CHAPTER ONE

JAMES LUNA

ARTIFACTS AND FICTIONS

I don't want to be an Indian any more
I don't want to be an Indian for historical reasons
I don't want to be an Indian for commercial reasons
I don't want to be an Indian for 'Sentimental Reasons'
I don't want to . . .

JAMES LUNA

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.

W. E. B. DUBOIS

The Body as Artifact and Fiction

My body practices being dead.

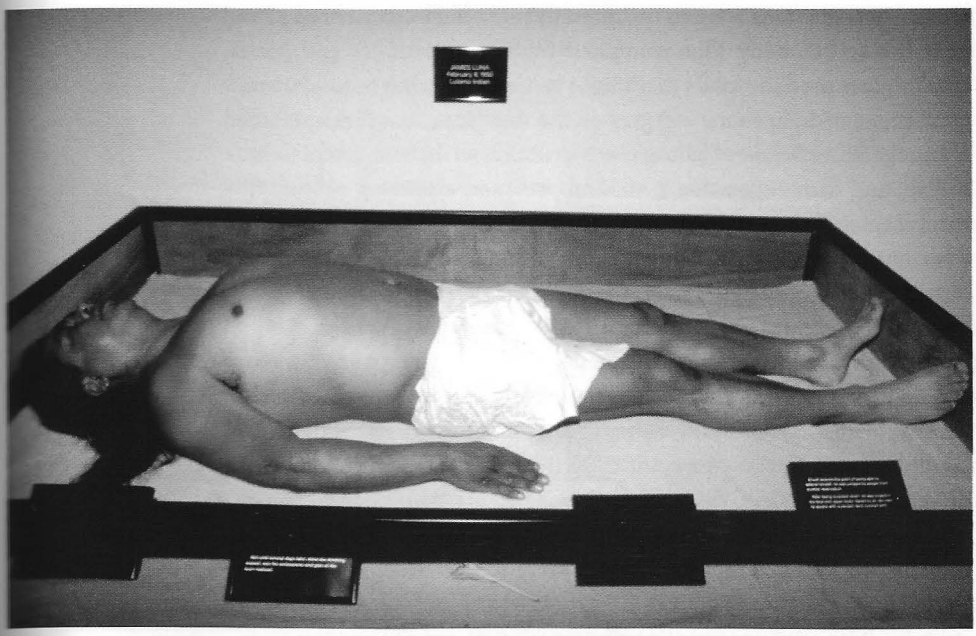
—Bas Jan Ader

Luna received a degree in art in 1976 at the University of California, Irvine, where he studied with the Dutch conceptual artist Bas Jan Ader and the feminist artist Eleanor Antin, among others.[17] Ader's experimental performances, many of long duration and involving the body in some form of physical transformation, influenced Luna's own form of endurance performance art, while Antin, known for creating and posing as female (and male) personas, probably had an effect on Luna's approach to inventing and staging Indian characters. In many of his works, Luna uses his own body as a flexible sign, pliable enough to accommodate a broad spectrum of projected myths. Yet he seems keenly aware of the limits of corporeal legibility, of the way that physiognomy and skin color can suture a person to a racist caricature or a historical archetype. This sutur-

ing moment can be understood as a small death for the living subject, and it is this moment that Luna both enacts and critiques.

For *The Artifact Piece* (1987–1990), which is probably the artist's best-known work, Luna created an installation in which his own body and personal belongings became artifacts on display in the section devoted to the Kumeyaay Indians at the San Diego Museum of Man (figure 1.14). The Kumeyaay exhibition is permanently installed on the second floor of the museum, offering a historical view of the Southern California indigenous groups colonized by the Spanish missionaries in the late eighteenth century; Kumeyaay food, dress, pottery, and baskets are displayed as well as a history of games, an overview of ceremonies, and a replica of a traditional Kumeyaay house. While colonial contact is presented as part of the exhibition, the emphasis is clearly on the preservation of artifacts that date before the arrival of the Spanish, ignoring the interesting and inevitable transformation of indigenous daily life during and after colonization.

