

# **Umbilicus**

**June 8–26, 2001**

**Scuola Grande di San Teodoro**



**la Biennale di Venezia**

Press Release  
 Umbilicus - A NA3 Presentation  
 A latere 49<sup>th</sup> Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte  
 La Biennale di Venezia, June 2001

The Native American Arts Alliance (NA3.org) sponsored its second "a latere" exhibition at the 49<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale. **"Umbilicus" opened June 8, 2001 at the Scuola Grande di San Teodoro, Campo San Salvador**, an excellent location near the Rialto Bridge which afforded high visitation. Our gallery host Studio Antonio Dal Ponte arranged broad press coverage of the event with a crowd of 250 attending the opening. Contacts from Finland, Canada, Switzerland, Africa and Germany were made with great interest shown from universities and museums internationally.

Our **curatorial theme of creation and emergence** originated with the collaborative vision of artists Richard Ray Whitman, Mateo Romero, Darren Vigil Gray and Gabriel Shaw. NA3's concern with **globalism and the environment** was further developed on site by artists Beat Kriemler and Bob Haozous as they constructed a immense belly structure from aluminum and plastic rods, which was covered in barbed wire, laurel branches and torn red cloth. Sherwin Bitsui's work was featured inside the belly as he narrated the poem "Chrysallis" on film with visuals produced by Gabriel Shaw. The belly occupied a grand exhibit hallway complete with frescos, ancient stone and marble, creating **an indigenous sense of place** within the rich historic architecture. In an attached cloistered room, an additional video by Gabriel Shaw addressed the uses of propaganda and **the importance of self-knowledge** in rich visual detail. The strongly evocative audio component of the video was completely scripted by Gabriel Shaw on site, even as the singing gondoliers competed for attention from the canals below. The installation would not have been possible without the diligent work of our Italian colleagues: Elisabetta Frasca, Tullia Giacomelli, Mario Di Martino, Giancarlo Adorno, Marcello Berto, Piero Menegozzi, Celia Pedrini, Lorenzo Marangoni and others. Patricia Michaels, Nancy Marie Mithlo and Lisel Odenweller's presentations at the opening communicated the vitality of "Umbilicus" as **a contemporary indigenous arts dialogue**.

The official 49<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale catalogue "Plateau of Humankind" featured not only a photo of our board members at large but a large reproduction of Richard Ray Whitman's signature piece "Cecilia" - an ultrasound image of his granddaughter with the text "I begun to see when I was not yet born, when I was not in my mother's arm, but inside my mothers' belly." **The question "Umbilicus" poses - "What is the center of our reality?" has initiated global conversations on contemporary human existence and our relationship to the land while defining native expression as self-authenticating and valid.** This contemporary arts statement has created a dialogue with others who relate the situation of indigenous people, establishing an alternative agenda on the debate of contemporary world affairs. As Whitman states, "In this way, we trace the actions of our resistance." To learn more contact [www.indigenadialogus.net](http://www.indigenadialogus.net) or nmithlo@smith.edu.



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# la Biennale di Venezia

**49. ESPOSIZIONE INTERNAZIONALE  
D'ARTE•PLATEA DELL'UMANITA'•PLATEAU  
OF HUMANKIND•PLATEAU DER  
MENSCHHEIT•PLATEAU DE L'HUMANITE'  
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HUMANKIND•PLATEAU DER  
MENSCHHEIT•PLATEAU DE  
L'HUMANITE'•PLATEA DELL'UMANITA'•**



Artists  
gwils boha  
Mateo Romero  
Bob Haozous  
Richard R. Whitman

Curator  
Nancy Maria Mithlo

Organization  
NA3

#### A NA3 Presentation

*We learn about our people not when  
we are in our mother's arms, but in  
our mother's belly.*

"Our existence is self-evident."

gwils boha

"It is ours, to ourselves."

Richard Ray Whitman

"Questioning what it means to be an  
indigenous person."

Bob Haozous

"A portrait of the artist in current  
vernacular."

