

Ceremonial

June 10–August 26, 1999
Schola dei Tiraoro e Battioro



la Biennale di Venezia

August 9, 1999



CEREMONIAL

native american arts alliance

Fax to:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Nancy Marie Mithlo, Ph.D., Chair, Native American Arts Alliance, Santa Fe, NM

In America: Phone (505) 474-3289 Fax (505) 473-2767

email: nmithlo@aol.com web site: <http://www.NA3.org>

“Ceremonial” Claims Sovereign Status at the 1999 Venice Biennale -Nancy Marie Mithlo, Ph.D., Chair, Native American Arts Alliance

Marking a first for both American Indians and the international arts community, a native-run organization claimed tribal sovereignty in June by sponsoring its own international arts exhibit at the prestigious **Venice Biennale** in Italy. The **Native American Arts Alliance** (Also known as **NA3** - a small non-profit collective based in Santa Fe, NM) curated the exhibit “*Ceremonial*” in the hopes of redefining contemporary native arts through self-determination. In the words of **NA3** member **Bob Haozous**, “It is time for us to define who we really are to ourselves- to truthfully portray ourselves as contemporary people not only with a past, but also with a future.”

The work of featured artists **Rick Glazer Danay**, **Harry Fonseca**, **Bob Haozous**, **Frank LaPena**, **Jaune Quick-to-See Smith**, **Kay WalkingStick**, **Richard Ray Whitman** and poet **Simon Ortiz** was juried by the curatorial board of the **Biennale** offices and sanctioned as an official “a latere” exhibit. As one of 60 exhibiting agencies, the “*Ceremonial*” project seeks to claim the inherent right of native people to self-representation, without censorship from galleries, markets or federal and state arts agencies. Difficult social issues addressed by the participating artists such as environmental abuse, genocide, religious intolerance and loss of identity have become a part of an international dialogue on social justice and human rights.

NA3 board member **Lloyd New** states that without the determination of the group which also includes **ATLANTL** Director of Development **Patsy Phillips** and Galisteo-based writer **Bernard Pomerance**, the inclusion of native arts into this highly-regarded arts forum might never have happened. “Contemporary Native American artists are making major contributions to the world and should be recognized as such,” he asserts. Representatives from the U.S. Embassy in Rome as well as the United States Information Service attended the June 10th opening where **Simon Ortiz** read his poem “*What Indians?*” to an engaged audience of 200.

Works in the exhibition include: “*Shots Heard Round the World*” an installation by **Jaune Quick-to-See Smith**, “*Without Earth, There is No Heaven*” a video by **Richard Ray Whitman**, a large fiberglass nude titled “*Separation*” by **Haozous**, and a set of four large canvases filled with gold crosses and red oxide paint by **Harry Fonseca** titled “*The Discovery of Gold and Souls in California.*” While **Rick Glazer Danay**’s installation “*If Good Americans When They Die Go to Paris - Do Good Indians When They Die Go to Santa Fe?*” featuring a stuffed Mickey Mouse impaled by an arrow drew laughter, the works on paper by **Frank LaPena** “*Diaspora: California Indians*” and **Kay WalkingStick**’s “*Seeking the Silence I and II*” elicited thoughtful contemplation and questions from the largely European audience.

The next step and perhaps the most challenging one for the **NA3** organization is to make the impact of the **Biennale** experience accessible to a wider audience, particularly rural native communities. Together with Muse-Ed Studios of Santa Fe, a video of the event filmed by **Gabriel Lopez Shaw** will be produced and distributed to all tribal community colleges. As **LaDonna Harris**, **NA3** Board member and founder of **Americans for Indian Opportunity** states “We’ve been given a new voice. Our next major effort is to make contemporary art a part of our lives as it used to be.”



Exhibition catalogue cover

Ours is a project of great promise and hope.

The Native American Arts Alliance (NA3) was formed in 1997 to address the growing distance between contemporary native arts production and its relevance to native communities. Our group of seven Native American artists, intellectuals, leaders and educators realized that a new artistic forum needed to be created outside of regional market constrictions. We decided to bring our concerns about the cultural relevancy of art to an international forum. At the 1995 Venice Biennale, Canadian curator Gerald McMaster exhibited the art of Edward Poitras. Both are native. In 1997, the indigenous Australian artist Brenda Croft presented the exhibit 'Fluent' featuring the works of three aboriginal women artists. NA3 believed the time was ripe to present the works of mature Native American artists at the 1999 Venice Biennale.

The exhibit is titled *Ceremonial* in recognition of the reintegration of art and community. We have taken the responsibility of leadership in transforming native arts from decorative statements to honest self-portrayals. *Ceremonial* is our tool for achieving personal and social change. It is also a recognized and utilized form of self-transformation for all people. We are each named, married and buried with a certain amount of ceremony. As a purposeful and willful rite of passage, ceremony as a communal tradition can alter one's life. By definition however, ceremony can also mean 'a conventional social gesture or act without intrinsic purpose' such as 'standing on ceremony.' These two disparate definitions allude to the divide which separates thought based on individualism and communal thought.

The artist as an individual and the artist as a member of society are often at odds. The fine arts arena mandates that one must be completely 'free' of all cultural constraints to be a legitimate creator. Yet who among us is ever totally free of our society's values? The native artists exhibited in *Ceremonial* claim a unique heritage. The commonality of loss - loss of land, language and culture serves to relate these artists to each other.

