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John Hitchcock

Traces of the Plains



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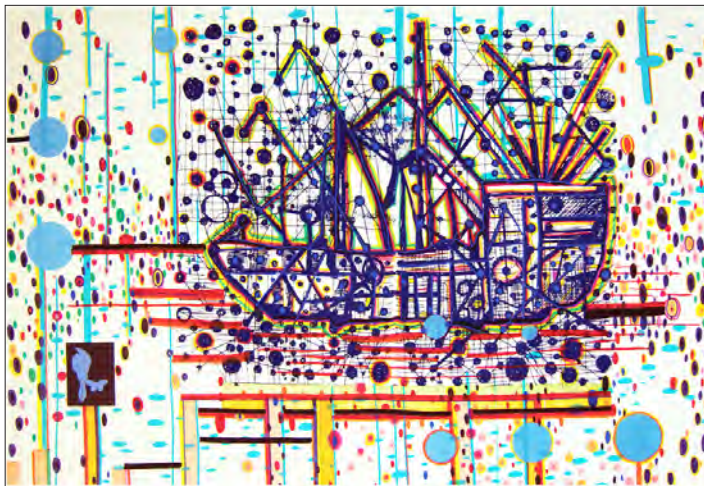
Chemically Wasted (Warhorse)

screenprint & drawing on paper

30x44 inches, 2011

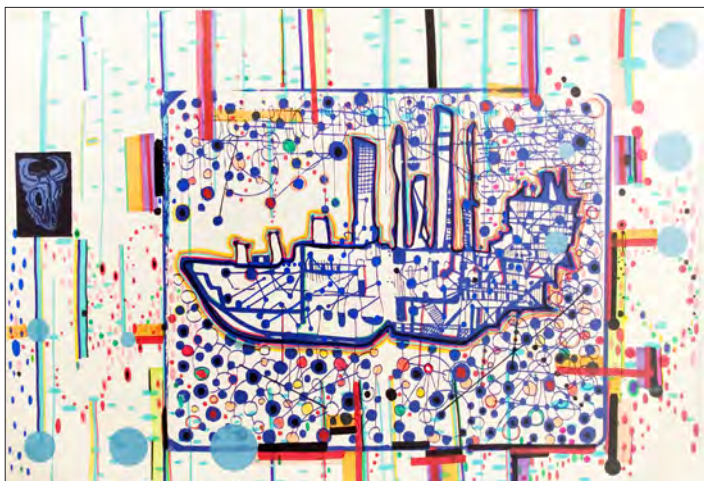
Artist's Statement

The exhibition **Traces of the Plains** consists of works on paper; multimedia installation of printed matter and video that reference the trauma of war and fragility of life. Hitchcock sets familiar images of U.S. military weaponry against unfamiliar mythological and hybrid creatures originating from the Wichita Mountains in western Oklahoma to allegorically explore the notion of assimilation and control.



Over The Ocean

screenprint & drawing on paper
30x44in, 2011



Black Arrow Over the Mountain

screenprint & drawing on paper
30x44in, 2011

Perpetual Conflict

the work of John Hitchcock

by Nancy Marie Mithlo, Ph.D.

Kiowa author N. Scott Momaday is known for his vivid writings about American Indian life in the American Southwest and the Southern Plains. In his poems and novels he recounts events that he did not experience himself but that he is enabled to experience through ancestral memory. In his novel *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, he describes this process as one of a journey, "It is a whole journey, intricate with motion and meaning; and it is made with the whole memory, that experience of the mind that is legendary as well as historical, personal as well as cultural." [1]

Comanche artist John Hitchcock similarly draws from "whole memories" – legendary, personal, and cultural – in his printmaking and installations. His stories are important to my own analysis – to the telling of stories close to home – because he shares in the history of the imprisonment. The Kiowa and Comanche tribes gave land for the Chiricahua Apaches to inhabit after their release from their P.O.W. status in 1913. Our relatives live in close proximity to each other and our lives are intertwined by numerous "whole memories." We share the same stories of two primary local presences: the Wichita Mountains – an ancient rocky outcropping visible for miles across the rolling hills of the southern plains, and Fort Sill – the largest field artillery complex in the free world, established in the late 1800s to subdue his people and later to imprison mine. The Wichita Mountain Wildlife Refuge, established in 1901 and run by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service now encompasses the Wichita Mountains. Fort Sill, the place my tribe is named after, is an active base, home to 61,000 people including military personnel and civilians.