In the live performance tradition of artists such as Chris Burden (*Bed,* 1972) or Marina Abramovic (*Rhythm 2,* 1974), James Luna engaged in body art endurance tactics by lying, partially sedated, on a sand-covered table, wearing only a loincloth, several hours a day during the run of the exhibit. He was so still and quiet that some visitors did not realize he was alive until they were standing beside him. Placed next to his body were museum labels that identified Luna as a member of the Luiseño tribe, along with other explanatory labels that offered descriptive information regarding various marks and scars on his body, as might be found next to an archeological specimen.[18] One label offered a glimpse into the artist's personal life that contrasted sharply with the romantic image of the noble savage maintained elsewhere by the museum: "Drunk beyond the point of being able to defend himself, he was jumped by people from another reservation. After being knocked down, he was kicked in the face and upper body. Saved by an old man, he awoke with a swollen face covered with dried blood. Thereafter, he makes it a point not to be as trusting among relatives and other Indians."[19] The violence of Luna's story and the unappealing quality of its characters, almost all of whom were either drunk or brutal, undermined the potential for voyeuristic pleasure as visitors stood over the artist's silent, breathing body. Luna consciously leveraged the rhetorical strategies of museum display labels to counteract the comfortably distant gaze employed when most visitors walk through an exhibit. Luna's performance became not only a metaphor for the long history of violence that led Europeans to place Indian bodies on display, but also uncensored evidence of violence in Native American life today.[20] The one redeeming element in the narrative—being "saved by an old man"—illuminated the contradictions of life on the reservation as a mix of abjection and compassion.



1.14 James Luna, *The Artifact Piece*, 1987–1990. Installation view of artist. Photo courtesy of the artist and the Heard Museum.

1.15 James Luna, *The Artifact Piece*, 1987–1990. Installation view with display case. Photo courtesy of the artist and the Heard Museum.

Other contradictions were to be found in three museum vitrines placed near the artist's body. One contained traditional artifacts and "medicine" objects used in rituals that might be found in other natural history exhibitions of indigenous cultures of the Americas. Another contained a strange assortment of shoes, each customized by the artist to look Indian, and each suggesting a missing presence, a missing subject. The third display case contained Luna's personal belongings and mementos: a current driver's license, a diploma, tapes and records by contemporary musicians such as Miles Davis, the Rolling Stones, and Jimi Hendrix, political buttons for Students for a Democratic Society and the United Farm Workers of America, comic books and writings by Allen Ginsberg and Charles Bukowski, small sports figurines, paper toys, pictures of children, a plastic Godzilla and a statuette of a Franciscan monk with his arm around a small Native American child (figure 1.15).[21] By bringing these private belongings into the museum and by identifying the Indian as one who consumes popular culture, Luna counteracts the perspective of cultural institutions and museums that represent indigenous peoples of the United States as already extinct.

As both living and "dead," Luna produces the conditions for an existential and epistemological disruption of the typical conditions of museum spectatorship. Scholar Jean Fisher observes of *The Artifact Piece,* "There is a diabolical humor in this parody of the 'Indian' in the realm of the 'undead'.... If the purpose of the undead Indian of colonialism is to secure the self-identity of the onlooker, the shock of his real presence and the possibility that he may indeed be watching and listening disarms the voyeuristic gaze and denies it its structuring power."[22] In a parallel argument, Miwon Kwon writes that *The Artifact Piece* "is not an overt insistence on the inclusion of excluded or repressed 'real' histories of particular 'minor' constituencies within official narrative of the dominant culture. Instead, the self-sacrificial gesture of offering his own body and personal effects as gifts to the museum, becoming the "vanquished Indian"—in other words, 'killing' himself—is a strategy of opposition and resistance of a different order.... Even as Luna enacts a personal erasure in order to make visible a social one, *The Artifact Piece* claims life and survival."[23] Luna's performing body, lying in a liminal state of stasis, paradoxically becomes the mummified artifact that refuses to die.

Museum displays, particularly of a colonial kind that permit dominant cultures to display the artifacts and cultures of the vanquished, are structured around a carefully calibrated form of temporal fetishism in which objects operate both as signs of oppression or dominance, and of its disavowal. This fetishism works through a process of denial and substitution. In order to disavow the history of exploration and violence that produced the relations of dominance and control that led to the collection or theft of cultural artifacts, museums create pleasurable environments of con-

templation carefully designed to minimize historical references to political and social contact or conflict between cultures. Artifacts are displayed as rare and unique aesthetic objects to be admired for their remarkable craftsmanship, or as utilitarian tools to be examined and understood in the context of their use. Colonial museum displays thus regularly substitute the material object for the historical narrative of its provenance, while providing pleasure in good fetishistic fashion precisely because this substitution allows visitors to see what they desire (aesthetic beauty, other ways of life, their own glorious past) without seeing what they fear (the real history of violence that underlies colonial contact and cultural imperialism, the resentments of racism, the contemporary reality of economic inequality). As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblet observes, "Documentation and exhibition are implicated in the disappearance of what they show."[24] Thorough, thoughtful, tasteful, and often carefully researched exhibitions can unwittingly contribute to this disavowal, denial, or distraction by seeming to provide all the information a visitor could possibly want. *The Artifact Piece* works as a rhetorical foil to this kind of fetishism. It provides information (about contemporary life, violence, alcoholism) the visitor does not want to see, thereby revealing the unconscious habits of display that romanticize and historicize the Indian as part of the vanishing past, existing in a pristine precolonial state. It also reminds viewers that race and ethnicity may be taxonomies whose boundaries are patrolled by exhibitions, but that these taxonomies are also *lived* by human beings.

