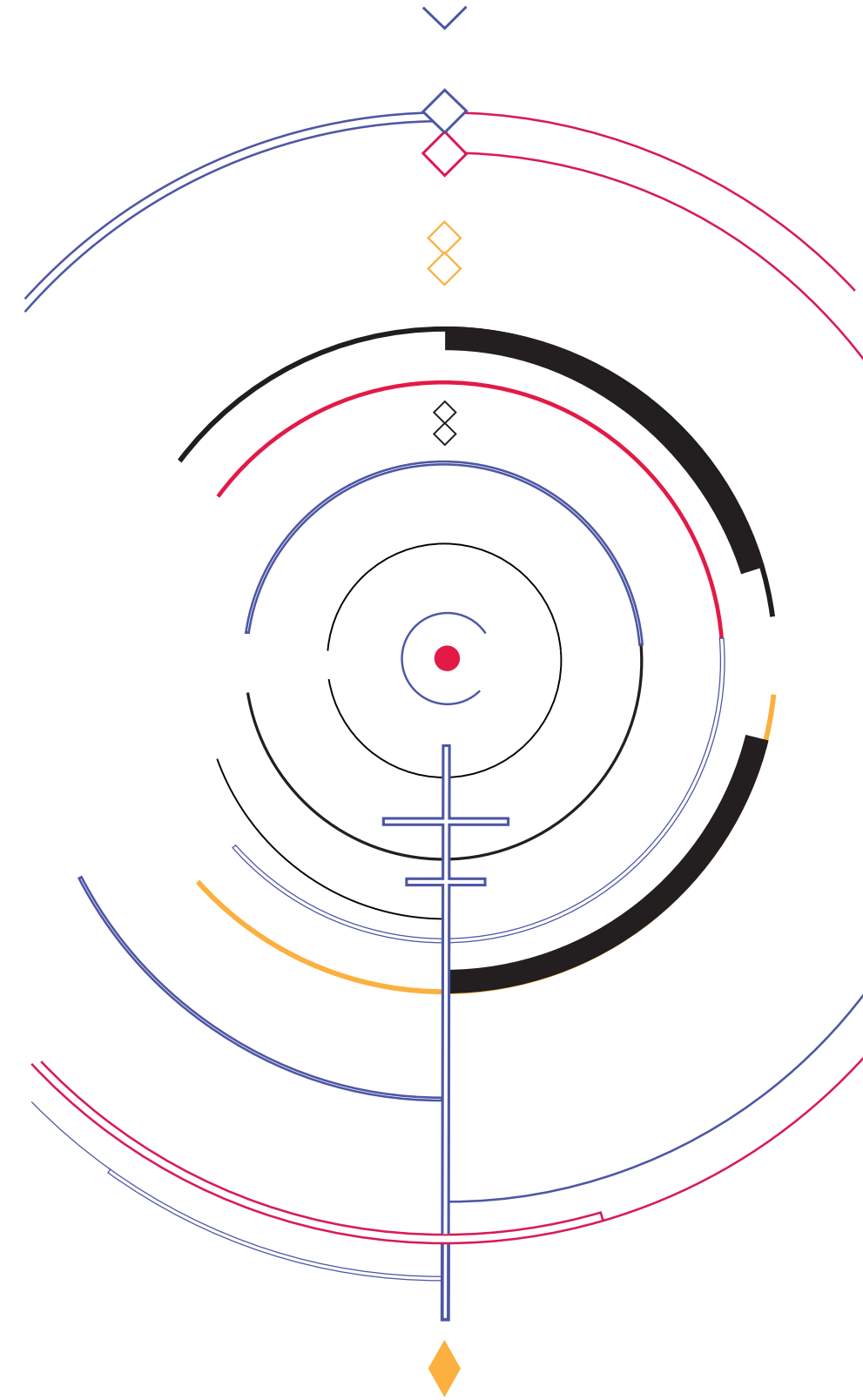
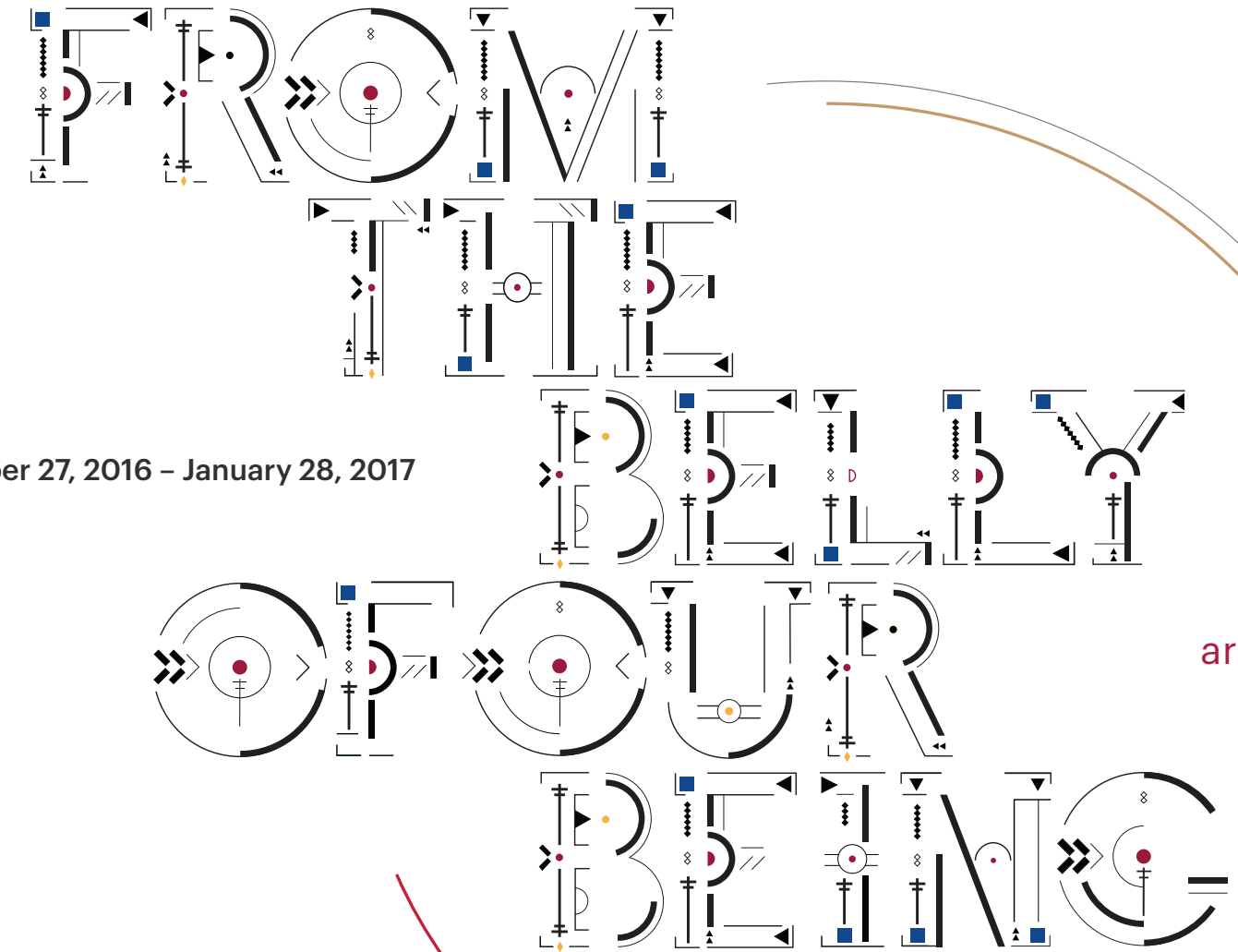


FROM THE BELLY OF OUR BEING
art by and about Native creation





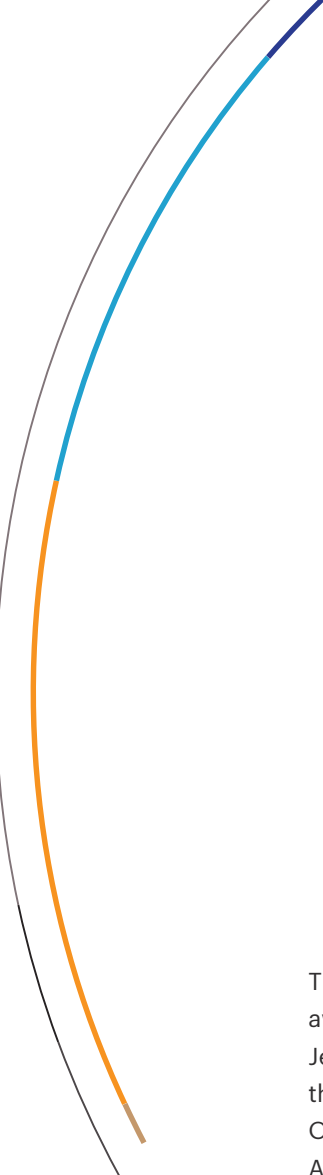


The title 'FROM THE BELLY OF OUR BEING' is rendered in a stylized, geometric font. Each letter is composed of black outlines with internal patterns of dots, lines, and small colored squares (blue, red, orange, yellow). The letters are arranged in three rows: 'FROM' and 'THE' on the top row, 'BELLY' on the middle row, and 'OF OUR BEING' on the bottom row. The text is framed by three large, curved lines: a grey arc at the top right, an orange arc at the bottom right, and a red arc at the bottom left.

FROM THE BELLY OF OUR BEING

September 27, 2016 – January 28, 2017

art by and about
Native creation



This project is supported in part by the following: an award from the National Endowment for the Arts, Jeanene and Ron Hulse, Mary Ann and Ken Fergeson, the Chickasaw Nation, the Oklahoma Arts Council, OSU/A&M Board of Regents, and the OSU Museum of Art Advocates.

In addition, the OSU Museum of Art would like to extend a thank you to Bockley Gallery in Minneapolis, MN and the Institute of American Indian Arts Museum in Santa Fe, NM.





“It is from this bold rainbow of possibility that these women inspire and dream outside the boundaries of what is collectively termed Native art.” heather ahtone

PREFACE

Victoria Rowe Barry

Director and Chief Curator
Oklahoma State University Museum of Art



➤ The Oklahoma State University Museum of Art serves an important role in bringing insightful and original exhibitions to our communities.