Mateo Romero

*Umbilicus* asks, "What is the center  
of our reality?" Our exploration—uti-  
lizing the mediums of paint, installa-  
tion and film—concerns the meaning  
of "the center of the center"—known  
as sipapu, belly button, navel or the  
umbilical cord.

*Umbilicus* draws on issues of periph-  
ery, margins and center in a world  
defined by merging racial and ethnic  
traditions. The umbilical cord is a  
physical reminder of our total depen-  
dence upon another human being, just  
as we are dependent upon the envi-  
ronment and our world community.

nature, not reactive to the desire of  
the dominant culture to remain in an  
unchallenged, celebratory mindset.  
We assert our right to humanity  
beyond nationalistic labels and con-  
front the idea that our job is to cor-  
rect the cultural ignorance of others.  
Whitman—"So much is put on us to  
give, give, give. We respond by give,  
give, giving."

Our existence is dependent upon sur-  
vival in contemporary terms.

The work newly defines native  
expression as self-authenticating  
and valid, both its technological  
medium and its chosen subject of  
origins, both tribal and western.

Romero—"We are locked into the  
past, in a cultural baggage mentality.  
This is our chance to reinvent our-  
selves here and now."

The unanswerable question about  
what constitutes a Native American  
identity.

*Umbilicus* creates a dialogue about  
what reference points are drawn as  
we define ourselves as indigenous  
people. These conversations include  
reference to the land, the people and  
the historic trauma of genocide.

Haozous—"An earth relationship is  
still here for us. We have to redefine  
ourselves in terms of the earth, not  
economic terms.

we trace the actions of our resistal  
boha—We have all been colonized.  
strength is in our diverse approach  
addressing our colonization.

NA3's mission is to allow a group  
native artists the opportunity to cre-  
ate culturally-significant art free  
the pressures of a commercially-  
ven society.



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*Umbilicus* draws from a communal  
approach to curation, organizing and  
interpretation.

*Umbilicus* deals with issues of survival,  
identity and indigenous commonali-  
ties leading to a global dialogue.

*Umbilicus* is NA3's response to the  
denying of our existence.

Resisting the multicultural main-  
stream.

This most recent curatorial effort  
signifies NA3's continued interest in  
articulating not simply the paramet-  
ters of our existence, but our life  
experiences communicated on our  
own terms. The effort is pro-active in

Whitman—"We petition the earth for  
who we are. We petition our tribe. I  
petition my small Yuchi community  
for who I am.

What is common to people whose  
way of life has been outlawed.  
Creating a dialogue with people who  
can relate to our situation.