As native people, we are aware of the power of our collective lived realities; the pain, trauma and beauty of our cultures. Self-transformation, community and self-identity are explored as we reflect on our past and future. We know what it means to be a native person at the end of a century marked by genocide, assimilation and exploitation. What does the new millennium promise?

*Native American Arts Alliance
Nancy Marie Mithlo, Chair
Harry Fonseca, Co-Chair
Patsy Phillips, Development
Members: Bob Haozous, Lloyd
New and LaDonna Harris
Elisabetta Frasca, Program
Coordinator
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and beliefs.*

Ceremonial

Richard Glazer-Danay

Harry Fonseca

Bob Haozous

Frank La Pena

Simon Ortiz

**Jaune Quick-to-See
Smith**

Buffy Sainte-Marie

Kay WalkingStick

Richard Ray Whitman

Artists

Nancy Marie Mithlo

Curator

**Native American
Arts Alliance**

Organization

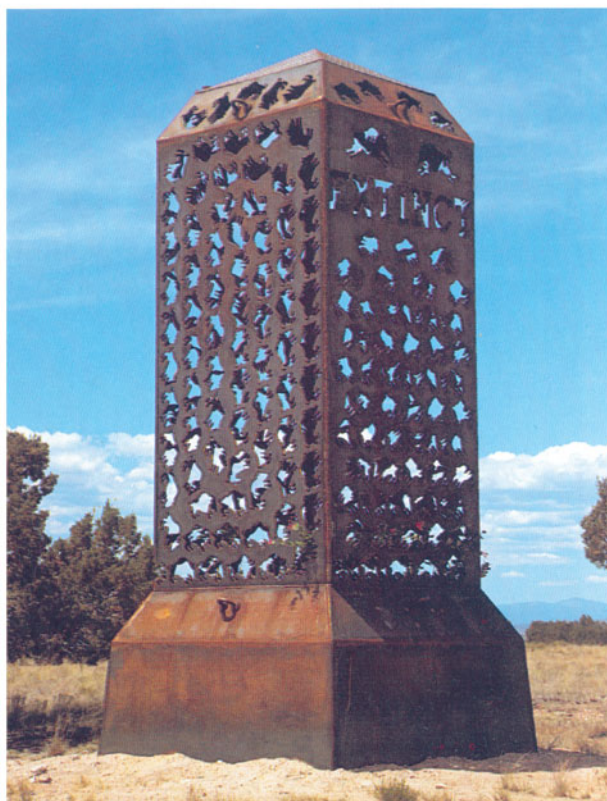
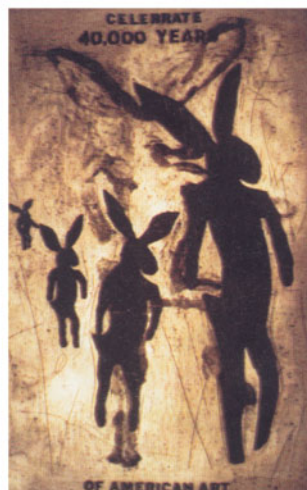


Frank La Pena
House of Sound
1996
monoprint, 77x112 cm

Harry Fonseca
The Discovery of Gold and Souls in California
1999
4 canvases, acrylic on canvas, each
213x183 cm

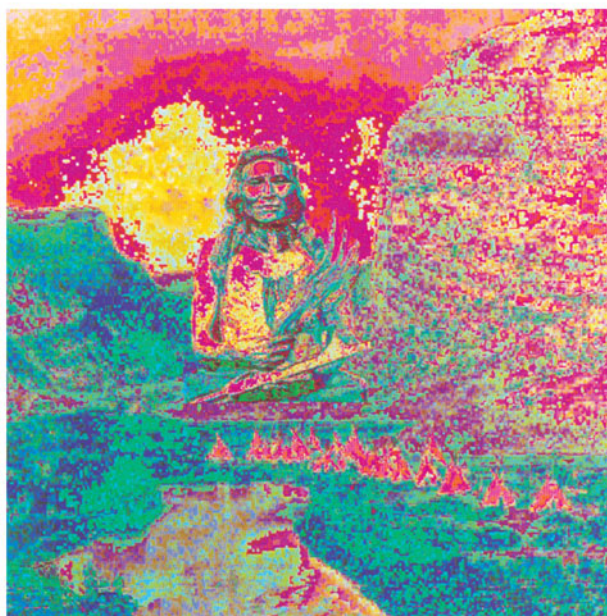
Bob Haazous
Extinct
 1997
 steel, 36.5x152.5x152.5 cm

Buffy Sainte-Marie
Pink Village
 1987
 computer graphic, ilfordchrome print,
 173.5x186 cm



Jaune Quick-to-See Smith
*Celebrate 40,000 Years of
 American Art*
 1995
 collograph etching, 103x127 cm