From the Belly of Our Being: art by and about Native creation provides a special opportunity for all visitors to experience contemporary Native American art making, many examples of which are being seen here for the first time. We are most grateful for the inspired vision of guest curator, heather ahtone. The exhibition she has brought into being brings us face to face with Indigenous female-centered creation stories. A theme shared by all tribal nations, it comes to us in an array of versions, each one part of the family yet

distinctive, like an offspring, each story belonging to one of the artists’ cultural traditions.

The catalogue accompanying this remarkable exhibition builds on the insights of the creation story, using heather ahtone’s long personal relationships with these artists as a conceptual platform. The stories the artists share with the curator—each relating their personal stories through their artwork—as well the curator’s comments about their art, offer a deeper appreciation of the role of Native women.

For the OSU Museum of Art, this exhibition inaugurates our third year of programming, with an extraordinary array of events—discussions, artist workshops, and performances—to enhance our understanding of the exhibition narrative.

We are especially grateful to Jeanene and Ron Hulsey, the Chickasaw Nation, the National Endowment for the Arts, Mary Ann and Ken Fergeson, Burns and Ann Hargis, the OSU/A&M Board of Regents and the OSU Museum of Art Advocates for their support of the exhibition, programs, and catalogue for *From the Belly of Our Being*.

Finally, I must commend my over-achieving team of colleagues—collectively the museum staff, interns, university colleagues, and the OSU Museum of Art Advocates for their ongoing contributions to the success of projects like this. I’m inspired daily by their work and dedication.

We hope you find this exhibition as exciting and engaging as we have throughout its development.

CURATOR’S ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Guest Curator

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

➤ **My grandfather always told me to begin with being thankful.**

The women in this exhibition have honored me by allowing their work to be included, and I am greatly indebted to each of them for their enthusiasm and generosity. I am incredibly grateful to the Oklahoma State University Museum of Art and Shawn Yuan, former curator, who invited me to do something special in their galleries. I deeply appreciate the guiding hand of Victoria Berry, whose unwavering faith in the project grounded my continued efforts to make it reality. To the staff at OSUMA, who built all the supporting blocks through

educational programming, promotion, publication, and grant writing—*thank you!*

This project received generous support from the Institute of American Indian Arts Museum and Bockley Gallery, for which I will remain grateful, and I encourage you to explore their galleries. In addition Jeanene and Ron Hulsey enthusiastically donated to the project and, through their support, ensured that we could move the project along very early in the development of this exhibition. *From the Belly of Our Being* would not be possible, in its present form, without the support of the National Endowment for the Arts; and as this is my first curatorial project to receive this level of national support, I am humbled. I also want to thank the

Chickasaw Nation for recognizing the value of publications on Native art and supporting publication of the exhibition catalogue—*Chokmash’ki!*

With deep regard, I want to also acknowledge my University of Oklahoma and Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art family, who allowed me the freedom to work away from home. And to my Ahtone, Begaye, and Wika families, and, especially, Marwin, Talullah, and Miko—for whom I am driven every day to make the world a place worthy of your spirits—bless you.

Kari Ataunbi

KIOWA 1971

Sainday's Sunglasses illustrates the **Kiowa** story of how the sun rotates around the earth. In the story, Sainday, Fox, Deer, and Hawk steal the sun from the people on the other side of the world who were using it to play a ball game. In a relay race they bring the sun to this side of the earth, burning their backs slightly while they carried it, which is why they all have black tips on their fur and feathers. When they get it to this side of the earth, Sainday throws it high into the sky so we can share it half the time with the people on the other side of the earth. I love the whimsy of this story and that our origin story clearly relates that the earth is round and there are people living on the other side. I made sunglasses because I thought it must have been really bright when they were carrying the sun on their backs. The box serves as illustrations to tell the story, as you are opening the layers and removing the glasses. I used wood from India because it is a material that comes from the other side of the Earth. The glasses are constructed of 22 karat gold, rutilated quartz, 18 karat gold, deer antler, sterling silver, buffalo horn, opal, and polarized lenses.

The box is lined in brain tanned smoked buckskin and the top has sterling silver, petrified palm wood, petrified coral, yellow diamonds, and a yellow sapphire.

Story of the Big Dipper illustrates the Kiowa story of the big dipper and what is commonly referred to as the Devil's Tower. I think it is interesting that so many of our landmarks were named devil this or devil that. Perhaps it's a reflection of the fear the European people had when they were moving west. This piece is an early example of a relatively small group of work that I started when I first began to make art. The series relates our Kiowa origin stories through the common objects of jewelry and accessories. A means to bring the larger, the mythic, the stories and experiences that form our culture into a current and accessible format. This purse is constructed of sterling silver, 14 karat gold, diamonds, brain tanned buckskin. There are compartments for money, a credit card, lipstick, a comb, and a condom.

RIGHT

Sainday's Sunglasses, 2008.
Sterling silver, 22 karat gold,
petrified palm wood, rosewood,
petrified coral, opal, polarized
lenses, mirror, deer antler,
buffalo horn, brain tanned
smoked buckskin, yellow
diamonds, agate, rutilated
quartz, 8" x 8" x 8"
Loan courtesy of
private collector

NEXT PAGE

Story of the Big Dipper, 2011.
Sterling silver, diamonds,
14 karat gold, mirror with
a smoked buckskin case,
7 1/2" x 2 1/6" x 6 7/8"
Loan courtesy of Gary and
Brenda Ruttenberg





Julia Buffalohead

PONCA 1972

Regarding my painting, there are narrative internals that engender a few tropes that reflect the creatures that play a heroic role within these creation stories. For example, there is an Iroquois narrative about a woman that falls from the sky. It goes something like . . .

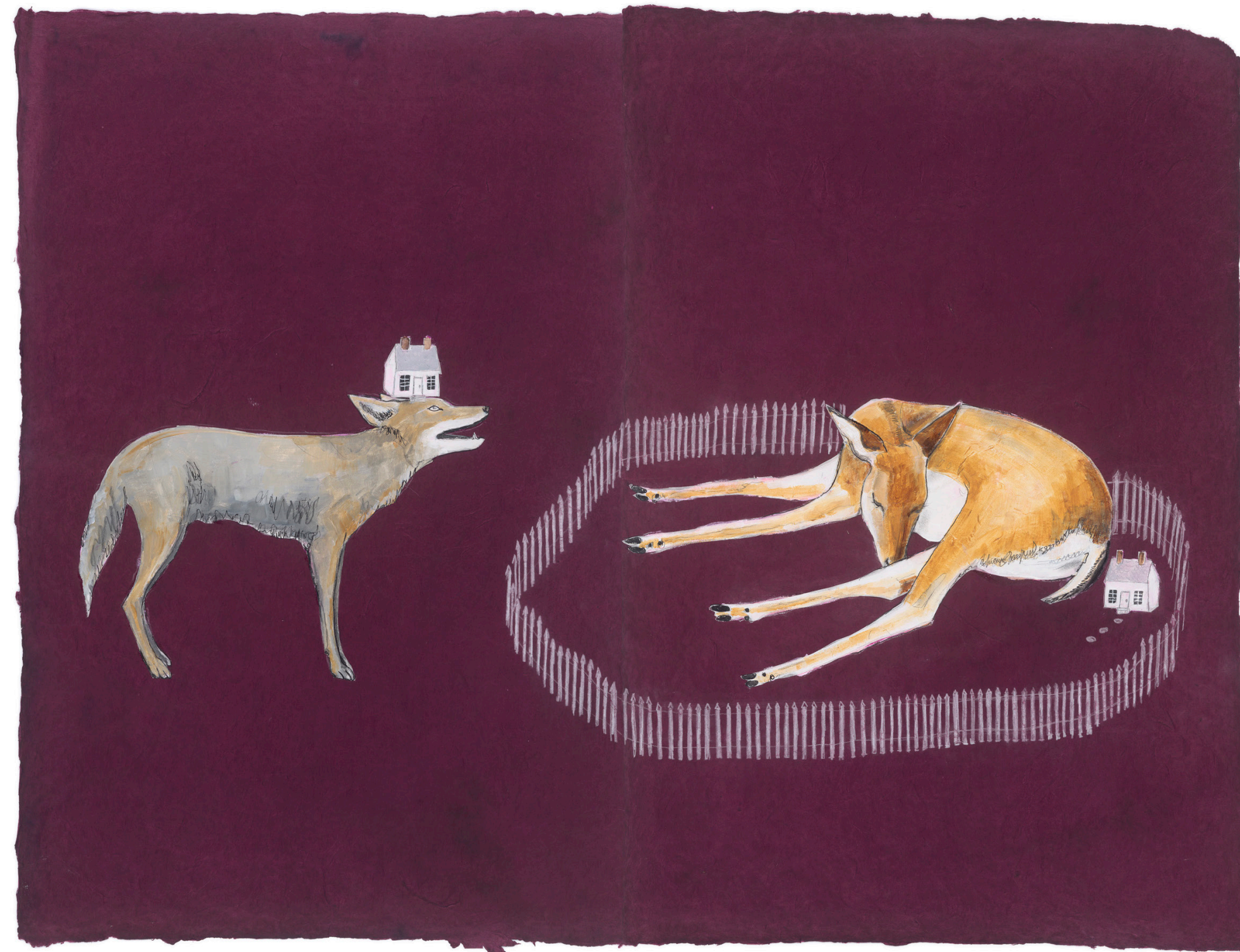
There is no land, it is all water. There are animals: beaver, otter, loon. The animals go diving deep down to the bottom; they gather mud to create the earth. Muskrat is the weakest, and doesn't make it back up to the surface alive. But he brings mud in his paws. The Sky Woman takes the mud and spreads it across the turtle's shell and creates the land. Then she reaches into the sky for a bundle of seeds which are sown to grow into the grass and the plants.

My work draws from the substance of traditional narrative while contextualizing it within my personal sphere of experience. Like muskrat, I am attracted to such characters and cultural heroes that are unlikely to succeed. In pictorial terms, coyote and the others tend to transcend the materiality of their cosmos. In this situation, tragic or comedic, as the case might have it, my animal characters ask questions about our human world—or make worldly criticisms.

