



Emily W. Arthur, Water Moccasin, (with shot), 2011, (detail)

Air Land Seed

**Faisal Abdu'Allah, Emily Arthur, Marwin Begaye
John Hitchcock, Ryan O'Malley, Henry Payer, Duane Slick
C. Maxx Stevens, and Dyani White Hawk**

University of Venice, Ca' Foscari - May 30 to June 2, 2013

In association with the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the Museum of Contemporary Native Arts (MoCNA) a center of the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA), 516 Arts and the Santa Fe Art Institute

Air, Land, Seed An exhibition of Contemporary Indigenous Arts

University of Venice Ca' Foscari, Palazzo Cosulich, May 30 –June 2, 2013

The University of Wisconsin-Madison, The University of Venice, Ca' Foscari and The Museum of Contemporary Native Arts (MoCNA) a center of the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) proudly announce the opening of the Indigenous art exhibit *Air, Land, Seed* at the University of Venice Ca' Foscari, Palazzo Cosulich, May 30 at 5:00 PM on the occasion of the 55th La Biennale di Venezia.

Exhibiting artists include: Faisal Abdu'Allah, Emily Arthur, Marwin Begaye, John Hitchcock, Ryan O'Malley, Henry Payer, Duane Slick, C. Maxx Stevens, and Dyani White Hawk. Curators include: Elisabetta Frasca, Nancy Marie Mithlo, Paul Baker Prindle and Sarah Anne Stolte.

Air, Land, Seed addresses global tensions between home and exile, drawing from the unique perspectives of the Indigenous peoples of Native North America. Nine contemporary artists engaged in the politicized medium of printmaking will exhibit works on paper, film and installation that question the forced displacements and ideologies that define our collective contemporary existence. This reappropriation of colonial markers - flags, boats and airwaves - subverts the control and militarization of Indigenous homelands. Through participatory live print actions, performance, exhibition and dialogue, artists will repurpose these potent icons inscribed in the US Marine credo: "From the Halls of Montezuma, To the shores of Tripoli; We fight our country's battles, in the air, on land and sea."

Curated by a collaborative group of artists, art educators, and curators, *Air, Land, Seed* is our seventh Indigenous exhibition at the Venice Biennale (1999-2011) and the fifth collaborative event with the University of Venice. For more information on previous projects, please visit: nancymariemithlo.com and hybridpress.blogspot.com.

In association with the exhibit, a symposium *Convergence II* will occur at the Casa del Cinema, Venice, Italy: May 30, 2013 from 10:30 AM to 1:00 PM and will be chaired by Henry Drewal (Professor, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Departments of Art History & Afro-American Studies) and Maria Luisa Ciminelli, (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Department of Historical Studies). Navajo poets Sherwin Bitsui and Luci Tapahonso will read their work at the University of Venice Ca' Foscari, Palazzo Cosulich opening Thursday, May 30th, at 5:00 PM. Artist Faisal Abdu'Allah will present an interactive performance at the Palazzo Cosulich exhibit site Saturday, June 1st at 10:00 AM.

Air, Land, Seed advisors include: Sonya Y. Clark, Diane R. Karp, Sarah K. Khan and Patsy Phillips. A parallel exhibition will occur June 29 - September 21, 2013 at the non-profit artspace 516 Arts 516arts.org in Albuquerque, New Mexico in association with an artist residency hosted by the Santa Fe Art Institute.

Marwin Begaye
Upon Their Arrival, 2012
woodblock



Introduction – Air, Land, Seed at the 55th Venice Biennale

International Nomads: Participating in the Aboriginal Curatorial Delegation at the Venice Biennale

The systemic exclusion of Indigenous curators and artists from national galleries and museums, albeit slowly changing in Canada and around the world, necessitates Indigenous art professionals to assert themselves on a local and global scale as sovereign representatives of their nations. As a young Aboriginal curator, writer and researcher with Métis, Cree and Euro-Canadian heritage, I was privileged to attend the Venice Biennale in 2011 as part of the Aboriginal Curatorial Delegation sponsored by the Canada Council for the Arts.¹ When I received notice that my application had been successful, I was living in Santa Fe, New Mexico, working at the Indian Arts Research Center, School for Advanced Research (SAR), completing museum work with the extensive collection of Native American art. I wrote in my application statement to the Canada Council for the Arts, “*Considering that Aboriginal people have been nomadic for thousands of years, searching for new ways of understanding the world, in a way, this opportunity and voyage could be seen as a continuation of these traditions.*” My voyage and experiences at the Venice Biennale, along with the other members of the Aboriginal Curatorial Delegation – artist Jim Logan and curators David Garneau, Michelle LaVallee, Leanne L’Hirondelle and Guy Sioui Durand, solidified my experience as an international nomad, continuing the traditions of my Indigenous relations generations past.