In *The Predicament of Culture,* James Clifford offers a useful analysis of the art-culture system's production of what he calls machines for "making authenticity." Museums are the most potent of such machines because they function to mark the boundary between the "authentic" realms of art (connoisseurship, the art museum, the art market) or culture (history, folklore, ethnographic artifacts, material culture) and the "inauthentic" realms of fakes, tourist art, and ready-mades.[25] *The Artifact Piece* crosses these traditional divides by presenting an artist as an "artifact" and by placing mass culture objects beside traditional ritual objects. Moreover, Luna's work also shows how museums produce isolated or suspended symbolic orders that mark two kinds of imagined subjects: those who are identified as bearers of an institutional gaze, and those who are identified as objects of that gaze. The imagined subject who sees with the eyes of the institution is the subject for whom the museum is an ideological home—what might be called the *speaking subject* of the museum—whose boundaries of comfort are defined by the limits of the collection and its display. The imagined subject who becomes the object of (or becomes objectified by) the institutional gaze can be thought of as the *spoken subject* of the institution. In Luna's installation, the artist takes advantage of the rare opportunity to perform as both the *speaking* and the *spoken* subject, the one who creates the display and who serves as its object.

The Artifact Piece is not an ethnographic representation. It is a fiction, based on historical fact: an autofiction. In their essay "Autofictions, or Elective Identities," Olivier Asselin and Johanne Lamoureux address the construction of artificial or "elective" identities as a recurrent theme in art practice throughout the twentieth century, observing that artists have developed new ways to represent subjectivity, "through the invention of pseudonyms, alter egos and imaginary lives; through the construction of new images of the self and new accounts of one's life; through fictitious self-portraits, autobiographies and personal mythologies."[26] *The Artifact Piece* also worked as an evidence-laden material self-portrait, what I called an autotopography in the introduction. Like French artist Christian Boltanski's *Vitrine de Référence* (1972), in which the artist displayed photographs of himself, a scrap of a pullover sweater worn in 1949, a ball of hair, family photographs, letters, handmade "tools," and sundry found objects all carefully labeled, Luna's work is a reliquary of a personal past, a mythology of existence that rests on the fragile evidence of fragments. Unlike Boltanksi's work, however, Luna's piece details the cultural paradox of living two contradictory lives, an indigenous traditional life of ritual and ceremony and an assimilated life that participates in mainstream popular culture and political struggles of the moment.

For this reason, Luna's work may also be akin to an autoethnography as defined by Mary Louise Pratt in her book *Imperial Eyes*.[27] There she offers a subtle vision of "autoethnographic expression" that refers "to instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer's own terms. If ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others, autoethnographic texts are those the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations."[28] Pratt argues that "authoethnography involves partial collaboration with and appropriation of the idioms of the conqueror."[29] Employing devices of museum display that have traditionally formed the means of representing (or erasing) the history of Native Americans, Luna engages with the "colonizer's own terms" to offer a critical response to historical representations of race. If museums have been one of the primary means by which those in power "represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others," Luna is able to usurp the form through a transformation of style and content. Pratt argues that "autoethnographic texts are typically heterogeneous on the reception end as well, usually addressed both to metropolitan readers and to literate sectors of the speaker's own social group, and bound to be received very differently by each."[30] Rather than reading *The Artifact Piece* as simply a representation of the artist's *identity*, it is possible to see how Luna strategically employs autobiographical elements to produce an ambiguous autofiction, a bicultural autotopography, and a critical autoethnography.

As an artist who interrogates the image of the Indian, Luna has also produced a significant body of photographic works that serve as ambivalent self-portraits. The photographic self-portraits discussed below are carefully staged genre parodies that work to unmask the phantom Indians haunting the popular visual imaginary of the United States, reminding us that the discourse of portraiture always functions within a larger ecology of portrayal. Not only is a portrait an image of someone, but it is also always a representation of the process of looking. To represent the history of a subject for whom ethnic stereotyping is a common obstacle, it may be necessary to take into account the problem of an institutional gaze that forms the contours of an imagined subject. Here the process of looking that underlies the reading of the portrait may be constrained by culturally sanctioned, institutionally supported categories of race and ethnicity.

As a recording device, the medium of photography has always been allied with truth claims: as evidence in courts of law, as the necessary supplement to historical narratives, as the existential proof for the passing of time, or as the unquestioned paradigm for visual documentary. Historians and theorists have engaged critically with this "truth effect" of photography for over a century, assessing the cultural investment in the indexical quality of the image and the connotations of naturalism that it implies.[31] Because of their long association, it is possible to draw a parallel between the truth effect of photography and what might be called the "truth effect" of racial discourse.[32] Both naturalize ideological systems by making them visible and apparently self-evident. As with photography, the visual or visible elements of race function to produce "truth effects" that appear natural.

