An Analysis of Murals Painted by Students at Intermountain Indian School in Brigham City, Utah

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AN ANALYSIS OF MURALS PAINTED BY STUDENTS AT INTERMOUNTAIN
INDIAN SCHOOL IN BRIGHAM CITY, UTAH

by

Carlos Junior Guadarrama

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
of
MASTER OF SCIENCE
in
American Studies

Approved:

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UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah
2018
ABSTRACT

An Analysis of Murals Painted by Students at Intermountain Indian School in Brigham City, Utah

by

Carlos Junior Guadarrama, Master of Science
Utah State University, 2018

Major Professor: Dr. Steve Shively
Department: English

My plan B thesis argues that Intermountain School in Brigham City, Utah was a progressive development, especially when placed within the context of other Native American boarding schools. I argue my point by conducting a close examination and analysis of several murals painted by prominent indigenous artist Allan Houser and students at the school as well as several other forms of art from Intermountain. In the first chapter of my thesis, I present evidence that demonstrates how damaging Native Boarding schools were for generations of students. I then present evidence which showcases how certain changes paved the way for Intermountain to stand as a more progressive development. In the second chapter, I present evidence that features how the art curriculum at Intermountain led to murals that represent a knowledge of culture and stand as a direct contrast to the ideologies of 19th century boarding schools. I break up the analysis into two segments: murals and significance to Intermountain. The evidence I
provide showcases how Intermountain was a progressive development that helped students acknowledge and showcase their cultural heritage on several platforms.
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I would like to thank Dr. Steve Shively for all of his help in making my thesis a document that represents Intermountain School accurately and respectively. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Lynne McNeill and Randy Williams for their assistance and insight throughout the proposal and defense processes.

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CJ Guadarrama
CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.   INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.  HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF INDIAN BOARDING</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCHOLS AND INTERMOUNTAIN</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Boarding School History</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermountain as a Progressive Development</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allan Houser at Intermountain</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. AFFIRMING CULTURAL IDENTIFICATION THROUGH MURALS</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artistic and Cultural Identifications in the Murals</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of Cultural Art to Students and School</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.  CONCLUSION</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.   WORKS CITED</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Allan Houser working on sculpture, <em>Comrades in Mourning</em>, circa 1948. Photographer unknown.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Image of a Desert Landscape located in boys dormitory, Allan Houser, circa 1950. Photographed by Peggy Barker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Image of Native Family on horseback located in school theatre. Allan Houser, circa 1950. Photographed by Peggy Barker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Image of young girl sitting in desert with her horse; some sheep surrounding her, painted in the Theatre at Intermountain. Allan Houser, circa 1950. Photographed by Peggy Barker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Image of Native Nations symbols located in male dormitory, painted by Intermountain student, circa 1979. Photographed by Peggy Barker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Image of Yakama Seal found in boys dormitory building, painted by Intermountain student, circa 1981. Photographed by Peggy Barker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Official Yakama Seal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Image of Traditional Gaan Dancer, painted by Intermountain student circa 1970s. Photographed by Peggy Barker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Image of Native American Dancer, painted by Intermountain student circa 1971. Photographed by Peggy Barker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Image of two Native American figures, painted by Intermountain student circa 1979. Photographed by Brad Peterson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Image of Hopi Kachina Dancers Painted by Intermountain student, circa 1970s. Photographed by Peggy Barker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Image of students dancing at Intermountain School, circa 1970.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Photographed by Peggy Barker

Figure 13. Image of Intermountain Art Club jacket, circa 1970s.
Photographed by Peggy Barker

Figure 14. Image of Intermountain School Yearbook Cover, 1983.
Photographed by Peggy Barker

Figure 15. Image of Intermountain Club Logo, circa 1970-1980s.
Photographed by Peggy Barker

Figure 16. Image of Native Figure found in boys dormitory at Intermountain, painted by Intermountain student, circa 1981.
Photographed by Brad Peterson
INTRODUCTION

Historians, Indigenous groups, scholars, educators, and authors have long described residential boarding schools for Native children as a dark piece of American History due to the role colonialism and assimilation played in these schools. The images of these schools expressed in narrative accounts, literature, and scholarship across several fields in the humanities and social sciences have long worked to tell the story of children who struggled to survive within the confines of their walls. The evidence reveals physical and emotional abuse at the hands of teachers and administrators, resulting in cultural genocide by programs meant to reform children into a mainstream way of thinking and behaving. The adverse effects these schools had on students after they left them are clear. In this thesis, I intend to show how one school, Intermountain Indian School, broke that reality with a focus on its art program that encouraged student cultural awareness and affirmation.

In 1950, Intermountain Indian School opened in Brigham City, Utah. The 40-building facility previously housed the Bushnell General Hospital, which served soldiers wounded in World War II. In the first 20 years of its existence, Intermountain housed only Navajo students. Facing closure in the late 60s, the school invited students from any Native nation, accepting only students who were one quarter or more Native. By 1975, the newly named Intermountain Inter-Tribal High School had become the largest boarding school in the world, housing more than 3,000 students from several tribes at its peak. It closed in 1984. After the school closed, Brigham City tried several times to purchase the property from the government, but was unable to do so as the city could not
complete a feasible development proposal large enough to fill the 40-building property. As the years went on, private developers purchased the property in pieces, demolishing or gutting several buildings and turning the once thriving school into townhomes and commercial buildings. As the buildings were being demolished, several private developers were able to save artifacts and donate them to the Brigham City Museum. However, years of misuse and weather damage left nearly every remaining piece of Intermountain beyond repair. Utah State University purchased the property in 2012, and while several attempts were made to save what was salvageable, most artifacts had long been destroyed. Both Utah State and developers tried to salvage what were arguably the most dynamic artifacts—murals painted by students who attended Intermountain—but many were destroyed in the process, unable to be taken off the plastered walls. Several of the remaining buildings were razed in preparation for a new Brigham City Campus. As a result, the photographs featured in this thesis are often the only surviving evidence of these artistic treasures.