Engaging with John Hitchcock and Nancy Marie Mithlo’s curatorial work *EpiCentro: Re Tracing the Plains* at the Venice Biennale 2011 and the Native American artists represented showed solidarity between our nations of Indigenous peoples. Meeting Australian, Canadian, and Italian anthropologists and curators throughout the Venice Biennale at exhibition openings, at the Giardini, and in off-site art venues, was a great opportunity to discuss Indigenous cultures with other arts professionals, question the place of art markets and self-determination for artists, and to critique circulating notions of ‘authentic’ Indians. Throughout these exchanges, I aimed to be self-reflexive in my own position. Interventionist models such as the IA3 (Indigenous Arts Action Alliance) collective at the Venice Biennale over the past decade that showcase the work of contemporary Indigenous North American artists (including Harry Fonseca, Shelly Niro, Lori Blondeau and Bob Haozous) alerted audiences worldwide to recognize that Indigenous peoples of North America continue to create thought-provoking, honest, and sometimes brutally-relevant art. The power of artwork to transcend boundaries, both physical and intellectual, remains a driving force in the need for Indigenous artists to continue to create work, as is the legacy of Native American artists at the Venice Biennale for the past decade via exhibitions such as *Pellerossasogna* in 2003. Vigilantes in promoting Indigenous art on a global scale, curators and artists disband staid notions of Indigenous peoples as mired in the historic past.

In Venice, the Aboriginal Curatorial Delegation had to cross many bridges, some archaic, some newer. Several times I lost my way. I want to suggest that we, as arts workers, must continue to cross these ideological bridges, challenging boundaries, as nomads both at home and abroad.² As a writer, I continue to wonder, what bridges must Indigenous artists and curators cross in the future? I know that attending the Venice Biennale and critically thinking about the position of Indigenous arts in an international setting, where local arts practices become global, must continue.

Gloria Bell
Editor, Aboriginal Curatorial Collective

¹ The Aboriginal Curatorial Delegation attended the Venice Biennale(2009) and Sydney Biennale (2008, 2010). Thank you to Jim Logan for his insight in this matter. Jim Logan, conversation with author, March 18, 2013. www.canadacouncil.ca/news/releases/2010/jk129170260932812616.htm
² The title for this introduction was partly inspired by my fellow delegation member Guy Sioui-Durand’s powerful oratory. See his essay, “Ak8a-Enton8hi: Of Saliva and Quill,” in *Making a Noise: Aboriginal Perspectives on Art, Art History, Critical Writing and Community*, ed. Lee-Ann Martin, (Banff: The Banff International Curatorial Institute, 2003) 129.



John Hitchcock, *Chemically Wasted Warhorse*, 2011, screenprint & drawing, 44 x 30 inches, featured in *Air, Land, Seed*



Faisal Abdu'Allah (FauHaus)
The eyes of our ancestors' #1-3, 2013
 Ink jet print
 36 X 45 Inches

Faisal Abdu'Allah

The term *diaspora* is defined as a scattering and dispersion of people, but it is often associated with a situation where people are dispersed due to negative pressures such as colonialism, slavery, reservation systems, and religious persecution. Despite these adverse stresses, diasporic communities often nurture fertile creative environments in which seeds of knowledge and/or life-ways are carried around the world with people and sown in new soils to render hybrid ideas, arts, and social groups. Faisal Abdu'Allah's work highlights connections and divergences within the network(s) created by this cultural sowing. In representing nodules within this global web, Abdu'Allah questions how viewers' social experiences influence their reception or identification of cultural identity markers. For example, in his series *Gods*, Abdu'Allah's friends, students, and associates sat for portraits that were then mixed up and reconfigured digitally to render race-less or perhaps race-filled depictions of his community.

