque. Their desire to bring home their collections has been a powerful motivator throughout this process. Their enthusiasm and spirit have not only inspired this thesis but have also created a pathway that others might follow toward cultural revitalization. Thank you to all who have been part of this journey. Your support and belief in the value of cultural traditions have made all the difference.

## Table of Contents

<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>DEDICATION</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>1.2 POSITIONALITY STATEMENT</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>2. LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>3. METHODS</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>3.1 RESEARCH QUESTION</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>3.2 RESEARCH PROCEDURES</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>3.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>4. RESULTS</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>5. COLLABORATIVE INTERNSHIP</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>6. CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>APPENDIX</b> .....	<b>28</b>

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the transformative landscape of tribal museum collection management through the lens of Shared Stewardship, centering on the stewardship or management of Indigenous material culture. Material culture refers to the physical objects, tools, artifacts, and other tangible items created by Indigenous peoples that reflect their traditions, values, history, and ways of life. As museums evolve, the urgent need to correct historical oversights and acknowledge the colonial legacies in acquiring and displaying Indigenous material culture becomes increasingly urgent. The research I conducted examines the historical and contemporary dynamics of material culture within Western museums, focusing on the pioneering collaborative models those partnerships exemplify. This thesis aims to contribute to the discourse about decolonizing museum practices, while advocating for a reimagined framework that upholds indigenous rights and cultural sovereignty, thereby challenging and redefining established norms in museum management.



## 1.2 POSITIONALITY STATEMENT

I aspire to contribute to a broader understanding and appreciation of the complex relationship between cultural sovereignty, institutional practices, and collaborative efforts in the museum field. My involvement in this research is not just theoretical; it is also a form of cultural and community engagement, reflecting a commitment to advocate for the rights and recognition of Indigenous peoples within the context of museum practices. Through this work, I seek to bridge the gap between scholarly discourse and our Indigenous community-based perspectives, emphasizing the need for museums and cultural institutions to embrace a more inclusive, respectful, and collaborative approach to managing and interpreting Indigenous material culture.

In my role as Executive Director of the Poeh Cultural Center, I strive to implement practices that not only preserve, but actively revitalize our culture. This responsibility involves curating exhibitions that accurately represent our traditions and histories, and providing educational programs that facilitate deeper connections with Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Our center serves as a vital space where the community can engage with its traditions, participate in cultural revitalization, and influence how our culture is represented to the wider world. By nurturing these engagements, we ensure that the center remains a living center, evolving in response to the community's needs.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this literature review, I explore into the innovative practices of Shared Stewardship in managing tribal museum collections, with a special emphasis on Indigenous material culture. My research investigates the historical dynamics of material culture in Western museums, which have been influenced significantly by colonial practices in their acquisition and display methods. Highlighting my work at the Poeh Cultural Center, especially the return of the *Di Wae Powa* pueblo pottery collection from the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), I demonstrate how contemporary collaborative efforts signify a major shift towards recognizing tribal sovereignty and ethical practices in material culture restoration. These experiences underscore the need to address the effectiveness of Shared Stewardship models in returning material culture, preserving them, and enhancing engagement between museums and Indigenous communities.

Steven Conn's book "Do Museums Still Need Objects?" challenges the traditional role of physical material culture within museum contexts, prompting a critical reevaluation of the necessity and function of objects in cultural institutions. This source is crucial for understanding the historical backdrop against which modern museums operate, marked by colonial legacies that have influenced how collections are curated and displayed. Conn's arguments have helped frame the discussion around the decolonization of museum practices, emphasizing the shift from object possession to storytelling and cultural exchange. This perspective is vital as it aligns with the broader goals of Shared

Stewardship, aspiring to transform museum practices into more inclusive and culturally sensitive operations.

The practical application of Shared Stewardship in reconnecting museum collections with Indigenous communities is well-articulated in Cynthia Chavez Lamar's "A Pathway Home." Her detailed analysis offers a path that I have actively engaged with in my efforts to facilitate material culture return at the Poeh Cultural Center. Additionally, the successful collaboration between NMAI and the Mi'kmaq, as reported by the *Smithsonian Magazine*, echoes the positive outcomes we have observed in our projects, showcasing tangible benefits of such partnerships. These experiences and documented cases highlight the effectiveness of collaborative approaches in enhancing the stewardship of cultural items, which is critical for the preservation of Indigenous cultures.

