



**CONTEMPORARY
INDIGENEITY**
SPIRITUAL BORDERLANDS

great plains
ART MUSEUM



ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Contemporary Indigeneity is a biennale exhibition inaugurated in 2012 to highlight the artistic contributions of the American Indian artists who reside in or make art about the Great Plains. In 2016, works by artists with Native American heritage were invited to submit artworks that incorporated their interpretations of sovereignty, spiritual connections to the land, and cultural identity within the boundaries of the Great Plains region. The submitted works were reviewed by a panel of curators and judged on aesthetic and technical merit as well as the relevant interpretation of the designated theme. Selected works represent a diverse range of artistic media ranging from jewelry to quilts to abstract paintings. It is about the contemporary Native experience on the Great Plains.

ARTISTS

Gina Adams

Molly Murphy Adams

Nadema Agard

Chase Kahwinhut Earles

Bunky Echo-Hawk

Robert Martinez

Henry Payer

Nelda Schrupp

Gwen Westerman

Monte Yellow Bird Sr. (Black Pinto Horse)

EXHIBITION SPONSORS



HUMANITIES NEBRASKA

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heather ahtone, James T. Bialac Associate Curator of Native American & Non-Western Art, Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, University of Oklahoma

Netha Cloeter, Director of Education and Social Engagement, Plains Art Museum, Fargo, North Dakota

Jill Ahlberg Yohe, Ph.D., Assistant Curator of Native American Art, Minneapolis Institute of Art

ABOUT THE MUSEUM

The Great Plains Art Museum in downtown Lincoln, Neb., exhibits art that interprets the history, culture, environment, and creative spirit of the Great Plains of North America. Changing exhibitions feature contemporary artists as well as work from the Museum's permanent collection including art of the American West and Native American art consisting of bronze sculptures, paintings and drawings, other works on paper, and photographs.



CONTEMPORARY INDIGENEITY: SPIRITUAL BORDERLANDS

Inaugurated in 2012, *Contemporary Indigeneity* is a biennale exhibition that highlights artistic contributions by American Indian artists who reside in or make art about the Great Plains. In 2016, the third iteration of the exhibition emphasized artworks that explored the concept of spiritual borderlands. Broad interpretations of each artist's spiritual connection to borders were expressed in various media ranging from jewelry to quilts to abstract paintings. Rather than focusing on traditional modes of representation typically associated with work by American Indians, the exhibition incorporated work comparable to any artist working today regardless of ethnicity.¹

The term borderland often conjures images of physical spaces. However, connections to specific places can be difficult to ascertain, particularly in a global economy with continually shifting geo-political borders coinciding with virtual discursive spaces created via technological advancements. Corporeal location no longer solely defines space, thus complicating the ways in which one associates with community and defines personal identity. For American Indians, political and societal circumstances have created "unimagined discursive spaces," and according to artist and curator Gerald McMaster, their contemporary space is a "negotiated space."² These circumstances are most often rooted in a historical narrative dictated long before the current generation of artists began creating. Aboriginal ancestral homelands were redefined by U.S. government policy that established reservation and territorial lands. According to McMaster, "the urban and rural now make up two discursive places or communities that form the reservation narrative."³ The discourse from these two spaces affects how



Contemporary Indigeneity installation at Great Plains Art Museum

artists interpret the liminal spaces where they create and live. Such conditions also contribute to the difficulty in defining what exactly constitutes as Native American art.

For the context of the *Contemporary Indigeneity: Spiritual Borderlands*, artists were identified as Native based on their tribal affiliation, although the criteria was not as strict as those set forth by the 1990 Native American Arts and Crafts law regarding the sale of indigenous art forms. The Great Plains Art Museum recognized the importance of including only artists of American Indian or First Peoples descent for reasons that include, but are not limited to, the marginalization of indigenous peoples that often results in a lack of adequate representation in mainstream museum collections and fine art exhibition venues. In selecting artworks for *Contemporary Indigeneity 2016*, how each artist and their community culturally identified them(selves) as Native bore more weight than genetic distinction or federal designation. Many of the participating artists are enrolled tribal members. However, some artists included do not have federally recognized tribal affiliation despite their familial connections and knowledge of ancestral traditions.

Even before the passing of laws to protect indigenous artists in the 1990s, scholars and artists have struggled to determine what defines American Indian art. In the late 1970s, American literary scholar Geary Hobson addressed the issue when compiling an anthology of Native American texts. Drawing from political and societal positions of the time, Hobson mapped out four ways of defining how an individual can be identified as Native American: “1) the Indian’s tribe’s or community’s judgement, 2) the neighboring non-Indian communities’ judgement, 3) the federal government’s judgement, and 4) the individual’s judgement.”⁴ To understand how this need for “racial authenticity” and “Indianness” has emerged, one must first consider the history regarding Native American art in a post-colonial America.