RIGHT

Intuition, 2016.

Acrylic, ink, and pencil
on Lokta paper, 31" x 39"
Loan courtesy of artist
and Bockley Gallery





LEFT

***The Trail*, 2015.**

Acrylic, ink, and pencil on Lokta paper, 31" x 60"
Loan courtesy of artist and Bockley Gallery

RIGHT

***Sky Woman*, 2016.**

Acrylic, ink, and pencil on Lokta paper, 31" x 41"
Loan courtesy of artist and Bockley Gallery



Naribah Chacon

NAVAJO • 1980

Manifestations of a Changing Woman

Changing Woman is a central deity to our creation stories. She is the personification of all change and cycles. It is she that we honor with the changing season, changing times of day, and stages of life. It is said that Changing Woman is sometimes a young girl, an adolescent woman, a mature woman, or an old lady depending on the direction that she is headed. She is honored throughout time and by all women. We sing songs to her when we give birth, begin menstruation, get married, and have a home. We honor her knowledge of all cycles in life.

Storm

The storm pattern is said to signify the home, and its connection to the elements and the four sacred mountains. The pattern is a symbol of our existence on earth. The center symbol is always the home. In this painting the “home” is placed where the subject’s heart is located. Diné women are central to the home: we carry the lineage of our family, the history of our grandmothers and where they have been, we must know why we are connected to the mountains.

Emergence

It is said that our place of emergence was where the streams came together and flowed in four directions. One to the east, one to the west, one to the north, and one to the south. Along these streams were the first dwelling places. It is said that First Man sought out First Woman when he saw a turquoise fire burning, he looked between a black cloud and white cloud and he found her.

Center of the Web

Spider Woman is a key figure in our creation stories. It is said that in the third world the Holy Ones told Spider Woman that she had the ability to weave geometric patterns as a map of the universe. At first she did not know what they meant, and was not instructed how it should be done, but curiosity became her energy and driving force to weave her creations. In the fourth world it is Spider Woman who taught us to weave, she is central in teaching us the philosophies to live in this world. Here she is gazing at a spider, contemplating how a circle is created with a straight line.

RIGHT

Manifestations of a Changing Woman, 2011.

Oil on cradled masonite,
24” x 24”

Loan courtesy of
Travis D. Day





LEFT

Storm, 2013.
Acrylic on birch,
33 1/2" x 45 1/2"
Loan courtesy of artist

RIGHT

Center of the Web, 2016.
Oil on birch, 36" x 24"
Loan courtesy of artist



Anita Fields

OSAGE/MUSKOGEE b 1951



The Osage creation story describes how we came to be a people of the earth. It relates the journey from the heavens of the earth and sky people, who were the children of the sun and the moon. They are described as stars hitting the earth like meteorites. The earth was covered with water with only rocks to stand on. In an effort to find earth, several animals were sent into the depths of the water to find land. It is said that the mighty elk blew into the four directions creating great winds that caused the waters to recede, and the earth was revealed. The elk wallowed in the moist earth and wherever his hair clung to the earth, grasses, trees, and foods grew to nourish the people. The earth and sky people joined together with the underground and water beings to become the people.

The two pieces that I am exhibiting are linked to the creation story through symbolism and metaphor. As in most creation stories, the Osage creation story is complex with many layers addressing the various aspects of being human. Our story informs our worldview, one that is based on the division of the earth and sky; it represents the order, balance, and duality found in life, nature, and the universe. Both pieces will include imagery, symbols and patterns associated with concepts found within our beliefs and philosophies. The larger focus will be from the female side found within the duality of life.



LEFT

***What My Heart Knows,* 2016.**
Porcelain clay,
9" x 5 1/2" x 7"
Loan courtesy of artist

RIGHT

***Finding Our Way to the Earth,* 2016.**
Porcelain clay, photo
image transfer, mixed
media, 58" x 38"
Loan courtesy of artist



Tammy Garcia

SANTA CLARA PUEBLO B 1969



I grew up in Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexico, in the 1970s and '80s. There are still five generations of women on my mom's side that also grew up in Santa Clara, all of us dancing and making pottery. In the dances, stories were told through song, traditional ceremonial clothes, and movement. On pottery, stories were told through shape and design. Dances are performed in all seasons. Much thought and many details go into the preparations and experience of the dance. It may be an aunt with the right jewelry, or your mom who helps with the moccasins and wrapping the belt. Now I am reminded of grandma's delicious red chili stew. The day the dance is performed there is also a great feast. I learned to make the traditional coil built pottery from my mother when I was sixteen years old. I later started sculpting pieces to be cast in bronze. This young native girl depicted in the sculpture is my daughter, Leah.

RIGHT

Leah, 2010.

Bronze, 37" x 15" x 11"

Loan courtesy of artist

Image courtesy of Blue

Rain Gallery



Shan Gashorn

EASTERN BAND CHEROKEE b 1957

The digital composite, *Viable*, uses Luther Standing Bear’s wise words as the backdrop for a photo portrait series featuring a young Indian woman, carrying our most precious cultural legacy. This tryptich of images sends a literal message—one about her gestation of a cherished gift—but also metaphorically, that as Indigenous people, we have a responsibility to nurture and keep our culture alive.

On the exterior of the Cherokee-style column basket, *Feminine Sacred*, the aforementioned quote is combined with the language of the Violence Against Women Act of 2013. This legislation grants tribes the authority to protect Native women from sexual violence at the hands of non-Natives, thus defending the life-givers who are our original connections to the Mother Earth since time immemorial. Woven on the interior of this piece are words written by a Native woman in the last stages of her pregnancy, thanking the Creator for the gift of sharing her body with this new life and for the blessing of being chosen to be part of this child’s journey.

It is the mothers, not
the warriors, who
create a people and
guide their destiny.

Luther Standing Bear (Lakota)

RIGHT

Feminine Sacred, 2010.
Woven paper basket,
7” x 8 1/2” x 21”
Loan courtesy of artist

NEXT PAGE

Viable, 2016.
Monotype, chine colle
with ledger paper.
Each Image: 22” x 28”
Loan courtesy of artist





33

Tori Groves

KIOWA 1970

Sunboy's mother was an earth woman and his father was the Sun. His father was a jealous man and didn't want his wife to return to her people. She lived alone with him and her son in the sky world. She was lonely and missed her family. When she finally plotted her escape through the clouds and back to earth, she failed. The rope she tied around herself and her child was too short and they were left dangling from the sky, only to be discovered by her husband upon his return. He was very angry and enraged; he threw a rawhide wheel at her and killed her. She fell to the earth, dead. Her baby was alive but now he was an orphan—his mother was dead and his father had abandoned him. Sunboy was left in this new world to nurse on his dead mother's breast. Eventually he found Spider Woman's camp next to a river. She was an old lady and she knew who he was, the son of the Sun and an earth woman—half from this world and half from that world.

Eventually, he trusted her and she became his *Taah*, his grandma. She raised him like only a grandma can. She loved him like only a grandma can. He became strong and powerful and eventually became the Sun Boys, two men, two halves of the same self.

The Sun Boys' story is as old as the beginning of our time, yet it is a story I have heard many times among my own family and friends. How many people do I know who were raised by their grandmas? How many people do I know whose father could not be a good father? Whose mother was not able to be there for them? Who were abandoned, orphaned, and raised by the elders? The Sun Boys are us.

RIGHT

***Sunboy's Women*, 2011.**
Glass beads, wooden beads, and Swarovski crystals on raw silk,
72" x 72" x 2"
(each panel: 32" x 72" x 2")
Loan courtesy of artist



Linda Lomahaftewa

HOPÍ/CHOCTAW B 1947



Ancestral Gulf Bird #15

Ancestral Gulf Bird #6

In the beginning, birds could speak. Everyone could understand each other—birds, humans, animals. The writing on the ledger paper demonstrates how our communication has become fractured over time, and we as humans have lost the ability to communicate to the birds. The backgrounds reference the four rivers that the Hopi people had to cross before finding their homeland and also mark the passing of time. The red emblem comes from beadwork and is known as the Celestial Eye, which to me represents my connection to my Southeastern Woodland ancestors. Through our migrations and shifting relationships with our fellow creatures, Creator watches over us and is unchanging.

Remembering Choctaw Ancestors

The center of this tripartite mixed-media painting is Nanih Waiya, the Mother Mound of the Choctaw people. Choctaw people emerged from the nearby Nanih Waiya cave. Both mound and cave are in Winston County, Mississippi, and once again belong to Choctaw people. Moon gave corn to the Choctaw people through the two Twin Warriors, shown here in red and based on petroglyph designs. The sun circle is based on the Claflin shell gorget design from Stalling's Island, Georgia. The sun circles symbolize the connection from our sacred fires in the center of our ceremonial grounds that communicate our prayers and intentions to Creator. The photographic transfers are of departed Choctaw ancestors. The Celestial Eye image is represented here in white, hatachi, the color of peace; it is found on Choctaw beaded baldric sashes such as the two that the Choctaw man and woman are depicted wearing. The colors come from dawn, when we greet Creator and the day ahead.

RIGHT

Remembering Choctaw Ancestors, 2010.

Acrylic, mono print, paper, photo collage on canvas.

Loan courtesy of artist
15 1/2" x 37 1/2"





LEFT

Ancestral Gulf Bird #6, 2010.
Monotype, chine colle with
ledger paper, 21 3/4" x 28 1/2"
Loan courtesy of artist

RIGHT

Ancestral Gulf Bird #15, 2010.
Monotype, chine colle with
ledger paper, 21" x 26"
Loan courtesy of artist



Cedar Marie

STANDING ROCK SIOUX • 1963



This hand-carved Inuit-style kayak paddle takes its conceptual and metaphorical strength from the genesis story of Sedna,* Goddess of all Sea Life. There are many versions of the story, yet themes of love, betrayal, and resiliency are common among them.