Perhaps for this reason, the history of photography is inseparable from the history of racial discourse. Particularly in the late nineteenth century, photography was used to support the creation of eugenics, a false science that claimed to determine human character based on the study of phenotype. Because differences in body type (i.e., low-brow, high-brow) were said to reflect moral and intellectual qualities, race became one of the primary objects of the camera's differentiating gaze. Epidermalization became codified through photography, shaping public consciousness in the United States both before the civil war and after, with images of former slaves or colonized natives depicted as little more than zoological specimens.[33] This effect was produced by placing partially clothed or entirely unclothed subjects against a gridded backdrop in order to better measure their physical attributes using the supposedly "scientific" apparatus of the mechanical lens. Anthropometry, as this practice of bodily measurement was called, not only became a dehumanizing tool of pseudoanthropologists, but also was the origin of the criminal mug shot developed by Alphonse Bertillon in France in the 1880s.[34] Anthropometry of African Americans, Native Americans, Native Australians, and Native Canadians was practiced until at least the late 1930s.[35]

It is also the case that well-meaning social scientists and cultural enthusiasts found photography to be the best tool to document what was considered at the time to be the vanishing civilizations of the American Indian.[36] A romantic urge to preserve and protect Native Americans in their authentic state often led to fantastical depictions of native life as divorced from the realities of colonial encroachment. Alan Trachtenberg observes that a major shift in photographic practice can be traced from the 1870s, when a typical image of an Indian consisted of a before-and-after sequence depicting "wild-looking" youth transformed into docile boarding school students, to the 1890s when unassimilated Indians were depicted as objects of desire and fascination. This transition took place, of course, at the very moment that Indians were no longer considered a military or territorial threat.[37]

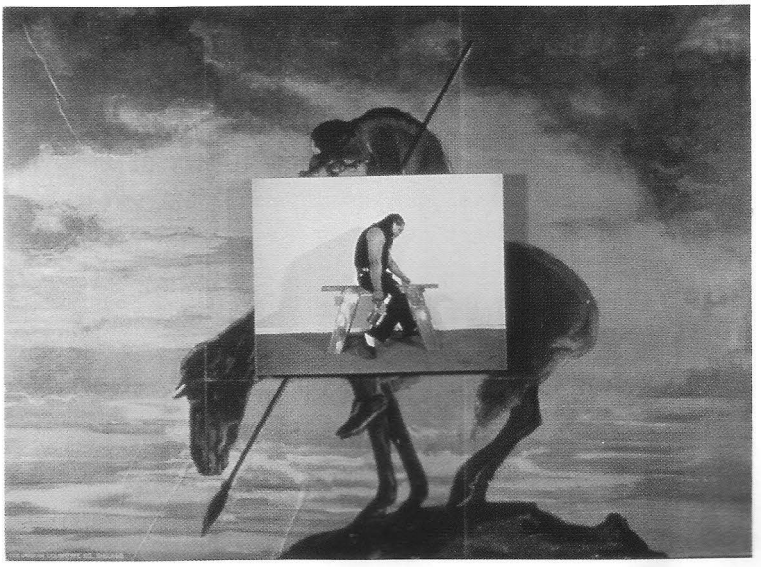
Edward S. Curtis shot stunning and seductive portraits of many different Indian tribes between 1906 and 1927, but he was also known to carefully pose his sitters, manipulate costumes, or retouch negatives to remove signs of modern life so that the portraits would appear more "authentic."[38] His sitters were paid to perform their roles as Indians before the lens.[39] With titles such as *Kalispel Type* (1911) or *Hopi Man* (1921), actual names, ages, social positions, family connections, and life narratives disappeared into the smoky soft focus of Curtis's pictorialist gaze. Both pseudoscientific and romantic photographic depictions of Native Americans have circulated in American popular culture and consciousness for over one hundred years, creating a pervasive and persistent "truth effect" of innate "Indian-ness" that has become part of the underlying visual sediment upon which more extreme forms of racial stereotyping are built.