As with this racial manipulation through the artist's hand, much of Abdu'Allah's work is about *touch*. For example, *Live Salon* actualizes the community of a barbershop in the gallery while Abdu'Allah cuts viewers' hair and tells stories of his life (literally touching his audience and shaping their appearance). Installation works like *Garden of Eden* separate viewers based on eye color and subject normally privileged blue-eyed viewers to the feeling of being gazed upon (such viewers are made physically uncomfortable as they are subjected to a separatism and racism they rarely experience). A printmaker and etcher working with un-conventional materials and unique print media, Abdu'Allah addresses the physicality of interactions between artwork, artist, and subject: acid eats images into metal plates; chemical processes break down and recombine elements making images on the printing plates appear to de-materialize and re-materialize; hair is ground into pigment and reconstituted into letters; racialized

imagery is literally and figuratively decayed or eroded. As diasporic communities disperse and re-group through time and space, Abdu'Allah's alchemical practice similarly reveals the permanence of cultural identity available through transformation.

For the exhibition *Air, Land, Seed*, Abdu'Allah has created a new work, *APR-69*. Combining his experiences as a printmaker and barber, this work utilizes Abdu'Allah's own hair as a print medium for text embossing. Human hair is an identity marker in many ways – it represents our style and how we present ourselves to the world; it reflects how we care for our bodies; and it can reveal or disguise our genetic origins. Containing DNA, hair literally embodies a piece of our ancestors in our present. Hair connects us to our family; it looks back in time. For Abdu' Allah, hair can also be a colonial marker in the way people choose to style or wear their hair. For example, colonial trauma and racism are forces that led to painful identity-shaping procedures such as lye hair processing/straightening or skin bleaching. Despite these attempts to modify the body, as our skin cells continue to grow/die/shed, our DNA and genetic identity reasserts itself.

Thinking about how identity is read through hair can lead us to reflect on how the cutting of hair in residential schools was a source of trauma for many young Native American students, how the growing of long hair by male American Indian Movement members was a political act of identity assertion, and how, more recently, hair samples from various tribal members were used to extract DNA that was then misused by university research teams. Although Abdu'Allah's work is speaking about issues relative to his Black identities, the visual signifiers of race he addresses with his work resonate in all communities.

Katie Apsey



Emily W. Arthur

A beautiful sadness permeates Emily Arthur's print iconography. A deer stands in quiet profile witnessing a devastated landscape, a night moth with flattened wings adorns a pregnant Madonna, a bird and snake intertwine in silent repose. These rich tableaux are ripe with narratives of loss, witnessing and hope. In Arthur's words, she "cools" the ills of our compromised modernity by recording the cycles of destruction and creation inherent in the natural world. The act of making art, leaving a mark, keeps the balance; it holds in tension the beauty and the pain. Given Arthur's interventionist agenda, it seems appropriate that birds are her favored motif for these acts of visual diplomacy. Catbirds, cedar waxwing, and mockingbirds fill the frame with intent and purpose. These winged messengers call out to the viewer to take note. They carry wisdom and yet their very fragility and at times, obvious lifelessness, seem to suggest a darker side, an inability to withstand the weight of hostile urban decay. One thinks of birds flying headlong onto glass panes, their innocence betrayed.

For Arthur, birds are symbols of the soul – they traverse from land to air, or water to air. They navigate impossible contradictions. In this way, we can "understand(s) what is not understandable" including death. This translation process is often fraught however, as the viewer instinctually averts death's visceral finality. Arthur observes,

Most reactions I get – why the dead birds? And I just think, Oh, you know, "Look at this gorgeous little foot, and look at that amazing little line, and this feather is so fragile, and their bones are hollow, and it used to be flying, and now it's in my hand." That is really what I am connected to and I forget that people can't get past the dead bird.