Frank La Pena
Deer Dancer
 1997
 monotype, 76x56 cm





Richard Glazer-Danay

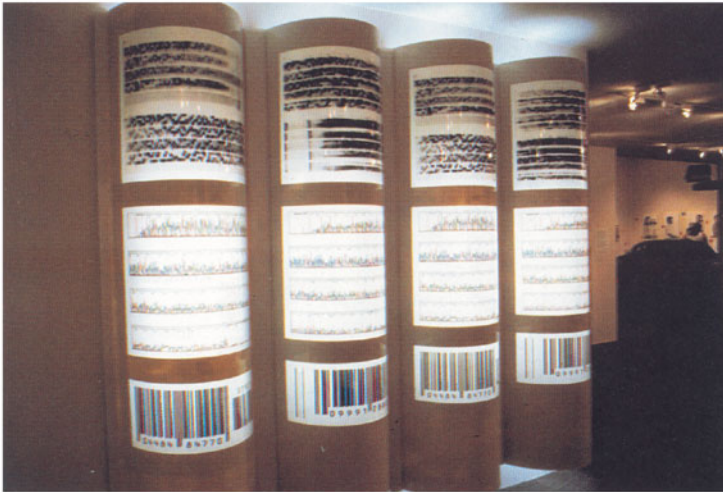
Punk Mohawk
1983
oil, wood, 25x25x25 cm

Richard Ray Whitman

DNA Totems
1998
mixed media, 244x61x304.8 cm

Key WalkingStick

Seeking the Silence I
1994
collage on paper, 81x163 cm



Not Somewhere Else

But this is Salt Lake City, Utah.

Yeah, it could be elsewhere. In fact,

it could be Somewhere Else City,
United States of America, Planet Earth,
but this is Salt Lake City,
right smack on the western edge
of the center of the world, believe it or not.

Yeah, it's not elsewhere. It's not Somewhere Else City. It is

Salt Lake City
Salt Lake City
SALT LAKE CITY
SALT LAKE CITY
SALT LAKE CITY

No where else but
And, yeah, what a place, what a place.

What a place to think of Indians.

"Where are the Indians?"
"What Indians?"
"You know, Indians."
"I don't know what you're talking about."



Description of *What Indians?*,
a graphics installation with a poem
by Simon J. Ortiz, included in
Ceremonial, an exhibition on native
art at the 1999 Biennale



nove artisti Indiani d'America

CEREMONIAL

"Ceremonial" marks the moment in history when Native American arts return to their own communities

Schola dei Tiraoro e Battioro - Campo San Stae, Venezia
La mostra resterà aperta fino al 26 agosto con orario 11.00-19.00

48. Esposizione internazionale d'arte

native american arts alliance

“Ceremonial”

The exhibit “Ceremonial” is a collective effort of concerned Native American artists who recognize the need to address contemporary social issues in an honest and uncensored manner. Leslie Silko, a Laguna Pueblo writer has stated “Denial of ourselves and our own origins is one of the most devastating psychological weapons the Whites have ever used against us”. The denial of one’s pain leads to the production of images which seek to portray only the beauty of one’s culture at the expense of depicting the reality of one’s daily life.

Indian life today is full of terror and death and great suffering, but despite these tremendous odds against us for two hundred of years – the racism, the poverty, the alcoholism – we go on living. We live to celebrate the beauty of the Earth and Sky, because the beauty and vitality of life... has never been lost. The world remains for us as it has always been. One with itself and us, death and laughter existing side by side... (Silko, in Aaron Yava. 1975. *Border Towns of the Navajo Nation*, Holmgangers Press, Alamo, CA).

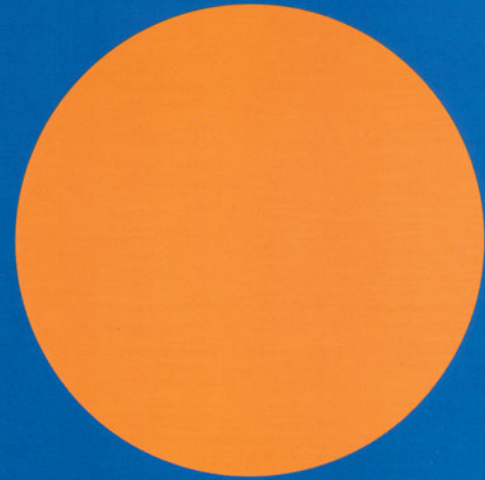
“Ceremonial” marks the moment in history when Native American arts return to their own communities. “Ceremonial” is the place in time when integrity in the arts, as a social endeavor, is again realized. “Ceremonial” is our tool for achieving social change.

La mostra “Ceremonial” rappresenta uno sforzo collettivo di artisti nativi-americani impegnati che riconoscono la necessità di illustrare le questioni sociali contemporanee in modo onesto e privo di censura. Leslie Silko, uno scrittore di Laguna Pueblo, ha dichiarato: “La negazione di noi stessi e delle nostre origini è una delle armi psicologiche più devastanti che i bianchi abbiano mai usato contro di noi”. La negazione del proprio dolore conduce alla realizzazione di immagini che cercano di ritrarre solo la bellezza della propria cultura a spese della rappresentazione della realtà della propria vita quotidiana.

*La vita degli indiani oggi è piena di terrore, di morte e di grandi sofferenze, ma malgrado queste terribili avversità che durano da oltre duecento anni – il razzismo, la povertà, l'alcolismo – continuiamo a vivere. Viviamo per celebrare la bellezza della Terra e del Cielo, perché la bellezza e l'energia della vita... non è mai stata perduta. Il mondo resta per noi ciò che è sempre stato. Uno, con sé e con noi, morte e riso uno accanto all'altro. (Silko, in Aaron Yava. 1975. *Border Towns of the Navajo Nation*, Holmgangers Press, Alamo, CA).*

“Ceremonial” segna il momento storico in cui l'arte nativa-americana ritorna alle sue comunità. “Ceremonial” è il luogo nel tempo in cui l'integrità delle arti, come impegno sociale, è compiuta. “Ceremonial” è il nostro strumento per raggiungere un cambiamento della società.