Art historian Marvin Cahodas has explained, “Indian artists have been subject to varying social conditions over the last four hundred years or so, and hence their art has changed accordingly.”⁵ While many American Indian artists still draw from traditional imagery and art making practices, they, unlike their non-Native counterparts, are expected to exhibit their “Indianness” regardless of the media in which they work. Moreover, as contemporary artist Edgar Heaps of Birds points out, Native artists are the only members of the art community who must prove who they are.⁶ Native American artist and scholar Rick Hill questioned the validity tests for “Indianness” to which artists are subjected that ask such questions such as: “Does he live on the reservation? Did he grow up in his culture? Does he speak his language? Did he marry an Indian? Does he care about being an Indian?”⁷ The need for such inquiry relates to the laws regulating how artists identify as Native because of non-Native imposters infiltrating the indigenous art market. Despite recognizing the practical intentions of such legislation, Hill explains the downside of it: “We now have the Indian intent overshadowed by the non-Indian desire for content. We’re not looking at why Indians do art but we want to see some sort of reaffirmation that the work is Indian.”⁸ Curator Nancy Marie Mithlo has written about such challenges faced by non-white artists:

Artists who choose to identify with a certain community (Indian artist, Chicano artist, African-American artist) simultaneously forfeit their perceived “freedom” by embracing a cultural identity. The word Indian placed before the word artist triggers a response laden with stereotypes. Notions concerning the “cultural baggage” of Native artists (as opposed to the perceived individual freedom of their non-Native peers) invalidate Indian contemporary art from consideration as fine art.⁹

Artists who embrace their indigenous identity are in essence placing themselves in an art world borderland that requires one to choose whether their identity is based on being either an artist or an Indian first. Mithlo has suggested three options that artists can take: “deny or obscure one’s ethnicity (artist first, Indian second), remain as an unequal but acceptable “other” (I live in two worlds), or reject the fine arts agenda completely (there is no word in my language for art).”¹⁰ Adopting the

theme “Spiritual Borderlands,” the Great Plains Art Museum encouraged participating artists to explore the concept of the borderlands, in part, as a means for audiences to further experience art created by indigenous artists working in what can be considered a fine art no man’s land.

The concept of borders has become a recurrent theme in contemporary North American aboriginal art. Art historian Kate Morris credits this phenomena to “an increasing occurrence of border-rights conflicts between Native nations and the governments of the United States and

Canada.”¹¹ Jolene Rickard’s work *Corn Blue Room* included in the *Reservation X: The Power of Place* exhibition at the National Museum of the American Indian directly relates to the issue described by Morris.¹² In reference to her work, Rickard explained:

We are at a point in Iroquoian society in our relationship to both the U.S. and Canadian governments, where they’re wondering when we are going to let go of our borders. I need to do something that reconfirms our borders—the “borders of sovereignty”—the geopolitical borders that mark our nationhood, our reservation, our self-determination, and our territories.¹³

Many of the works included in *Contemporary Indigeneity* followed a similar trajectory in regards to borderlands, sovereignty, and agency over indigenous imagery. The way in which the exhibiting artists addressed the topic fell into broad themes. Indigenous land rights and sovereignty are central to works by Gina Adams, Bunky Echo Hawk, Robert Martinez, Henry Payer, Gwen Westerman, and Monte Yellow Bird Sr. Other artists in the exhibition, Molly Murphy Adams, Nadema Agard, Chase Earles, and Nelda Schrupp, draw from or create with traditional media and symbolism in artworks that explore spirituality in both rural and urban environments.

The variety in media and interpretation of spiritual borderlands– be it physical borders or the abstract notions of how American Indians fit within the realm of contemporary art – by the ten artists included in *Contemporary Indigeneity* reveals a wide-ranging artistic practice indicative of all contemporary art. In addition to celebrating contemporary American Indian art of the Great Plains, the Great Plains Art Museum sought through this exhibition, and others like it, to

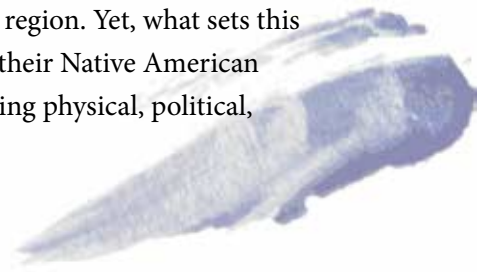




facilitate a physical space where the artistic indigenous experience has a voice, while simultaneously educating the community about the significance of Native cultures in the region. Yet, what sets this exhibition apart was the unique perspective these artists offer because of their Native American heritage. Moreover, the artworks demonstrated the complexity of navigating physical, political, societal, and personal spaces for contemporary American Indians.

Melynda Seaton, Ph.D.