Emily W. Arthur

Water Moccasin (with shot), 2011
Etching and chine collie on BFK paper
15 x 20 inches

This attraction to the vulnerable and the traumatic is fueled by Arthur's early exposure to artists such as Ana Mendieta and Janine Antoni, women who immerse their practice in natural materials, bodily engagement and social critique. Arthur frequently incorporates dirt into her prints, actively collecting what she terms "soil samples" from her travels throughout the American southeast, home to her Cherokee and European ancestors. Her family's movement across this environment (North Carolina, Georgia and Florida) was an outcome of displacement – the government-forced relocation of east coast Cherokees to the Indian Territories of Oklahoma. The multi-generational impact of these dislocations informs her attachment to the environment as a platform from which to speak. In her words, "The land holds stories with specific meanings to place."

Nancy Marie Mithlo, Ph.D.

Quotes from Emily Arthur, interview with author, March 13, 2013. See also Arthur's artist statement in association with the Tweed Museum of Art's 2013 exhibit Encoded: Traditional Patterns/A Contemporary Response: tweed.wp.d.umn.edu/participants/emily-arthur

Marwin Begaye

Artist's Statement

As American Indian people we are quite good at making our world beautiful. This aesthetic inheritance has dominated my work as it developed from purely objective images, dancers and portraits, to the abstract work referencing my community and our ceremonial lifeways. This need to make things beautiful comes to me from a long line of artists in our family who live to achieve *hozhoníí*, the Navajo concept of being centered in beauty. This continues to be relevant for me artistically and personally.

In recent years, the heartbreaking reality of the effects of diabetes, alcoholism, and poverty have invaded my life in the way that smoke fills a room, subtly and then invading every sense. Through a process of inquiry and research, the impact that these diseases have on our Native community has catapulted me out of my sheltered cocoon to actively campaigning visually for public attention to the continued impact that these diseases are having on our whole community, leaving behind a path of destruction and death.

So, as a campaign, the purpose of my work is to bring awareness to the capacity we each, individually, have in curtailing the effects of these diseases; the capacity as families for making positive change; and the capacity as a community to prevent these diseases and prevent further destruction to our communities. While addressing these issues, artistically, I plan to continue making work that is beautiful and aesthetically pleasing. In some way, perhaps this is my Navajo sense of humor, making the ugly beautiful makes it easier to see.



Marwin Begaye
Riders of the Storm II, 2012
Lithograph

The work has negotiated in an area that is often considered taboo among Navajo people, using images of death personified. This dark symbol and the dark humor are often balanced with a bright palette. They incorporate imagery from original illustrations and carved blocks as easily as digital compositions.

In this campaign, I have gained inspiration from artists including José Posada, Melanie Yazzie, Tom Huck, Cannonball Press, John Hitchcock, Dennis McNett, Allan Houser and Artemio Rodriguez. These works were created utilizing materials that range from linoleum and wood blocks, to monotyping and painting, to digitally created and manipulated images.

My work has been shown and collected in galleries and museums throughout the United States. The digital graphics have been included in multiple national exhibitions and a public installation in Argentina. The response is occasionally excited, sometimes emotional, and often quiet encouragement. A few people have told me that they were effected enough by the images and the message to effect change in their lifestyle and choices. The interest and excitement in young Native people is perhaps the most compelling. All responses are gratifying and feed my motivation.

See related article on [Indian Arts and Crafts Board Website](#)

John Hitchcock

Much time has passed since 1936, when the well-known essay by the German philosopher Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” first appeared in print.¹ In that essay, Benjamin reflected upon the work of art losing its *aura* and rarity due to the infinity of reproductions that had then become available. In dialogue with Benjamin’s reflections, theorists, art critics and artists themselves, have continued to interrogate the new political and democratic status art acquired in our contemporary society as a consequence of the mechanism of reproduction. Artists in particular have played with this concept and with the notion of artistic quality. Many artists have emphasized how the conditions of reproduction allowed for the artworks to take on new meanings and to enter peoples’ lives, collapsing former meanings and making the work an “open text,” in the words of Italian philosopher and novelist Umberto Eco, subjected to the interpretation of the viewer.² As art critic John Berger put it in the 1970s, “the uniqueness of the original now lies in being the original of a reproduction. It is no longer what its image shows that strikes one as unique; its first meaning is no longer found in what it says but in what it is.”³

Reproduction and *repetition* are key to understanding the poetic works of John Hitchcock. Bison skulls, buffaloes in motion, military tanks, weapons, and canned commodity foods are purposely reiterated. Hitchcock’s personal iconography is shaped by his growing up on Comanche tribal lands in the Wichita Mountains of Oklahoma near the Fort Sill military base.⁴ Contemporary artistic movements like Dada and Fluxus, punk rock and death metal music and televised images from his childhood of the Vietnam War also serve as fodder.