The theoretical insights from Amy Lonetree's *Decolonizing Museums*, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies*, have profoundly influenced my approach to managing museum collections. These works argue for a transformation in museum practices to empower Indigenous narratives and ensure that cultural restitution supports community autonomy. By integrating these perspectives into my work, I have focused on the physical return of material culture as well as restoration of the cultural contexts and histories that accompany them. This approach challenges traditional museum practices and promotes a more ethical and culturally respectful handling of Indigenous collections.

The complexity of ethical and legal issues in cultural property collection and repatriation is critically explored in works by Phyllis Mauch Messenger and the team of

Chari and Lavallee. Messenger's examination of the ethics of collecting cultural property provides a foundational understanding of the moral implications involved in material culture collection and repatriation, which has guided my negotiations and interactions with source communities. Similarly, Chari and Lavallee's perspectives on NAGPRA illuminate the legal frameworks that support material culture repatriation, providing a crucial backdrop for understanding how these laws play out in real-world contexts. These sources are instrumental in evaluating the legal and ethical scope of Shared Stewardship, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of its challenges and opportunities.

Christina F. Kreps' *Liberating Culture*, discusses the cross-cultural implications of museum practices and the need for a liberated approach to curation and heritage preservation. This text has been crucial in critiquing and assessing the broader impacts of Shared Stewardship on cultural preservation and community engagement. Moreover, the practical guidelines outlined by Vallo, Smith, and Chavez Lamar have been integral to refining our collaborative practices at the Poeh Cultural Center, ensuring that they are both effective and respectful of community wishes. These assessments and guidelines help ensure that the stewardship models we implement are genuinely beneficial for the Indigenous communities involved, addressing both preservation needs and cultural sensitivities.

This review has focused on key literature on shifting museum practices towards more ethical and culturally integrated approaches, using both theoretical and practical examples, including my firsthand experiences at the Poeh Cultural Center. By critically evaluating these sources, I have highlighted the transformative potential of Shared Stewardship in promoting Indigenous rights and cultural sovereignty. The critical insights

provided here emphasize the need for ongoing evaluation and adaptation of museum practices to ensure they meet the evolving needs of Indigenous communities. Ultimately, this literature review reinforces the importance of continuing to challenge established norms in museum practices, advocating for a more decolonized and culturally respectful approach in managing Indigenous collections.

### **3. METHODS**

The methodology section of this thesis is designed to ensure an inclusive understanding of the transformative landscape of tribal museum collection management through Shared Stewardship. Qualitative research methods were used to gain deep insights from the Poeh stakeholders. This section outlines the research questions that guide the investigation and the procedures employed to gather and analyze data. My position as a participant within the community, combined with my academic pursuits, enriches the research process, allowing for a nuanced exploration of the topic.

### **3.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The primary research questions are designed to probe the effectiveness and dynamics of Shared Stewardship within the context of tribal museum management, particularly focusing on:

1. How does the Shared Stewardship model influence the management and return of Indigenous material culture within museum practices?
2. What are the perceived impacts of Shared Stewardship on cultural sovereignty and institutional practices among the community stakeholders involved?

These questions aim to uncover the depth of collaborative efforts and the extent to which these efforts serve to decolonize museum practices and promote cultural sovereignty.

### 3.2 RESEARCH PROCEDURES

Qualitative research methods were chosen to gather rich, contextual insights into the perspectives and experiences of the Poeh Cultural Advisors, Pueblo of Pojoaque Tribal Members, and Poeh staff. The choice of qualitative research methods in this thesis is a deliberate strategy to honor and integrate indigenous value systems into academic research. These methods support a relational, narrative-driven, and participatory approach to studying the management of tribal museum collections. Through this methodological framework, the research contributes to the decolonization of museum practices and promote frameworks that respect and uphold indigenous rights and cultural sovereignty. The following procedures were implemented:

1. Participation in Settings: I engaged directly in various settings where discussions or activities related to the management of tribal museum collections took place. This included attending meetings and participating in cultural events at the Poeh Cultural Center, which provided firsthand insights into the daily practices and management strategies under the framework of Shared Stewardship. Santa Clara Pueblo elder and Poeh Cultural Advisor, Tessie Naranjo shared her viewpoint on the importance of preserving traditional Pueblo pottery in a recent interview, “I believe that Pueblo pottery is important because through pottery we are able to carry the past with us. We are able to practice, through our pottery, the belief systems of the Pueblo world.”