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XLVIII ESPOSIZIONE INTERNAZIONALE D'ARTE

CEREMONIAL
ARTE CONTEMPORANEA DEGLI INDIANI D'AMERICA



RICHARD GLAZER DANAY • HARRY FONSECA
BOB HAOZOUS • FRANK LAPENA
SIMON J. ORTIZ • BUFFY SAINTE-MARIE
JAUNE QUICK-TO-SEE SMITH
KAY WALKINGSTICK • RICHARD RAY WHITMAN



99

**SCHOLA DEI TIRAORO E BATTIORO
CAMPO S. STAE • VENEZIA**
10 giugno/26 agosto 1999 orario 11-19

Native American Arts Alliance
NA3 1704 Llano str. - P.M.B. 184 - 87505 Santa Fe N.M. U.S.A.

Segreteria Organizzativa: Studio “Antonio Dal Ponte”
Rialto, San Polo 622 - 30125 Venezia - tel. 041.5239315



BOB HAOZOUS
"Madonna (Beth)"
 Photograph

Native American Arts Alliance

Nancy Marie Mithlo, *Chair*
 Harry Fonseca, *Co-Chair* Patsy Phillips, *Development*
Members: Bob Haozous, Lloyd New and LaDonna Harris
 Elisabetta Frasca, *Program Coordinator*

Mission Statement

The Native American Arts Alliance (NA3) will build and sustain a forum to explore and communicate the intelligence, creativity, complexity, and diversity of our communities. Our goal is to promote, support and stimulate the vitality of contemporary Native American Art locally, nationally and internationally. Cultural integrity is fostered by honoring this exchange of ideas, images and beliefs.

The NA3 wishes to acknowledge the generous support of the Lannan Foundation for planning and development.

"Ceremonial"

Participating Artists - Venice Biennale 1999

RICHARD GLAZER DANAY
 Mixed Media/Painting - Corona, California

HARRY FONSECA
 Painting - Santa Fe, New Mexico

BOB HAOZOUS
 Sculpture - Santa Fe, New Mexico

FRANK LAPENA
 Painting - Sacramento, California

SIMON J. ORTIZ
 Poetry - Tucson, Arizona

BUFFY SAINTE-MARIE
 Digital Art - Kapaa, Hawaii

JAUNE QUICK-TO-SEE SMITH
 Painting - Corralles, New Mexico

KAY WALKINGSTICK
 Painting - Ithaca, New York

RICHARD RAY WHITMAN
 Photography/Installation - Norman, Oklahoma

NATIVE AMERICAN ARTS ALLIANCE (NA3) is a tax exempt organization located in Santa Fe, New Mexico - USA

ART

Biennale Celebrates the Local

By Roderick Conway Morris
International Herald Tribune

VENICE — In recent years Venice Biennales have sometimes seemed not so much surveys of art as a conspiracy of the worldwide postmodernist gallery and curatorial establishment to impose on the general public its narrow vision of what contemporary art ought to be.

The news this year, however, is by no means all bad, and the event, which opens Sunday and continues until Nov. 7, embraces a considerable amount of skillful, distinguished and interesting new work.

It is a primary characteristic of mainstream postmodern art that the style is consciously international, and individual pieces and installations could have been produced anywhere from Bangkok to Benghazi, Cape Town to Copenhagen. Thus this Biennale registers a significant shift back toward the local and regional, and indeed the figurative.

Impressive are the pieces in the Spanish pavilion by Manolo Valdes. Having passed through an abstract period, he has used collages of canvases and oils to create bold female portrait heads paying homage to Matisse, but taking some aspects of that master's style several stages further.

With the entire Great Britain pavilion to himself, Gary Hume is exhibiting — in addition to portraiture pictures of figures — fauna and flora. He uses bold colors on large aluminum sheets. The works have a Pop-Arty, psychedelic flavor reminiscent of the 1960s, which Hume himself only experienced as a small child, given that he was born in 1962, and in this respect they are positively nostalgic and old-fashioned. But Hume has a confident and distinct sense of design.

Howard Arkley's "The Home Show" in the Australian pavilion also draws on Pop Art and illustrates the emerging trend of daring to be decorative. His luridly colorful and patterned renderings of suburban houses and their interiors look like the sets for some surrealist soap opera. The enterprise is a send-up, but a humorous and good-natured one. And once again we are confronted with a manner that is local and "national," rather than anonymously international.

The South Korean artist Noh Sang Kyoon, meanwhile, has confronted the East-West mix of his own culture by making a seated Buddha and enormous panels entirely covered with sequins that constantly change shade in the waxing and waning beams of artificial lights. The effect, suggestive at the same time of disco, religious shrines and fashion kitsch, is weirdly absorbing.