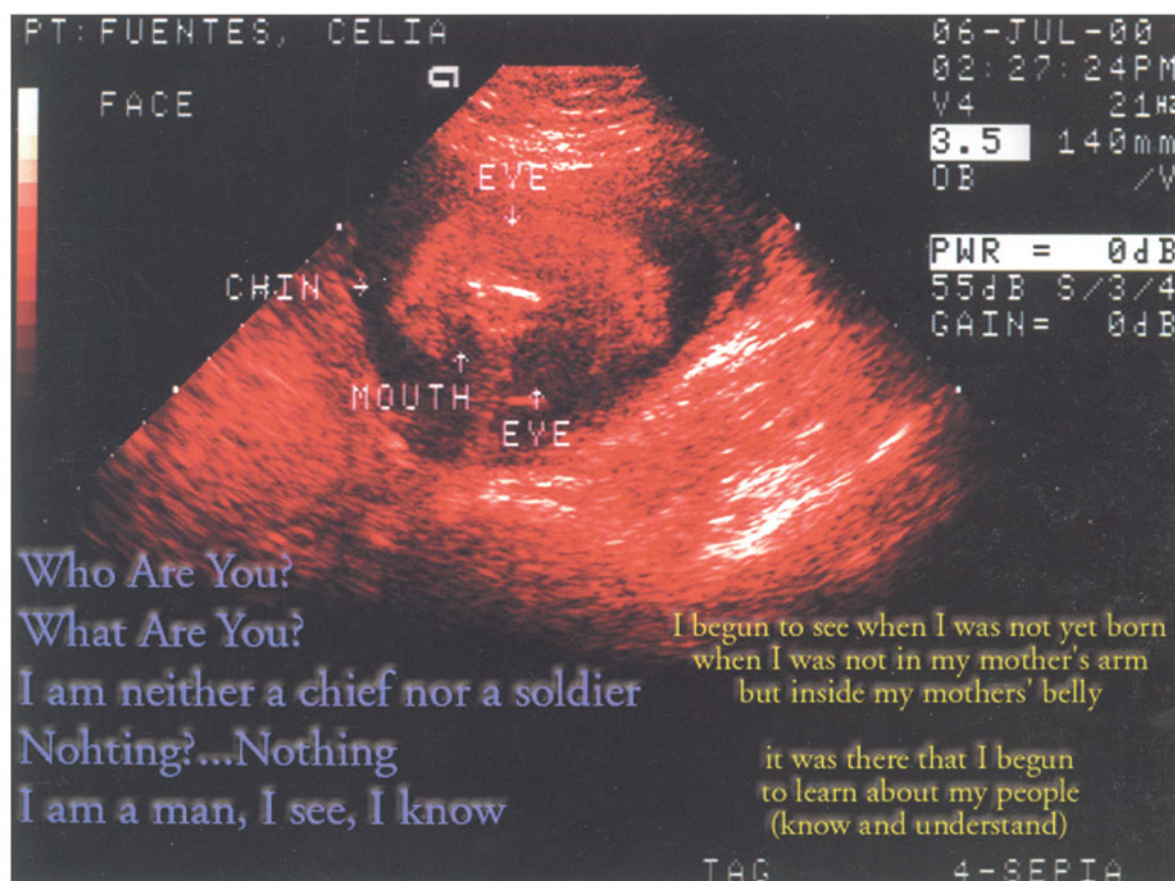
NA3 offers an alternative agenda on  
the debate of contemporary world  
affairs. Our work conveys the necessi-  
ty of exchanging information and  
strategies on contemporary art  
expressions—dialogues that will  
expand our often self-imposed isola-  
tion and subordination. In this way,

NA3  
Annual board meeting  
2000  
Back left to right:  
Mariah Sacoman,  
Gabriel Lopez Shaw,  
Maggie Ohnesorgen  
Bob Haozous,  
Nancy Marie Mithlo  
LaDonna Harris,  
Lloyd H. New,  
Harry Fonseca,  
Simon Ortiz,  
Richard Ray Whitman  
Seated left to right:  
Dale Kronkright,  
Mateo Romero,  
Darren Vigil Gray