A paddle is a signifier of movement. Its intent is to stir the waters and to journey forward with diligent resolve. Within the context of contemporary environmental concerns, this forward motion is a testament to our moral courage to stand against the influences of Big Oil and to reduce the human causes of climate change. If we love the place where we live, how do we express that love? Are we choosing to hear nature’s global warnings—water pollution, ocean acidification, degradation of sea habitats, and melting polar ice, or are we betraying our home?

Otoliths—the ear bones of fish—are housed in a small glass bottle with a cork stopper that is tied to the kayak paddle. The position of the bottle of otoliths is key; it is placed in the center of the paddle loom to act as a kind of compass that is always in the paddler’s view. It is a reminder that we have choices. If we heed nature’s warnings and work to correct our course, we will not have forgone our integrity as a species. We will have

come to our highest senses. We will have sought brave and creative solutions in determining our future relationship—and our children’s future—with the planet.

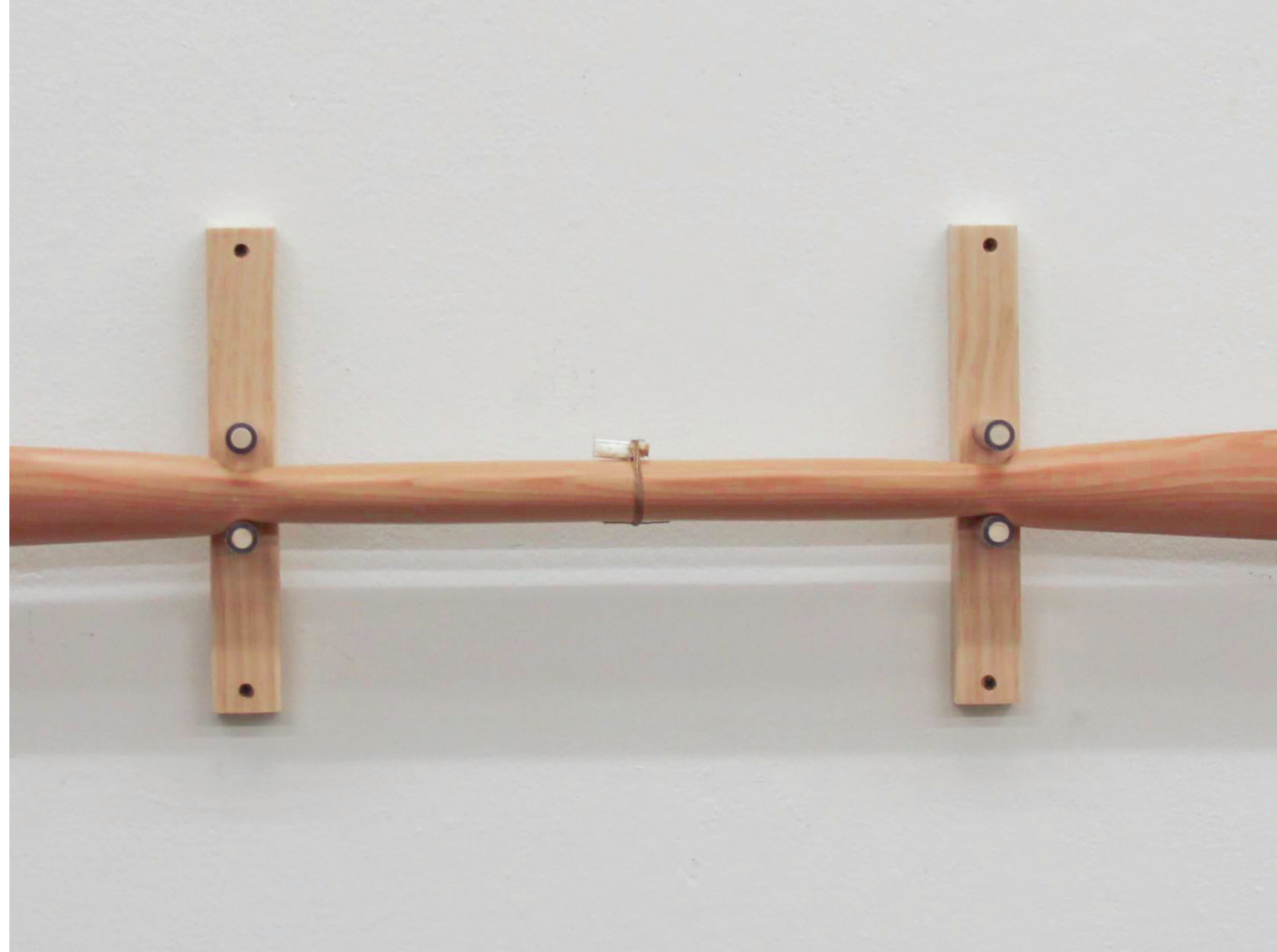
*Sedna was a young Inuit woman with a strong heart and mind.

After rejecting several marriage proposals from men in her village sent forth by her father, she agreed to marry an unknown hunter who convinced Sedna’s father that he could provide for her. The hunter takes her to a nest high on a floating island cliff where he reveals his true nature, that of a dark spirit bird. Sedna’s father attempts to rescue her in a kayak. As they flee, the spirit bird creates a great storm with his wings. Fearing for his life, Sedna’s father throws her overboard in hopes this will stabilize the boat and calm the spirit bird. It does not. She clings to the side of the kayak until her fingers freeze and break off. Each broken digit then transformed into the first seals, walruses, and whales of the sea. Though Sedna sinks to the bottom of the sea, she does not die. She becomes the mother and guardian of all sea life.

RIGHT

Journey (Detail),
2016.

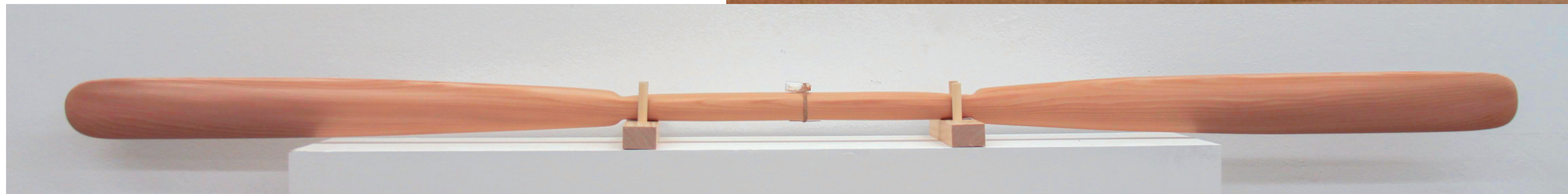
Western red cedar, otolith
bones, glass, cork, wax
thread, paste wax,
81” x 3 1/2” x 1 1/2”
Loan courtesy of artist



RIGHT

Journey, 2016.

Western red cedar, oto-
lith bones, glass, cork,
wax thread, paste wax,
81" x 3 1/2" x 1 1/2"
Loan courtesy of artist



Nery McMaster

Plains Cree/Blackfoot © 1988

My history is my origin. My work might reveal who I am, the foundation of my being, or it might sometimes reflect an ancient truth. While one work might suggest long ago or express a relation to the world around, everything is an extension of who I am. Finding an object or seeing an animal might remind me of an ancient story I've heard or one that might have been told to me. Other times an object might reflect my own complex heritage from both sides of my family, which become an origin story of its own. My history is born also in the land and I am an embodiment of all that is around: I speak of the land; it speaks through me. It is charted not by instrument alone but by ancient stories that guide us. My origin, my history tells me where I'm going.

RIGHT

Terra Cognitum, 2013.
C-print, 37" x 51"
Loan courtesy of artist and
Katzman Contemporary





LEFT

*Harbinger of Sudden
Departures, 2013.*

C-print, 37" x 51"
Loan courtesy of artist
and Bockley Gallery

RIGHT

Tilsam, 2010.

C-print, 25" x 25"
Loan courtesy of artist and
Katzman Contemporary



America Meredith

CEROKEE NATION 1972

The Columbian Exchange between the Americas, Australia, and Afro-Eurasia is considered one of the greatest cataclysmic shifts in human history. The exchange of humans, plants, animals, and microbes marked the creation of a new world—both positive and negative. St. Kateri Tekakwitha (Mohawk/Algonquin, 1656–1680) was at the center of the maelstrom of change, and my painting *Extremis Malis Extrema Remedia* reflects the ambivalence of this new world being created around her.

This very real historical woman was stricken by smallpox, one of the many epidemic diseases that killed an estimated 90 percent of the Indigenous population of the Americas, yet she survived and was about to tell her tale.

Disfigured with pockmarks, Kateri lived in a time of epidemics, warfare, and social turmoil and converted to Christianity at the age of twenty. At that time and now, many in her tribe see her not as a hero, but as a cultural traitor, turning away from her tribe and religious beliefs. The title, Latin for “extreme ills, extreme remedies,” evolved into our phrase “desperate times call for desperate measures.” While I personally don’t agree with Kateri’s choices, who am I to judge how she found comfort, since I cannot possibly imagine the suffering she endured?

The arch she is praying under represents the institution of the Roman Catholic Church, which includes symbols of suffering and sorrow, including the whip that Kateri used for self-flagellation. Surrounding her is Nature—scenery from the Northeastern Woodlands where she lives. She is depicted in contemporary Iroquois or Haudenosaunee clothing. The beadwork motif at the bottom of her skirt is the Sky Arch, symbolizing the Upper World, flanked by symbols of the Celestial Tree, which echoes the scenery and shows that the Sacred is all around us.

RIGHT

***Extremis Malis Extrema Remedia*, 2010.**
Acrylic on canvas,
59” x 47”
Loan courtesy of artist



Nolly Murphy Adams

NON-ENROLLED DESCENDANT b 1977
OGLALA LAKOTA

Iktomi Dreaming

In Lakota mythology Anog Ite, also called Double Faced Woman, is a daughter of Wazi and Kanka, and wife of Tate (the Wind). She was a talented and beautiful woman tricked by Iktomi (Spider) and her mother into attempting to seduce Wi (the Sun). Wi is publicly shamed that he has forgotten his wife, Hanwi (the Moon). For scheming to displace a wife and neglecting her own children, Anog Ite was punished with a second face that is hideous. Anog Ite was the mother of the Four Winds and Yum (the whirlwind) but as further punishment was banished from her children.