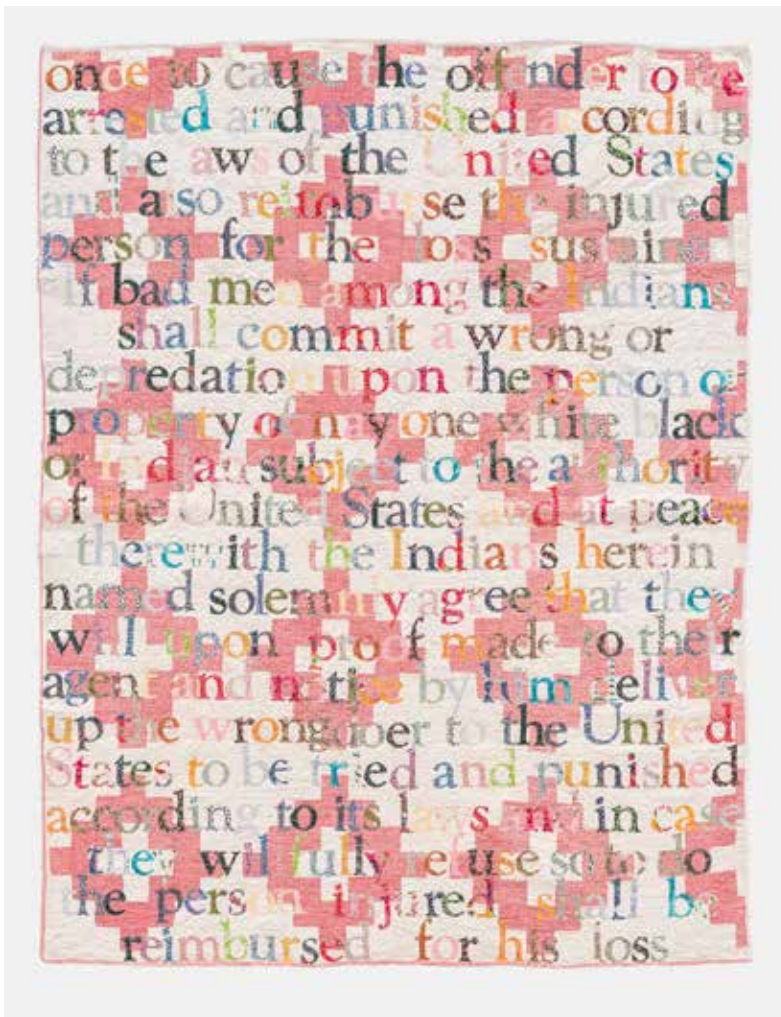
Curator/Museum Administrator,
Great Plains Art Museum at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln



1. The Great Plains is loosely defined as a region that stretches westward from the Missouri River at Omaha and Kansas City to the Rocky Mountains, and northward from the Texas Panhandle into the Canadian Prairie Provinces.
2. Gerald McMaster, "Living on Reservation X," in *Reservation X*, ed. Gerald McMaster and Canadian Museum of Civilization (Seattle, Wash. : Hull, Quebec: University of Washington Press ; Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1998), 19.
3. *Ibid.*, 21.
4. Geary Hobson, ed., *The Remembered Earth: An Anthology of Contemporary Native American Literature* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981), 8.
5. Marvin Cahodas, "Washoe Innovators and Their Patrons," in *The Arts of the North American Indian: Native Traditions in Evolution* (New York: Hudson Hills Press in association with Philbrook Art Center, Tulsa, 1986), 172.
6. Lawrence Abbott, *I Stand in the Center of the Good: Interviews with Contemporary Native American Artists* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 51.
7. *Ibid.*, 67.
8. *Ibid.*, 78.
9. Nancy Marie Mithlo, "Lost O'Keeffes/Modern Primitives: The Culture of Native American Art," in *Reservation X*, ed. Gerald McMaster and Canadian Museum of Civilization (Seattle, Wash.: Hull, Quebec: University of Washington Press; Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1998), 57.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Wright Morris, *The Home Place* (Lincoln, Neb: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 551.
12. *Reservation X: The Power of Place in Aboriginal Contemporary Art*, organized by the Canadian Museum of Civilization, presented work by seven Native contemporary artists and essays by Native American scholars who examine concepts of community and identity.
13. Jolene Rickard quoted in McMaster, "Living on Reservation X," 128.

GINA ADAMS

(NOT TRIBALLY AFFILIATED, OJIBWE/LAKOTA)



Broken Treat Quilt,
1868 Fort Laramie
Treaty, 2014

calico hand cut letters
on antique quilt
63.25 x 83.5 inches

In her series of multimedia works *Its Honor Is Pledged Here*, Gina Adams focused her attention on broken treaties. Adams identifies herself as a “Contemporary Indigenous Hybrid Artist.” She is not tribally affiliated but has Ojibwe and Lakota heritage which plays a large role in her artmaking practice. Adams explains, “My ancestral memory and the oral stories told to me by my family have imprinted my soul map and created who I am. My work is about prolonging life. This moment. This breath. The eternal heartbeat...even though I may not have those who have come before, I do have the continued remembrance of what was.” Adams’ body of work most aptly relates to current issues driving the protests in North Dakota over the proposed Dakota Access Pipeline as well as the government sale of sacred Apache lands in Arizona. Part of her series is comprised of treaty quilts. The artist painstakingly cuts out individual letters from calico fabric, the first industrialized commodity of the United States. She then sews the letters onto quilts crafted during the era when these treaties were ratified, essentially rewriting the text of broken treaties between the U.S. government and Native American tribes. Displayed behind each quilt, the names of the tribal members who signed the documents – often with only an “X” – are listed.