Scuola Grande  
San Teodoro,  
Campo San Salvador,  
San Marco 4810

June 8-26  
2001  
11:00 am - 7:00 pm

Richard Ray Whitman  
*Cecilia*  
 2000  
 Still from echography

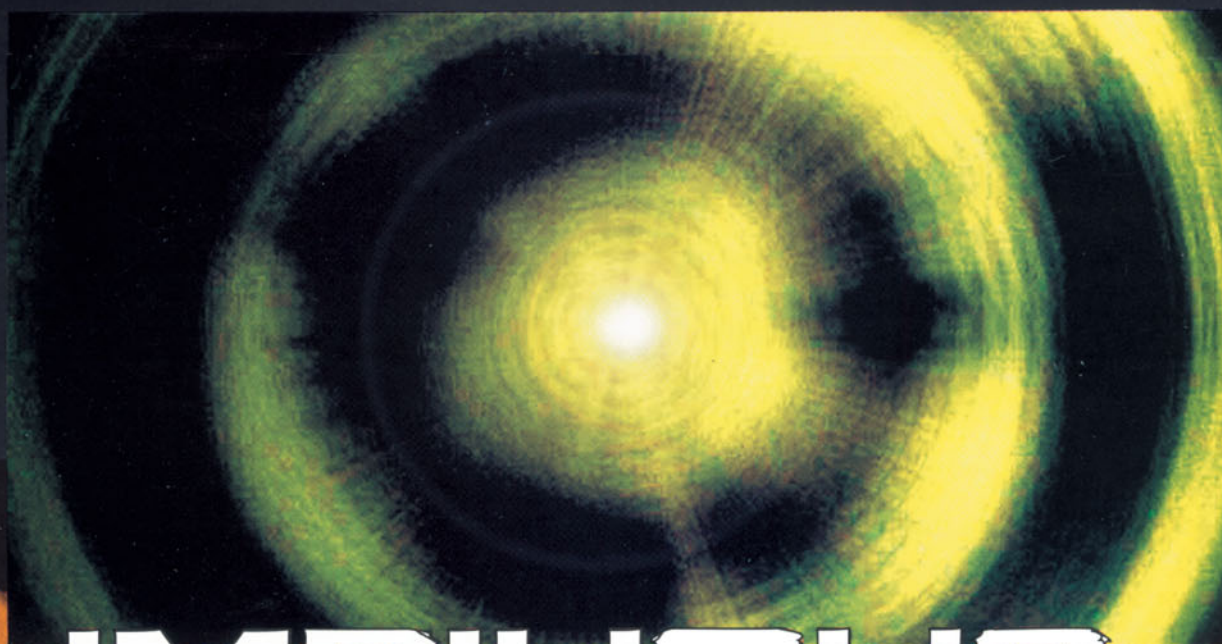






la Biennale di Venezia  
49. ESPOSIZIONE INTERNAZIONALE D'ARTE

JUN.07.2001 6PM- OPENING  
SCHOLA GRANDE DI SAN TEODORO  
CAMPO SAN SALVADOR  
LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA  
JUN.08.01-JUN.26.01



# Umbilicus

gwils bob hdozous matteo romero richard ray whitman





**NATIVE AMERICAN ARTS ALLIANCE (NAA)**

**JUN.07.2001 6PM- OPENING**  
**SCHOLA GRANDE DI SAN TEODORO**  
**CAMPO SAN SALVADOR**  
**LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA**  
**JUN.08.01-JUN.26.01**

**NAA.ORG**  
**HOSTILES.NET**  
**MANTAKAMEDIA.COM**  
**PARANUMANA.NET**  
**TORUGA.ORG**  
**NATVEEYESPROJECT.ORG**  
**BOBHOZOUS.COM**  
**TOYDHR.COM**

**Umbilicus**

Here's what I located on the chat board that I thought might translate to the pamphlet. Remember also that we have the biennale catalogue text we can scan from as well. I am also available to author text for submission if needed. Thanks for all your work on this.

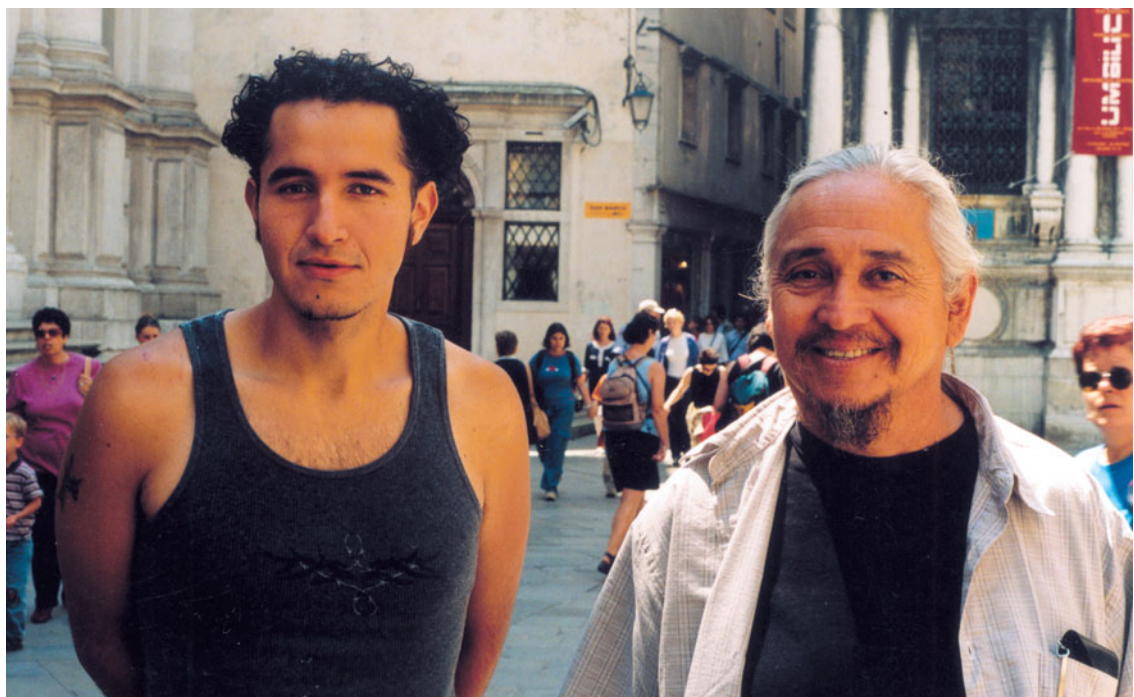
B.....