After her banishment Anog Ite brought the skills of hide tanning, clothing, and quillwork to the first peoples as they emerged onto the earth. Despite her mistakes and loneliness, she still had much to offer, including the means to redemption.

She is a character of duality and complexity, a person of terrible beauty and revulsion. She possesses and shares her incredible talents and knowledge, but is also a figure of fear and pain for pregnant women and babies. Anog Ite is credited with the admirable skills and patterns associated with quillwork and beadwork. It is said that she brings her skills to women in dreams, but there is danger in becoming too enamored with the

artistry of beadwork and quilling, it can become obsessive to the point of imbalance.

Anog Ite teaches lessons that relate to the social norms regarding sexuality, motherhood, and human frailty. It is a story of the complexity of the feminine condition, of manipulation, forgiveness, grief, and redemption.

Sewing Box, for Anog Ite

The sewing box is decorated with two styles of beadwork, both floral and geometric styles and designs used by the Lakotas. These designs are supplemented with the beaded QR codes that tell Anog Ite's story in text form.

RIGHT

Sewing Box, for Anog Ite, 2016.
Sculptural beaded sewing box,
8" x 10" x 10"
Loan courtesy of artist



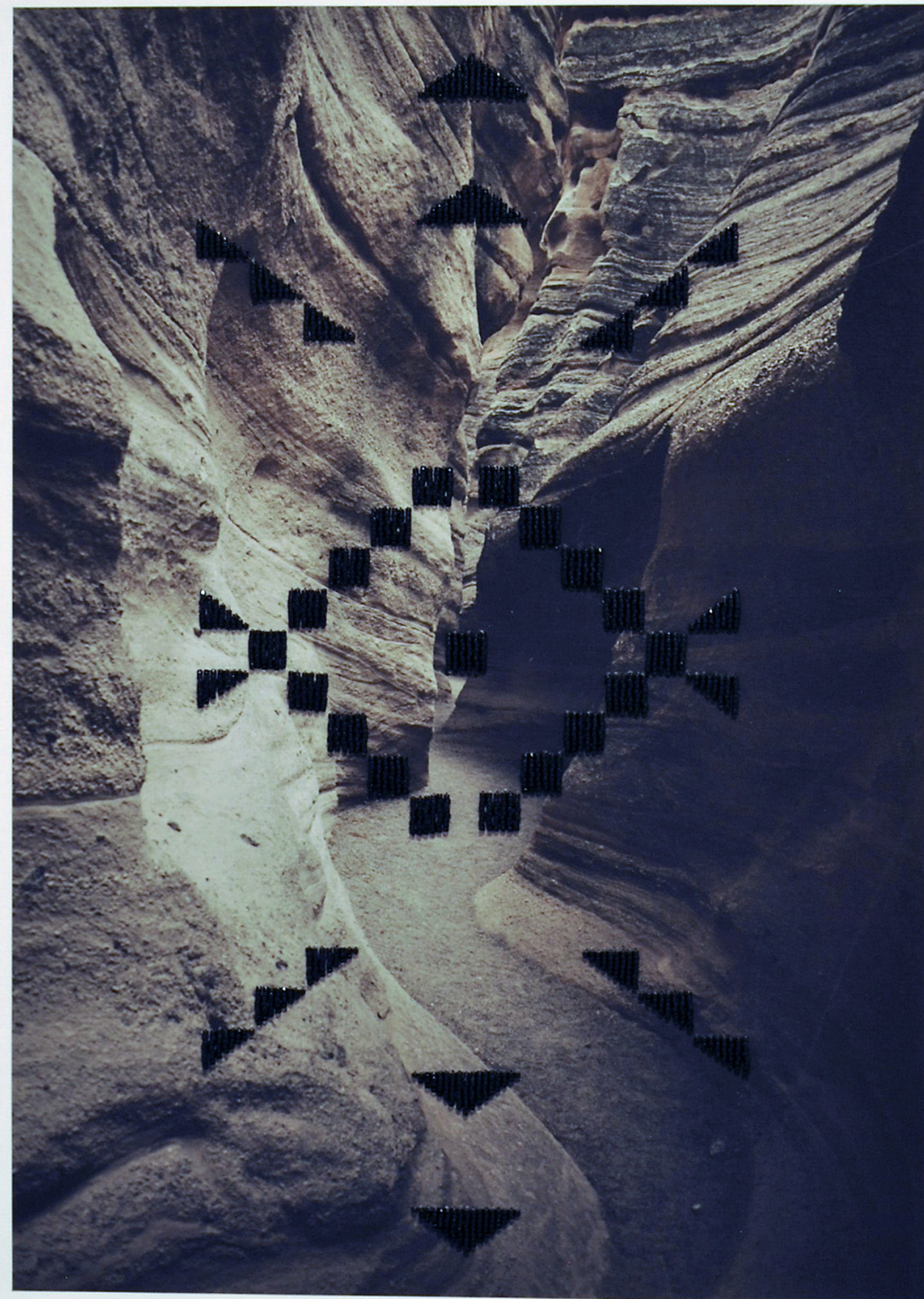


LEFT

Sewing Box, for Anog Ite, 2016.
Sculptural beaded
sewing box, 8" x 10" x 10"
Loan courtesy of artist

RIGHT

Iktomi Dreaming, 2016.
Beadwork and mixed
media on paper,
mounted on birch panel,
12" x 15" x 3"
Loan courtesy of artist



Lianne Redeye

SENECA b. 1985

Being from a community that is matrilineal, the forces of women and creation are woven throughout our shared history and build our future. I see the works I create as an extension of these forces because as a figurative artist my work is an intersection of autobiography and community. Representation of Native peoples from a Native perspective is important to me. I depict my Native culture and the relationship between perception and experience through genre scenes and portraits of people from my home reservation in New York.

For the *Frame Series* I explore new content but especially aesthetic possibilities in weaving together personal narratives, family relationships, and historical trauma.

Bad or good, my relationships to the women in my family have helped shape where I am today. For these works I chose to look closer at those relationships and themes of domestic violence, abuse, mental illness, but also good things like caring, providing, protecting, and teaching. The resulting paintings and Seneca beaded picture frames have an intensely personal and emotional component, making the project very revealing. The creation of these works felt necessary after the birth of my first child because it forced me to think about what survival means by adding a new generation to the family in the face of the continued effects of Colonialism.

LEFT TO RIGHT

Frame Series (Pam):
When the Kinzua Dam Happened/“Now Who’s Going to Protect You?”, 2016.

Frame: Fabric, seed beads, porcupine quills, thread;
 Study: Gel photo transfer, gouache, and acrylic on watercolor paper,
 19 1/2” x 11 1/4” x 2 1/4”
 Loan courtesy of artist

Frame Series (Gram):
My Grandmother Lived Here and I Cried/ “My College Girl”, 2016.

Frame: Fabric from grandmother’s nightgown, seed beads, thread;
 Study: Gel photo transfer, gouache, and acrylic on watercolor paper,
 19 1/2” x 11 1/4” x 1/2”
 Loan courtesy of artist

Frame Series (Elliot):
My Survival Led to Him/ “I Won’t Hurt You, I Will Protect You”, 2016.

Frame: Recycled screenprint on paper, fabric, seed beads, thread;
 Study: Gel photo transfer, gouache, and acrylic on watercolor paper,
 19 1/2” x 11 1/4” x 1/4”
 Loan courtesy of artist



Cara Romero

CHEMEHUEVI 1977

In Chemehuevi (pronounced cheh-meh-WAY-vee), our Creator is a female deity. Her name is Great Ocean Woman (Hutsipamamau'u) and she created all the land and people from her body with the help (and sometimes mischief) of Wolf, Coyote, and the Mountain Lion. There are several other female familiars during our early dawn stories. All of the females have great strength and diversity, they range from old to young, sometimes they are desirable, provocative, and dangerous—sometimes they are nurturers and healers with the most powerful medicine.

From a very young age, Chemehuevi women are taught that their innate strength as a woman and life giver is all-powerful, maybe sometimes even supernatural, and we are respected as equals in Chemehuevi society. We hold power in government and historically in battle. This unique perspective shows up throughout my art. It is always my intention to visualize this inherent Chemehuevi belief in the all-powerful, supernatural strength of women. It is a gentle but powerful shift to see Native women portrayed in this way from an indigenous female perspective.

I am deeply committed to making work that addresses Native American social issues and changes the way people perceive Native Americans, especially Native women, in contemporary society. If we want respect, love, and beauty among us and others, we must actively promote it through our art.

RIGHT

Eufaula, 2015.

Archival pigment print,
44" x 44"