The 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty Quilt included in the exhibition portrays the treaty signed between the U.S. government and the Sioux tribes designating the Black Hills and much of the Dakotas as part of the Great Sioux Reservation and recognizing the Sioux peoples’ rights to their sacred lands. With the discovery of gold in 1874, miners flooded the region, spurring the U.S. Army to send General Custer with a military detachment to the Black Hills to protect the miners. Despite Custer’s defeat at the Battle of Little Big Horn in 1876, the U.S. government continued the fight and eventually

confiscated the land in 1877.¹ A legal dispute over the property continues to this day, and the treaty is central to the opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline. On April 1, 2016, tribal citizens of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe set up a Spirit Camp along the proposed route near Cannon Ball, North Dakota, where the pipeline will cross the Missouri River into Iowa. Adopting the nomenclature of “protectors” rather than protesters, more than 200 hundred different tribes sent representatives and aid to the camp.² The goal of the movement is to protect the water essential to not only the members of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe who depend on the Missouri River as a water source, but to also bring attention to environmental concerns associated with oil pipelines. The Tribe believes the pipeline route approval violated the terms of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 that guarantees the “undisturbed use and occupation” of their homelands.³ In November 2016, the Army Corp of Engineers halted construction on the project until a more thorough assessment of the environmental risks posed by running the pipeline under the Missouri River could be done.⁴ The demonstration at Sacred Stone Camp is the largest gathering of North American tribes since the Battle of Little Big Horn in 1876.⁵ Current events such as the #nodapl movement demonstrate the significance of art in communicating and bringing attention to American Indian culture.

In addition to the treaty quilts, in *Honoring Modern Unidentified* and *Basketball Assimilation Banners*, Adams combined banners and basketballs in a single installation



Detail of *Broken Treat Quilt*, 1837 Treaty with the Yankton Sioux, 2014
calico hand cut letters on antique quilt
72.5 x 91.5 inches



Detail of *Honoring Modern Unidentified*, 2015
encaustic and oil on ceramic
9 inch diameter

as a means of addressing issues related to memory and trauma that stem from American colonization practices and treaty policy. Banners embellished with silhouettes of the peace medals given to tribal leaders who signed treaties with the United States hung above nineteen basketballs, icons of contemporary reservation life, crafted out of ceramic and encaustic marked with indigenous symbols. Seven basketballs forming a center line represent the American presidents responsible for creating the treaties are flanked by six balls symbolizing the Spirit that Was and six others referencing the Spirit that Remains; respectively denoting the past and present of Native American culture.

1. “Sioux Treaty of 1868,” September 9, 2016, <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/sioux-treaty/>; “The Avalon Project : Fort Laramie Treaty, 1868,” September 9, 2016, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/nt001.asp.
2. Leah Donnell, “At The Sacred Stone Camp, Tribes And Activists Join Forces To Protect The Land,” National Public Radio, September 10, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2016/09/10/493110892/at-the-sacred-stone-camp-a-coalition-joins-forces-to-protect-the-land>.
3. “Dakota Access Is Violating Federal Law,” accessed September 15, 2016, <http://sacredstonecamp.org/federal-violations/>.
4. “Joint Statement from the Department of Justice, the Department of the Army and the Department of the Interior Regarding Standing Rock Sioux Tribe v. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers,” The United States Department of Justice, September 9, 2016, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/joint-statement-department-justice-department-army-and-department-interior-regarding-standing>.
5. It is estimated the number of villagers at the Battle of the Little Big Horn, June 25-26, 1876, to be 8,000 with 1,500 to 1,800 warriors. There was an estimated 3,500 protectors at Sacred Stone Camp in September 2016 and the scale of the camp is expected to increase. Rebecca Bengal, “What Amy Goodman’s Arrest Warrant Means for the Dakota Access Pipeline and Free Speech,” Vogue, September 15, 2016, <http://www.vogue.com/13477294/dakota-pipeline-amy-goodman-democracy-now-standing-rock-sioux-protests/>. and “Battle of Little Big Horn,” government, National Park Service, Little Big Horn Battlefield National Monument, accessed September 15, 2016, <https://www.nps.gov/libi/learn/historyculture/battle-of-the-little-bighorn.htm>.

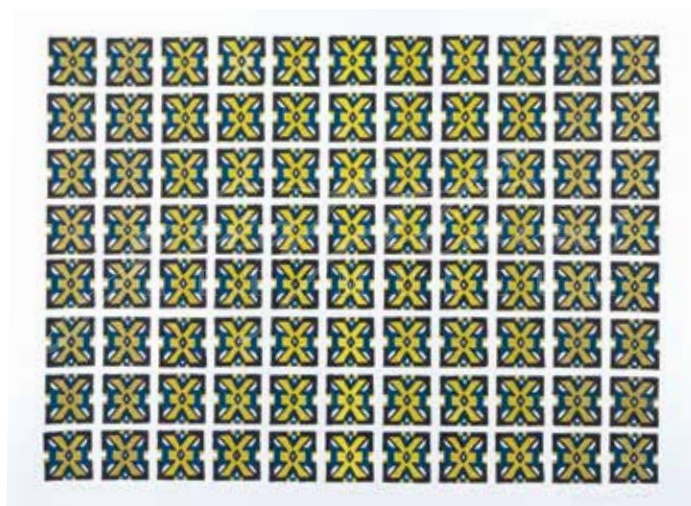
MOLLY MURPHY ADAMS

(NOT TRIBALLY AFFILIATED, OGLALA LAKOTA)

Known for her intricate beadwork, Molly Murphy Adams embraces her mixed heritage to use the visual language of color and shape to articulate new observations on politics, history, and identity. A mixed-media fiber artist, she often merges contemporary subjects with traditional media. In *Red Earth, Blue Sky*, borders between the earth and sky are illustrated two-fold in this intricately beaded box. Not only does Murphy Adams use colors to define space—blue for sky and orange for earth, but she also creates a dimensional separation by situating the sky on the exterior and the land on the interior. Further borders were created between abstract/spiritual and representation/corporeal. Geometric design embellishes the orange plane and a scissor-tailed fly catcher amid the blue sky.