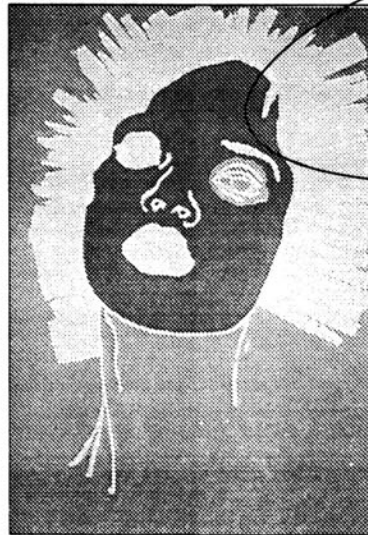
Two other artists whose works are not figurative but retain a strong atmosphere of their places of origin are Danae Straton of Greece and Ricardo Pascale of Uruguay. Danae's multi-layered glass



F. Allegretto

Serge Rezvani's "Femme dans la Foret," at Galleria del Leone.

sculpture with its shimmering and reflecting outer surfaces is like a prismatic box for capturing, condensing, even cooling, Greece's fiercely strong light. Pascale makes intriguing, richly warm-hued discs, circles and pillars of fragments of pieces of hardwoods from abandoned industrial sites. These forms have a strangely ancient and spiritual quality,



Mathew Marks Gallery

Gary Hume's "Angel," from 1997, in the Great Britain pavilion.

a harmonious blending of the natural and man-made. Both these artists' pieces would make perfect adornments to public gardens and other civic open spaces.

On the less serious side are some amusing stunts, notably the Russian duo Komar and Melamid's show of photographs of Moscow — the local and the regional even getting a look-in here —

taken by a 7-year-old chimpanzee called Mikki, and paintings done by elephants.

Across the way is the former Czechoslovakia pavilion, now amicably divided between the two nations. The latter half of the former combo offers to tattoo visitors with designs made by several Slovak artists, thereby leaving a more permanent mark on the public than any other pavilion can perhaps hope to achieve.

Harald Szeemann is this year's curator of the International section, called dAPERTutto in Italian, the pun (open to all/all over the place) failing to make it into the well-nigh meaningless English translation: APERTOoverALL. Some 100 artists have filled the enormous, many-roomed Italia pavilion, as well as the Rope Walk and other derelict factory spaces at the nearby Arsenal, with a plethora of installations, video works, photographs and so on. Most of these are predictable, not to say banal. But the outsized installation "Jue Chang," consisting of 100 chairs, stools and bedsteads converted into hide-covered drums, which visitors are invited to bang with assorted police truncheons, is great fun for children and potentially useful for adults needing to work off their frustration at some of the junk on display nearby.

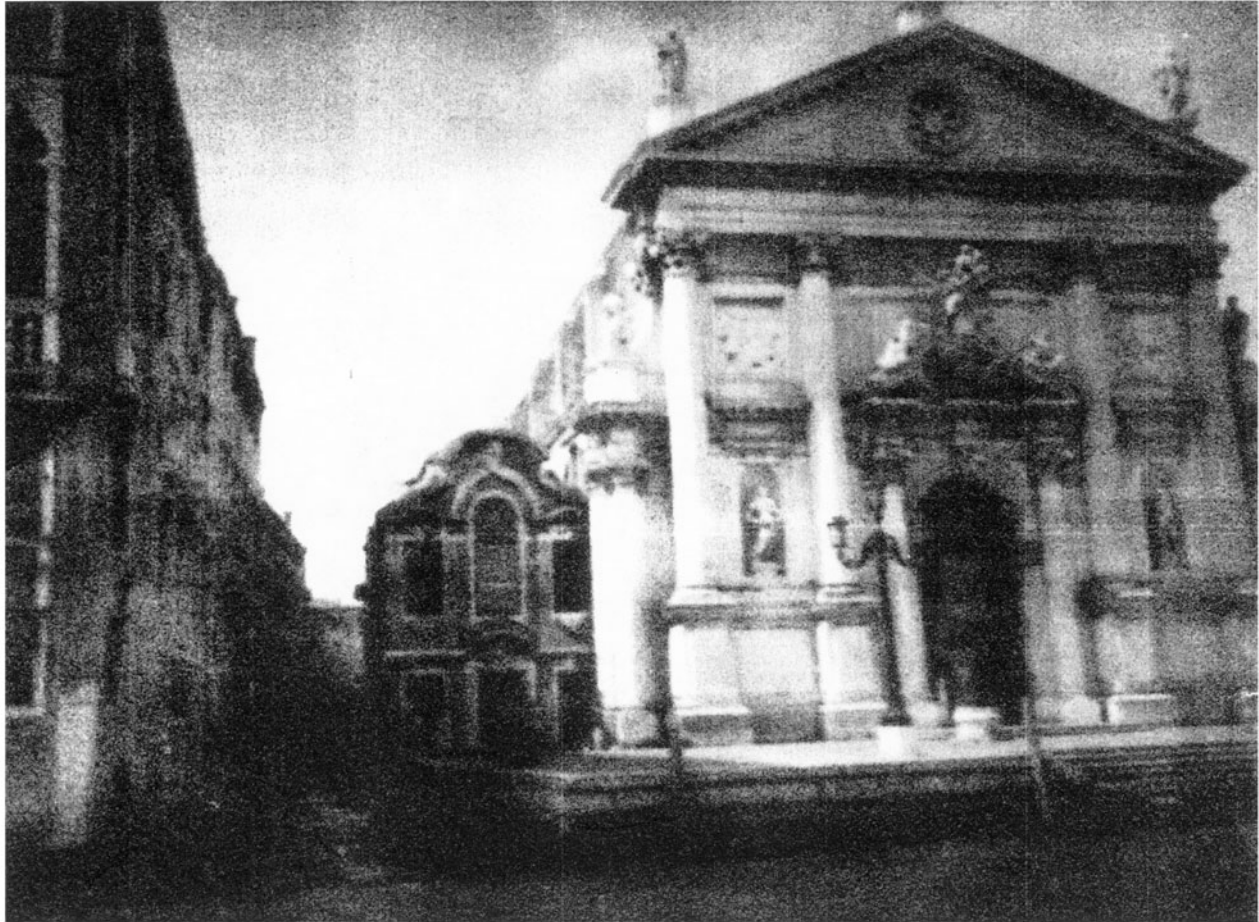
Two parallel exhibitions have been staged against considerable financial and organizational odds: "Alabama Today: The Time of Ironic Optimism," at the Ex-Instituto Maria Ausilatrice on Fondamenta San Gioachin near the Arsenal, and "Ceremonial," at the Schola dei Tiraoro and Battioro in Campo San Stae. These are group shows by Albanian and American Indian artists respectively.