Loan courtesy of Cara
Romero Photography





LEFT

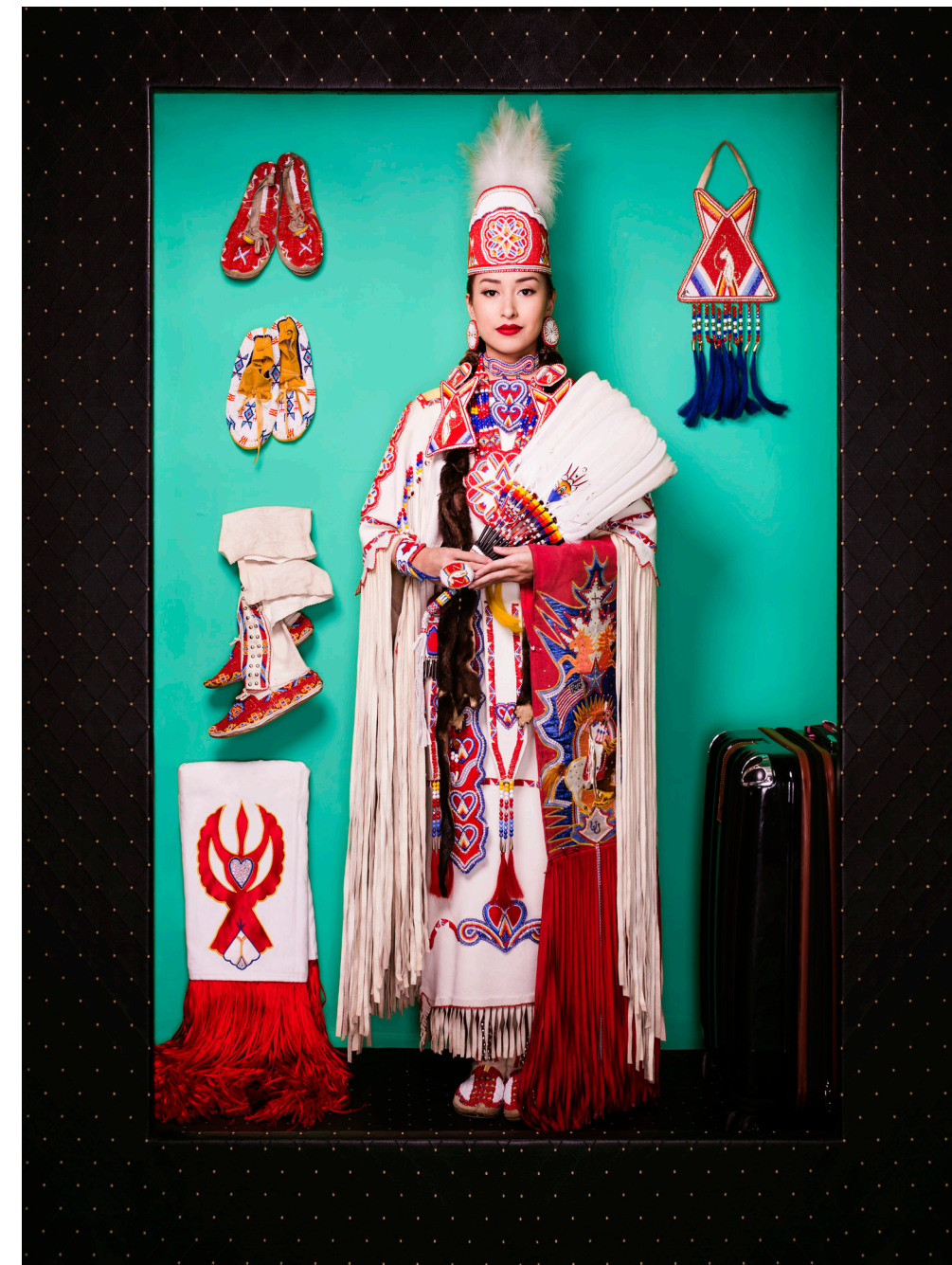
***Water Memory*, 2015.**
archival pigment print,
44" x 44"
Loan courtesy of Cara
Romero Photography

RIGHT

***Jenna*, 2016.**
Archival pigment print,
29" x 28"
Loan courtesy of Cara
Romero Photography

FAR RIGHT

***Wakeah*, 2016.**
Archival pigment print,
48" x 36"
Loan courtesy of Cara
Romero Photography



Erin Shaw

CHICKASAW/CHOCTAW b 1975



My work as an artist rests in this simple assertion: *We are collectors of stories and the stories we collect shape the people we are.*

As I collect and work with stories, I am reminded time and time again that stories are fluid. They must bend and move in order to continue to serve us. I sometimes see myself going into ancient times, gathering up stories and bringing them into my current context. Our ancient stories are vital to us today. I believe in order to keep them vital, we must actively participate with them. Within my work, my aim is not merely a retelling, but a current engagement. I allow these stories to evolve, even as I do. This element of my work is vital, as I investigate and explore how my cultural heritage has shaped me and how it will continue to shape future generations.



Beneath the Shallow Sea,
2016.
Acrylic canvas mounted
on board, 7 round canvas
circles: 2 – 30”, 2 – 24”,
1 – 20”, 1 – 16”, 1 – 12”
Loan courtesy of artist



C. Maxx Stavers

SEMINOLE/MUSKOGEE ▮ 1951

Although I grew up in Wichita, Kansas, my parents always kept us close to our heritage and traditions that they grew up with in Wewoka, Oklahoma. In all Native nations oral traditions were so important and the storyteller held an important place in the community and family. My dad and my Aunt Nelly were our family storytellers, and we as kids spent many times sitting at the kitchen table or traveling in a car listening to both of them.

Hearing how the wind is the life giver to all and how it opened the shell to allow the animals to take their place on earth is a great visual story. It also describes the relationship of the clans and their place in the tribe and learning the role of the woman, as being important in the tribe, family, and being the life giver of our traditions. From generations to generations it is through the woman that one receives their clan.

My installation reflects these beliefs and memories of these stories of my family. I made a form resembling a shell and placed visual motion to weave into the space. The piece also has images of both of my grandmothers within the installation, as they are the bloodlines of my family and life.

RIGHT

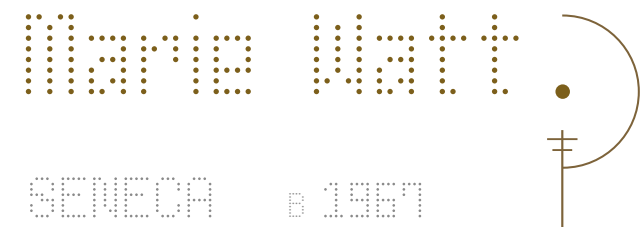
***Force of Nature*, 2016.**
Mixed media,
site-specific installation,
10' x 10' x 10'
Loan courtesy of artist



Force of Nature (Detail),
2016.

Mixed media, site-
specific installation,
10' x 10' x 10'
Loan courtesy of artist





Trek (Pleiades) reflects on long journeys, as well as our ancient and modern fascination with stars. Stars are the basis for the ancient art of astronomy, calendar systems, navigational wayfinding, teachings, and mythology. The star motif in this piece draws from a design on a Native American basket; the maker is unidentified, but it is of California or Oregon origin and resides in the collection of the Hallie Ford Museum of Art. I have depicted the Pleiades, or Seven Sisters, in honor of my friend Alma Nungarrayi Granites, whom I met during the Landmark artist exchange and printmaking residency organized by the Tamarind Institute (Albuquerque, New Mexico) and the Yirrkala Art Center (Yirrkala, Northern Territory, Australia). The starship *Enterprise* (from the original series of *Star Trek*) underscores intersection of the historical and contemporary, the real and mythical. *Trek* reflects on man's ancient and modern preoccupation with the sky.

Blanket Stories: Indian Territory: Growing up Indigenous in the United States, the phrase "Indian Territory" has a lot of resonance. On one hand, this land we share was once entirely an Indian territory, but it actually refers to a very specific part of U.S. history. During the Indian Removal Act of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many tribes were forcibly relocated to a portion of the south central United States with organic borders,

called Indian Territory. The Indian Appropriation Act of 1889 opened the door to white settlement and this space also became known as Oklahoma Territory. In 1907 the two territories officially merged to become the state of Oklahoma. "Oklahoma" comes from the Choctaw word meaning "Red People." Oklahoma now has 39 federally recognized tribes and a significant urban Indian community, which is a powerful present day expression of Indigeneity in Oklahoma and the United States.

Round Dance: I didn't grow up dancing in pow-wows, but the Round Dance is one dance in which I have often participated. Historically a healing dance, in pow-wow and other social gatherings, the Round Dance is considered a friendship dance. I like how this dance is often multigenerational and invites everyone to be part of the circle. There is a blanket in this blanket story column made of satin bindings that reminds me of brightly colored pow-wow regalia.

Grandmother: My tribe, the Seneca Nation of Indians, is a matrilineal society. Our clans, land ownership, and even voting rights have long been the domain of women. I never knew what feminism was until I went to college, and then I realized I was raised by proto-feminists.

LEFT

Blanket Stories: Indian Territory, Round Dance, Grandmother, 2016.

Cedar and reclaimed wool blankets.

102" x 34" x 22"

Loan courtesy of artist, PDX Contemporary Art, and Greg Kucera Gallery



Oyari White Hawk

SICANGU LAKOTA B 1976

My center, my home, in both a physical and spiritual sense comes from the teachings of our people, the Očeti Šakowin Oyaté. From our cultural teachings and practices I have learned how to carry myself in the world. It is from this place that I have been taught the ideals I hold as the utmost important in life: Notions of balance, prayer, compassion, generosity, courage, wisdom . . . respect, duality, humility, resilience, this list could go on and on. From the stories of our Lakota people, my own life experiences, and relationships within my community, the guiding principles in my life have been cultivated. It is from these stories, teachings, and experiences that I have learned my place in this life, the ways in which I can contribute, love, give, support, fight, and share. Much of this is done through my artistic practice and these ideas can be seen reflected in my work.

At times these reflections are very direct. I have made works and will continue to create pieces that speak directly to Lakota spirituality, stories, and teachings. Other times, these teachings and stories are the foundation upon which a longer expansive narrative line is developed. Yet, they are always there somewhere beneath the layers of life and experience, embedded at the beginning.

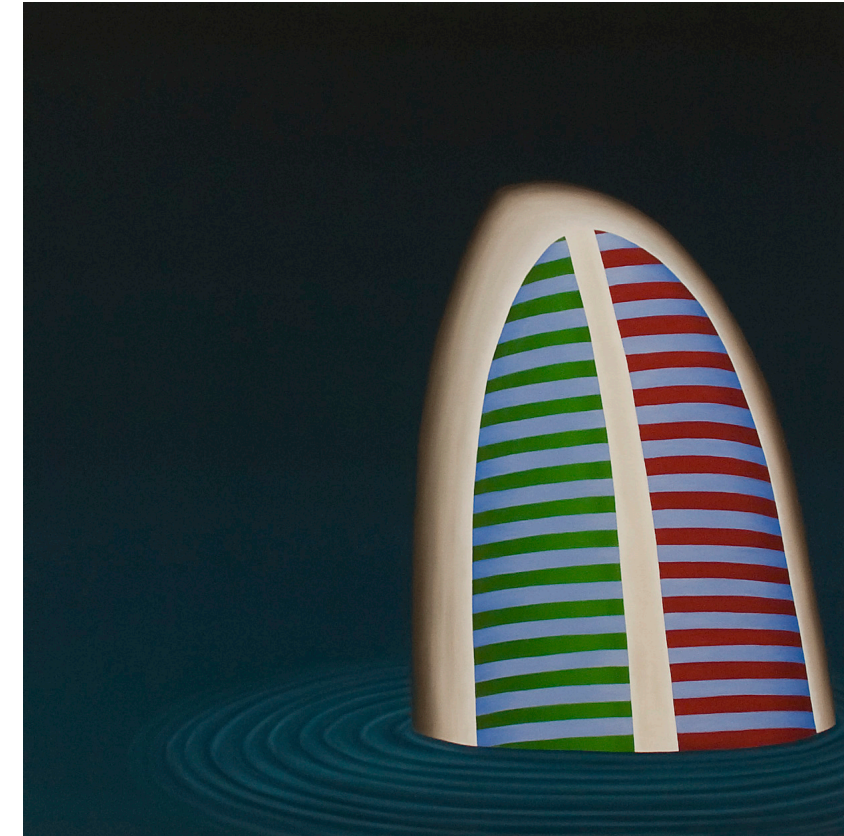
Anunk Ite, or Double Woman, plays an important role in the Lakota emergence story and the gifting of quillwork to our people. Much good has come from her, but she also has an ugly side and is at times selfish and manipulative. The works in this exhibition speak strongly to ideas conveyed in these stories of balance, reciprocity and duality.