In two photographic-based works, Murphy Adams aesthetic of blending the old with the new is evident by

the application of traditional beading on contemporary photographs taken by LeRoy Grafe. In *Black and White 1*, the artist beaded diamond and triangular forms in contrast to the dark walls of the ravine captured in shadow of the image. The shapes direct the viewer's gaze to a sunlit opening in the canyon, conjuring imaginings of ancient pictographs that mark land forms throughout the Great Plains. Her work not only crosses the borders between traditional Native American art and contemporary media, but also between tactile and textual aspects of 2-D art. This practice is integral to Murphy Adams' artistic process: "The liberties I take with materials, line quality, and design elements reflect my interest in contemporary art and the development of abstraction in the Western art tradition. I use the visual language of color and shape to articulate new observations on politics, history, and identity."



Parfleche, Blue and Gold, 88, 2015
reduction print
37.25 x 29.75 inches



Black and White 1, 2015
black and white pigment print on matte finish cotton paper, beaded with glass seed beads, and mounted on birch wood panel
8 x 8 inches



Eastern Washington 1, 2015
chromatic pigment print on matte finish cotton paper, beaded with glass seed beads, mounted on birch wood panel
9 x 9 inches



Above and right: *Red Earth, Blue Sky*, 2014
beadwork on wool
9 x 6 x 4 inches

Parfleche, Blue and Gold, 88, a reduction print, merges traditional Native American design with contemporary printmaking art practice. Apart from the intentional color fade from gold to pale yellow, the composition is composed of 88 identical squares. The methodology of the reduction process requires that the print block be carved for each color and then printed multiple times on the same sheet of paper. In this instance, the artist carved the design and printed the block 88 times for yellow, then carved out the blue design followed by a final carving for the black. All total, the block was printed 264 times for this single artwork.



NADEMA AGARD (WINYAN LUTA/RED WOMAN)

(NOT TRIBALLY AFFILIATED, SIHASAPA LAKOTA)

Nadema Agard, who has ancestral connections to the Cherokee, Lakota, and Powhatan peoples, creates multimedia works that incorporate symbolism from several diverse cultures that coexist within the same urban environment as her New York City residence. Agard describes her artwork as “making a global Hunka or adoption ceremony as a quintessential Lakota gesture as an urban artist with an Indigenous perspective.” In *The Four Lakota Virtues*, Agard designed what she describes as portraits from her personal Lakota perspective. Each virtue, or portrait, represents a Lakota value: *Wóohitike* (Bravery) and *Wówalitake* (Fortitude) signify male personifications, and *Wówač̣aṅtognake* (Generosity) and *Wóksape* (Wisdom) symbolize the female. The work incorporates imagery inspired by Buddhist

Thangkas (paintings on cotton or silk often depicting deities, scenes, or mandalas) and Greek Icons (religious paintings of Christian saints, the Virgin Mary, and Christ). The number also references the four cardinal directions, seasons, classical elements, stages of life, basic components of plants, and colors of humanity.

Agard's *Mitákuye Oyasin (We Are All Related)* also demonstrates her multicultural approach to artmaking. Red, yellow, blue/black, and white represent the sacred Lakota colors, and the ring of jingles are symbolic of both traditional Lakota and Ojibwe spirituality. In her work, Agard attempts to capture aspects of her urban community that she views as a “confluence of culture and a *mélange* of humanity with a distinct beauty and place, united in diversity.”



Lakota Virtues, 2015

Wóohitike (Bravery) 36 x 39 inches

Wówalitake (Fortitude) 36 x 39 inches

Wówač̣aṅtognake (Generosity) 36 x 38 inches

Wóksape (Wisdom) 36 x 38 inches

mixed media on canvas panel

Mitákuye Oyasin (We Are All Related): Medicine Wheel, 2015
canvas, jingles, vinyl, felt, cotton binding
72 inch diameter



CHASE KAHWINHUT EARLES

(CADDO)

Taking inspiration from contemporary pottery design, ceramic artist Chase Earles implements traditional pottery techniques to portray stories from the Caddo Nation. One of his hand coiled pots illustrates *The Caddo Story of Night and Day*, a creation narrative where the first people called a council to bring light to the darkness. Picturing the sun and moon along with different color of deer on opposing sides of the vessel, Earles conveys the story narrated by Coyote outlining that the cycle of day and night is achieved by hunting different colored mythical deer and its importance to the ritual of daily life. First to speak at the council, Coyote explained:

We have had enough darkness; we must now have light. It is right that we should have both. There are yellow, black, spotted, and white deer upon the earth. These deer are here for a reason. If you kill the yellow deer, everything shall be yellow all the time. If you kill the white deer, we shall have day. If you kill the spotted one, everything shall be spotted and very bad. If you kill the black one, we will have night. But if you kill both the black and the white deer, then we shall have day and night. During the day we can go out and hunt and visit, and during the night we can return to our homes and rest.