Luna's choice of medium for his series of self-portraits appears to derive from a knowing critique of this tradition, both in the history of photography and the history of fine art. One of the first versions of this exploration can be found in the installation *AA Meeting/Art History* (1991). In a room containing four metal folding chairs gathered around a video monitor and an ashtray full of cigarette butts, several photographic self-portraits depict the artist in classic poses from the history of Western European and American art. Wearing a black T-shirt and pants, the artist posed as Rodin's *Thinker,* as a reclining odalisque, and as a slouching figure hunched over a sawhorse with a bottle of beer hanging from his hand; this last was a reprise of James Earl Fraser's *End of the Trail.* The strangely ludicrous and pathetic comparison between these canonical figures of art history and Alcoholics Anonymous participants also figures the cultural abyss that separates them. Indigenous corporeality becomes unmoored from the racial "type" as viewers familiar with the historical references to Rodin or Fraser are able to compare the abjectness—and grace—of Luna's body with the classic images through which, and against which, it signifies. Teresa Harlan writes, "Creating a visual history—and its repre-

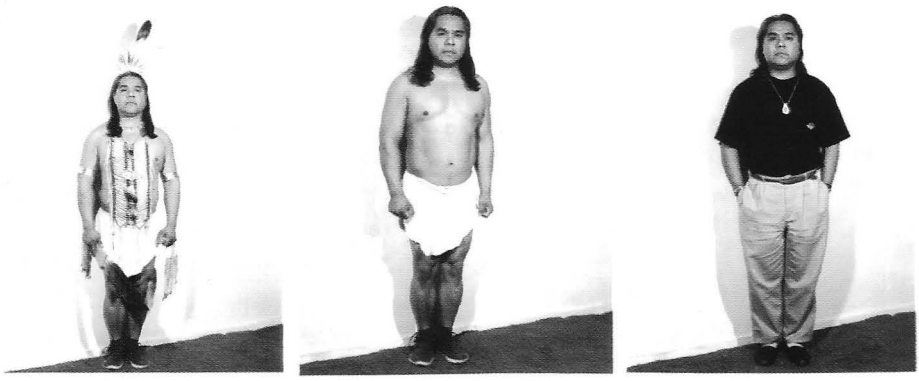
sentations—from Native memories or from Western myths; this is the question before Native image-makers and photographers today. The contest remains over who will image—and own—this history."[40]

By 1890, most Native Americans were confined to reservations and had suffered so profoundly from extermination, disease, and starvation that the overall population reached a historical low (the numbers have increased since then). It was no coincidence that in 1894, when he was seventeen, Fraser produced the first version of his now classic and much reproduced *End of the Trail,* which depicts a defeated Indian warrior, his head bowed in resignation or exhaustion, his braids blown by the wind, his spear hanging dejectedly in his hand.[41] Fraser's father was involved in railroad expansion, but it appears that the young Fraser sympathized with the Indians, who certainly seemed to be vanishing at the time, pushed further and further west by the unstoppable machine of industrialization. A large plaster version of the statue won a gold medal at the Panama Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco in 1915 and quickly became one of the most popular images of the time, appearing on postcards, on calendars, on posters, and in miniature form.[42] Today one can easily find replicas for sale on the internet, and museums across the country have copies in their permanent collections or on display.[43] The original sculpture was recently refurbished and is now housed in the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City.

Luna's restaging of Fraser's image turns on the calamity of alcoholism in Native American communities. Although the figure appears equally defeated in Luna's depiction, an underlying sense of tenacity or persistence exists. Luna's image returns in a later work superimposed over a color painting of Fraser's original, retitled *End of the Frail* (1991) (figure 1.16).



1.16 James Luna, *End of the Frail,* 1991. Black-and-white photo by Richard Lou. Courtesy of the artist.



1.17, 1.18 James Luna, *Take a Picture with a Real Indian,* 1991. Photos courtesy of the artist and the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program.

In the photograph, Luna faces in the opposite direction as Fraser's Indian, and the wordplay of the title invites viewers to reassess the presumed frailty of the indigenous population, its purported defeat and demise. Luna's work is also in conversation with that of other contemporary Native American artists who have worked with photography as a cultural trope, directly referencing or deconstructing its anthropological gaze. For example, Marcus Amerman has produced a series of portraits that reconstruct the formal views of Edward S. Curtis's photographs, substituting indigenous men and women unromantically posing in contemporary clothing.[44] Amerman's images suggest that the photographic past infringes on the present as a discourse that can be reimagined though its rehabitation.

While some may assume that the idealization and commercialization of the image of the Indian lies in a past era, and that Luna's work is primarily a historical critique, ample evidence points to the reality that the display of Indian bodies and practices across the United States is still a lucrative commercial business today.[45] Reenacting the objectification of the Indian body as a tourist curiosity, the artist combined live performance with a photo shoot in *Take a Picture with a Real Indian,* staged both by the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program, in an exhibition entitled *Site-Seeing: Travel and Tourism in Contemporary Art* (1991), and later at the Salina Art Center in Kansas (2001). In both performances, Luna stood on a low platform covered in artificial turf with three life-sized photographic self-portraits flanking him on either side, their two-dimensional presence echoing the lifeless "cigar store" Indians that still populate parts of rural America as well as the cardboard cutouts—called "stand-ups"—designed for tourism and advertising. One of Luna's stand-ups wears simple street clothes, another shows the artist in an elaborate warrior costume with feathered headdress and decorative breastplate and in the last Luna wears only a leather loincloth and moccasins (figure 1.17). Audience members had the option of being photographed with the artist who appeared at the performance in each costume in succession (figure 1.18).