are we really only blood and dirt having no contemporary intelligence or philosophy our poets leap into the blood and guts of identity and we are speaking from a hard edge and pretty even our most abstract thinkers must sit on the stool provided by mr jansen and produce art for it's own audience art for arts sake art for it's own community just let the artist alone in his studio to create what does that mean does this individualistic philosophy based on universalism have anything to do with the indigenous people of the earth the big question of na and contemporary indian art is just this if we are in cultural limbo can our art be any better must it always be their reflecting instead of our own

In an age when the world's connection becomes more apparent everyday, it's necessary to send signals. To speak from our center as human beings gives myths such as "cultural difference," no power. As in the beginning, this is the way it is. We are all facing us all we must supersede superficial barriers and utilize a global consciousness with all in mind. The only face to put on this enemy is our own. We sleep with it at night, then wake up to the sun in it's arms. It resides within as well as outside. Under any complexion, under any nationality. Vague artistic statements and vain market pockets only serve as distraction to getting on with the real work that must be done.

**JUN.08.2001 THRU JUN.26.2001**

**NATIVE AMERICAN ARTS ALLIANCE (NAA)**



Participating artists Gabe Shaw (AKA gwils) and Bob Haozous

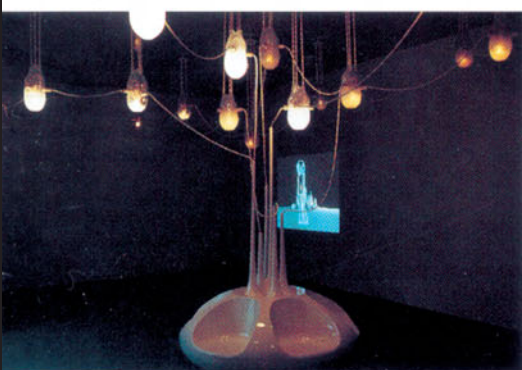


# Art in America

SEPTEMBER 2001



*Ilona Németh and Jiri Surůvka's Invitation for a Visit, 2001, an interactive installation based on Németh's apartment; in the Czech and Slovak Republics pavilion.*



*Pierre Huyghe's untitled installation (foreground), 2001, incorporating an Elsie Crauford-designed resin bench, 1972/2001, with lights collaboratively created by Huyghe, Philippe Parreno and M/M, and Huyghe's projected digital animation One Million Kingdoms (background), 2001; in the French Pavillion.*



*Partial view of Siobhán Hapaska's video installation May Day, 2000; representing Ireland, at the Scuola di San Pasquale.*

## "If You Do Not Exhibit, You Do Not Exist!"

This is how curators Salah M. Hassan and Olu Oguibe ruefully explain their determination to bring an exhibition of contemporary African and African Diaspora art to the Biennale. The cruel irony, of course, is that as more artists and presenters heed this imperative, they compete ever more fiercely for the time and attention of viewers. The possibility of being overlooked exists even for the most centrally located shows. Most visitors to Venice will see Fabrizio Plessi's digitally engineered displays of water and fire that fill the windows of the Museo Correr on Piazza San Marco. Far fewer are likely to venture into the museum for the rest of "WaterFire," a strong exhibition whose capstone is a chevron-shaped configuration of dugouts, each outfitted with monitors placed side by side. The monitors face the ceiling and broadcast a "streaming" video of rushing water in a refreshing, Paikian conflation of the natural and the electronic.