The Caddo people accepted Coyote's words and went hunting until they killed both the black and the white deer. From that time on, there was both day and night.

Another work, *Underwater Animals*, depicts an alligator, turtle, and fish, creatures that play roles in many stories about Caddo homelands located along the rivers and lakes located in East Texas, Louisiana, and portions of southern Arkansas and Oklahoma. Earles' work is further connected to place by the use of Oklahoma clay for his kiln fired and stone and/or straw burnished forms.



The Caddo Story of Night and Day, 2015
hand coiled ceramic
8 x 10 inches



Underwater Animals, 2016
hand coiled ceramic
5 x 4.75 inches

ROBERT MARTINEZ

(NORTHERN ARAPAHO)

Robert Martinez's artwork incorporates historical imagery, myths, and stories of the American West and Arapaho culture that connect to concerns faced by contemporary Native Americans. In *Ind Country Today*, Martinez evokes the tradition of ledger drawing by combining historical imagery with a present-day subject. The smiling portrait of a modern woman donning traditional regalia takes a "selfie" with her mobile phone. Posed in front of a copy of a map drawn by George Catlin, one of the first Europeans to paint portraits of North American indigenous people, the image serves as a tongue-in-cheek commentary on the nature of portraiture. Martinez blurs the line between past and present through media and imagery while simultaneously recognizing how American Indians can regain agency in regards to how their visage is captured and distributed.



Indn Country Today, 2015
pencil & charcoal on faux 1883 George Kaitlin Map of "Indian Country"
10.5 x 16.5 inches

BUNKY ECHO-HAWK

(YAKAMA/PAWNEE)



Lady Justice, 2015
acrylic on canvas
30 x 40 inches

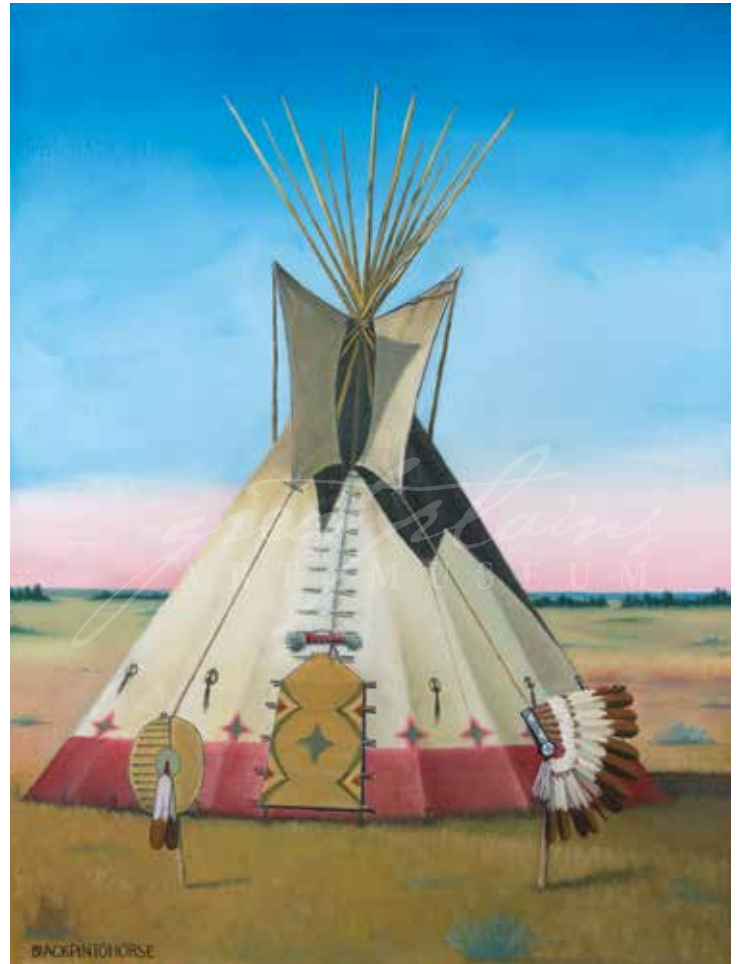
As a fine artist, graphic designer, photographer, writer, and a non-profit professional, Bunky Echo-Hawk's goal as an artist "is to truly exemplify the current state of Native America." Echo-Hawk is a traditional singer and dancer of the Pawnee Nation and an enrolled member of the Yakama Nation. In his vibrant painting *Lady Justice*, he re-envisioned the allegorical personification of the American judicial system, as a Native woman. The ghost dance dress she wears symbolizes spiritual and moral authority. Her moccasins are embellished with Pawnee stars signifying renewal and survival. However, unlike the standard representation of Justitia portrayed blind-folded, here the icon's eyes are wide open. In lieu of the blindfold, a band of red bleeds across the figure's face, referencing traditional Pawnee face paint. Posed against a hot pink background, Echo-Hawk's incarnation incorporates contemporary style with Pawnee iconography altered by a legal system instituted through European colonization.