LEFT

Connections, 2015.
Acrylic, size 13 beads,
on canvas, 42" x 42"
Loan courtesy of artist
and Bockley Gallery

RIGHT

Self Reflection, 2011.
Oil on canvas, 48" x 48"
Loan courtesy of artist
and Bockley Gallery



Melanie Vazzie

NAVAJO B 1966

Looking Forward is about Changing Woman, who is part of our creation story. She is our female leader and teacher. I have made work about her and, in that way, it is about me and all women. We need to be strong and see beauty in the world around us. It is something I was taught at an early age but also something that I have to keep teaching myself every day. Wake up early, pray, think in a good way, and be good to yourself and those around you. It seems simple but it is very hard to do with many things that get in the way. *Looking Forward* is about moving forward into a better place and with a strong mind, body, and soul. Many of my works are an attempt to create a better space and place for my own mind and body to concentrate on. I am attempting to follow the creation story in which we are all moving together through different worlds to a better place. We are recreating ourselves again and again into being fresh and new to stand up to the hardships of life.



LEFT

Looking Forward, 2004.
Monotype, 30" x 22"
Loan courtesy of
artist, Clark Barker
Collection, and Glenn
Green Gallery.

RIGHT

Strength from Within, 2004.
Fabricated steel with
a powder coat finish,
36" x 20 1/2" x 16"
Loan courtesy of
artist and Clark Barker
Collection



Dobra Yapa-Pappan

JEMEZ PUEBLO/KOREAN 1971



By nature, Native peoples are storytellers. I am a Korean and Jemez Pueblo artist who utilizes digital imagery to visually share my story about identity, being mixed race, cultural pride, and home. The centralized figure in *En route* and *There and Back Again* are literal visual portrayals of a young Pueblo girl, my daughter Ji Hae, dressed in a traditional Pueblo manta, who is leading me to ceremony. I interpret this as the next generation connecting us to our Native traditions, helping our cultures to continue thriving, and keeping us tied to our ancestral homelands. I also incorporate the popular images of the “L” train and a Chicago Transit Authority map to represent our urban home in Chicago. I convey the similarities within the spirituality of both my cultures by using symbolic imagery, motifs derived from origami paper such as the butterfly and dragonfly, that have significance in both Asian and Native (Pueblo) cultures.

LEFT

En Route (L Series),
2016.

Digital print on fine art
paper, 30” x 20”

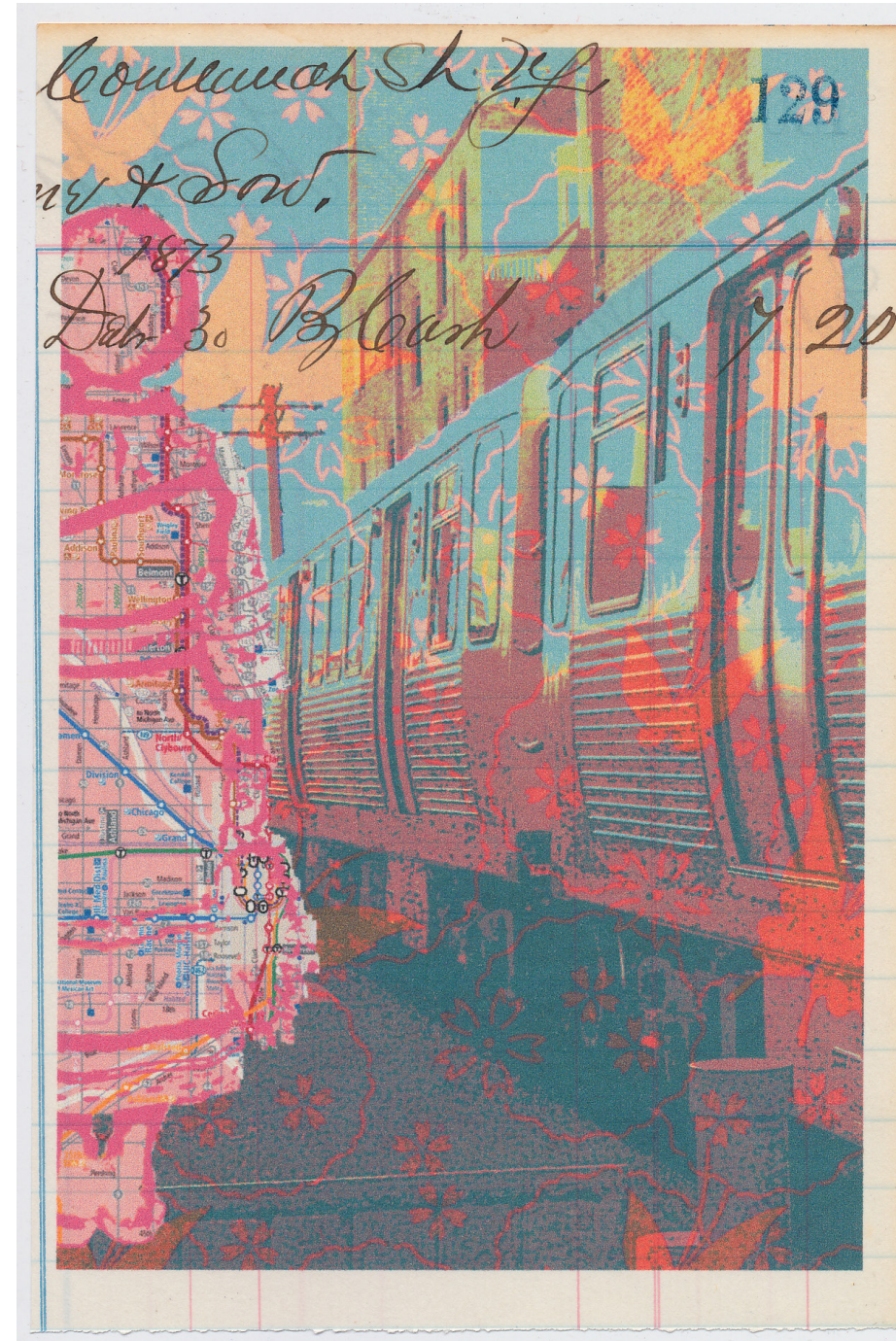
Loan courtesy of artist

RIGHT

There and Back Again,
(L Series), 2016.

Digital print on fine art
paper, 30” x 20”

Loan courtesy of artist



CURATOR’S STATEMENT

From the Belly of Our Being:
art by and about Native creation

heather ahtone (CHOCTAW/CHICKASAW)

GUEST CURATOR

“Walking, I am listening to a deeper way. Suddenly
all my ancestors are behind me. Be still, they say.
Watch and listen. You are the result of the love
of thousands.”

Linda Hogan, *Dwellings*

From the Belly of Our Being: art by and about Native creation presents art made by some of the nation’s finest Native American artists, while providing a glimpse into the complex relationship between contemporary art and feminine cultural identity. Indigenous people pass our cultural ethos to the contemporary generation through our tribal creation narratives, wherein we find stories of the women who made the world.

The names and roles of these feminine forces vary: Asdzáá nádleehé or Changing Woman in Navajo, Selu or Corn Mother in Cherokee, Sedna or Mother of the Sea in Inuktitut, Ataensic or Sky Woman in Seneca, Nokomis or Grandmother in Ojibwe, Anunk Ite or Double-Face Woman in Lakota. These women had a hand in creation, forming the people and things of the Earth, providing us with gifts that sustain us into the twenty-first century. Through these examples, our tribal communities learn to be respectful of women, guide the men to understand the feminine role within tribal society, and, often, vice-versa.

In this exhibition, each participating artist explores how these feminine forces continue to inform the ideals of feminine behavior and gendered roles—the ability to be both delicate and gentle, while also being a force that is powerful and bold. Their art addresses those creation stories, where feminine forces may wield great intellect, wisdom, skill, and generosity, yet sometimes be crippled by recognizable human frailties. *From the Belly of Our Being* provides an opportunity for the artists to express, overtly or in a more nuanced way, how these forces live through them and within their art.

That time of the beginning was not so long ago that we have forgotten. So, the idea that these forces are present in the arts of Indigenous people is not a courteous nod to primordial time—the art is evidence that these figures still live in our hearts and minds. It is our collective hope, curator and artists alike, that in sharing the art through which the stories live we will edify others to appreciate these feminine forces and the role of women within our collective social engagements. *From the Belly of Our Being* is our remembering, our telling of these stories for ourselves and for our children.

IN THE BEGINNING (or the Art of Creation)

The story of this exhibition begins with the artists. Over the last ten years and in personal conversations, the most exciting shared moments of my talks with these artists has often been when they wanted to share a new work and tell me how it represents their culture. At

some point, this kind of conversation took place with more than half of the artists included in *From the Belly of Our Being*. There was one element of these conversations that remained constant—that the artist’s inspiration often came from a creation story and this story informed the artist’s sense of self. Those creation stories, plural because each tribe has its own genesis, contribute in part to our sense of belonging to specific places, within our families and to one another. These stories are our philosophies and our maps to the world.