Of the national pavilions and collateral shows located outside the Biennale's two principal venues, Hassan and Oguibe's exhibition proves to be one of the most satisfying. Organized with Emma Bedford, "Authentic/Ex-centric: Conceptualism in Contemporary African Art" takes up the project of decentralizing conceptualism from the 1999 exhibition "Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin" [see *A.A.*, July '99]. Effectively installed in the 17th-century palazzo of the Fondazione Levi near the Accademia Bridge, the show presents six artists who work with video, installation and photo-derived imagery, and who train a critical eye on the markers of African identity both on that continent and in the West. Unlike "Plateau of Humanity," there's not a polychrome figure in the house, unless you count the astronaut family in Yinka Shonibare's *Vacation* (2000). They wear brightly patterned space suits that mimic the wax-printed "African" cotton—actually manufactured in Dutch Indonesia—popular in 19th-century Europe. Shonibare, a London-based artist raised in Nigeria and the U.K., received a special mention from the Biennale jury.

Godfried Donkor, too, evokes European imperialism. The Ghanaian-born artist's four ink-jet prints on canvas, some of them as stocked with period incident as a Hogarth engraving, trace the mystique of the black boxer to Lord Byron's London. Muslim Africa, specifically the mystical nature of the written word in Islamic culture, is considered in Rachid Koraichi's *Le Chemin de Roses* (2001), an installation of textiles, ceramic vessels and metalwork. The attendant prohibition of images in Islam is linked with the suppression of women in Zineb Sedira's *Quatre générations de Femmes* (1997). Commandeering the traditionally male craft of tile-making, Sedira incorporates tiny photographs of the women

## COLLATERAL EXHIBITIONS

**Allora, dunque**, works by Lothar Baumgarten, curated by Chiara Bertola, at the Fondazione Querini Stampalia, near S. Maria Formosa [closes Sept. 26].

**Authentic/Ex-centric: Africa in and out of Africa**, works by African and African Diaspora artists, curated by Salah Hassan and Olu Oguibe with Emma Bedford, organized by the Forum for African Arts, at the Fondazione Levi, Palazzo Giustinian Lolin, near the Accademia Bridge [closes Sept. 30].

**The Deliverance and the Patience**, installation by Mike Nelson, ex-Birreria Dreher, Giudecca [closes Sept. 9].

**Eden**, glass and plastic works by the artist group Wurmkoos and former psychiatric patients, at the Spazio Berengo, Fondamenta Vetrai, Murano [closes Sept. 9].

**Hollywood**, Maurizio Cattelan's replica of the "Hollywood" sign, at the city dump of Bellolampo, Palermo [through Nov. 30].

**IASPIS in Venice**, group show sponsored by the Stockholm-based international residency program and curated by Magdalena Malm, at the Magazzini del Sale, Dorsoduro [closed Aug. 5].

**Markers—Art & Poetry in Venice**, outdoor exhibition of text and image banners, curated by Doron Polak, via Garibaldi [closes Nov. 4].

**Marzona Villa Manin**, over 200 works of 20th-century art from the collection of Egidio Marzona, curated by Marzona with Elena Carlini, Paolo Toffolutti and Pietro Valle, at the Villa Manin di Passariano, Codroipo, Udine [closed Aug. 26].

**Rock the Campo!**, contemporary video and performance art from Finland, organized by FRAME Finnish Fund for Art Exchange, bars and restaurants in Campo Santa Margherita [closed June 17].

**TerraFerma**, group show, curated by Roberto Caldura, inaugurating the Centro Culturale Candiani, Mestre [closes Sept. 16].

**La Trahison des Images—Portraits de Scènes**, group show organized by Espace 251 Nord, at the Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, Palazzo Franchetto, Campo Santo Stefano [closes Sept. 9].