MONTE YELLOW BIRD, SR. (BLACK PINTO HORSE)

(ARIKARA/HIDATSA)

Monte Yellow Bird Sr., who signs his work as Black Pinto Horse, considers himself a “contemporary ledger artist and painter nurturing and sharing the true indigenous heartbeat.” Rife with symbolism, Yellow Bird views his artwork as a way to honor his spiritual roots. Many of his artworks are contemporary versions of historical ledger art dating back to the late nineteenth century. The practice of drawing pictographs utilizing materials such as pages from ledger or account books with pencil, ink, and watercolor emerged when Plains warriors were imprisoned at U.S. military forts.¹ Rendered with bold line and color on an historic ledger, Yellow Bird’s *Say...My Friend and I Borrowed Some of Your Ponies* infuses a sense of humor on an image of a lone rider with two horses in tow. A dog (presumably “my friend”) runs ahead of the central figures and three horses run across the top margin above the action.

Yellow Bird’s *The Chief Star Lodge*, a painting on canvas, references the border between heavens and earth and acts as a visual manifestation of remembrance for indigenous ancestors that have become stars in the heavens and to honor the keeper of the stars. The Chief’s lodge, centrally located, is the focal point of the image and laden with symbolism. A red border, symbolizing the People, encircles the teepee’s base and is adorned with seven stars to signify the relationship between mankind and the heavens. Yellow/ blue medallions with horse hair sit just above the stars to denote enlightenment of the Holy Dog (horse nation). Twelve lodge poles honor the number of eagle feathers in the tail of the eagle nation. The parfleche door embellished with four designs represents the four directions, and a large blue star symbolizes the “Chief That Sits Above.” A sage bundle above the door, a warrior shield with two feathers, and a war bonnet placed on the flap poles are indicative of a prayer. The entire scene is presented during daylight, the time symbolic of the ancestors’ smiles which also serves as a reminder that the stars twinkle regardless of whether they are seen with one’s eyes or heart.



The Chief Star Lodge, 2016
oil on canvas
24 x 18 inches



Say...My Friend and I Borrowed Some of Your Ponies, 2015
colored pencil on Milford CT ledger, cir. 1875
8.25 x 13.25 inches

1. “Keeping History: Plains Indian Ledger Drawings” (Smithsonian Albert H. Small Documents Gallery), accessed September 16, 2016, http://americanhistory.si.edu/documentsgallery/exhibitions/ledger_drawing_2.html.

HENRY PAYER

(HO CHUNK)



K(no)w Exit, 2015
mixed media on canvas
30 x 34 inches

The focus of Henry Payer's mixed media works blends artmaking techniques of painting and collage to convey messages relating to the historic removal and physical relocation of the Ho Chunk people from their ancestral homelands in Wisconsin to their reservation in Nebraska. Payer utilizes collage and mixed media to conceptually convey the act of physical relocation and motion within a 2D surface. His multi-media collages incorporate "found objects" and photographs in a composition reminiscent of work from the DADA and Surrealist art movements of the early twentieth century.

In *K(no)w Exit*, the artist integrates "found objects" (hotel key card, duplex outlet wall plate, maps, cartoons) and photographs (canoes, electric transmission lines) representative of the transient nature of his tribe's relocation. Coalescing imagery and objects from both past and present reflect ideals relevant to the contemporary Ho Chunk experience.



K(no)w Direction, 2015
mixed media on canvas with wood panel
32 x 36 inches

NELDA SCHRUPP

(PHEASANT RUMP NAKOTA FIRST NATION)



WE Are Still Here, 2015

argentium silver, horsehair, replica trade bead
36 x 3 x 1 inches

Nelda Schrupp's intricate, hand-crafted jewelry pieces are laden with symbolism through the melding of traditional craft and materials with iconography of the contemporary era. She describes her process as "Construct, Deconstruct, Reconstruct." Schrupp begins by making simplified hollowed geometric forms (square, circles, triangles, rectangles, etc.) out of metal, then cuts them down into abstract segments, and finally reconstructs the segments into what she defines as "complex Cubist-like versions of their former selves."

Decorative Dance Rattle represents her simple design style that has been incorporated into her work from the beginning of Schrupp's professional art career in 2003. A sacred object, the rattle is used in many private ceremonies such as blessings, healings, and namings. Traditionally, male artisans constructed rattles out of natural materials such as rawhide, dried turtle shell, deer hooves and antlers, and horsehair. However, Schrupp has broken tradition by making her rattles more abstract in design. She retains the use of horsehair and deer antler for decorative elements as there are no contemporary substitutions, and she views their incorporation as paying homage to the critical contribution of her ancestors.

In the necklace, *WE Are Still Here*, comprised of Argentium silver, horsehair, and replica trade beads, Schrupp created a visual narrative detailing the impact of colonization on Native American culture. For example, trade beads and a whiskey bottle represent fur traders



Decorative Dance Rattle Montana Agate, 2014
sterling silver, copper, montana agate, brass thimbles and hawks bells,
cowbone hairpipe, deer antler, horsehair.
21 x 12 x 2 inches