Both have avoided the folkloric and tended toward postmodern modes of expression. But there is a sense in both cases that this language too is an alien one. The resulting feeling of dissonance and the evident search for an idiom to satisfy both tradition and life in today's world, not to mention allusions to the tragedies of these peoples' histories, make both shows poignant and thought-provoking.

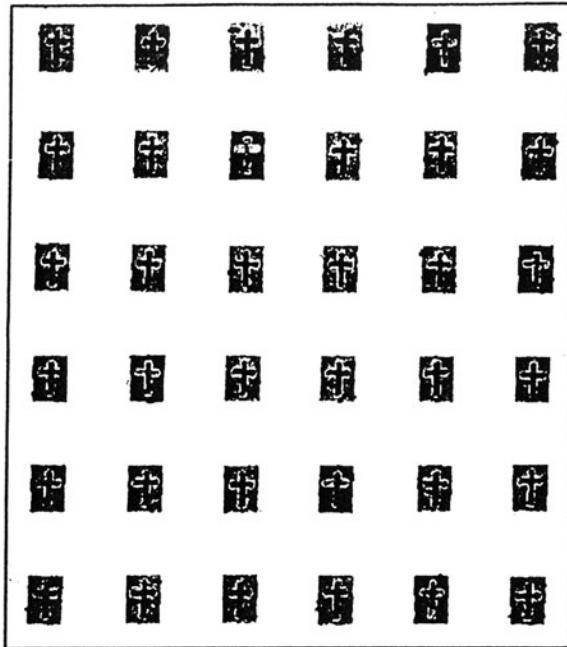
Of the parallel private gallery shows, outstanding is Serge Rezvani's, at Galleria del Leone on the island of Giudecca. Rezvani, now in his seventies, enjoyed a successful career as a painter (and won instant celebrity by composing and singing the song "Le tourbillon de la vie" in Truffaut's film "Jules et Jim") before turning to writing.

Rezvani has taken up his brush again for a series of silhouetted nudes using only black oil and leaving areas of the canvas white to achieve the modeling and contrast. These dynamic and daring works create an almost filmic illusion of movement, and to see an artist at this stage of life embarking on a completely new technique and direction is refreshing to behold.

INTERNATIONAL SPOTLIGHT

NA3 AT THE VENICE BIENNALE

WHAT IS NA3? — NA3 is the Native American Arts Alliance, formed in 1997 to address the growing distance between contemporary Native arts production and its relevance to Native communities. NA3 is comprised of seven Native American artists, intellectuals, leaders, and educators who realized that a new artistic forum needed to be created outside regional market constrictions. NA3 decided to bring their concerns about the cultural relevancy of art to an international forum—the 1999 Venice Biennale. The NA3 exhibit—curated by Nancy Marie Mithlo—is entitled *Ceremonial* in recognition of the reintegration of art and community. NA3 has taken the responsibility of leadership in transforming Native arts from decorative statements to honest self-portrayals.



'The Discovery of Gold and Souls in California,' acrylic on canvas, 7 x 6 feet, by Harry Fonseca

Native American Arts Alliance goes to Venice

Exhibiting under its own flag

By Ruth Lopez

The effort to send Native American artists to the 1999 Venice Biennale began after Santa Fe sculptor Bob Haozous and his wife, Nancy Marie Mithlo, returned from a visit to the 1997 biennial.

Inspired in part by the Canadian pavilion curated by Native American artist Gerald McMasters, Haozous and Mithlo decided the biennial needed a pavilion for Native American work from the United States.

The Native American Arts Alliance (NA3), a group of seven board members, formed to raise the necessary funds and select the artists.

The importance of the Venice Biennale, the first international contemporary art show, which started in 1895, owes much to its longevity. The eyes of the art world turned to the Italian town June 9, when the 48th International Exhibition of Contemporary Art

opened its doors. The exhibition continues through early November.

In 1995, the United States chose as its representative black painter Robert Colescott. That decision might signal the opportunity that awaits artists of color. Not so the NA3.

"We decided it would take another 100 years for an Indian to be chosen," said Mithlo, a professor of museum studies at the Institute of American Indian Arts and an NA3 board member.

