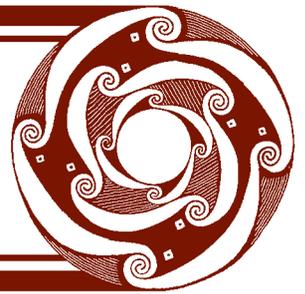




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Tekcno Powwow: Ancient Rhythms for the I-Pod Generation (Coming to Colorado College in October)

Like many young graduate art students, Bently Spang eagerly embraced the electronic music movement that swept through dance clubs in the 1990s. While his peers may have found the hypnotic rhythms and ecstatic dance of the techno-music scene to be exhilaratingly new, Spang was reminded of his childhood on the Northern Cheyenne reservation in Montana. "I was blown away by the energy," Spang says. "It felt like déjà vu; the effortless dancing that comes out of it is like going through a wall, and not unlike my own experiences at a powwow on the reservation." To explore the similarities he saw between the powwows of his childhood, the edgy techno-music dance parties of his college years, and urban break-dancing competitions, Spang collaborated with Navajo artist and DJ Bert Benally to create *Tekcno Powwow*. A participatory event, *Powwow* combines traditional Native drumming and dancing with techno-music, video, and hip-hop dance to explore how diverse cultures borrow from each other to support their own ethnic identities. *Tekcno Powwow* provides Spang, a prolific artist, curator, performer, and writer, with a multi-media format to examine contemporary Native American identities. "I am interested in sampling from as many mediums and modes of expression as are necessary to express my experience as a Cheyenne man," Spang says. "Sitting squarely in the center of a continuum of making that is countless generations old, I move forward with my work to embrace the contradictions, illuminate the injustices, and celebrate the intricacies of a living culture."

Tekcno Powwow's synthesis of influences reflects the traditional powwow's historical role as a forum for cultural exchange between American Indian tribes. While the exact origins of the modern powwow are unknown, it is generally accepted that the concept of the powwow developed out of late 19th century gatherings of Plains tribes who met to exchange songs, dances, and ceremonies. These inter-tribal gatherings were crucial in preserving Native cultures during the United States Government's ban on Native ritual and dance, which extended from the mid-1800s to the early 1930s. During this time, dance ceremonies were held in secret, or disguised as other activities. Incorporating traditional customs, such as honoring elders and naming ceremonies, modern powwows are an important part of Native cultural and public life. A multi-ethnic hybrid of music, fashion, and dance, *Tekcno Powwow* mirrors the traditional powwow's function as a vehicle for social exchange, community-building, and education.

By mixing Native American drum rhythms with techno-music or show-casing a break-dancing Fancy Dancer, *Tekcno Powwow* challenges the idea that Native American cultures are static. "Everyone feels they know who Native peoples are, and yet they continually put us in one time period," Spang says. Anthropologist James Clifford has identified the belief that cultural authenticity can be maintained only if a population remains immune to change, as in the salvage paradigm. Implicit to the salvage paradigm is the belief that the culture in question is on the verge of extinction and must therefore be preserved, unadulterated, for posterity. Updating the traditional powwow for a media-driven, technological age, Spang challenges this moribund view of Native culture by hosting *Tekcno Powwow* in character as The Blue Guy: Indian of the Future. Inspired by

comic book superheroes, Spang says of his performance character, "I want to show that the Indian of the Future is cool and sexy."

Throughout his career Spang has repeatedly disputed the notion that tradition and innovation are mutually exclusive within Native cultures. Noting that the dynamic adoption of new artistic media is a hallmark of an evolving culture, he cites myriad examples of Native artistic exploration. He says, "Imported glass beads from Europe were combined with traditional tanned hides and sinew; metal and mirrors were incorporated

into traditional regalia. This ability to adapt and innovate, as evidenced by the artwork, is what has facilitated our survival." Spang engages the same fluid interplay between the traditional and the contemporary in the creation of his *Cyberskins*, powwow regalia made from technological detritus, such as computer motherboards. The *Cyberskins* express the performers' dual citizenship in traditional and contemporary worlds. Spang says, "*Cyberskins* draw inspiration from current powwow regalia, traditional information, and high-tech culture."

Tekcno Powwow will take place on Saturday, October 6 at 8 p.m. in Cossitt Gym. The event is free and open to the public. *Cyberskins* will be on display in Coburn Gallery, inside Worner Center, from October 11 through December 6, 2007. For more information on either event, or directions, call the Worner Information desk at 389-6607.

—Jessica Hunter Larsen (CC '90),
Colorado College Curator Interdisciplinary Arts Program



Bently Spang as The Blue Guy: Indian of the Future

Photo Courtesy of Bently Spang