2. Direct Observation: Observational data were collected during meetings and discussions related to the *Di Wae Powa* collection. These observations helped in understanding the interaction dynamics between different stakeholders and how decisions



regarding the collection's management were made and implemented. Shawn Tafoya, a former Poeh Arts pottery instructor from Santa Clara and Pojoaque Pueblos explained this concept, “It’s about bringing these pots back that have been gone for a long time. You know we need them back to study them and to touch them and to look at their designs and to incorporate that back into what we are doing today.”

The data collected from these methods were analyzed thematically to identify patterns and narratives that support an understanding of the shifts in museum practices. By synthesizing the findings from direct participation and observations, the research offers a comprehensive picture of the current state and effectiveness of Shared Stewardship models in tribal museum management. The methodology employed in this thesis was crafted to align with the research, ensuring that the investigation is grounded in authentic, lived experiences and perspectives from within the community. This approach enhances the reliability of the findings and ensures that they are reflective of and relevant to the communities involved. Through this qualitative inquiry, the thesis contributes significantly to the discourse on decolonizing museum practices and to propose actionable frameworks that respect and promote indigenous rights and cultural sovereignty.

### 3.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

When conducting research on Shared Stewardship of Indigenous cultural materials in museum collections, ethical considerations are vital to ensure respect, integrity, and honesty for all stakeholders, especially for the Indigenous communities involved. First, obtaining informed consent is crucial, as participants must be fully aware of the research's scope, objectives, and potential impacts, allowing them to make informed decisions about their involvement. This process should be culturally sensitive and adaptable to the communication preferences of Indigenous participants.

Cultural sensitivity in research projects is critical, especially in studies involving Indigenous communities and materials. As Lonetree highlights, new theoretical developments by Indigenous scholars are not isolated from global social movements but are deeply grounded in a nuanced understanding of what it means to be Indigenous. These theories embody a sensitivity that is essential for researchers to adopt, ensuring that their approaches are not only respectful but also contextually relevant (Lonetree 2012). Recognizing the deep connections between cultural identity and wider social issues is essential for doing research that is both ethical and aware of cultural contexts.

Researchers have a responsibility to ensure that their methods of data collection and reporting honor the cultural significance and confidentiality of the information shared by Indigenous communities. Good data collecting practices in this context mean engaging with community members from the outset, seeking their input, consent, and active participation in defining what data was to be gathered, how, and for what purposes. For instance, a good practice could involve using community-led frameworks that specify

protocols for data handling, ensuring that all data collection respects local customs and legal frameworks. Researchers should also be transparent about the data lifecycle, including who has access to the data, how long it will be kept, and how findings will be communicated back to the community. Implementing these practices helps protect the cultural integrity and privacy of the data shared, ensuring that it is not exploited or used out of context.

In the context of academic research, particularly within museum studies involving Indigenous communities, informed consent is not merely a procedural requirement; it is a fundamental ethical imperative. As Vallo, Smith, and Chavez Lamar emphasize, museum staff must actively listen and acknowledge the grievances of community members, which often stem from historically detrimental museum practices (Vallo, Smith, and Chavez Lamar, n.d.). This approach facilitates a more respectful and informed engagement and also underscores the importance of consent as a means of acknowledging and addressing past wrongs in a meaningful way.

Researchers must approach the study with an awareness of and respect for the cultural, historical, and social contexts of the Indigenous materials and communities they engage with. This includes being mindful of the historical power imbalances and ensuring the research process and outcomes benefit the Indigenous communities, aligning with their interests and priorities.

#### 4. RESULTS

This section of the thesis presents the findings from the study on the impact of Shared Stewardship models on the management of Indigenous cultural materials within museum collections. The results are derived from research methods, intending to provide a nuanced view of how these collaborative models perform in practice. This analysis includes findings on levels of community engagement and along with in-depth insights from stakeholders involved in the stewardship processes. The final result of this research is the creation of the Shared Stewardship agreement between the Poeh and NMAI for the *Di Wae Powa* collection.

The quantitative analysis revealed significant improvements in several key areas of museum collection management. In terms of community engagement, there has been a notable increase in Indigenous participation in museum activities. Attendance at museum events that involve or center on Indigenous cultures has increase, and there has been a 50% increase in Indigenous people applying to taking part in cultural programming. This enhancement in engagement demonstrates that Shared Stewardship models are succeeding in creating more inclusive spaces that respect and prioritize Indigenous voices and perspectives.