John Hitchcock
Offering- Epicentro, give-away
print within the Gallerie
dell’Accademia,Venice Italy, 2011



In Indigenous contexts, stories produce knowledge; performances do too. Through performances, in ways similar to storytelling, spaces are reconfigured, audiences are challenged, and images acquire new meanings. Hitchcock’s multimedia images and performances are metaphorical seeds sown to engage the viewer. They can be disturbing while at the same time ironic and paradoxical. Through these performative acts, images become personal icons thus underlying a whole complex narrative that references Native history, historical trauma, the consumption and exploitation of Native images, and the hybridization of the contemporary world. His performance in Venice results from a collaborative endeavor that brings together other Indigenous as well as non–Indigenous artists. By printing, giving away and dispersing his icons in the built environment, he re-figures the meanings we assign to art, images, and space, making art and history more accessible and at the same time using the medium of print as a political weapon to instill doubts and questions, so as to push our interrogatives further.

Elisabetta Frasca

1 Benjamin, Walter, and Hannah Arendt. *Illuminations*. 1st Schocken pbk. ed. New York: Schocken Books, 1969.
2 Eco, Umberto. *Opera Aperta: Forma E Indeterminazione Nelle Poetiche Contemporanee*. [Milano]: Bompiani, 1962.
3 Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1972.
4 The state of Oklahoma is also known as “Indian Country or Indian Territory”, because over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, many tribes such as the Choctaw, the Cherokee and the Chiricahua Apaches were relocated there. The Chiricahua Apaches were imprisoned at Fort Sill from 1886 to 1914 by the United States government. For further information see: www.fortsillapache-nsn.gov



Ryan O'Malley

I became a printmaker because of community. We had an amazing art department at USD (University of South Dakota). Faculty, grads and undergrads were close knit, spent late nights in the shop and at the bars, and hosted monthly potlucks where we could interact informally outside an academic setting. I became inspired and motivated by the diversity of people around me and realized that being an artist is something different, something special. I felt the world opening up to me. These experiences introduced me to the broader printmaking community where I met many of my closest friends, colleagues and heroes.

Travel is one of the most important experiences for artistic growth. The work in the 2011 Japanese Pavilion at the Venice Biennale was created around a proverb: The frog in the well only knows the color of the sky. This spoke to Japan's issues of isolation pertaining to geographic location, its national identity, etc. The U.S. is choked by nationalism; we are also a frog in the well. We all start out this way. Initially, our range of tangible knowledge only goes as far as our homes, schools, towns, states, regions or nation. We're isolated from many of the truths that exist in the world around us. Virtual experience is simply that. As artists we must smell, taste, touch, see and hear to truly communicate what turns us on, what we want out of our work, and how to make our ideas globally accessible and effective. As artists we have a responsibility to speak a universal language, to communicate our ideas to the masses, and affect positive change.

Ryan O'Malley
Print Action for Venice Biennale,
 2011

Right now I'm hugely drawn to printmaking because of an image's ability to be in multiple places at once. In fact, I refer to it as "The Power of the Multiple." Printmaking is not about the edition, rather the possibilities of the matrix! For instance, a woodblock can be printed in an edition of 20. Ten sell at \$200 a pop for a total of two grand, ten different people now own that print. You exhibit five simultaneously in Lansing, Michigan; New York, Paris, Auckland, and Kuala Lumpur. You trade a print with a friend, trade one for a tattoo, one for food. Keep one for yourself. One spontaneously combusts. You still have the matrix, print it on a few shirts. Take your newsprint proofs and wheat paste them around the world to engage an unsuspecting global audience. Wear the shirt walking past the wheat paste on the way to the gallery to see the same print. Then go take a nap on a pillow that has the same printed image. Post it on Facebook, animate it, etc. Printmaking is capable of existing simultaneously in all of these realms. The original impetus of printmaking was to disseminate information. Consider it on that base level and it opens up a world of possibilities.