These dual government influences: the Wildlife Reserve meant to serve as "an island

in the sea of modernity”[2] and the base “totally dedicated to the development and implementation of joint field artillery training”[3] provide potent ingredients for Hitchcock’s visual musings on war, conflict and Native ideologies. The Wildlife Refuge explains its connection to local tribes by stating, “Marauding bands of Comanches used the mountains as a resting and hiding site after pillaging deep in Texas and Mexico.”[4] A critical appraisal of the descriptives “marauding” and “pillaging” in interpretative text used today to describe the sovereign nations who continue to live in close proximity to this U.S. run facility illuminates how stories are told in this region.

The Wildlife Refuge is a government-run habitat for large grazing animals including bison, elk, deer and cattle as well as other un-invited species including the coyote, an animal not targeted for re-introduction to the region but existing there despite government programs. Hitchcock employs these creatures in abundance in his recent installation titled “Flatlander.” Luminescent monotone silk-screened prints of buffalo heads and unarticulated machine parts are displayed in a grid-like fashion across a twelve foot expanse, with two-dimensional bright wooden contrasts of animal heads floating away from the grey monochrome background.

“Flatlander” introduces many of the concepts discussed as central components of an American Indian art aesthetic, but it does so in a rather stealth fashion. Hitchcock mediates between the pervasiveness of the nation with all its trappings to both retain and destroy unique peoples and lifeways, but he also mediates between competing parts of himself as son to a Comanche mother and a German father. Throughout his youth, Hitchcock was taken by the richly evocative images of my tribe’s spiritual figures – the Mountain Spirit dancers, mixed in heavy doses with large animals that roamed near his home, the incessant sound of explosives from the base next door and the quiet orderliness of his grandmother’s beadwork. These elements merge as dreams and ghosts who occupy his prints and installations in profuse numbers.

¹ N. Scott Momaday, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*. University of New Mexico Press, 1976.

² “A Brief Refuge History,” U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge. <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/oklahoma/wichitamountains/refhist.html>. Accessed January 2, 2011.

In a recent interview, Hitchcock described how as a child he would wake at night to the sounds of movement outside his window, only to find when he pulled back his curtains the head of a large bull that had managed to jump the fence inquisitively looking back at him. Tales of the beautiful and mysterious “deer woman” who steal men from dances at night, the haunted corners of remote two-lane roads deep into Indian territory where ghosts that linger in the foggy beds of creeks might hop into your car with you, the prohibitions of climbing into the mountains after dusk or before sunrise for fear of encountering supernatural men, animals or men as animals – these deeply evocative stories are alive and actively haunt Hitchcock’s prints. The animals that tourists think of as pets in a zoo at the Wildlife Refuge have inhabited the gallery space – looking straight in your eyes as you might encounter them at night in the headlights of your car. If I had audio to accompany this piece it would include the rumble of field artillery exploding in the distance and the screeching of brakes on asphalt.

Hitchcock has chosen not to show the viewer a literal depiction of these experiences, but has selectively profiled key iconographic motifs that reflect the legacy of Indigenous peoples in conversation with the national constructs they navigate. These legacies of Indians and whites crashing violently across the windy plains of what is still known as Indian Territory are very much alive in Hitchcock’s print landscapes but they are made doubly visceral and real by his own biography of being of mixed ancestry. His physical occupation of that liminal space bleeds out of these works in a state that he describes as “perpetual conflict.” [5] Hitchcock’s rendering of “on the other side of the ocean” takes place inside him through “whole memories” that are his alone, but are also the legacy of Native political histories that reverberate today.



³ www.sillmwr.com/post_guide_staff_directory.pdf

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ John Hitchcock, Interview with author December 29, 2010.