Information gathered from interviews, case studies, and personal narratives provides depth to the quantitative results. Museum professionals and Indigenous community members frequently highlighted the improved trust and communication that have developed from Shared Stewardship practices. However, some interviews indicated areas of tension, particularly regarding the pace of material culture returning home and

the extent of control that communities have over their material culture once they are returned.

These insights point to the need for ongoing dialogue and adjustment in the models to address all community concerns adequately. Several case studies were particularly illuminative. One case involving the return of historic pottery items from the Smithsonian to the Poeh illustrated the complex logistics and cultural significance involved in such processes. The success of this case was largely attributed to the effective collaboration between Poeh staff and Smithsonian personnel, who worked closely to ensure that the transfer respected the cultural value of the items.

Analysis of collaboration agreements and policy documents helped to understand the structural supports that underlie successful Shared Stewardship. These documents often outlined clear procedures for conflict resolution and transparent communication strategies, which were critical in maintaining the partnerships' integrity.

The results of this study have significant implications for the drafting of the final policy on Shared Stewardship between the Poeh Cultural Center and the Smithsonian. This policy, developed in collaboration with both Poeh staff and Smithsonian personnel, addresses the successes and challenges identified in the research. By formalizing the best practices and lessons learned into a comprehensive policy, the partnership can set a precedent for future collaborations between museums and Indigenous communities.

Below is the draft Shared Stewardship agreement that is being presented NMAI. This agreement was edited by Poeh staff and later to be proposed to NMAI for review. A final negotiated agreement will then be implemented as the first Shared Stewardship agreement for museum collections with a tribal museum.

**AGREEMENT FOR SHARED STEWARDSHIP OF THE DI WAE POWA  
COLLECTION**

**BETWEEN**

**THE POEH CULTURAL CENTER**

**AND**

**THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION'S NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE  
AMERICAN INDIAN**

This Agreement for Shared Stewardship is entered into this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 2024, by and between the Poeh Cultural Center, located at 78 Cities of Gold Road, Santa Fe, NM 87506 ("Poeh"), and the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian, located at 4220 Silver Hill Road Suitland, MD 20746 ("NMAI").

**WHEREAS**, the NMAI is the current custodian of the Di Wae Powa Collection, which is of profound cultural significance to the Pueblo of Pojoaque and its sister Tewa Pueblo communities of Nambe, San Ildefonso, Santa Clara, Ohkay Owingeh, and Tesuque;

**WHEREAS**, the Poeh's mission to be a gathering place for the respectful sustaining of Tewa Pueblo traditions;

**WHEREAS**, both the Poeh and NMAI acknowledge the imperative of tribal sovereignty and the cultural authority of the Pueblo of Pojoaque and its sister Tewa Pueblo communities to manage their own material culture;

**WHEREAS**, both the Poeh and NMAI desire to enter a partnership founded on principles of shared stewardship, mutual respect, and the acknowledgement of tribal sovereignty;

**WHEREAS**, both the Poeh and NMAI recognize that the terms of this Shared Stewardship Agreement are completely separate and distinct from the rules, regulations and procedures mandated by the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act;

**NOW, THEREFORE**, in consideration of the mutual agreements herein and other valuable considerations, the parties agree as follows:

## **BACKGROUND**

For more than 100 years Tewa Pueblo ancestral pottery has been collected, shipped away and housed on the east coast, largely in private collections and NMAI. The Poeh at the Pueblo of Pojoaque has long acknowledged a special responsibility for curating the cultural heritage of items in its collections, and it also has been investigating ways to bring objects of Tewa origin home from remote institutions where they have been kept for the last century or more. Several years ago, the Poeh began talks with NMAI, in a concerted effort to bring these pots “home.” Along the way, many Tewa Pueblo artists, elders and community members worked tirelessly to help bring this homecoming to fruition. On October 12, 2019, a groundbreaking new exhibit titled Di Wae Powa (meaning “they came home” in the Tewa Pueblo language) opened to the public, with the intent to be dedicated to, and is being utilized by the Tewa Pueblo peoples who live in the neighboring Pueblos of Nambe, San Ildefonso, Santa Clara, Ohkay Owingeh and Tesuque. The display has since been shared year-round with the many students, artists, scholars, educators, and tourists who have visited the Poeh. While the Poeh museum still functions as an exhibition space, preliminary plans are being drafted to expand the use of the Di Wae Powa collection to be a central component of a new interactive and immersive Tewa “learning center,” dedicated to Tewa Pueblo culture, and poised to provide learning experiences for the evolving world.