Hopi philosophy teaches that the people emerged at the *sipapu*, the belly button of the world. Sipapu is not a mythical place, but a real geographic location in the area of the Grand Canyon, and it is just one of many places that are part of our Indigenous creation stories. These narratives often teach that the Earth is our mother and all things that come from the Earth are given to nourish and provide for the people, as a mother cares for her children. My Choctaw people tell of Nanih Waiya, a mound we consider our mother, located in Mississippi. And so, the story repeats itself, across the continent, stories of emergence and arrival and of mythical transformations. The people are created and made whole through gifts that often come from feminine forces of creation. The names of these women vary, as do their gifts: Selu who brings the corn, Changing Woman who makes the people, Sedna transforms into the animals of the sea, Sky Woman descends to make the earth, among so many more. These stories have resonated within my soul, both as a child born into a matriarchal line filled with stories of the strength of our women and as a mother trying earnestly to make the world a place where my children will be whole. Feminine strength is the inspiration that guides *From the Belly of Our Being*: art by and about Native creation.



LEFT

Meryl McMaster
***Caduceus*, 2010.**
C-print, 25" x 25"
Loan courtesy of
artist and Katzman
Contemporary

This exhibition celebrates art made by Native women who remember our stories of creation and are dreaming the future into being as contemporary artists. The stories that inform works in this exhibition are unique to each artist’s personal experience and vision. For that reason, each of the artists was asked to provide a brief statement allowing viewers to understand the personal nature of the relationship between the art and their culture. While it is considered a curatorial prerogative to interpret the artist’s intention, the unique character of this project and these relationships called for a different approach. Each of the twenty artists provided a statement, retained in the artist’s voice, included as testaments within the gallery and the catalogue. The statements range from Tammy Garcia’s intimate description of preparing for feast days with the women in her family to Nanibah Chacon’s invocation of Changing Women as an inspiration for her self-identity as a modern woman. Their statements reflect the personal emotion and the persuasive role held by the women in their world.

REMEMBERING (or the Art of Being Native)

The act of remembering transcends time. Each time we tell our tribal narratives the listener is transformed from the present into the moment of creation, in audience with the original characters and contributing again to the power of that story, where one can find meaning that has the potential to guide us in the present. When we hold our ceremonies for our children—at their birth, to mark their puberty, at their weddings—it is not uncommon for the stories of the ceremony to be invoked. The telling reminds us how the rituals came to be gifted to our people, and why they should be done for our people to be fully developed.

With the broad representation of eighteen tribal communities within the exhibition proper, it becomes apparent that the very identity these women have formed in relationship to their tribes, their families, and have expressed within their art, shares the common element of story. Our stories begin in the beginning, often before mankind. For Teri Greeves’s Kiowa relatives it begins in the time of the giants, and for C. Maxx Stevens’s Seminole people it begins at the point of emergence into this world, with the wind felt upon the face as the first human experience. As the gendered roles emerge through particular characters, hearing those details we recognize parts of ourselves. Perhaps we recognize what we ambitiously desire to become or ardently strive to avoid. Dyani White Hawk Polk and Molly Murphy Adams both consider the Double-Face Woman as an important lesson in femininity and relationships.

There are few singular moments upon which we dwell, recognizing that it is through the compilation of the longer epic that the edifying lens becomes focused. We learn to look through that lens at our own circumstance. Certainly the world we look upon has many differences from the environment of the stories, but the characters are often not so different. We remain, as Native women, concerned for the well-being of our children, focused on the daily routines that meet the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of our families, and cognizant that every small choice has, potentially, big impact. Cedar Marie’s kayak paddle reminds us that sacrifices are often necessary to provide for those needs. Marie Watt’s blanket story rests in Stillwater, as a landing place for Sky Woman and the continued generation of Seneca women.

It is not uncommon in our Native communities

that we share stories, within cultural regions or through cultural engagement. A common feature that has been apparent to me is that for many of our communities, the Earth is gendered female. Recognizing that the Earth provides for her children, meeting all of our needs, as mothers we strive to do the same. But we also strive to protect our mothers, and this includes the Earth. Julie Buffalohead’s drawings address this relationship and responsibility, as we hold our Earth mother in our hands. Cara Romero’s photographs of the great flood, which is so very common in creation stories, reminds us of the power of water and the importance of our relationship to the land. Linda Lomhaftewa’s depiction of the ibis recalls the delicate relationship that many creatures have to spaces we endanger.

In concert with our creative role as part of the continued story of Indigeneity, accountability is a common theme of discussion amongst Native women. Accountability resonates across cultures—women across the globe recognize that we are the makers of the future. This is evident in Melanie Yazzie’s images of women, inspired by her travels to different Indigenous communities, where she found accountability to be a shared truth. For Native women, though, I contend that accountability is a two-sided coin. We recognize our own roles as mothers of the next seven generations, but we also acknowledge that we must hold others accountable. We know that as much as we must work to create within our children, families, and communities an ethos of gratitude, kindness, generosity, and stewardship, we must also hold others responsible for helping make sure that the future is a place wherein our children and communities will be able to act on this ethos. Shan Goshorn reminds us so in the baskets she so deftly weaves, inviting us to lean in to the story. Anita

Fields uses the delicate medium of ceramics to speak, through the language of a wedding dress, to the delicate balance of earth and sky and the people between.

We have had great leaders at every level who have prepared us to step into any role that allows us to engage on behalf of our future generations. As a young woman I knew of tribal leaders Mildred Cleghorn and Wilma Mankiller. Terri Parton continues this legacy for our young women today. We have heard the bold words of women that guided us forward: Zitkala-Ša, who wrote of our humanity; Joy Harjo’s kitchen table, where we could make our families; Linda Hogan, who reminds us that our humanity is tied to all other kinds of animal people, and as much to the water and air that flows through our bodies. America Meredith’s painting of Saint Kateri presents another such story, one that speaks to the suffering and survival of our people. That is what Indigenous art speaks to, as do our songs, poetry, and dance. This is why it has been so important to include dance and storytelling within the programming schedule for the full development of *From the Belly of Our Being*.

IMAGINING (or from the Belly)

Chickasaw author and environmentalist Linda Hogan speaks to the “love of thousands” that prepared the way for each of us to step into our own being. That love fostered dreams, which fostered new stories and new myths. As much as the stories of creation are embedded in the past and remembering, it is through our new dreams that we create the future. We must imagine our healing. We must imagine our great-grandchildren and beyond. We must imagine prosperity and strength. From the imagining, then, we create a path to move forward. The artists in this exhibition imagine that future as a

RIGHT

Nanibah Chacon
Emergence, 2013.
Acrylic on birch,
33 1/2” x 45 1/2”
Loan courtesy of artist



beautiful and sacred place, where stories continue.

Within the art of Meryl McMaster and Erin Shaw we recognize that part of the experience of living our cultures is recognizing that the stories continue to be written—or illustrated, as the case may be. As much as we cherish the stories of the creation times, we are part of the longer story; we are the beginning of a story as it is being written. Please recognize that it takes great courage to honor the story within, especially when it has not yet been told.

Recognizing that we, as women, are the conduit to the continued vitality of our communities is an empowering position. Several of the artists, like Luanne Redeye, have provided incredibly intimate portraits of their roles as women within their families. Or Debra Yepa-Pappan, whose use of maps and ceremony and references to Chicago’s elevated trains reveal a cartographic system that guides her between homes.

Without providing a deeper ontological examination, the artists give viewers the tools to look deeper into the relationship between the stories and the objects. As a curator, I recognize that many of the stories will be unfamiliar for most visitors, but I yearn for the time when our cultures will emerge from the veil of being seen as “Native American,” a homogenizing racial identifier, and will be recognized for the unique tribal diversity that has survived into the twenty-first century.

AND IN THE END

In the 1980s I recall Jesse Jackson describing how he was “pregnant with anticipation.” That phrase has been tucked away in my subconscious and sits with me in preparing for this exhibition. It is important to note that there have only been rare instances of exhibitions focused on Native American women. In 1985,



LEFT

Marie Watt
***Trek (Pleiades)*, 2014.**
 Reclaimed and gifted
 wool blankets,
 cedar, 74" x 123 1/2"
 Loan courtesy of artist,
 PDX Contemporary Art,
 and Greg Kucera Gallery

Women of Sweetgrass, Cedar and Sage was mounted at the American Indian Community House by Harmony Hammond and Jaune Quick-to-See Smith and was well-received by both the Native and non-Native communities. Theresa Harlan curated *Watchful Eyes: Native American Women Artists* at the Heard Museum in 1994. But I am unable to think of another exhibition that included a national approach and focused on women. The scarcity of exhibitions that address art by Native American women may be representative of the nascent field of Native American art history, or it may be a reflection of the minimal attributions given to women within the vast scope of Native American collections, mostly historic and mostly accumulated for museums by men. Regardless, this exhibition, *From the Belly of Our Being: art by and about Native creation*, is a valuable contribution to the field for many reasons. Most importantly, perhaps, it will place a small paving stone for the work of others to broaden this story.

So often, as contemporary voices, the relationship of our creative work to our tribal histories is drowned out by an art history canon that is built on

a Western story of creation, wherein the present eats the past to allow only “newness” to be celebrated. But the antagonisms that are perceived in art and society, especially between traditions and contemporaneity, are less often working against each other within Native culture and more often serve as complementary colors that brighten the palette. It is from this bold rainbow of possibility that these women inspire and dream outside the boundaries of what is collectively termed Native art. They are working in materials or imagery that defy measures of cultural “authenticity,” whatever that may be. Yet, each artist will tell you that those feminine forces of creation guide their work daily.

Working with these gifted women to create a space where they could tell the stories embedded in their art has been especially rewarding. There is a murmur, a vibration that stirs within this project. It is possibly the fifth element, recognized by the Navajos as the energy that stirs the other four primal elements into action. It may be the power of beauty, a gift from creation, as it enlightens the mind to see the potential that we each hold within our center. Enjoy! *Ayukpachi!* •

Published on the occasion of the exhibition

From the Belly of Our Being: art by and about Native creation

Curated by heather ahtone

Oklahoma State University Museum of Art

Stillwater, Oklahoma

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Stillwater, and author.

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