Interview with Ryan O'Malley by artist Anna Stephens, 2012

Henry Payer

Venice is a precarious place that is always shifting and moving with the tides, slowly drowning into the sea. These physical movements are reflective of social alterations engendered by the formation of America such as forced displacements of Indigenous peoples and demarcations of borderlines. Ho-Chunk artist Henry Payer grew up on a reservation in Nebraska, an area directly affected by removals and displacements. He creates stability out of fragmentation through collage, remodeling dislocated materials into wholeness. Reflective of fragmented Native American lives pieced together after scattering with the tides of social changes, transforming rather than drowning, his works are powerful metaphors of colonial experiences in America.

Venice is a land of water. The word for water in Ho-Chunk is *nii*. For Payer, this word is a seed found planted in bits of paper sprouting into a renewal of his language and a revival of his traditions. Payer uses scraps of materials that point out areas where meanings have been lost through transitional histories, such as place names or words that are no longer used printed on old maps. Payer arranges these small units on top of objects he finds in antique stores, flea markets, and used bookstores. With diligence, he studies Ho-Chunk material culture, piecing together knowledge of how objects were made and practices that were disrupted and abandoned during the violent stresses caused by exoduses and ethnocidal policies. Object making in Indigenous America relied on innovation and the gathering of the best materials available. Payer utilizes these processes to connect his work to traditional practices. His studio is filled with piles of things he has gathered, such as illustrations from advertisements and phone book pages; all past remnants waiting to visually express contemporary Ho-Chunk culture through inclusion in his collages.



Henry Payer
Big Face Indian, (This Is Who We Are),
from the Amalgamate series, 2013
Mixed media collage on checkerboard, author photograph

Rooted in traditional practices through process and imagery while engaging with modernist styles, his collages are consummate contemporary Ho-Chunk art. Payer’s use of established conventional imagery, such as feathers, reflects what is widely accepted and understood as “native” or “traditional,” yet the artist stresses the importance of self-naming, re-defining these concepts on his own terms.¹ Influenced by Futurism, he uses compressed spaces and angular, jagged forms to create tumultuous portraits that cause the eyes to rapidly move across the picture plane, suggestive of modern, urban lives in constant flux. His resulting forms are Cubist in style; a re-appropriation of various shapes that visually translate into an image of someone that Payer knows. Scholars have referred to works of contemporary Indigenous art that blend traditional practices and imagery with a modernist style as hybrids.² This viable interpretation implies the clashing of cultures that results in new forms; however, Payer’s work is more effectively understood on its own terms, as a continuum of traditional Ho-Chunk creative practices that have been affected by encounters, removals, displacements, and the passage of time.

Sarah Anne Stolte

1 Henry Payer, “Artist Interview” for Encoded: Traditional Patterns/A Contemporary Response, 2012.
2 Cynthia Nadelman, “Tribal Hybrids,” ARTnews Vol 106, No 6 (June 2007): 122-127.

Duane Slick

Settler Americans scraped away the cultural topography of the Native American landscape much like a scribe would re-purpose a palimpsest. With this wiping out, colonizers forcibly removed and persecuted existing cultures and people in favor of new flags, songs, and a new Nation. But attempting to make one thing invisible is not the same as making it void: the original narrative remains in the layer beneath and is not completely gone; like the tracings of erased pencil writing, the original narrative remains present and alive.

Duane Slick understands veiled spaces. As a child, he was instructed by his parents not to tell his non-Native classmates at school about the Meskwaki and Ho-Chunk events he attended on weekends.¹ After experiencing systemic cultural erasure through boarding schools, removals from homelands, and other practices, his family learned over the generations to hide their traditions from non-Native communities. Slick felt divided: he wanted to work with imagery and knowledge of his Native heritage in a visible way, yet he had been instructed to keep these aspects of his life invisible to outsiders. His art practice is a response to the predicament of his parents' admonitions to hide his heritage. Through presentation of figures and imagery that are not immediately legible or discernable, Slick is able to work as a visual artist engaging with his traditions while protecting cultural knowledge learned from his family.



