

From Cannons to Canons: Authenticity, Hybridity and Eighteenth-Century
Military Collectors of Native North American Art
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The early contact-period history of Native North American art is largely built on the foundation of collections made by British military officers posted to North America between Seven Years War and the War of 1812. Like all collections, these assemblages are historically contingent, making available certain types of Aboriginal material culture and art while occluding others. In this lecture I will look at several key collections of Aboriginal objects from the eastern Great lakes that were 'put in motion' between the 1750s and the early 1800s and that continue to define notions of authenticity, hybridity, and value. Re-reading them through the textual evidence of contemporary novels and travel writing, I will argue that these collections reflect two quite distinct modes of collecting. The first was controlled by a distanced and ironic concept of the 'curiosity,' while the second resulted from their collectors' more intimate, embodied, and participatory engagements with Aboriginal peoples and their ways of being in the world.