The power of the performance lay in the careful dynamics of staging the pose. In the Salina Art Center performance, Luna invited audience members up to the front of the room to "take a picture with a real Indian here tonight, free." Although he did not charge audience members, he emphasized the commercial transaction that normally attends such actions. "You get to take two, you take one home, and you leave one. Take a picture with a real Indian here in the middle of America. America likes to say *her* Indians. Come on," Luna gestured with the rattle in his hand, "take a picture with a *real* Indian."[46] Placing emphasis on the word "real" Luna repeated the phrase several times, challenging the audience to make a decision about what might constitute a real Indian. One of the first groups to come up on stage was a white family with two children.

Fully clothed and posed around Luna, who was wearing only his leather loincloth, their light skin contrasted with his exposed, tan body. Not one of the family members looked at Luna, or talked to him as they stared expectantly at the camera. Luna stood impassively and stoically for all of the shots. His neutrality in the pose and seriousness of expression, not to mention his general silence, invited a similar response from the audience. No communication took place between artist and audience members during the photographic act, which seemed almost pornographic in its live objectification of the artist-as-image. Photography as a mediating procedure became the conceptual focus of the work; as a medium inviting social "contact" through the artificial act of the pose, it also guaranteed that no substantive interchange would transpire. The fact that most participants chose to be photographed with Luna in his traditional rather than contemporary dress suggested that their notion of a "real Indian" depended on familiar stereotypes, not a contemporary artist in khakis and a T-shirt. One white woman who was photographed with the artist commented, "Well it was so disconcerting to stand by him. He was so inert and so unreal in lots of ways... statuesque. But I could smell the leather. Don't you think that's the way real Indians smell... with leather? What did you think?"[47]

It is instructive to compare the 1992 performance-installation *Two Undiscovered Amerindians...*, by Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gomez-Peña who posed as two caged "savages" in a parody of the displays of indigenous populations by colonizing countries that began as early as the fifteenth century and continued well into the twentieth century. Dark-skinned bodies of colonized peoples from Africa or South America, for example, were on display for the enjoyment and curiosity of white audiences at venues as various as world's fairs, nightclubs, circuses, zoos, and natural history museums in Europe and the United States.[48] Although Fusco and Gomez-Peña dressed in faux grass skirts and Converse tennis shoes, leopard skin wrestling masks and sunglasses, some viewers were still convinced that the performance was real and that the two performance artists were members of an indigenous tribe put on display in a cage (the work was exhibited in museums and art galleries in major cities including New York, London, Washington, DC, Madrid, and Sydney). Fusco and Gomez-Peña also offered to pose for photographs with museum and gallery visitors for a fee. In her essay about the performance experience, Fusco writes that "the public investment in [cultural and racial stereotypes] does not simply wither away through rationalization. The constant concern about our 'realness' revealed a need for reassurance that a 'true primitive' *did* exist, whether we fit the bill or not, and that she or he was visually identifiable."[49]

The discourse of the real, the fantasy of the authentic, and the desire for proximity to cultural or racial alterity appears to be nearly as strong in

the contemporary art audience as it was for Curtis one hundred years ago. This pervasive fantasy and desire fuels a lucrative market of tourism in the United States where both native and nonnative entrepreneurs live off its perpetuation. In an interview about *Take a Picture with a Real Indian,* Luna remarked, "I saw some Indian selling his red ass to sell jewelry, and I was ashamed but knew what he was doing—he was working, I've worked too. When this opportunity came to do a statement on tourism, I thought of the Navajo and how as Indians we have all been on the tourist line."[50] After posing with numerous audience members, the artist continued his monologue: "America likes to name cars and trucks after our tribes. America likes to name film festivals after our sacred dances. America doesn't like us wealthy.... Americans like romance more than they like the truth. Take a picture with a real Indian in Pine Ridge, South Dakota.... Take a picture on skid row in Oklahoma City. Come to the Indian hospital in Washington State. Come to the res', come to the city, we are all over, we are all over, take a picture with a real Indian."[51]