**Umbilicus**, group show organized by NA3 (Native American Arts Alliance), curated by Nancy Maria Mithlo, at the Scuola Grande San Teodoro, Campo San Salvador [closed June 26].

**WaterFire**, works by Fabrizio Plessi including outdoor installation in Piazza San Marco, curated by Carl Haerlen, Museo Correr, San Marco [closed July 29].



la Nuova

VENERDI'  
22 giugno 2001

## CULTURA &amp; SPETTACOLI

Gli artisti indigeni d'America fino al 26 a San Teodoro  
L'«ombelico» di cielo e terra

Sono tornati a Venezia anche per questa edizione della Biennale gli artisti indigeni d'America, con la mostra *Umbilicus* — che segue *Ceremonial*, organizzata due anni fa — in programma sino al 26 giugno alla Scuola Grande di San Teodoro, in campo San Salvador (orario 10-18).

La Native American Arts Alliance presenta in questa occasione i lavori di quattro artisti — Bob Haozous, Gwils Boha, Mateo Romero e Richard Ray Whitman — che indagano sul concetto indigeno di emergenza e del “centro del centro”, che sia, appunto il *sipapu*, l'ombelico o il cordone ombelicale oppure il ventre gonfio di una donna incinta — utilizzando mezzi espressivi diversi come la pittura, scultura, il video.

Il concetto metafisico dell'universo come globo assoluto si riflette in molte culture degli indiani d'America.

*Umbilicus* attinge ai problemi contemporanei che vengono dalla periferia, dai margini e dal centro del mondo, composti ormai da un miscuglio di razzismo e tradizioni etniche.

Il cordone ombelicale è il promemoria fisico della nostra totale indipendenza da un altro essere umano, esatta-



Immagine da un video in mostra

mente come dipendiamo dall'ambiente e dalla collettività in cui viviamo.

*Umbilicus*, attraverso le opere in mostra, affronta il problema della sopravvivenza e dell'identità delle comunità indiane, cercando di condurle verso il dialogo globale. La terra è il punto di partenza. «Una relazione con la terra è ancora possibile — dichiara Haozous — dobbiamo ridefinire noi stessi nei termini della terra, non in termini economici».

*Chrysalis*

It wasn't the leaves that descended upon you  
 or the horse that knelt on the river's edge  
 psuhing his nose through mist  
     a root that wanted to peel itself into a flower.

It was ash,  
 dry as the skeletons of drained soup cans  
 on the river front  
 where a man's course throat bleeds  
 because the language is a dying thing  
 covered in blankets  
     beaten with forks and spoons.

These baskets have become graves,  
     a shot glass of tears tucked between the legs of a veteran  
 a wristwatch pulled tightly around his tongue  
     so that he may savor this hour  
 when death drags its tail across the necks of hunted children.

who are shivering again, under the sun's sharp chin  
 half awake in a boat on a shore of grey gulls  
 pressing grapes into their eyes  
 drinking the wine that leaks from their shadows

Cities break into sand before the approaching shovel;  
 their windows glisten in the soft light of the Milky Way  
 as I remember it.

How young I was to read the passages of the bible  
 my wings caked in earth  
 mud forming in my footsteps  
 water seeping from my lips when he came to drink  
 He came to drink and could not stop.  
 He was a bee pollinating the milky white surface of the  
     moon reflected in the rearview mirror.

The deer blinked and all was well again,  
 calm as the breeze blowing through prison gates.  
 I shave the edges of my mustache and imagine cutting the  
     policeman's arm from his flashlight.  
 but still it did not stop the lions from sniffing the snouts of  
     dying bulls,  
 or the red squaw from selling her jewelry in aisles of restaurants  
 serving leaves and grass.

*And no, there is no one here.*  
 This casket: the seed of a blood clot.

Bread dipped in gun powder is to be fed the first graders in  
     that moment.  
 when their hair is cut  
     and a ruler is snapped,  
 and their whispers metamorphose into a new chrysalis of thought.  
 A new wing emerging from the lips of these Indians.  
 Who are no longer passing thoughts in the paragraphs of an  
     oil-soaked dictionary  
 but hooves carved into talons,  
 hilltops from which light is transformed into the laughter of  
     crickets.