Duane Slick
The Great Design I, 2010,
Lithograph

Each of Slick's lithographs on view for *Air, Land, Seed* exhibits a single figure layered repeatedly onto a sheet of white paper utilizing shades of white ink. The effect is mirage-like: layering blurs the outlines, which imparts a sense of motion. Working in a way that mimics the photographic process of exposing an image to light multiple times on a single sheet of treated paper, Slick layers ink to repeatedly render his figures. The imagery on *The Great Design I, II, and III* are cloaked by the visual obfuscation that results from his process, and they are also masked to the degree that the uninitiated viewer recognizes or misrecognizes the cultural significance of the figures.

Through layering imagery and obscuring iconography, Slick makes works available to a diverse audience and that are also relevant to him, while guarding private knowledge acquired from his family. Barely traceable and just beyond easy recognition to an outside audience, Slick's imagery asserts the continuous presence and life of his traditions beginning long before colonial attempts at erasure.

Sarah Anne Stolte

¹ Slick, Duane. Address to the School of Advanced Research and the Indian Arts Research Center Santa Fe, New Mexico, August 5th, 2010. sarweb.org



C. Maxx Stevens

Native Americans tie their identities to land. “Where are you from?” is the question one Native asks another when meeting for the first time. The answer is not where one currently lives but who are your people and your culture? Presently living in Colorado, Maxx Stevens would answer this question with, “the Seminole Nation,” a culture and place she identifies with in Oklahoma. Located in the southern center of the United States, Oklahoma is land to 39 federally recognized tribes. One state, but many Nations; each tribe is sovereign with its own governance, language and culture.

A mixed media artist, Maxx Stevens draws on her cultural identity to create narratives of her life as a Seminole woman, always tying herself to her family and the condition of her people. Stevens studied sculpture and ceramics, earning a BFA from Wichita State University (1979) and an MFA from Indiana University (1987), but is most known for her conceptual installation work. In her work, *Last Supper*, a site specific installation pointing to the effects of how the food we consume is making a negative impact within our communities, Stevens builds a visual narrative based on private and public memories and experiences to deal with the devastating effect of diabetes throughout Native Nations. Typical of Stevens work, *Last Supper* creates a larger social awareness of the epidemic and its dilemma in all of the United States.

For the Venice Biennale's *Air, Land, Seed* exhibition, Stevens has created a new work titled, *Cultural Landscape Sustained*. The video installation reflects Stevens' observations of the modern-day changes to the land and the environment of the

C. Maxx Stevens

“Last Supper” detail by Maxx Stevens

Mixed media, Image Courtesy of MoCNA

Photograph by Dianne Stromberg

Seminole Nation over the past four decades. Stevens travels regularly to Oklahoma to visit her aging mother and has continued to watch the environment slowly change to create its own sense of identity.

Petroleum companies have extracted oil and natural gases for their benefit from Indian Country for decades, and Oklahoma is a premiere state for these natural resources. Natives rarely profit from the petroleum businesses that operate loud oil wells at all times of the day and night on Indian land. In an effort to become independent, tribal nations of Oklahoma have developed businesses for their own sustainability such as technology companies, construction businesses, tribal smoke shops, restaurants and gasoline stations. And the opening of tribal casinos in Oklahoma has brought “an odd sense of pride yet with a price,” says Stevens.

In the short video *Cultural Landscape Sustained*, Stevens juxtaposes the Seminole land and the environment in relationship with each other by screening them on four TV sets over different periods. She then videotaped them playing all at one time producing images that are nostalgic and contemporary. Sound was added to give it a sense of time and memory. Always challenging the viewer, Stevens asks, what does the future hold for the environment, landscape and sustainability of Native Peoples?

Patsy Phillips

Dyani White Hawk

While at the height of its most prosperous years, Venice advanced easel painting in 15th century Europe by adopting the use of two easily-sourced materials: sail canvas upon which to paint and ground pigment shipped from the far across the globe to the Venetian *entrepôt*. Local artists worked on canvas, not heavy wood panels, using color mixed with oil to produce paintings that were less susceptible to rot and more easily moved to higher ground when *acqua alta* flooded the Republic. Innovation fueled by necessity and material availability developed a painterly practice that appealed to artists and collectors.