My interest in Intermountain Indian School began when I was three years old as I toddled my way to the Migrant Headstart preschool in what had been Building 2 of the Intermountain property. Although the building was well preserved, the preschool was surrounded by 30 or so other buildings that were abandoned, in disrepair, and otherwise inhospitable. “What happened here?” I once asked. However, neither of my teachers could answer my question. Stumbling answers like, “People lived here a long time ago and then there was a big war and then they all had to leave” and “Este lugar era para los indios” were all I received. As I grew older, I researched the school history; however,
there wasn’t much to go on. Every rock I overturned revealed nothing and left me with more questions than answers. In seventh grade, I asked my Utah history teacher about the property, but she couldn’t answer my questions. In high school, I asked my honors English teacher about it after we read *When the Legends Die*, a book by Hal Borland about a residential boarding school, but he couldn’t answer my questions either, remembering only, “Well, I remember a lot of buses coming around August, and then there’d be a lot of young [Native Americans] around town. Then they’d leave in May. We never went into their area though, that was off limits.” Brigham City residents who were not directly affiliated with the school rarely entered the property. An invisible barrier became visible when the school closed, and government officials paid workers to barricade every point of entry and nail “No Trespassing” signs on each building.

When it became clear nobody would ever be able to answer my questions, I crossed the barrier and crawled in through a broken window in search of information that was not available for me anywhere else. As I was walking down a dark hallway, I saw a mural that made me stop. Up until this point, I had never thought of Intermountain as a lively institution. However, this mural provided evidence of a once-thriving school with real students. My revelation re-ignited the spark that began with a young 3-year old and resulted in a driving ambition to learn more. As I walked down the hall, I thought about the countless days of me begging my parents to drive through the property, evening walks around the buildings as a teenager, and hours spent in the Native American section at the library. Still, nothing was as informative or beautiful as that mural.
After I moved away from Brigham City to attend college, I assumed my time with Intermountain was over. However, this was not the case. A fieldtrip to USU’s Special Collections and Archives led me to a map of the property, and for the first time in my entire life, I saw Intermountain in all its glory. Since that day, I have worked with former students and faculty to help document, study, analyze, and preserve the history of the school. My most recent project focuses on how Intermountain’s art program stood as a progressive development that rose above the dark history of residential boarding schools. My hope is that, in doing so, I will finally answer the questions from so long ago.

I argue that the school’s art program successfully combated factors which made late 19th century and early 20th century boarding schools damaging for students. Intermountain discarded the foundation of previous schools: the social evolution theory, which claimed the only way to “civilize” children was to replace every remnant of “savagery” they had. I examine how Intermountain administrators provided objectives for art teachers which encouraged students to research their cultural heritage and incorporate traditional knowledge in their paintings. In short, I demonstrate how providing a platform for students to create pieces of art that represented them in their own image stood in direct contrast to the early 19th century boarding schools. In the first chapter, I establish that Intermountain was successful in doing this by focusing its efforts on two strategies which eventually led to student-painted murals throughout the Intermountain campus:

2. Implementing guidelines that encouraged students to research their culture and create self-representations of their culture.
In the second chapter, I showcase student murals that were possible because of the culturally respectful objectives implemented by its teachers. I break the chapter into two parts, first using scholarship to analyze how students told culturally significant stories through art. In the second segment, I discuss how art marked Intermountain as a progressive establishment. I conclude with the argument that Intermountain remained progressive because school officials continued to take steps which helped students showcase their cultural heritage through art, first, by keeping the objectives that encouraged students to research and showcase their cultural heritage in class, and second, by embracing student art in several other public platforms, such as yearbook covers, powwows, and school clubs. I end the chapter by suggesting the information and analysis presented in my thesis adds important insight of a progressive institution to the already expansive scholarship on Native American boarding schools.
CHAPTER I
HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOLS AND INTERMOUNTAIN

Early Boarding School History

The prevailing view of scholars of history, education, and literature is that Native American boarding schools did considerable damage to the students they tried to help. The abuse children faced at the hands of school officials runs the gamut from physical to emotional and has been widely documented, each account more horrific than the previous. In one example of horrible physical abuse, Linda Reese explains punishment students faced for speaking their native language:

The rigidly enforced rule forbidding the use of the Kiowa language [at the Riverside Schools at Anadarko] proved the most difficult trial for students to overcome. Punishments for speaking their native language included paddlings, holding quinine tablets in their mouths, or brushing their teeth with lye soap (121).

In another example, Fred Kabotie, a Hopi born student who attended the Santa Fe Indian School, recalls a memory of emotional abuse students faced upon arrival: “When [we] first started attending school, [school officials] looked at you, guessed how old you were, set your birthday, and gave you an age. Then they’d assign [us] a Christian name. Mine turned out to be Fred” (Archuleta 29). Amelia Katanski explains the social evolution philosophy in place when notorious Indian School, Carlisle Institute, first opened rather well. Suggesting:

Social evolutionism imagined a linear, hierarchical relationship among races. The ideology was accompanied by a ‘replacement’ model of identity, which claimed that education
would totally transform students as they ‘progressed’ from tribal ‘savagery’ to Western ‘civilization . . . (4).

Taking children from their families, a key component in the social evolution theory, marked yet another horrible story in the long and tragic history of the relationship between Native Americans and white settlers. David Adams summarizes the now well-discussed, tragic consequence of this story:

For tribal elders who witnessed the catastrophic developments of the 19th century—the bloody warfare, the near extinction of the bison . . . the shrinking of the tribal land base . . . the invasion of missionaries and white settlers—there seemed to be no end to the cruelties perpetrated by [them]. And after all this . . . the white man had concluded that the only way to save Indians was to destroy them, that the great Indian war should be waged against children (336-337).

As tragic as this evidence is, the war that was waged against children might not have even started if not for a journey U.S. representatives made to the Sioux nation towards the end of the 19th century. In the fall of 1882, Native American policymakers Herbert Welsh and Henry Pancoast went to the Sioux nation to determine how the United States could quickly assimilate Native Americans into white culture. They came back with two conclusions: “first, that [Native Americans] were capable of being assimilated into the mainstream of American life; and second, that the only barrier to achieving this was the lack of political will to do so” (Adams 9). These conclusions influenced Welsh and Pancoast to draft a reform that would solve what they considered to be the United States’ “Native American problem” in three steps. The first step was to reduce Native Americans to locations the U.S. Government viewed suitable. The second step was to allow Native Nations to assign a police task force for the reservations so they could help
police themselves. The third step in the supposed reform focused on education. Welsh and Pancoast argued that Native children needed to be raised with the same ideologies and beliefs as white children. By putting these reforms into legislation, the U.S. government spearheaded a project which led to generations of hardship and damage to Native Americans. Due to that hardship, it has been difficult to look at any boarding school and argue for its progressive ideologies.