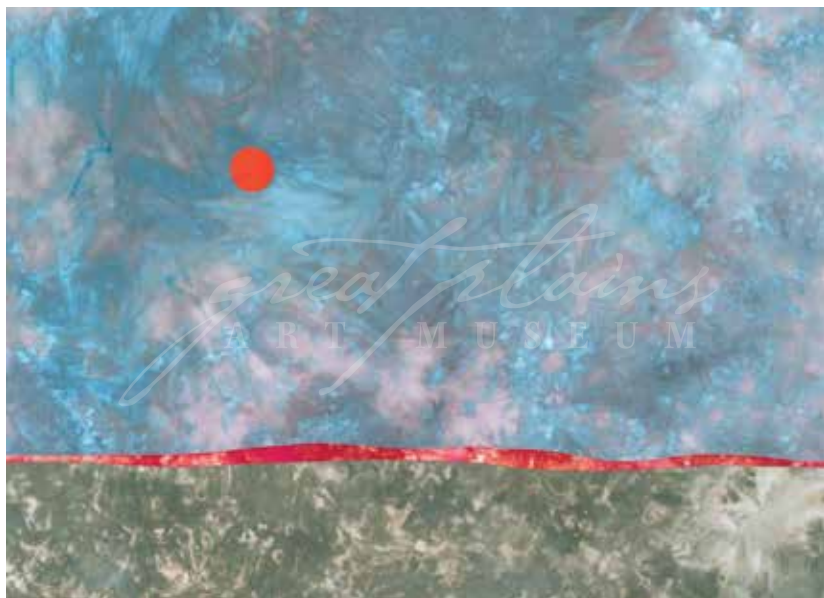
and the beginning of the downfall of the Native culture. The inclusion of a Bible and crosses symbolize the Christian churches the government allowed to “educate and civilize” Native people viewed as savages. This government-sponsored indoctrination often resulted in the torture of indigenous individuals and led to the spread of diseases brought to the North American continent by European missionaries. Other icons reference the transitions made because of technological advancement. The car, over the passage of time, replaced the horse as a means of transportation, and television became a new narrator following the loss of traditional oral history.

GWEN WESTERMAN

(SISSETON WAHPETON OYATE)

Textile artist Gwen Westerman's art is grounded in Dakota culture, history, oral tradition, and language recovery. In describing aspects of her Dakota heritage, Westerman explains, "We have a long, rich history explaining not only where we came from, but also our responsibilities to each other and to the universe. The deep spiritual connection we have to the land is embedded in our language, where the word for our mothers and for the land is the same - *Ina* - and knows no borders." The artist addresses issues of borderlands in her quilted work *Medicine Lines* that combines both artificial and tangible borders marking the original homelands of the Dakota which cover southern Saskatchewan and Manitoba, as well as Montana, North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Minnesota, and Iowa. The border between Canada and the United States at the 49th Parallel is referred to by Native peoples as the "Medicine Line," an artificial boundary that separates Dakota bands. Through intentional design, Westerman's composition illustrates the two types of boundaries. Artificial borders defined by state and federal designation are depicted with thin yellow lines nearly invisible in comparison to topographic borders defined by the region's rivers. For Dakota people, water, or *Mni*, is the first medicine, connecting people to the land. More clearly defined in blue, the real medicine lines connecting the Dakota bands adhere to rivers' paths that were trade and travel routes before European explorers and settlers arrived in the region.

In another work, *Ocokaya kin ekta / At the Center*, 2006, yellow, red, black, and white signify the four directions of Dakota culture. Unlike cardinal orientations, these Dakota directions are not linear, but instead circle the earth. A human figure constructed from deer rawhide at



At the Center of the Four Directions, 2016
hand dyed fabric
48 inch diameter

Above: *Wildfires Up North*, 2015
hand dyed fabric
38 x 28 inches



Medicine Lines, 2016
hand dyed fabric
40 x 34 inches

the work's center symbolizes the Dakota as common people taking the red road, which is considered the path of wisdom and life.

Depicting place in a more concrete manner, Westerman created a plains landscape by implementing quilting techniques in *Wildfires Up North*. The variations in fabric colors were made through a dying process that creates a unique design that cannot be replicated. The artist mixes snow from outside her home in Mankato, Minnesota, with pigment. She then places the mixture on top of raw cotton fabric. As the snow melts, the pigments disperse through the fabric, depositing color as the dye moves through the material. For this work, Westerman was inspired by the atmosphere effect on the Great Plains sky created by large wildfires burning in the Canadian province of Alberta during the fall of 2015.



Left to right: Netha Cloeter, Jill Ahlberg Yohe, heather ahtone

JUROR PANEL EVENT

A panel of jurors from the Great Plains Art Museum's biennial juried Native American art exhibition discussed their selections for *Contemporary Indigeneity 2016: Spiritual Borderlands* at a the Paul A. Olson Seminar in Great Plains Studies on Nov. 3, 2016.

The jurors for this year's exhibition were selected for their knowledge of and connections to the contemporary Native American art community. The informal panel discussion provided insight on the selection process and addressed topics regarding contemporary Native American art.

The jurors and panelists were:

heather ahtone, James T. Bialac Associate Curator of Native American & Non-Western Art, Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, University of Oklahoma

Netha Cloeter, Director of Education and Social Engagement, Plains Art Museum, Fargo, North Dakota

Jill Ahlberg Yohe, Ph.D., Assistant Curator of Native American Art, Minneapolis Institute of Art

Sponsored by UNL Faculty Senate Convocations Committee



heather ahtone
answers questions on
Native American art



Jurors speak with Great Plains Graduate Fellows of the Center for Great Plains Studies.