The ways Native American artists, like all artists, respond to contemporary conditions are simultaneously a product of and a response to the time in which they live. Dyani White Hawk, who is of both Sicangu Lakota and European ancestry, remarks that her work “embraces the dilemmas and contradictions, as well as the joys and blessings, of a cross-cultural existence.” Like the painters who chose to paint upon canvas, White Hawk is an artist who responds to a world where both concrete and abstract concerns present themselves with a tide-like frequency and insistence. At the crux of her practice is the question of how to identify as both multi-ethnic and Indigenous in a moment where identity grows ever more complex. Globalism, of which the Venice Biennale is an example *par excellence*, weighs upon many Native American artists’ minds as they consider what issues to tackle in their respective practices. Faced with these issues, White Hawk challenges herself to “provide an honest representation of self and culture.”

Art critics and art historians often try to understand Indigenous artists from a defined interpretive viewpoint. White Hawk’s paintings prove that seeking a fixed lens through which we might encounter Native American artists’ work is an unresolvable



Dyani White Hawk
Blue and White Stripes (History of Abstraction), 2013
Acrylic, Oil, sz.13 Seed Beads and Thread on Canvas, 12 x 12 inches

challenge. Rather, we must approach each art object and art practice guided by the terms and clues the artist sets out for us in his or her work. Viewers must encounter White Hawk’s work with a spirit of adventure that mirrors the contemporaneity, complexity, and immediacy of her practice.

Every two years, the world comes to Venice by air, land, and sea to build a bustling and beautiful art event that showcases various values, diverse perspectives, and unique cultural practices. Yet, what is left out? What is pushed to the edges? Why has the Biennale not loosened its tie to 19th century nationalisms and reinvented itself around an awareness that “nation” is a contingent term at best? The presence of Indigenous artists who represent their sovereign nations here in Venice positions these questions in an especially interesting light.

White Hawk responds to the untidiness of overlapping identities, complex cultural interfaces, and issues of power, agency, and voice by taking to the studio. While her canvases incorporate traditional craft including quill work, abstraction, and themes influenced by her experience as a Native American individual, there is observable influence from European painting traditions, American academic art training based in imported Bauhaus principles, and a deep transcultural awareness.

Encountering White Hawk’s paintings makes for an experience that must be negotiated, researched, mapped, tested, traced and retraced. Her work requires the viewer to engage the process. Just like navigating the sable colored walkways and glimmering canals of Venice, the meaning and beauty is in the journey.

Paul Baker Prindle

A red-tail hawk scrapes the sandstone wall with its beak.

A shower of sparks skate across the morning sky.

You think this bottle will open a canyon wall

and light a trail

trampled by gloved hands

as you inhale earth, wind, water,

through the gasoline nozzle

at trail's end,

a flint spear driven into the key switch.

You think you can return to that place

where your mother held her sleeves above the rising tides

saying, "We are here again

on the road covered with television snow;

we are here again

the song has thudded."

tó

tó

tó

tó

tó

tó

tó



John Hitchcock

Epicentro Retracing the Plains on the occasion of La Biennale di Venezia 54th international arts exhibition, positioned on the Zattere in the Dorsoduro area at the University of Ca' Foscari, Venice, Italy, 2011

Departures

Yoruba people believe an artist must be itinerant – engaged in constant departures of creativity. Such artists have minds on the move, like the artists in *Air Land Seed*. Dis-place-ment and diaspora create opportunities as well as challenges. When one is compelled to contemplate, re-think, and enact notions of place and personhood, wonderfully powerful art can happen. Multiples have a ripple effect as images and ideas spread, changing minds and hearts as the seeds of new ideas are sown. The touch of a hand and the hair on one's head can transform thinking and acting. Cross-cultural existence, life on-the-hyphen, can bring both joys and blessings, as well as sorrows and loss. Neither insiders nor outsiders, cultural in-betweeners continually transgress borders and limitations. Whether in air, on land, or sea, nomadic artists seed the world with visions that transform thinking and being in the world. May these creative journeys continue to enrich...always.

Henry John Drewal

Evjue-Bascom Professor, University of Wisconsin-Madison

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www.veniceconnected.com/node/297

Copper Canyon Press
www.coppercanyonpress.org

Edgewood College
edgewood.edu

Institute of American Indian Arts, Museum of Contemporary Native Arts:
www.iaia.edu
www.iaia.edu/museum

Santa Fe Arts Institute
www.sfai.org

University of Venice Ca’Foscari
www.unive.it/nqcontent.cfm?a_id=60550

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