After Welsh and Pancoast reported their findings, Native boarding schools started appearing in the United States throughout the 19th century, all designed with the goal to assimilate Native children into white culture. One of the most infamous of these schools was the Carlisle Indian Industrial School. School officials soon learned it was difficult to get any support from Native Nations or the U.S. government, so Henry Pratt, Carlisle’s founder and first Superintendent, began campaigns to prove he could turn a Native American into an obedient white child. This required “before and after” pictures of students as they arrived at Carlisle and then again after they were in their required uniform. He claimed these images were accurate representations that his school successfully assimilated their students. Pratt gained support from the Native Nations by stating that their children would help them with treaties if they could read and write in the white language.

The first year at Carlisle was one of struggle for the school and its students. In his autobiography, Battlefield and Classroom, Richard Pratt writes, “When I reached Carlisle, there were still no supplies from the Bureau. . . . Finding suitable teachers was also a part of the [first year] anxieties” (231). Pratt recalls the first night at Carlisle,
retelling what we can now recognize as a horrific account showcasing the fear that students underwent while away from home—

All of the boys had their hair cut except two of the older ones. . . . Late that night [Pratt] was aroused by a very discordant wailing, which grew in volume . . . [Pratt] sent a boy for an interpreter . . . who explained that the boy who had refused to have his hair cut afterwards did the job himself with a knife. He said that his people always wailed after cutting their hair, as it was an evidence of mourning, and he had come out to show his grief. His voice had awakened the other students, and eventually, everyone started wailing (Pratt and Utley 232).

Pratt later reveals that he got the students to stop crying by telling them their cries could be heard by the people in town, and if the town citizens came to the school “something dreadful might happen” (232). Instruction at Carlisle started with English-only ideologies in which faculty, staff, and students were only allowed to speak in English. The ideology was built on Pratt’s goal of stripping away any remnant of Native culture from students. In a letter Pratt wrote the U.S. House of Representatives, Pratt states, “Isolated as these Indian youth are from the savage surroundings at their homes, they lose their tenacity to savage life . . . and give themselves up to learning all they can in the time they expect to remain here” (Pratt and Utley 248). This quote proves Pratt took great pride in the role he played in assimilating Native youth, showcasing that the sole purpose of Carlisle was assimilation, not education.

The eventual widespread conclusion that Native boarding schools were damaging went beyond Carlisle. Literature by Native American writers who attended boarding schools often showcases just how damaging schools were to generations of Native children at the time and since. In his memoir *The Middle Five*, Francis La Flesche recalls
the emotional abuse he observed. La Flesche writes in his preface: “All the boys in our school were given English names, because their Indian names were too hard to pronounce. Besides, the aboriginal names were considered by missionaries as heathenish, and therefore should be obliterated” (xvii). La Flesche’s description of this horrifying experience is heartbreaking and offers a window all too familiar with the stories told by other Native children.

Another literary example of harsh student experiences comes from Louise Erdrich’s famous poem, “Indian Boarding School: The Runaways,” which describes a scene of students who attempted to run away from the boarding schools. She begins the poem, “Home’s the place we head for in our sleep. / Boxcars stumbling north in dreams / don’t wait for us. We catch them on the run.” These lines describe students’ desire to run to something—anything—familiar. In the case of this poem, “home” represents the physical home these students came from, but also their Native culture that is in danger of being lost forever. “Boxcars stumbling north in dreams” suggests the students are wandering, with no real sense of direction. The final lines in the example elucidate that the students running away are also running out of time. They run with a sense of urgency and with the understanding that if enough years pass, there will not be another train to help them recover the traditions they lost.

Poets Annette Arkeketa and Ed Edmo also wrote about the Native American boarding school experience, focusing on the hardships students faced in over-crowded classrooms and with teachers cruelly cutting hair. They showcase how traditions of abuse from some of the earliest schools continued well into the 20th century. Arkeketa writes,
“Your child will not be let / back in school / if he does not / cut his hair!” showcasing the level of mistreatment and dehumanization students faced upon arriving at an off-reservation boarding school. Edmo’s poem, “Indian Education Blues,” exposes how hard students struggled to hold on to their cultural heritage, and implies that they were stripped of their cultural knowledge by placing a high emphasis on curriculum designed to “civilize” these children. Edmo writes, “I remember / how to get a deer . . . / I remember / the stories told by the old / but . . . my report card / is bad.” Edmo tragically expresses how his cultural knowledge has no place in his new classroom, how everything he was taught to do is irrelevant, or even “uncivilized.” These examples from literature reveal a widespread understanding that Native boarding schools were harmful, unprogressive, and, probably worst of all, successful in their goal of assimilation.

**Intermountain as a Progressive Development**

By 1950, when Intermountain opened, the tide was changing due to an extensive, nationwide effort to make boarding schools more suitable for students. This shift came in part from the 1932 recommended changes in Indian policy by the Secretary of Interior’s Committee of One Hundred final report, which called for “adequate school facilities, higher salaries to attract more qualified teachers, more schools with special regard for day schools. . . and an increased number of [Native] students in public schools” (Reyyhner and Eder 205). These guidelines were later implemented into instruction at Intermountain, along with others that initially came from an investigation of Indian Affairs led by Lewis Meriam. Meriam and an expert team conducted several months of
fieldwork from 95 schools in 23 states at the request of the Secretary of Interior. The team revealed the curriculum in place at 19th century Native boarding schools often stood in contrast to reservation life. Published in 1928, their report states

The philosophy underlying the establishment of Indian boarding schools, that the way to ‘civilize’ children is to take them, even very young children, as entirely as possible away from their home and family life, is at variance with modern views of education and social work, which regard the home and family as essential social institutions from which it is generally undesirable to uproot children (qtd. in Reyhner and Eder 403).