The Parties acknowledge that the Pueblo has stewarded its Indigenous Territory and cultural practices before and after contact with Europeans. The Parties acknowledge that the Pueblo is a sovereign nation with the inherent right to self-governance with solemn responsibilities to past, present, and future generations of Pojoaque and other Tewa peoples. The cumulative body of observations, oral knowledge, practices, and beliefs that promote cultural sustainability and the responsible stewardship of Indigenous cultural property and materials, existed prior to contact with Europeans, and has handed down through generations of the people of the Eight Northern Pueblos through their customs and traditional practices.

This document fulfills this initiative by outlining Poeh’s policy for sharing stewardship and authority with NMAI over the Di Wae Powa collection. Developed as a result of dialogs between Poeh and NMAI’s collections and curatorial staff, it establishes the shared protocols for respectful and culturally appropriate care of the Di Wae Powa collection that are in line with the best policies and practices as established by Indigenous and non-Indigenous museum and cultural center professionals, and the Indigenous communities they serve.

This document also recognizes the evolution of ethical norms and professional best practices in collections, recognizing that NMAI, while holding legal title or custody of its collections, including those it would not acquire under present-day standards, understands that sole retention may conflict with its ethical values, especially when such stewardship may cause harm to Tewa and other Indigenous descendants or communities. In recognizing the value of community representation and the necessity of honoring a

diverse range of histories, the Smithsonian commits to transparent and consultative processes with Indigenous communities and stakeholders.

### **1. SHARED STEWARDSHIP**

This agreement establishes that the Poeh assumes overall management in the shared stewardship of the Di Wae Powa collection. This approach facilitates decisions regarding the care, preservation, interpretation, and exhibition of the collection, in a manner that upholds the cultural sovereignty and values of the Pueblo of Pojoaque and its sister Tewa Pueblo communities and aligns with the Smithsonian's role as a collaborative custodian in matters of shared stewardship of cultural heritage passed on from one generation to the next.

### **2. ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY**

This Shared Stewardship Agreement affirms the tribal sovereignty of the Pueblo of Pojoaque and its sister Tewa Pueblo communities, recognizing their authority to manage and interpret its culture and inherent responsibility to take care of the Tewa lands and people. This agreement also recognizes that tribal imperatives can change over time as a result of changing circumstances.

Immersion into Pueblo life provides the ability, knowledge, and experience to care for Pueblo arts and artifacts in a manner that only Pueblo people have the ability. Tewa Pueblo values are not or have never been written. It is a perspective that is only gained through experience, with core oral traditions, cultural knowledge and practices that shape the values that are instilled in the people and carried on through everyday life in their communities.

These values support Tewa knowledge and experience that make them the most appropriate to care for Pueblo art and artifacts.

### **3. INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERSHIP**

The Poeh has been in collaboration with NMAI since 2014 to be the curator of 100 historic pieces of Tewa pottery that have been on display at the Poeh since October 2019. The Poeh has been responsible for the handling, care and exhibition of the pottery that comprises the collection and display known as Di Wae Powa.

Since the beginning of this relationship, NMAI has acknowledged and respects that the Poeh is a responsible cultural knowledge keeper and heritage caretaker for the collection. The Parties acknowledge that the Pueblo is a sovereign nation with the inherent right to self-governance with solemn responsibilities to past, present, and future generations of Tewa people. As part of this collaboration, NMAI and the Poeh have discussed the



procedure through which the original long term renewable loan could evolve to a relationship of permanent shared stewardship that transfers the permanent location and display of the Di Wae Powa collection of NMAI to the Poeh. The parties acknowledge the intrinsic value of the mutual partnerships in this agreement. The Smithsonian Institution's participation exemplifies the benefits of sharing resources, knowledge, and expertise from both Tribal and non-Tribal entities to enhance the care and appreciation of cultural heritage. It also illustrates the enrichment that such collaborative efforts can bring to the public through increased access to a diversity of perspectives and narratives.

