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Whether it is his overlay of the modern and the traditional, his skewing of past and present iconic images, or his employment of text, Longfish’s art draws on a sense of honor that allows truth to be pulled from all directions and the spirit to emerge from within the work in a way that heals the very wound it addresses.

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3 Longfish, Personal Correspondence.
6 Ibid.
It is with spirit George Longfish enters the creative act, and it is with spirit that he is guided through and beyond it. As he steps into a painting, he and the work create dialogue, a space mutually respectful and adaptable. During his initial attempts at drawing the Pawnee chief Pita Lisaru (Man Chief), who would eventually occupy the first panel of his distinguished triptych The End of the Innocence, Longfish was frustrated by his inability to re-create him. Longfish saw that something was awry: "The painting was guiding me as much as I was guiding it; my original idea was drastically changing as I tried to begin." This flexibility, ironically, enabled Longfish to readjust: he saw what he had taken for granted. Longfish honored Pita Lisaru and said hello to his spirit, and the chief then agreed to take the first step. In four days, Longfish had drawn him.

Longfish has often asserted that Native people must own their cultural knowledge: "The more we own our religious, spiritual, and survival information, and even language, the less we are able to own our religious, spiritual, and survival information, and even language, the less we are able to control.... The greatest lesson we can learn is that we can bring our spirituality and we are able to own our religious, spiritual, and survival information, and even language, the less we are able to control.... The greatest lesson we can learn is that we can bring our spirituality and...

In this way, tradition is delineated as evolutionary, as powerful and enabling, rather than fixed, stodic, or sentimentalized as Westerners' images of 'Indians' would make it out to be. In her article "Sovereignty: A Line in the Sand," Tascaota scholar Jolene Rickard writes, "As an ongoing strategy for survival, the work of indigenous artists needs to be understood through the clarifying lens of sovereignty and self-determination, not just in terms of assimilation, colonization, and identity politics." Longfish's art asserts the traditional and spiritual energy that, in Rickard's words, "jumps track and cuts a new swath for indigenous expressions."

Longfish's paintings, moreover, work from the inside out by creating a literal dialogue of humor, irony, and re-appropriation. His paintings—manifested through both image and language—produce a renewal of the "orality" grounded in Native traditions, a re-invigoration of dialogue and discourse. Embedded in that, of course, is the position of the receiver or listener, and it is from here that the story and message become realized, for it is only through the exchange that the aesthetic is passed, the truth discerned from the lie. Ojibwe scholar Gerald Vizenor argues that although the English language has been the tongue of colonialism, racial domination, and stifling tribal simulations, it has also been a language of paradoxical reinvention, subversion, and renewal when employed by Native people. He likens Native people's appropriation of colonialist tools to a new "Ghost Dance literature"—a challenge, a prayer, a song, a dance, an aesthetic that subverts dominance and continually re-creates Native survival and tradition. Longfish's "language"—whether image, form, color, or text—is exactly this: an aesthetic renewal of Native consciousness and an imagistic and textual re-visualization of indigenous people in North America. In Winter Still Life Landscape, South Dakota, 1893, two images of Chief Big Foot's frozen body mirror one another, with a soldier and a tent in the distance. Phrases framed as questions and answers, "Old men, women and children," "Dead 300+," "Posed Death," and "No Snowmobiling," appear as text both framing and cutting through the images. To be sure, humor subversively hints at the absurd, more importantly, however, the text writes through the being, far from the stereotypical "Indian" of popular culture. The middle panel, a painting of a jar of "100% natural Seneca apple sauce" with the words, "Progress, Acculturation, Assimilation," makes subversive commentary on American culture's appropriation of things Native, and the government's political agenda that ironically equates modernity with homogeneity. Finally, the third image, a photo of a powwow fancy dancer with the words, "America, White Bread, Mom, Apple Pie, The American Dream," emphasizes the gap between Native America and the non-Native United States while satirizing the affirmed tenets of what constitutes an "American." According to David Penney in Native American Art Masterpieces, "tradition in its purest sense functions by persisting as a culturally rooted filter that interprets the world on its own terms."
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Longfish has often asserted that Native people must own their cultural knowledge: “The more
we are able to own our religious, spiritual, and survival information, and even language, the less we
can be controlled. . . . The greatest lesson we can learn is that we can bring our spirituality and
warrior information from the past and use it in the present and see that it still works.” This com-
can be controlled. . . . The greatest lesson we can learn is that we can bring our spirituality and
warrior information from the past and use it in the present and see that it still works.” This com-
pression of history and present reality subverts linear constructs of time and allows Longfish to
re-appropriate cultural images and words in order to discern the truth from the lie in a way that
has always been innate to Native philosophy and religion. In The End of the Innocence, for example,
Longfish juxtaposes past and present figures, thereby creating a space where the nostalgic and
the romantic are undercut by humor and irony. Longfish’s paintings complicate the notions of the
contemporary Native condition while debunking the myths and stereotypes that have stood for
more than 500 years as the colonizer’s agenda of erasure. In the new piece, Hunting for the Supreme
Buffalo Burger, Longfish continues to address the loss of survival information, questioning what
literally, spiritually, and culturally feeds Native people.

Longfish uses all bold colors and crosscutting words brings a vitality that “speaks to the size of
the issues” his paintings examine.1 His work engages political issues that have a long history, and the
paintings necessarily work on a large and uncensored scale—with colors that strike, not appease,
with text that complicates, not explains. Within the color and language is a psychic and spiritual
expressiveness that both aligns Native-American art with Western modernism and upholds resistance
to it. Longfish examines the idea of “soul theft” by acknowledging the strength in re-owning one’s
spirituality. For example, in Modern Times, three seemingly disparate images are linked by loaded
textual commentary running across them. The first image, a self-portrait with the words, “Twentieth
Century, Tribal, Seneca, Warrior, Artist, Healer,” positions the artist as a multidimensional human
being, far from the stereotypical “Indian” of popular culture. The middle panel, a painting of a jar of
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