These reports called for an end to Native boarding schools, recommending instead a policy which would “give consideration to the desires of individual Indians” (332). Understanding the financial complexities of eliminating all Native boarding schools without much notice and also to quell the criticism that came from these reports, President Hoover appointed Carson Ryan Jr. director of Indian Education, with a “three-point program: to develop community schools, to support federal-state contracts to put Native children in public schools, and gradually phase out boarding schools” (Reyhner and Eder 209). All of these changes happened gradually and only in a few cases. 1932 guidelines set in place by President Hoover stated, “The primary objectives of Indian schools [were] to give students an understanding and appreciation of their tribal lore, art, music, and community organization” as well as “to teach students, through their participation in school and local governments, to become constructive citizens of their communities” (Reyhner 218). These guidelines left Intermountain caught between old traditions and the more progressive approach to teaching their students in its first years of existence.
One way that Native boarding schools tried to implement the new guidelines was through art programs, though many curricula—still running under the social evolution theory older schools incorporated—struggled to implement art in a way that celebrated tribal lore and cultural knowledge. In her book, *Colonized Through Art: American Indian Schools and Art Education*, author Marinella Lentis argues that art curricula in Native American boarding schools presented art as a tool for vocational education. Lentis explains art education facilitated aptitudes built on the foundation that a child who had training in hand-eye coordination, learned in art programs, could then take said knowledge and apply it to their trained labor. Therefore, many of the most early Native boarding schools, such as Haskell and the Phoenix Indian boarding school, “were required to take all instruction of creativity out of their art curriculum in order to uphold the guidelines of the time” (Lentis 43).

In direct contrast to schools such as Haskell and Phoenix, perhaps the most successful program of Intermountain’s progressive efforts was its art program. Intermountain made genuine efforts to uphold the guidelines of the Meriam Report and those handed down by President Hoover by implementing programs solely in place to help students succeed. One of their many programs was the solo-parent program, created to help students who had children. Another effort was their athletics programs, which saw Intermountain students take first place in state competitions like men’s and women’s track and field, men’s basketball, and wrestling. In addition to these programs, Intermountain also hired prominent Native American artist, Allan Houser to teach students art. Though it was not unheard of for Native boarding schools to hire Native
American faculty, hiring Houser was the direct shift needed to pull Intermountain away from having an art curriculum focused entirely on training students to be better workers.

In a guidebook given to art teachers at Intermountain, (and shown to me by former teacher, Peggy Barker) there is a list of objectives and strategies teachers were required to teach, which stand in direct contrast to the curriculum created during the late 19th century. The objectives includes guidelines that encourage students to express their culture creatively:

- To encourage [students] to draw or paint what he knows best.
- To share [student] background in art using Indian motif.
- To encourage research in [students] own background to have something to say in art.

At the time, researching Native culture was unheard of at Native boarding schools that operated under the social evolutionist theory, as a student could not assimilate while retaining traditional knowledge. Another example in the guidebook for teachers, likely from when teaching students about the color wheel, encourages students to “Arrange color shapes on 9x12 paper to form Indian motif.” Asking teachers to encourage students to paint Indian motifs was unprecedented in Native boarding schools of the 19th century and for several in the early 20th century. The very idea that it was a key objective in the art curriculum at Intermountain showcases the administration’s efforts to let students represent themselves, demonstrating their progressive ideology. In the evaluation section of each assignment, teachers are told to grade a student based on “How attractive the finished project is. How well they understand values. [Since Indian Motif is encouraged,]
how well did they use their own background in their projects.” The evidence presented showcases the effort Intermountain administrators and teachers made to let their students represent their own culture, proving that it was not a school built on the same principle as Carlisle, Haskell, Phoenix, or other Native boarding schools. It was not a school embedded in the racist ideology that the only way to help Native youth was to strip them of any remnant of their culture competency and turn them into obedient white children. It did not run on social-evolution theory.

**Allan Houser at Intermountain**

Two years after Intermountain opened, school officials made the dramatic step to hire prominent indigenous artist Allan Houser as a teacher. At the time, Houser had already created mural work for the Main Interior Building in Washington D.C. In 1948, he sculpted a commissioned piece for Haskell Institute. Designed in honor of the students who lost their lives in WWII, *Comrades in Mourning* (featured in figure 1) was the first sculpture Houser created; his previous works were paintings. Houser’s sculpture features the creative detail he brought to Intermountain, details that were unfortunately left out of other art curricula.

Shortly after his arrival, Houser began painting murals with a fundamentally creative style. The murals were displayed in high-traveled areas of Intermountain and represent motifs often seen in paintings of the West. While art education in other schools primarily focused on providing students with proper hand-eye technique, the murals Houser painted focus on the creative aspect of art and showed students how they could
incorporate their own cultural traditions in their artistic endeavors. Peggy Barker, an art teacher who came to Intermountain after Houser left, states that the murals he painted depicted indigenous culture in a way that students at the time had not seen—positively, and by an Indigenous person. As Barker states:

These paintings were incredibly empowering for the students as it showed students—for possibly the first time in their entire lives—that their culture was important enough to be placed on a public wall. I believe that Houser’s paintings worked with the school’s art curriculum guidelines to encourage students to paint their own representations of themselves on their dormitory walls. Because most of the murals that were painted came after Houser left Intermountain, the students used what they saw in the gym and theater to paint the murals in their dorms.
Figure 1. Houser looking at sculpture, *Comrades in Mourning*, Allan Houser, circa 1948. Houser’s landscape murals were typically painted in public areas and feature famous landscapes in the Southwest region of the United States. Figure 2 features several rock formations found in what is now Monument Valley in Arizona, particularly the formation known as The Mittens. The rock formation depicted in the mural reveals both knowledge of the landscape as well as an understanding of its sacredness to the Navajo Nation. Its location inside a study room in one of the male dorms likely served a reminder of home to students who were homesick during the long winters. The green plant growing out of the corner of the image also symbolically represents the growth of students at Intermountain. It stands alone, brighter than the other desert shrubbery, and pointing upwards as though reaching for a promise that it will be nurtured in the desert. With one branch reaching directly for the sky, and the other towards The Mittens, the elements of this mural reflect the need to remember tradition—to reach for it from time to time as they progress through school and life.