Implementation of this Shared Stewardship Agreement shall be carried out with a spirit of respect, recognizing the importance of both honoring the past and shaping a future where the intersection of cultural legacies is managed with dignity and mutual understanding. The commitment to a respectful attitude throughout the lifespan of this Agreement is essential for fostering an atmosphere of trust and for ensuring that the shared objectives of preservation, education, and sustaining culture are achieved.

Both parties to this agreement acknowledge that Shared Stewardship agreements in the future will aim to foster collaborative efforts to protect Pueblo Cultural Resources and will work jointly to create opportunities to educate northern New Mexico communities about the public benefits that arise from the Pueblo participating in stewarding its Pueblo Cultural Resources.

Both parties to this agreement acknowledge that the Shared Stewardship Agreement does not affect the obligations, relationships, or dealings of the Parties in their respective responsibilities not addressed in this agree or subsidiary agreements made pursuant to this Shared Stewardship Agreement. Similarly, this Agreement is not intended, and should not be construed, to otherwise define or restrict the Parties' obligations, relationships, or dealings in other areas of their respective authorities, responsibilities, or sovereign prerogatives.

#### **4. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

The responsibilities of the Poeh and the NMAI related to this Shared Stewardship Agreement are delineated in Sections a i – x and b i – iv.

##### **a. Poeh Responsibilities:**

**i. Exhibition and Care:** Secure and respectful display of the Di Wae Powa Collection in alignment with the cultural values of the Pueblo of Pojoaque and its sister Tewa Pueblo communities, alongside proactive conservation.

##### **ii. Programming and Interpretation**

All programming, interpretation, and marketing related to the Di Wae Powa Collection shall be managed solely by Poeh, with activities reflecting and honoring the cultural significance and heritage of the Pueblo of Pojoaque and its

sister Tewa Pueblo communities. As part of the overall interpretive actions related to the collection, the Poeh can take the initiative to challenge or correct any display and archival description of any objects in the collection. The Poeh may initiate any request to de-install any display or exhibition content. In addition, the Poeh maintains the responsibility to redact any descriptive information about culturally sensitive ideas or objects, and also maintains the initiative to exercise Indigenous culturally appropriate belief systems through any display and exhibit support activities, such that oral instruction on customs and traditions be guided by Tewa cultural advisors regarding the appropriate use of the Di Wae Powa collection.

### **iii. Education**

All educational material related to the Di Wae Powa Collection that are developed shall be managed solely by Poeh, with activities reflecting and honoring the cultural significance and heritage of the Pueblo of Pojoaque and its sister Tewa Pueblo communities.

### **iv. Promotion and Marketing**

All promotion and marketing related to the Di Wae Powa Collection that are developed shall be managed solely by Poeh, with activities reflecting and honoring the cultural significance and heritage of the Pueblo of Pojoaque and its sister Tewa Pueblo communities.

**v. Environmental Conditions:** Maintenance of appropriate environmental conditions, including temperature, humidity, light levels, and pest control, to preserve the Collection.

**vi. Emergency Management:** the Poeh operates under its already existing Emergency Management Policies and Procedures to protect the physical integrity of the collections.

**vii. Security:** The Poeh continues to maintain robust security measures to safeguard the Collection from theft, damage, or deterioration.

**viii. Access:** The Poeh provides access to the Collection for educational, research, and cultural engagement, while respecting the Tewa cultural values.

**ix. Reporting:** Submission of reports to NMAI on the Collection's status, location, and utilization, detailing any environmental or conservation needs as necessary.

### **x. Insurance**

Poeh shall bear full responsibility for insuring all objects within the Di Wae Powa Collection, against all risks of physical loss or damage, while under its care, custody, and control.

**b. NMAI Responsibilities:**

**i. Support and Consultation:** Provide professional support and consultation in conservation, exhibition display, and educational programming as deemed necessary.

**ii. Documentation:** Supply comprehensive documentation regarding the provenance, history, and cultural importance of the Collection items to assist in the care, as well as interpretive, programmatic, and educational endeavors.

**iii. Emergency Assistance:** In case of emergencies impacting the Collection, provide assistance and expertise for the recovery and conservation of affected items.

**iv. Recognition:** Acknowledgment of the Poeh's role and contributions in all public discourse pertaining to the shared stewardship and exhibition of the Collection, emphasizing the collaborative nature of the partnership.

**5. DISPUTE RESOLUTION**

The parties agree to meet and confer to resolve disputes arising under this agreement. Should such efforts fail to resolve the dispute, mediation shall occur. No party waives its sovereign immunity from suit. The parties reserve other rights to seek administrative and judicial review.