Official participation in the biennial requires a nation affiliation. NA3 found a way around that, going under its own flag and sovereign status as Native people. The biennial board accepted the association's proposal, a first for the Venice Biennale and for Native Americans.

The exhibition, *Ceremonial*, will be on view in its own pavilion, an existing gallery space connected to a church near a major canal stop. The exhibit title refers to the power of the collective.

"We are aiming for social power," Mithlo said.

"Ceremonial" also has a more literal meaning, one intended to "empty that divide between indigenous thought and Western

thought," Mithlo said.

The nine artists chosen to participate are Rick Glazer Denay, Harry Fonseca, Haozous, Frank LaPena, Simon Ortiz, Buffy St. Marie, Jaune Quiek-To-See Smith, Kay WalkingStick and Richard Ray Whitman.

Ortiz, an Acoma Pueblo poet who teaches at the University of Arizona in Tucson, will display his poetry on a wall.

For Haozous, an Oklahoma Chiricahua Apache who came here years ago to study at IAIA, the desire to tell the world Native American artists are not just about producing decorative, historic and romantic pieces fueled the creation of *Ceremonial*.

"The idea comes from a need that is related to a revolution of identity," he said. "It is time artists started having some cultural responsibility."

Haozous and Fonseca curated *Ceremonial*.

Concerned about curating a show in which they also would exhibit their work, they consulted an elder. The message they got was empowering: "You don't use other people's rules," Haozous said he was told.

The selection process was lengthy, starting with 1,500 names.

"We included everybody ... anyone who had picked up a turquoise stone," Haozous said.

Finally they got the list down to 140 then 20.

"We chose artists we knew were mature professional artists who had never had an opportunity to address their own tribal concerns," Haozous said.

Ultimately he believes the NA3 should encourage Native American artists to have "a direct participation with their people" instead of trying to fit the standards of the New York art scene.

"It is something that has to be done to regain our health," he said.

But the NA3 couldn't have chosen a flashier or more prestigious platform from which to launch that view.

"We had to select our goals," Haozous said about the association's first choice of committing resources to show at the Venice Biennale. "The only way to show there is to have a national sanction. As a sovereign people, we don't need an outside sanction; we have sanctioned ourselves."

Lloyd Kiva New

(Cherokee), president emeritus of IAIA and an NA3 board member, has spent his life involved in the promotion of Native American art.

"I think it is time Indian people become recognized," he said. "They are not just quaint basketmakers anymore."

Contemporary Native American artists are making major contributions to the world society as artists, he said.

As for the criticism that almost inevitably might come up, that NA3 is a self-appointed group made up of a limited number of artists and friends, New feels confident there was no other way to proceed.

"I think if we waited for the big world of art to recognize what we are doing, it might never happen," he said.

New thinks one problem remains in the art establishment.

"They use their own criteria for judging ethnic values and tribal people never measure up to what they consider the going set of values," he said. "For instance, the New York scene and the pundits that make up that world of art are not likely to be open to upstarts."

That is exactly what the founders of NA3 are, upstarts who pretty much have decided to ignore the establishment and do their own thing.

"I admire the spirit," New said. "I have tried to help in any way to support them."

Ceremonial has given artists the opportunity to "go out there and do it," said Fonseca, who created four pieces for the biennial. "I think it definitely will put us in the spotlight. Nothing may come of it but at least we are putting ourselves out there."

One of Fonseca's pieces is a 7-by-6-foot acrylic on canvas, a painting of 36 crosses "the size of postcards, very orderly," he said.

Titled *The Discovery of Gold and Souls in California*, the painting confronts the impact the Gold Rush and the mission system had on California Native Americans.

Making the pieces was an opportunity to create work that might not sell but that addresses "more difficult subjects," he said.

Fonseca has another important reason to participate.

"One thing is the audience," he said. "There are just so many people who will see the work." □

We decided it would take another 100 years for an Indian to be chosen.

Nancy Marie Mithlo

IL GAZZETTINO

Domenica 13 giugno 1999

LA MOSTRA
 Alla Scuola
 dei Tiraoro
 e Battioro
 è allestita
 "Ceremonial"



L'opera di Kay Walkigstick in mostra a San Stae

L'anima segreta dell'arte pellerossa

Per la prima volta un gruppo di artisti pellerossa espone alla Biennale d'arte. Un evento di grande importanza per un popolo che, dopo lo sterminio subito dai colonizzatori bianchi, è tutt'oggi alla ricerca di una propria identità, di un proprio ruolo in una terra che un tempo era abitata da oltre 165 milioni di nativi, appartenenti a diverse nazioni, e oggi ospita, in parte nelle riserve, solo un milione e mezzo d'individui: tutto ciò che resta di tribù omologate sotto il falso nome d'"indiani". «L'arte nativa d'America non trova spazio nemmeno nei libri di testo scolastici - spiega Harry Fonseca, uno degli artisti presenti alla Scuola dei Tiraoro e Battioro, a S. Stae - la nostra cultura è continuamente degradata e strumentalizzata. Simboli ed icone dei nostri avi sono trasformati in una pittoresca attrazione turistica». Con l'obiettivo di testimoniare le sofferenze, ma anche la vitalità

e la forza delle culture indigene d'America, la "Native American Art Alliance" (un'organizzazione no-profit, con sede nel New Messico), ha organizzato dal 10 giugno al 16 agosto "Ceremonial", una mostra che raccoglie alcune opere (dipinti, assemblaggi, video) di otto artisti indigeni di grande esperienza e valore, scelti in una rosa di 150 candidati. Alcune opere ripercorrono le tappe principali della recente storia pellerossa, altre enfatizzano, con pungente impegno e humor, le contraddizioni della vita sociale americana, altre denunciano i sopprusi subiti o rievocano simboli ancestrali. La serie di croci dipinte in oro, rosso e nero commemora, ad esempio, l'azione missionaria nella California del sud, fonte di malattie e schiavitù per gli "indiani" di quel tempo; le grandi figure femminili, sono invece una moderna rappresentazione della madre terra.