The Mittens stand tall on the left, also working to move viewers’ eyes upwards. Their eyes travel from the tree branches, to the Mittens, to the sky, constantly moving upwards. Having a mural with this message in a study room was not by accident; the implicit argument it makes is that students should reach forward while also keeping an arm stretched out to the past. It is a message common in many cultures and traditions—the past helps to shape us. The mural’s creativity also incorporates several objectives of the curriculum, such as demonstrating Indian motif and cultural knowledge.
Students likely recognized The Mittens landscape as a part of the Navajo Nation. They also likely recognized other important landscapes like Canyon De Chelly. As scholars on Native Americans of the Southwest, Nicky Leach and Jeff D. Nicholas, suggest

> Few places on the Navajo reservation are as important to the Navajo as Canyon de Chelly. In the 1700s, [several Navajo members hid from the Spanish] in the canyon. In 1805, Spanish attack left 115 Navajos dead. . . . The dark walk of the 1864 Long Walk still hangs heavy over Canyon de Chelly (39).

To have a geographic location sacred to the Navajo Nation painted on a dormitory wall breaks the negative and harmful foundations of other Native boarding schools. It instills the idea that sacred landscapes were worth showcasing in public spaces. Muralism was
not born at Intermountain, but it thrived there, and these murals told that story. The Mittens monument is repeated in several other landscape murals that Houser painted, as are other desert scenes of the Navajo Nation in Arizona as seen in the background of figure two.

Figure 3. Image of Native family on horseback located in school theatre. Allan Houser, circa 1950. Photographed by Peggy Barker.

In addition to the evocative landscapes, Houser also painted murals featuring people. Figure 3, painted by Houser, features scenes that were familiar to students; it stands out as yet another example of creativity and traditional beauty. The landscape in the background is similar to the long stretches of desert in Arizona, and the traveling
family appears as though they have come a long way, probably to attend a powwow, as showcased by their dress. The baby in the woman’s arm is representative of a child that most students would have likely recognized as a younger sibling. The horses are constantly moving forward, strongly contrasting the “boxcars” in Erdrich’s poem, which stumble forward. As such, the placement of this mural inside the theater showcases that students, represented by the family, should constantly move forward with clear direction. The implicit argument is that the students, like the family in the mural, are going to a meeting place, where they will become a part of a community of people. The artistic creativity, the placement of the image, and the message itself all incorporate the published objectives of Intermountain’s art program.

The final Houser mural in this section (figure 4) features a young woman who is the same age as several students who attended Intermountain; it serves the purpose the others did—to remind students of their importance at Intermountain and the desert landscape. This mural showcases a moment in time in which the subject is stopping to rest, remember, and reflect. The only visible movement comes from the sheep in the picture, and though the girl in the picture is performing chores, she has stopped to take a break. The Arizona landscape stands tall in the background, making the mural look wide and expansive. The young girl, though the key component of this image, is still only a small part of the landscape.
Houser’s murals paid special attention to Native life, trying to depict accurate representations that students could affiliate with and feel proud of. As Barker indicated, these were likely the first images that students were exposed to that actually depicted their culture accurately and positively. Houser’s murals are key representations of the progressive ideologies in place at Intermountain. Intermountain’s curriculum stood in direct contrast to the social evolution theory that was embedded in 19th century curricula. As such, a close analysis helps to expand our understanding about how Native boarding schools changed in the last half of the 20th century. In the next chapter, I will showcase how the objectives in the art curriculum were implemented in student murals.
CHAPTER II

AFFIRMING CULTURAL IDENTIFICATION THROUGH MURALS

Artistic and Cultural Identifications in the Murals

Oral tradition is an important aspect of communication in Native culture that was often used as a way for many tribes to present, perpetuate, and preserve their history. This important tradition often later evolved to include rock art that depicted important events and legends of the tribe. This tradition has lived on at Intermountain in the form of muralism. Student murals at Intermountain often depict stories and symbols which reveal pan-Indian identity, nods to historical moments, and other cultural events that were used to present their history. Several of these murals were destroyed and the photos presented here are the only remaining evidence of this powerful art. In this chapter I examine six images of murals painted at Intermountain and discuss the level of cultural awareness present in them. I argue these murals provide evidence that cultural awareness was an important aspect of life at Intermountain, and was significant for both the students and the school.

One of the key components in the murals is respect for the past. Following Allan Houser’s model, the murals feature constant reminders of the past, or to the passing of time. The idea of time is crucial to what is often referred to as the “Native Universe.” Cree member Gerald McMaster states that the Native Universe is made up of “numerous circles [which] exist within the overarching circle: cultures, clans, tribes, families, and individuals. Circles are based on ancient teachings handed down through the oral tradition” (16). The image in figure 5 is a wonderful example of the Native Universe, as
the artist pays special attention to several of its components, such as time, circles, and culture. The mural in figure 5 features a link to the past in the form of the petroglyph-style antelope and hunter at the bottom of the mural.

![Figure 5. Image of Native symbol located in male dormitory, painted by unknown student, circa 1979. Photographed by Peggy Barker.](image)

This mural features an astounding level of cultural awareness significant to Intermountain and captures the concept of the Native Universe which has also been labeled the Pan-Indian movement. Framed within one large circle is Tawa, the Hopi sun, with feathers that are reminiscent of the red and black designs of the Pacific Northwest. Native American art scholar Bill Holm states in his book, *Northwest Coast Indian Art* that “[the Kwakiutl Nation’s] principal colors were black and red . . . the black was
generally derived from graphite and charcoal. The red, before the European trade period, was derived from ochers and hematite” (26). The feathers missing from the sun which then reappear around another circle connected by a bold line mark the idea that the sun covers all, past and present. This idea is reaffirmed by the constant movement of the painting. The sun is on an axis, constantly rotating and moving the other aspects of the painting in the process. The two dancers on either side of the sun are wearing crowns and holding stalks common to Pueblo corn dancers, but the lightness of the more detailed figure stands in direct contrast to the rest of the mural, symbolizing that the self is less important than the whole. The petroglyph-like images of the hunter at the bottom also contrast with the sharp, black outline of the rest of the painting. These individual images overlap within the overlapping circles—often stretching beyond them—symbolizing a unity despite their individuality. These images feature a cultural awareness that combines several different nations—Hopi and other pueblo of the Southwest, and the Kwakiutl of the Pacific Northwest—one of the key components Intermountain tried to focus on when it became Inter-Tribal in 1974. (For more information on Pueblo Corn Dancers, see pages 49-52 of *Native Universe* edited by Gerald McMaster and Clifford E. Trafzer. For more information on Tawa, or Hopi art, see *Decorative Art of the Southwestern Indians* by Dorothy Smith Sides).