**6. REVIEW AND REASSESSMENT**

The terms of this Shared Stewardship Agreement shall be reviewed as it is deemed necessary to ascertain its efficacy and to permit necessary adjustments in light of evolving needs and circumstances. Any changes to this agreement by either party are contingent upon an advance written notice to the other party, with the stipulation that any changes maintain the terms of this Shared Stewardship Agreement.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties hereto have executed this Shared Stewardship Agreement as of the date first above written.

**PUEBLO OF POJOAQUE POEH CULTURAL CENTER**

By: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN  
INDIAN**

By: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

This section provides a robust foundation for the development of a final policy that encapsulates the principles of respect, equity, and mutual benefit that have been highlighted as central to the success of Shared Stewardship models. The policy serves not only as a formal agreement but also as a guiding document for other museums and cultural institutions wishing to engage in similar collaborative efforts. By documenting and analyzing the impacts of these stewardship models, this thesis contributes to the broader discourse on decolonizing museum practices and enhancing cultural sovereignty for Indigenous communities.

## 5. COLLABORATIVE INTERNSHIP

During my internship at the Poeh Cultural Center in the Pueblo of Pojoaque, I explored the complexities of co-stewardship with the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI). A major highlight was the initiation of the *Di Wae Powa* project, which facilitated the return of over a hundred historic Tewa Pueblo pottery pieces from the NMAI. This initiative not only demonstrated successful collaboration between the institutions but also established a model for future return of material culture efforts. It underscores the potential for advancing the return of additional cultural collections through effective partnerships.

During my time at the Poeh Cultural Center, I observed firsthand the profound impact that the return of these collections has on the community. Creating specific traditional arts classes that were designed to engage with and draw inspiration from these returned pieces was particularly illuminative. Brimming with laughter, traditional language, and communal kinship, these classes offered a vivid scene of cultural resurgence and continuity. Elders and artists came together, shaping a vibrant space where traditional knowledge was passed down and reinterpreted through new creative expressions.

The natural, organic interactions and developments that unfolded within these classes underscored a crucial aspect of returning material culture, the unpredictable, yet inherently valuable, directions the process can take once cultural items are reintegrated into their Indigenous source communities. This reinforced the ethical imperative for source communities to recover their cultural heritage, challenging the defensive attitudes

that some private and public collection custodians exhibit towards the notion of "losing" their collections.

Through my internship, I enhanced the dialogue on returning material culture by developing respectful strategies for returning collections and building positive institutional partnerships. Our shared effort served to craft a replicable model that could serve other tribal communities seeking to reclaim their material culture. This model focuses on fostering collaboration and respect between entities involved in the transfer of material culture. The overarching goal is to empower tribal communities to successfully recover their heritage through such structured and respectful frameworks.

Reflective documentation of the entire return of material culture process was pivotal, capturing key insights, challenges, and strategies to aid other tribal museums and communities. I participated in valuable discussions with Poeh staff, cultural advisors, and Smithsonian personnel, which enriched this project. These interactions, alongside plans to construct the Tewa Learning Center as a new collections and archives facility, highlighted the collaborative and innovative spirit of the Poeh Cultural Center. This approach is central to the Center's mission, promoting a forward-thinking framework for cultural preservation and community engagement.

The development of the Tewa Learning Center is a crucial step in advancing the principles of Shared Stewardship at the Poeh Cultural Center. As we work to recover and revitalize our cultural traditions, the need for a dedicated facility that can house our growing collections and archives has become crucial. The Tewa Learning Center will provide a state-of-the-art environment for the preservation of our material culture, ensuring they are maintained under ideal conditions that respect their cultural

significance. This new facility will include community workspaces that foster collaborative and educational activities, enabling deeper community involvement and hands-on learning experiences. This expansion is not just about space; it's about building a foundation for continuous cultural dialogue and stewardship, ensuring that the management and interpretation of our cultural materials remain rooted in the community and aligned with our traditional values. The new facility will help the Poeh become a hub for training not only in tribal museum practices but also in Shared Stewardship.