C.M.

STATE OF THE ARTS

Nancy Marie Mithlo, Ph.D.

“No John Wayne, No Jesus Christ, No Geronimo”

Nancy Marie Mithlo, a Fort Sill Chirirahua Warm Springs Apache with a Ph.D. in cultural anthropology, teaches at the University of New Mexico, the Santa Fe Community College, and the Institute of American Indian Arts. In this article she describes the accomplishments of the Santa Fe-based Native American Arts Alliance, of which she is a member, and its efforts to challenge regional market-driven imperatives that affect the creation and reception of Native art.

Last summer, *Ceremonial* opened as the first Native American art pavilion of the Venice Biennale, a milestone that was the product of two years of hard work and dialogue among Native intellectuals, artists, and educators composing the Native American Arts Alliance (NA3). Our group was concerned with the growing distance between Native art production and its relevance to Native American communities. Our goal was to express ourselves as a contemporary people.

In retrospect, many of the methods and assumptions the NA3 utilized in getting to the Venice Biennale differ from standard fine-art mandates. We shunned the role of the curator, rejected institutional affiliations, and proceeded without major financial support. Instead we embraced consensus decision making, encouraged individual financial responsibility, and exercised our rights as sovereign peoples. Our original purpose was not to be oppositional with regard to a Western paradigm—none of us defined our process as “social” or “tribal”—but rather to act instinctually and according to what we thought was proper behavior. The realization that we were going against the norm came mainly in response to criticism, usually from our own communities.

What follows are excerpts from video interviews conducted by filmmaker Gabriel López Shaw with four of the *Ceremonial* participants: two artists and two organizers.

The Communal Effort

One of the things about the show in Italy that was just so wonderful was that it was a group effort. So when the show opened, it wasn't like anybody was a star. All the attention wasn't on any one person. Even though there were some artists who were not there, who did not go to Italy, their presence was just very, very felt. And I think we made sure of that when we were installing the show, 'cause we were conscious of them and conscious of them for the last 18 months, for heaven's sake. So that was very nice, it was sort of like an embrace of everybody, not just any one person.



Bob Haozous with Nancy Marie Mithlo.
Photograph by Melissa Gil

Working as an artist, we usually work pretty individually. And if there's a group show, I'm not usually putting that show together, I'm usually part of it, so I send a piece of work and that's all I do. In terms of working on this show and being really conscious of the group, that was very, very new for me...and incredibly rewarding. So, so rewarding. Having an idea, having to communicate with a lot of people, not making any decisions on your own, that you had a support system that was embracing you to make this show as fine and successful as we could. I think that's a very unusual experience and it's really pretty neat.

- Harry Fonseca

What I liked about this process is that it was a collaborative effort. Instead of a curator, one curator or maybe two curators saying “Well, this is what we're going to do and this is how we're going to do it, and we're going to invite these artists...” instead it was a group of people who met and discussed how we wanted the show organized, and you could call it curatorial work...but it was a lot of different voices. It was a lot of different tribal voices as well, and it was a lot of people at different levels of experience. It was a really good collaborative effort, which is different than what you normally see out there. Curators are very...protective, generally. And what I saw in this process was more of a willingness to be open to other ideas.

- Patsy Phillips

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The Native American Arts Alliance team 1999.
Seated left to right: Gabe Shaw, Harry Fonseca, Bob Haozous. Standing left to right: Simon Ortiz, Patsy Phillips, Nancy Marie Mithlo.





La Biennale di Venezia *Società di Cultura*

Settore Arti Visive
Il Direttore

Mrs. Nancy Marie Mithlo
Chair, Native American Arts Alliance
Santa Fe
New Mexico
USA

Venice, February 17th, 1999

Re. *Ceremonial*

Dear Mrs. Mithlo,

thank you for your the request for patronage of the above mentioned exhibition and the documentation you sent us.

As you may know, last year the Biennale was transformed into a cultural foundation and this brought some change in its proceedings. At the moment, we are also reconsidering the procedure concerning the "patrocinio"; in particular, this year (and in the future), we will acknowledge some cultural and artistic events "a latere" (i.e. beside the 48. Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte) rather than give them the "patrocinio"

Regarding your project, I believe that (although not all the proposals are of the same quality) on the whole it could be a good exhibition and that it would be nice if also Native American could be represented beside the Visual Arts Biennale. For these reasons, I will suggest to the Administration board to include *Ceremonial* in the "a latere" events that will accompany the Visual Arts Biennale; after the formal approval you will receive all the information concerning the conditions and the material for the catalogue.

With my best regards

Harald Szeemann
Harald Szeemann