In addition to emphasizing pan-Indian identities, Intermountain specifically asked students to produce art with their unique cultural identity in mind. In another mural that offers a tribute to the past, we see another example of the cultural awareness student artists, like the incompletely identified Elwell, who signed the mural on page 26. The
stylized image of the Yakama Nation Seal in figure 6 features several important details. Framed within an arrowhead, an Eagle-head is placed between two feathers. Just below the feathers, a ribbon reads “Treaty of 1855” with the letters YIN (Yakama Indian Nation) above, a stylized difference from the traditional ribbon which reads, Yakama Nation (the Nation changed the spelling from “Yakima” to “Yakama” in the early 90s). The story of this treaty, according to the Yakama Nation website, begins “in 1855, when the US government recognized Yakama Nation dominion on 12.2 million acres of land” (Tribal History). The east side of Mount Adams, or Pátu in Yakama, is located within the Yakama reservation lines, and is also depicted in Elwell’s mural. As a part of the treaty of 1855, 14 tribes came together to form the Yakama nation, and created a Seal that is pictured in figure 7. The mural’s existence stands as a testament to Intermountain’s efforts to encourage students to paint murals with cultural awareness.

Though the Yakama nation recognizes Mount Adams as Pátu, or “Snow topped mountain,” it is often representative as sacred entity. As Yakama scholar, Andrew Fisher states, the Yakama attribute Mount Adams as directly responsible for the streams that “nourish the five sacred foods of the [Yakama] (water, salmon, roots, berries, and game).” The mural below is reminiscent of the origin story of Pátu and the white eagle. As recounted in the paper at Lucullus Virgil McWhorter housed at the Washington State University Libraries, after a battle between Pátu and another mountain in which Pátu lost its head, the Sun came and replaced it with the head of the great Eagle. The eagle told the great creator,

I want two children to sit by me, to watch towards the sun. I will send them to every part of the world, to observe how everything is
going on. They will bring me word of what they see, of what is being done. I will regulate of what they see, of what is being done. I will regulate and control everything in the whole world.

The legend continues that the creator granted the Great Eagle two children, which could also be represented by the feathers. It is clear that Mount Adams and the Great Eagle are key figures in the Yakama nation. To see this seal, reminiscent of the origin story in which the Great Eagle sends children to see and observe how things go on in “every part of the world,” is important. Its placement in a Native American boarding school adds an element to the story of Pátu that should not be taken lightly or forgotten.

Figure 6. Image of Yakama Seal found in boys’ dormitory building, signed by Elwell, circa 1981. Photographed by Peggy Barker.

Figure 7. Official Yakama Nation Seal.
There are additional personal touches to this student’s representation of the Yakama seal—the two feathers and the clear sky. For example, in Elwell’s mural, the eagle head and Pátu have become one, just like the story in the legend. The two feathers can be representative of the children the creator granted Pátu so that they could explore the world and report back to Pátu. This mural takes on more meaning when one considers that the painter is a member of the Yakama tribe, and was sent to a boarding school in the same way Pátu’s children were sent out into the world. However, the symbol of the feather is not exclusive to the Yakama nation. The feather has several meanings in various Native American cultures and was featured in several logos for Intermountain. The use of the Yakama seal in art at Intermountain is significant on its own, but the changes made to the seal directly links to Intermountain’s art objectives for students to create something with ties to their cultural history.

Cultural identification for students also came through in murals which feature human figures. The mural in figure 8 features a traditional Apache crown dancer, also known as a Gaan dancer, which is very sacred to the White Mountain Apache Nation. Traditionally, there are four dancers who wear black masks, each representing the four cardinal directions of the earth. A traditional fifth dancer usually stays in the middle and wears a white mask, representing a superior being who has come down to show the Gaan how to live in harmony with nature. The crowns the dancers wear are reminiscent of deer antlers, an animal respected in Native culture. As well known, apache powwow drummer Joe Tohonnie, Jr. states, “We respect the deer in so many ways, one way is medicine—we eat the deer meat for medicine. [The dancers] have buckskin dress.”
This mural features several elements of cultural awareness, including the traditional black mask and crown that the Gaan wear, as well as the buckskin dress and shoes. The student mural’s placement in the east wing of a boys dormitory represents one of the cardinal directions referred to above. The dancers, also known as “mountain spirits,” usually recognized by their great power to cure, protect, or otherwise help the tribe. Its placement in an east wing could be because the placement of the school, just west of the mountains would give the appearance that the dancer was coming out of those mountains to protect Intermountain. As mentioned in the *Oxford History of Native North American Art*, “for the Apaches, spiritual and curative knowledge reside in the Mountain Spirit people who live beneath the mountains” (Berlo and Phillips 61). They are meant to bring harmony between nature and the Apache. The student artist brings that power to Intermountain, capturing the spirit’s ability to protect or otherwise bring harmony to the students. This mural was not the only way that Intermountain encouraged cultural awareness of the Gaan dancers or their ability to bring forth harmony. In its closing years, student dancers often performed Mountain Spirit dances at Intermountain in student-led and teacher-encouraged protests to keep Intermountain open.

The Gaan was not the only dance figure painted at Intermountain; the image in figure 9 features a student variation of a Navajo feather dancer. Painted in 1971, this mural stands as one of the earliest murals at Intermountain that was painted by a student. As Navajo dancer and blogger Emily Gig states, “traditionally, Navajo male dances were often animal in nature, that is to say the dance often honored different animals representing the movement of the hunter, gatherer.”
Figure 8. Image of Traditional Gaan Dancer, painted by Intermountain student circa 1970s. Photographed by Peggy Barker.
Figure 9. Image of Native American Dancer, painted by student at Intermountain circa 1971. Photographed by Peggy Barker.
The painting’s vibrant colors stand out in direct contrast to the bare wall, and the amount of detail the artist captures on each feather and piece of hair showcases an access to fine brushes and an array of paint colors, additional signs that school officials valued the art program. The dancer himself is crouched low, close to the ground, and seems to be holding a weapon, though vandalism has made it difficult to tell. Gig mentions that traditional Navajo male dancers typically carry weapons with designs representing their tribe and often crouch “low to the ground as though they are hunting.” The bustle of feathers honors the eagle, as does the crown the dancer wears; thus, the mural stands as yet another testament to Intermountain’s emphasis on cultural identity and awareness. On page 36, I present a picture of students who are dressed in similar regalia to the dancer in the picture as yet another example that Intermountain not only provided a platform for students to paint murals of cultural significance, but also to create artistic dance costumes of cultural significance as well.