Boiler

screenprint & drawing on paper
30x44in, 2011



Gathering Rocks

screenprint & ink pen on paper
30x44in, 2011



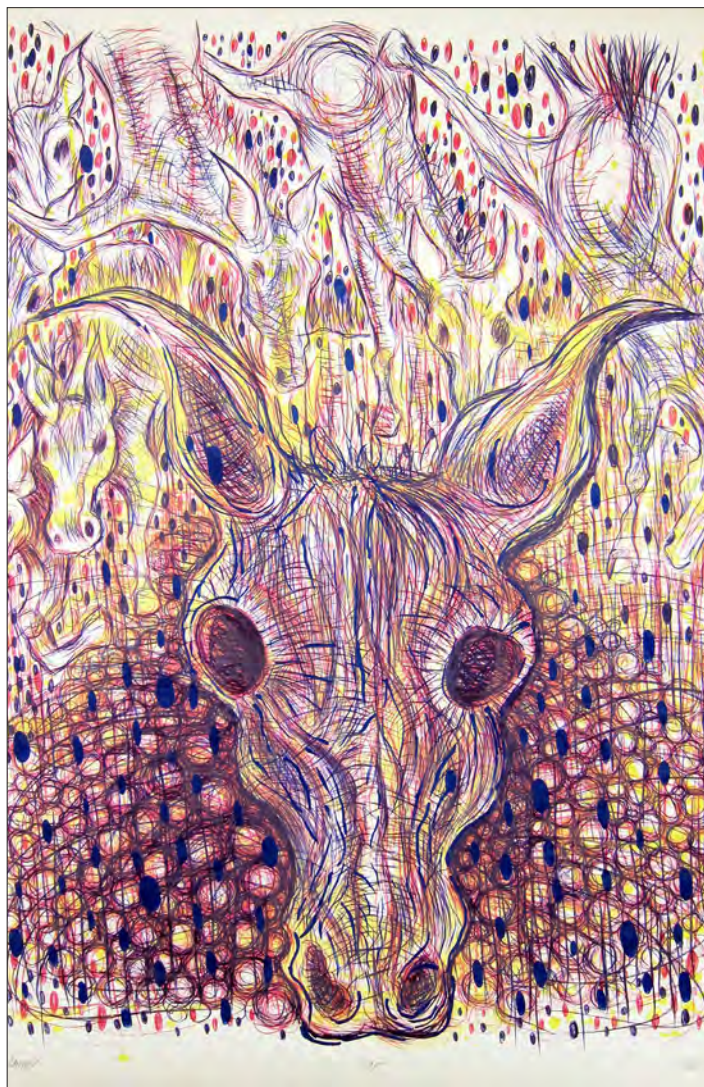
Signal Mountain

screenprint & drawing on paper
30x44in, 2011



Rabbit Hill

screenprint & drawing on paper
30x44in, 2011



Tule Canyon

lithograph on legion paper

38x50in, 2012



Ceremonial

lithograph on legion paper

38x50in, 2011



Equivalencies

screenprint & drawing on paper;
collaboration between Emily Arthur, Marwin Begaye, and John Hitchcock.
30x44in, 2012