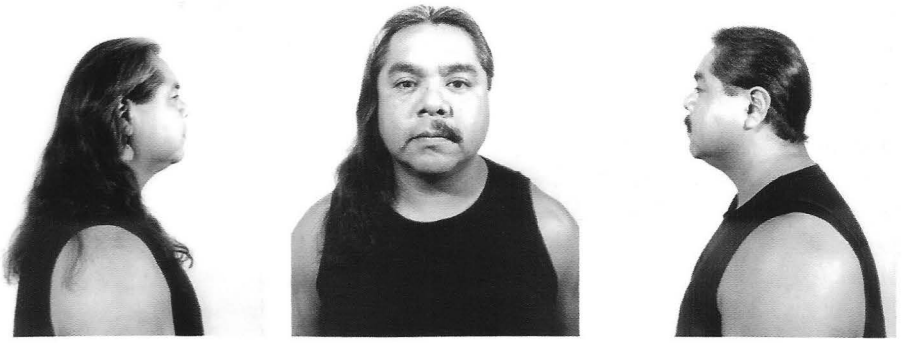
Concern with "realness" haunts the lives of many Native Americans, and it is a trope that recurs in Luna's work. As suggested earlier, the artist examines the conditions or events that suture actual persons to mythic fantasies; he also demonstrates how these fantasies, in turn, produce the living conditions and racial environment that actual people have to navigate. For Luna both "fantasy" and "real" are suspect categories whose boundaries are permeable. Scholar Ann Marie Acklam argues that Luna's work can be understood not in terms of mimesis but in terms of *mimetic excess* insofar as it engages the performed body as both subject and object in order to "de-mask the artifice of reality."[52] In *Take a Picture with a Real Indian,* Luna debunks the notion that a "real Indian" exists, but he also draws our attention to very concrete conditions of everyday life for Native Americans today.

The artist has commented, "And there's the issue of what's an Indian? Who's an Indian? If you're part Indian, What's the other part? How does that influence you? Does it make you less? Does it make you more? I don't have an answer for that but that's part of my work, questioning that."[53] *Half Indian/Half Mexican* (1990) took up this issue directly in the form of a black-and-white photographic triptych showing the artist posed in a frontal and two profile views. A parody of the traditional mug shot, with its connotations of anthropometric science from the nineteenth century, Luna's somber self-portraits managed to debunk the notion that photography can reveal the truth of the subject (figure 1.19). One profile shows a clean-shaven Luna with long hair and an earring, while the other profile shows the artist with short-cropped hair and a thick mustache. It is the frontal view that is satirical, showing the artist with long hair draped over one shoulder and only half a mustache. Funny, but strangely unsettling, the central image also raises the question of racial and ethnic

affiliation as a matter of choice or style—in this case, a shave and haircut. Conceptually and formally, Luna's work echoes Adrian Piper's *Political Self-Portrait #2* (1978), which recounts the fraught lived condition of the mixed-race subject. A black-and-white image of Piper is divided in half vertically so that her face appears to have white skin on one side and black skin on the other, like the negative/positive exposures of a photograph. Below the image, the word "paleface" appears in large block letters, and over the image is a poignant typewritten account of life lived as a light-skinned "colored" child that includes descriptions of abuse from both blacks and whites, revealing how living between two racial paradigms can be particularly brutal. Luna's *Half Indian/Half Mexican* is both more lighthearted and more celebratory of mixed cultural heritage than Piper's self-portrait, but it raises a set of parallel concerns about living as a racially split subject: concerns about belonging to a community, about being misread by the public, about rejection and assimilation.

Luna's portrait triptych was originally shown as part of an installation titled *Before Columbus/After Columbus* that included a circle of objects placed on the ground, half Native American (a traditional grindstone, basket with acorns, leather moccasins, flute, and family photographs on a bed of sand) and half Mexican (traditional Mexican *metate,* a can of refried beans in a cast-iron pan, leather boots, votive candles, and family photographs, on bright linoleum tiles). *Half Indian/Half Mexican* is distinctly autotopographical, and in some respects it functions as a risky confession for the artist, who quite possibly gains more support as an Indian artist than he might (particularly in the United States) as a Mexican American artist. In mainstream popular culture Indians, as we have seen, are often viewed as noble, mysterious, and wise, whereas Mexican Americans are often depicted as criminal, poor, and ignorant, despite the fact that genetic heritage and cultural traditions might well be shared by both, as the installation's material artifacts suggest. This is particularly true along the U.S.-Mexico border.

In the same way that *Take a Picture with a Real Indian* replicated the conditions of a roadside attraction in which the Indian's body is valued for its cardboard cutout resemblance to a stereotype, *Petroglyphs in Motion,* which was performed for SITE Santa Fe in 2001, replicated a high fashion runway. Audience members were seated in rows along two sides of a narrow aisle. Strategically placed floodlights along the floor in the darkened room mimicked stage lighting and also cast large, shadowy silhouettes of Luna against the white walls of the gallery space. The artist did not speak, but he was accompanied by a trap drum set played by Apache drummer Darren Virgil Gray. Using the quick change tactics of runway models, the artist appeared in a series of costumes and personas, the first a reference to German conceptual artist Joseph Beuys's ironic performance *I Like America and America Likes Me* (1974). During his first visit to the United



1.19 James Luna, *Half Indian/Half Mexican*, 1990. Photos courtesy of the artist.

1.20, 1.21 James Luna, *Petroglyphs in Motion,* 2001. Detail of shaman and of playing saxophone. Photos courtesy of the artist.