I began this chapter with a positive discussion of pan-Indian identity. This notion had appeal to some Native Americans who grew up separated from their ancestral tribal groups as it gave them something to affiliate themselves with. The idea of pan-Indian identity was troublesome to many others, however, as it led to generations of children who had successfully assimilated and embodied the myth of the “vanishing Indian.” As noted historian David Beck writes, the vanishing Indian belief was supported by two scholarly, yet ultimately damaging, theories in the early 20th century—first, that “America’s continental ‘Manifest Destiny’ was successfully completed in geographic terms,” and second, the “social evolution theory” which I discussed in chapter one.
Scholars suggest the vanishing Indian theory “posited that cultures battled with each other in an evolutionary contest and one was destined to triumph and the other to fade into extinction” (Beck). The mural in figure 10, painted by a student only identified as P. Mahone, stands in stark contrast to theories of vanishing and extinction, illustrating instead with powerful simplicity that the student and a tribal leader were eternally connected, and the culture would continue.

The image features a young Native male connected to an older Native American male with a more traditional look; while the connection is fragile, echoes of physical appearance suggest the two will never be disconnected. The feather in the older male’s hair is representative that the gentleman has done something significant enough to be gifted a feather, as feathers were always given by a tribal elder. Connecting the two figures suggests the two men are aware of each other and are still learning from one another. Like the branch from Houser’s painting of the Mittens (figure 2), the student artist is acknowledging the fact that he must reflect on his ancestral tradition and seek elders’ guidance. The young man’s head is bowed, symbolizing great respect for the elder. The placement of this mural, across a long hallway of a male dorm, likely served as a reminder to students to remember their elders while they were away from home. This image, possibly more than the others I have examined, accurately represents the importance of cultural awareness and identity that Intermountain pushed for in its students.
Murals that were painted by students from different nations fed directly into Intermountain’s emphasis on cultural awareness, which take a new significance when Intermountain became Inter-Tribal. Student murals began to feature implicit arguments for a particular culture’s presence at the school. One such mural shows evidence of symbols typically found only in art created by the Pueblo and Hopi nations of the Southwestern part of the United States. Figure 11 features Kachina dancers, which are
native to the Zuni and Hopi nations of southern Arizona and parts of New Mexico. This mural of Kachina dancers is rich in particular cultural presentation, and is also rich in style. The Hopi sun sits at the top of two dancers that represent Talavai, the morning singer Kachina, on the right, and Nakiachop, the silent warrior Kachina. The Kachina are viewed as human-like beings who are powerful enough to bring rainfall, healing, fertility, and protection.

In the Hopi tradition, Kachinas are the link between the gods and the people. Katchina season typically runs from February to July. In February, the Hopi host a celebration known as Powamuya where “people petition for the return of the Kachinas to the human community” (Berlo and Phillips 53). This mural is a clear example of cultural awareness, and its presence in a dormitory building separate from the Yakama mural and the Gaan mural is likely representative of Intermountain’s attempts to represent Indian nations fairly and respectfully. In several pueblo villages, the dance plaza seems to be a major focus in architecture as the public space allows people to “demonstrate the reciprocity between their world and the spirit world . . . embodied in the Kachinas” (Berlo and Philips 51). Though a hallway is not the same as a dance plaza, this painting could also mark the reciprocity between students, or students and dorm parents. The presence of such powerful and meaningful beings in a residential boarding school is, again, unprecedented and unheard of in early 19th century boarding schools.
Significance of the Cultural Art to Students and the School

Intermountain’s art objectives, which emphasized cultural awareness, are also present in other platforms pertaining to the student body, a vast leap forward from Native boarding schools of the 19th century and early 20th centuries. In one image that was taken during a powwow held in the Boys Gym at Intermountain, the Gaan Dancers appear in traditional dress dancing around a row of female students, likely acting as the “center” role in this traditional dance. Former Intermountain teacher Peggy Barker recalls helping students make their dresses for powwows in art class:
Well, the students wanted to show others that they knew their traditions, and so we would gather the materials from fabric stores in town or in Ogden, and then we could make them in class. The students loved it! They loved performing for their parents, the student body, and the town. We always invited the residents from Brigham, and sometimes they came, and other times they didn’t show up. But the children always looked amazing and always performed the dances and songs with professionalism.

Art at Intermountain was a way to unite the student body, and it permeated student life, unity powerfully prompted in a student design that was printed on special jackets that were given to members of the Native American Art Club at Intermountain (Figure 13). The design itself features a peace pipe, the smoke of which forms the boundaries of a circle. The two ends of the circle take the form of the eagle and the snake,
common motifs as the protectors in Native American lore, as eagle watches over earth in the skies, and the snake on the ground. The stylized teepee, suggestive of a snow-capped mountain, and the soaring eagle depicted within the circle are reminiscent of the varied backgrounds of the students, representing both plains and mountain traditions. The art also pays homage to their school mascot, the eagle. The bear paw on the bottom of the scarf is a symbol of strength, as though members of the art club were stronger as a group, but also suggesting the strength of the individual wearing it.

Student art was also well represented on yearbooks, showcasing how significant the art program was to Intermountain. In the image of the yearbook cover in Figure 14 we see an elder offer a peace pipe to the outstretched hands of a young warrior. The young warrior stands within the boundaries of the rising sun/son, representing both a new day as well as a new generation. The elder, seemingly coming out of the moon within an eagle of stars is literally “passing the torch” to the new generation, symbolizing that the graduating students must now take the peace pipe and the teachings of the elders and incorporate them within their own lives, ensuring the survival of their cultural heritage and paying special attention to cultural awareness. The image becomes more poignant considering that the year it was published, 1983, marks one year before Intermountain closed its doors forever.
Figure 13. Image of Intermountain Art Club jacket, circa 1970s. Photographed by Peggy Barker.
Figure 14. Image of Intermountain School Yearbook cover by Bruce Allery, 1983. Photographed by Peggy Barker.
Student art was significant to Intermountain, and the cultural awareness embedded within that art directly opposes the “social evolution” theory that 19th century boarding schools were built on, and which continued to dominate Native education for decades. The idea of a Native American boarding school encouraging any remnant of traditional Native cultural representation was unheard of in the 19th century but present in almost every form imaginable at Intermountain. In the last example, I would like to close with mention of the significance of Intermountain’s United Indian Club as well as the student-made design for the club’s logo. Framed within a student’s representation of the sun, we see a tribal elder draped in the American flag. To the left, an eagle calls out triumphantly, and to the right, another circle starts to take shape. This image is yet another testament to the significance of art at Intermountain and symbolizes the same ideas the murals, yearbook, and student jackets showcase, which was the opportunity to move forward while also respecting traditional values. That idea alone would have earned a student harsh punishment at Carlisle or Haskell or Anadarko, and the name of the club itself, the United Indian Club, would have certainly been beaten out of any student who presented it.