I want to remain here  
 where he doesn't drink my lips  
 or remove the cocoons my eyes have become.

Rattles erupt on the north horizon.  
 The harvester unties her shoelaces.  
 I see the sun, eclipse it with my outstretched palm,  
 and dig away my reddening skin.

"It wasn't like this before," I tell myself.  
 When I am thrown into a fluorescent room where the sink hunches  
 like an eagle claw  
 it stops,  
 pulls the wind to a breathing space the size of mouse's lung  
 and I am drowning in the air around my feet again.

Antelope are gnawing into the walls of the city.  
 And *those* Indians are braiding yucca roots into the skin of their  
     scalps again.

I want to fall beside them  
 count their fingers:  
     five hundred and five rows of spilled blood marking the trail  
     home.

the trail will not be followed again,  
 because there in the ears of the Indians  
 are echoes of the hissing belt  
 and the laughter of thieves  
 measuring the length of the treaty  
 with all teeth of the jury that is seduced by the glimmers of gold.

It's ash, all of it!  
 Fruit flies buried in the skin of onions,  
 canyons seeking the river that has left them orphaned,  
 cars cruising their velvet wheels over teeth and beaks,  
 eyeless dogs barking in hailstorms,  
 and owls, two of them coming from the east,  
 carrying the night between them: a wet blanket designed by a  
     woman who dreams of lightening  
 saying that we have finally become mountains  
 rising above a valley of weeping dishrags that cling to the ground  
     below,  
 raising fences and crosses and houses.

And no, this is not about sadness:  
 the gasp of a mute who buries his legs in the arroyo bottom  
 when the first drops of rain pepper his forehead,  
 who earlier that morning brought a leaf into the front yard,  
 saying that we may grow from this,  
 we may inch into the next world  
 and rummage for nectar in the thinning bones of shadowless  
     thieves.

This plate before me is made from broken tusk; this fork,  
     the fingers of rat  
 and we eat leather in caves behind the train tracks.  
 These caves where our hair breaks into ash when washed  
 is a place of birth;  
 the fist cry echoing from the amphitheater  
 was a song sung in thinning air.

This is not about the rejection of our skin;  
 the mud dries as it is poured into our ears.  
 But the linguist still runs his hands up the length of our tongues  
 perplexed that we even have a tongue.

—Sherwin Bitsui © 2001



# la Biennale di Venezia

Mrs. Nancy Maria Mithlo  
Chair  
The Native American Arts Alliance  
Santa Fe

Fax 001 505 4732767

Venice, March 23, 2001

Re. 49. Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte - "a latere" initiatives

Dear Mrs. Mithlo,

I am glad to inform you that the Administration Board, after having heard the opinion of the Director of the Visual Arts Section, Prof. Harald Szeemann, decided to include the exhibition you are organizing into the "a latere" events of the 49. Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte.

Please note that the Biennale is in no way responsible for the costs of the initiative. In particular, the organizers alone are responsible for obtaining the necessary exhibition sites and permits.

You can apply for the logo of the 49. Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte to the Publicity Office (Mrs. Genny Fiorin, phone +39 041 5218761 or 5218877, fax 041 5218837, e mail [biennale.adv@tin.it](mailto:biennale.adv@tin.it)). The office will give you directions for the use of the same.

Regarding the materials for the catalogue, please fill in, sign and send back the special form I am enclosing.

By April 20<sup>th</sup> 2001 we need the following information:

- the title of the initiative;
- the name(s) of the responsible organization(s);
- the venue (with address, phone and fax numbers);
- the name and phone number of someone who will be responsible for the initiative in Venice;
- the dates and hours of the preview and/or inauguration of the same;
- the opening and closing dates, with opening hours, weekly closing day and possible price of the entrance ticket.

tel. 0415218863 / 862 fax 0415204163 / 0415210038 e-mail [ventimiglia@labiennale.com](mailto:ventimiglia@labiennale.com)

Settore Arti Visive  
the Manager in charge