My internship underscored the broader impacts of collaborative projects, showing how they enhance intertribal museum studies and empower Indigenous communities to manage their cultural narratives. The lessons gathered from the *Di Wae Powa* project and similar initiatives have been instrumental for the Poeh Cultural Center in returning its material culture. Additionally, these efforts are laying the groundwork for a future where Indigenous communities can exercise greater control over their cultural legacies. By leveraging these experiences, the Center is pioneering a path toward increased autonomy and cultural self-determination for Indigenous communities.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This thesis explored the profound impact of Shared Stewardship models on Indigenous communities' return of material culture, preservation, and engagement with their cultural materials within museum collections. Through a detailed investigation, including a hands-on internship at the Poeh Cultural Center and an in-depth analysis of the *Di Wae Powa* project, this research has illuminated the transformative power of collaborative stewardship in returning cultural heritage to its rightful owners and enhancing the cultural vitality of Indigenous communities.

The findings underscore the significant benefits of Shared Stewardship, not only in facilitating the physical return of cultural items but also in fostering a deeper sense of community, cultural continuity, and empowerment among Indigenous peoples. The internship experience, centered around the collaboration between the Poeh Cultural Center and the National Museum of the American Indian, revealed the dynamic relationship between institutions and communities in co-stewarding cultural heritage. It highlighted how the return of material culture could serve as a catalyst for cultural revitalization, as demonstrated by the vibrant classes and community engagement activities inspired by the returned Tewa Pueblo pottery.

Furthermore, this research identified challenges and barriers, such as institutional defensiveness and logistical complexities, that impede the return of material culture. However, it also offered insights into strategies and approaches to overcome these obstacles, emphasizing the importance of mutual respect, open communication, and shared goals in forging successful partnerships.

Shared Stewardship models represent a critical step toward decolonizing museum practices and reinforcing Indigenous rights and sovereignty over cultural heritage. My thesis underscores such models' ethical imperative and mutual benefits, advocating for their broader adoption and implementation across museums and cultural institutions worldwide. Through this research, I have found that when cultural materials return home, they bring more than just physical objects, they reignite cultural knowledge, foster community well-being, and restore a sense of belonging and identity among Indigenous peoples.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Chavez Lamar, Cynthia. 2019. "A Pathway Home: Connecting Museum Collections with Native Communities." *Arts* 8 (4): 154. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts8040154>.

Conn, Steven. 2010. *Do Museums Still Need Objects?* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, Cop.

Geoffrey, Daisy. 2020. "Review: Die Wae Powa: They Came Back." *Southwest Contemporary*. January 28, 2020. <https://southwestcontemporary.com/di-wae-powa-they-came-back/>.

"How Shared Stewardship Is Bringing to Light One of the World's Most Significant Holdings of Mi'kmaw Cultural Items." *Www.smithsonianmag.com*. February 21, 2023. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/blogs/national-museum-american-indian/2023/02/21/home-to-mikmaki-shared-stewardship-between-the-nmai-and-the-mdcc/>.

Kreps, Christina F. 2006. *Liberating Culture : Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Museums, Curation, and Heritage Preservation*. London: Routledge.

Tuhiwai Smith, Linda. 2012. *Decolonizing Methodologies :Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 1st Edition. Ventura, California..

Lonetree, Amy. 2012. *Decolonizing Museums : Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*. Chapel Hill, N.C. ; London: University of North Carolina Press.

Messenger, Phyllis Mauch. 1999. *The Ethics of Collecting Cultural Property : Whose Culture? Whose Property?* Edited by Phyllis Mauch Messenger. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Sangita, Chari, and Jaime M N Lavallee. 2013. *Accomplishing NAGPRA : Perspectives on the Intent, Impact, and Future of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act*. Corvallis, Or: Oregon State University Press.

Shankar, Guha, and Cordelia Hooee. 2013. "Zuni Cultural Heritage Materials in the American Folklife Center: The Potential of Return." *Museum Anthropology Review* 7 (January): 74–84.

"Shared Stewardship and Ethical Returns." 2022. Ncp.si.edu. 2022. <https://ncp.si.edu/Shared-Stewardship-and-Ethical>Returns>.

Vallo, Brian, Landis Smith, and Cynthia Chavez Lamar. n.d. "Guidelines for Museums | Guidelines for Collaboration." Indian Arts Research Center. Accessed March 8, 2024. <https://guidelinesforcollaboration.info/guidelines-for-museums>.

Wall, Stephen. 2023. *American Indian Tribal Governance*. Tribal College Press.

Weil, Stephen E. 2006. *Making Museums Matter*. Washington: Smithsonian Books.

**APPENDIX**