The significance of art at Intermountain adds an important piece to the narrative about Native American boarding schools, and its progressive ideology must be brought to the front line. This thesis ensures the memory of the art program at Intermountain will live on, just as the images of these murals that were long ago destroyed can continue to inspire people. Like the oral tradition, these images preserve Intermountain’s history; the tradition lives on.
Figure 15. Image of Intermountain Club Logo, David Talk 1981. Photographed by Peggy Barker.
CONCLUSION

Art at Intermountain, featured in platforms such as classes (graphic art), clubs (Intermountain Art Club, United Indian Club), powwows which were open to the public, murals that feature cultural knowledge and awareness, and objectives focused on encouraging students to paint and draw Indian motifs, is significant to how Intermountain was able to stand tall as a progressive facility. Understanding the focus that Intermountain placed on art, and the art students produced in response to that encouragement, is a significant piece of scholarship on Native American boarding schools because it counters negative history and stereotypes with a progressive ideology.

By the time Intermountain closed in 1984, it had become more of a home for students than a boarding school, due in part to the efforts administrators and faculty made to help students acknowledge their culture. A video of students protesting the closure of their school stands as a testament to my claim. Made in a graphic communications class at Intermountain, the video’s closing minutes feature Student Council president Gail Nahwahquaw, who directs a prepared speech to an absent Congressman James V. Hansen, “We are here to ask you to reconsider your position on Intermountain School. We ask you to do so with our faces in mind . . .” (Curtis). Nahwahquaw begins to cry as she continues, “We would like to offer you the spirit stick, representative of the hopes of better lives that live within the students of Intermountain School” (Curtis). As Nahwahquaw prepares to offer the spirit stick to Congressman Hansen or Senator Hatch, she asks if they were present at the rally: “If not, are any of their representatives here?”
she asks. “Is there a representative for Congressman Hansen? . . . Is there a representative here for Senator Garn?” (Curtis). It is here that the students learn the unfortunate fate of their school—where they learned that the only people who could keep it open did not care enough about them to even show up to listen or talk to the students of Intermountain. Former art teacher Peggy Barker heartbreakingly recalls the role that art played in the protest, “I remember the students spending hours making the Crown Dancer dresses so they could perform the dance for Congressman Hansen. We helped the students make signs for the event. He didn’t even show up.”

In a unique, unpolished yet powerful mural painted in a boys dorm hallway, a dominant male figure with long hair and a stoic look stares out into the hallway. Although a part of the mural was destroyed by vandals who came decades after the school closed, the figure remains surrounded by one of the most common motifs in Native American rock art—the hand print. Native American rock art scholar, Campbell Grant states, “[While] hand prints were likely a form of signature . . . where great numbers are found together, may have represented some sort of identification with a tribal unit. In certain instances, they were made during a ceremony—this is certainly true of puberty-rite prints” (55). Although the artist has identified himself (beside the painting) as Papago, there is evidence that at least two sets of hand prints were used to complete this mural, as indicated by the different shapes and colors of the handprints on the wall surrounding the mural. Two sets of handprints are usually symbolic of unity in a Native community. The two handprints present in this mural could also symbolize unity between the artist and his roommates, or between the inhabitants of the room and the rest
of the dorm, or between the dorm and Intermountain, Intermountain and Brigham City, the artist and the world. Its location outside of a commonly used recreation or lounging area would have served as a reminder to students as they entered the recreation room, that they are all part of the Native Universe. The mural stands as yet another testament to the significance of art at Intermountain.

Figure 16. Image of Native Figure found in boys dormitory at Intermountain. Artist: Nolan Lopez, circa 1981. Photographed by Brad Peterson.
In recent reunions held on the Navajo Nation in Arizona and in Brigham City, which I have attended, students recall fond memories about their school and always stress how the many programs Intermountain offered helped them find success in life; the art program is one part of that whole. It stands as a testament to the school as a facility not built on the abhorrent social evolution theory foundation of 19th century boarding schools. It was not designed for the sole purpose of forcing Native students to complete their assimilation into mainstream society, eliminating all creativity to focus instead on hand-eye coordination for skilled laborers. In producing art used for costumes, Native clubs, yearbooks, murals, and jackets, Intermountain students embedded a level of talent and creativity that was not present in other boarding schools. Students produced art which paid equal attention to their past as to their future. Anthropologist, Daniel Miller suggests clothing is a “kind of pseudo-language that could tell us [more] about who we [truly] are;” how “clothes [are] not superficial, but actually [make] us what we think we are” (13). This idea thrived under Carlisle, as Pratt focused on changing the way students thought and felt by forcing them to wear soldier uniforms. Intermountain broke apart from this tradition, allowing students more freedom to express themselves. Though the school had dress code guidelines in place, school officials and teachers encouraged students to make and wear traditional regalia at powwows the school hosted, which directly contrasts Carlisle’s ideology. Extending this idea to Intermountain’s art program, particularly the pieces provided in this thesis, provides scholars with an opportunity to learn how these images reveal a progressive development in the otherwise damaging history of Indian boarding schools.
I do not wish to suggest every student who attended Intermountain felt this way, or even that every student who painted a mural escaped Intermountain unscathed. But additional scholarship to ensure the murals are not ignored, especially now since the school has been razed, will prevent the possibility of destroying this self-representation. To argue that because these students went to a Native boarding school then they must have had their culture beaten out of them—that Intermountain could not be marked as a progressive institution simply because, historically, Native boarding schools were damaging—would be one more blow not much different from the ideology implemented in Native boarding schools of the 19th century, which sought to rip students of their cultural history.
WORKS CITED