Cotton Electric

screenprint & drawing on paper
30x44in, 2013



Epicenter

screenprint

variable size, 2011



Epicenter

screenprint

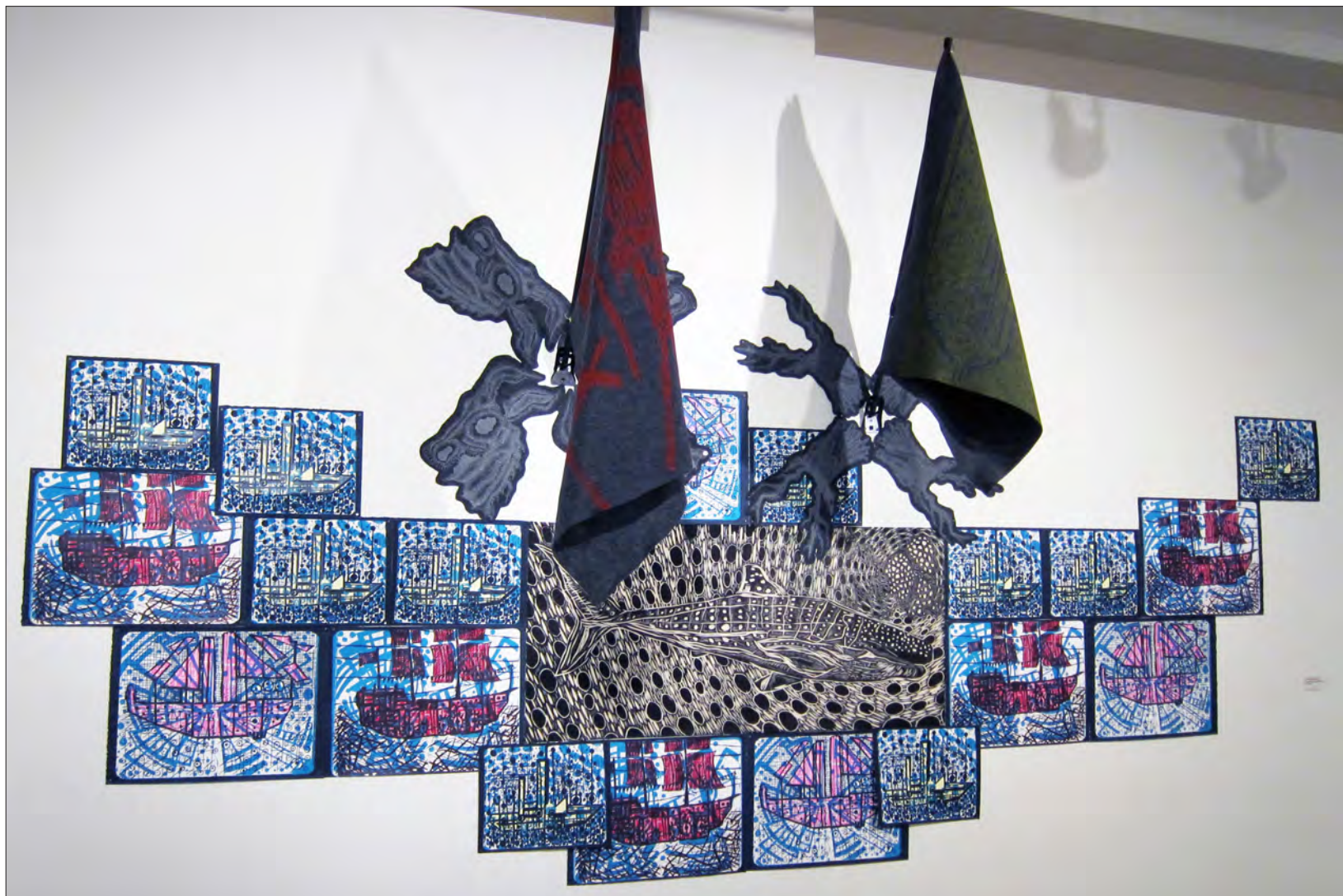
20x20x10ft, 2011



Flatlander

screenprint on paper, wood and felt

7.5 x 7.5ft, 2011



Whaleship Decolonizer

screenprint on felt and paper

22x10ft, 2011

About the Artist



John Hitchcock is an Artist and Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison where he teaches screenprinting, relief cut, and installation art. He earned his MFA in printmaking and photography at Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas and received his BFA from Cameron University, Lawton, Oklahoma. His awards include The Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Artistic Innovation and Collaboration grant, New York; Jerome Foundation Grant, Minnesota; the Creative Arts Award, University of Wisconsin.

Hitchcock's work has been exhibited at numerous national and international venues, notably "Epicentro: Re Tracing the Plains" and "Air Land Seed" curated by Nancy Marie Mithlo on the occasion of the Venice Biennale 54th and 55th International Art Exhibition at the University of Ca' Foscari, Venice, Italy; The Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York; the Kumu Art Museum of Estonia, Tallinn, Estonia; London Print Studio, London, England, UK; Waldkunstpfad /Forest-Art-Path, Darmstadt, Germany; South African Museum, Cape Town, South Africa; Museu de Arte de Brasilia, Brasilia, Brazil; Museum of Contemporary Art, Santiago de Chile; International Print Center New York, Chelsea, New York; Museum of Arts & Design, New York; Eiteljorg Museum, Indianapolis, Indiana; Naples Museum of Art, Naples, Florida; Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa, Oklahoma; Weisman Art Museum, Minneapolis, Minnesota; Exit Art, New York; the Print Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and the North Dakota Museum of Art, Grand Forks.

He has also served as artist in residence and given workshops at the American Culture Center, Shanghai, China; Frans Masereel Centrum for Graphix in Kasterlee, Belgium; the Proyecto'ace International Center for Visual Arts in South America in Buenos Aires, Argentina; The Venice Printmaking Studio, Venice, Italy; The Vermont Studio Center; Johnson, Vermont; Penland School of Crafts, Penland, North Carolina; Anderson Ranch, Snowmass Village, Colorado; Egress Press, Edinboro, Pennsylvania; and Vermillion Editions, Amarillo, Texas.

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