States Beuys performed a three-day art action at the René Block gallery in New York, isolated with a captive wild coyote. His motive seems to have been a desire to be in the presence of something truly native to the Americas (although he also used the opportunity to protest U.S. foreign policies in Vietnam and critique the capitalistic impulse behind them). In a much-reproduced image of the performance, Beuys appears wrapped in a blanket of felt with a curved walking stick protruding slightly above his head, as if protecting himself from the animal across the room. In Luna's first runway pass, he wrapped himself from head to toe in a patterned 'Indian' blanket with a protruding walking stick (in later versions a golf club) (figure 1.20). For those familiar with Beuys's earlier work, Luna's reference was immediately apparent, and it also brought to mind the fact that Beuys occasionally likened himself to a shaman, freely appropriating and romanticizing the traditional practices of indigenous cultures.[54] Luna's performance is perhaps both homage and critique, for it also echoes the ironic sentiment of Beuys's title: *I Like America and America Likes Me*. After all, the Indian is an idealized cultural icon of the United States, as well as its most abject, defeated subject.

The rest of the performance might be understood to explore this range of contradictory connotations. Luna's subsequent personas included a runner in briefs, who then returned dancing with a rattle, and then returned with a telephone receiver, dialing numbers and gesturing as if in conversation. The audience laughed at this unexpected transformation of the mythological to the modern-day Indian. Luna then returned as a theatrical Indian wearing a commercial costume fringed in bright yellow and red, playing a toy saxophone (figure 1.21). When he proceeded to hold out a paper cup for donations, the audience played along with the joke. But the laughter died down when he returned in dark sunglasses, a *cholo* plaid flannel shirt, and red bandanna, drinking from a beer can and staggering as if drunk. Holding out the same paper cup to the audience for spare change, he got fewer donations, and some audience members looked away uncomfortably when approached. Each persona offered a view into the contemporary lives of Native Americans who suffer from the ailments of modernity (unemployment, alcoholism) or who survive in the face of it. Moving through several more characters, including a foxlike trickster figure, a slick salesman, and a stately elder in a wheelchair, the artist offered the audience a compendium of cultural projections. Although Luna recycled familiar stereotypes as the starting point of his silent petroglyphs (the shaman, the drunk, the trickster), he created nuanced and surprisingly sympathetic revisions of each by emphasizing their subtle, human qualities. *Petroglyphs in Motion* revived a tableau vivant tradition in the guise of a contemporary fashion show. Luna took on the role of the runway model, by definition an object of display, and presented his characters as the reanimation of petrified archetypes. Because of the silhouette

effect on the walls, and the way in which the artist posed at each end of the runway, the work paralleled the artist's photographic practice more than his spoken performances. Visibility and invisibility were again at stake in Luna's effort to demonstrate how a fascination with the past, in this case with New Mexico's ancient petroglyphs, can obscure the lives of Native Americans in the present.

Overall, Luna's images are more *iconotropic* than iconoclastic, creating a conscious misinterpretation or reinterpretation of cultural icons to challenge their ideological power. They produce a visual articulation of the way the history of images, particularly photographic, comes to be imbedded in a lived corporeality for the subjects it defines. To live as an icon is to live artificially in relation to a public imaginary. This comes through in *Lunasteen* (2001) a black-and-white photograph of the artist leaping forward, with the neck of an electric guitar in one hand, pasted over an image of rock star Bruce Springsteen who is also leaping in the air, guitar in hand, in front of an American flag (figure 1.22). Formally echoing *End of the Frail* in its revision of an American icon, *Lunasteen* also serves to demonstrate the race politics underlying the public imaginary of national identity. As scholar Ellen Fernandez-Sacco observes, "The work wryly comments on how racial difference—both apparent and real—and iconicity reinforce whiteness in our sense of national identity and reaffirm constructions of white masculinity."[55] Luna's self-portrait is dwarfed by the Springsteen image. His intervention is only a small gesture against the vast apparatus of the U.S. culture industry, and the image demonstrates this fact as a question of scale. By superimposing his body on Springsteen's, the artist also claims the right to an American identity, yet demonstrates precisely how that right is denied, how American icons are usually white, how his own body signifies as racially unsuitable for this iconic role. Luna appears to be waving to someone, and his eyes are open. Perhaps the artist is hailing the future.