Mia The Docent Muse

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HEARTS OF OUR PEOPLE: NATIVE WOMEN ARTISTS

June 2 – August 18

We are pleased to bring you this extra issue of *The Docent Muse*, devoted entirely to Mia's upcoming special exhibition, *Hearts of Our People: Native Women Artists*, opening June 2, and running through August 18. We believe you will find this exhibition a truly *transformational* experience and, in turn, a great opportunity for you as a docent to transform the understanding of your guests of the artistic legacy, resiliency and vitality of Native women.

Table Cloth
Sisseton Dakota
Cat., No. 47

Prepare yourself: leave at the door your preconceptions and assumptions. That would include notions fostered by the conquering culture about "classic" or "typical" Native ceramics, fabric arts and carving. Were you aware that most Native art has been created by women?

Forget the idea that there is anything static or fixed in this tradition. These artists are adaptive, adoptive, assimilative, imaginative.

Do you imagine this as a 19th-century genre? Forget it! Here is contemporary work; here are today's ceramics and weaving, yes, and also photography, digital arts, installation...and a very "hot" 1985 Chevy el Camino named *Maria*.

Abandon also notions about how Native women accomplished only "craft," or ideas of subservience to males. Forget the notion that Native women artists were nameless: although never named by European collectors, archeologists or merchants (unless a name would make the white trader money), women artists were well-known and very powerful forces in their communities and beyond.

Hearts of Our People speaks to us through three themes: Legacy, Power and Relationships, and we will develop those themes here, along with unique profiles of some strong, fascinating, accomplished women.

Special thanks to Jill Ahlberg Yohe, Mia's Associate Curator of Native American Art, for her help, time, support and access in creating this issue (though, to be clear, we, not Jill, take full responsibility for content here.) –Ed.

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LEGACY SUSTAINS, INSPIRES, TEACHES, CONTINUES

Linda Krueger

Without exception, Native women artists represented in Mia's grand special exhibition, *Hearts of Our People (HOOP)*, speak with reverential gratitude of the women who went before: mothers, grandmothers, aunts, who for generations held their communities and cultures together in the face of hardship and stress. These ancients preserved and endlessly reinvigorated and reimagined their artistic traditions. In doing so, they insured the survival and vibrancy of their heritage, their *legacy*.

Colonialists and conquerors, within 200 years of their arrival, by means of disease, war, famine, genocide and the relentless push for land, wiped out 90% of Native people. The cultures that survived faced oppression and forced assimilation. Many were moved from their traditional lands to reservations and boarding schools designed to "eliminate the Indian" from Native people. Until passage of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act in 1978, Native people were forbidden to practice their cultural and religious traditions. Those who persevered through these harsh conditions faced blocked economic opportunities, persecution and racism.

Legacy sustained Native American art and culture through these challenges. The HOOP Board members describe legacy as "a concept and way of being that encapsulates the past, present, and future, and interconnects aesthetics and knowledge systems that transcend time and place" [Cat., p. 20]. Teachings passed on through countless generations have kept not only Native art but more broadly, Native culture, alive and strong.

The European art world, including especially its "experts," merchants and critics, has also challenged the art of Native women. The "classical" European (i.e., white, male and Christian) art tradition classified only painting and sculpture as "art" and devalued ceramics, basketry, and textiles as "craft," claiming those demonstrated little if any innovation. Art historians rejected the creative genius of Native women's geometric abstraction, even at a time when non-Native abstract art was all the rage. As a result, Native women's art has traditionally been significantly undervalued and under-appreciated. And yet, Native cultural traditions endure.

This exhibition recognizes the key role of Native women in this survival. They demonstrated remarkable resiliency in their ability to "change, adapt, bounce back, re-form, and reimagine" [Cat., p. 22]. They did this by including the next generation in their work process, sharing technique, aesthetic principles and cultural norms through oral traditions. "We are doing this for our children and for those faces that are yet to come," explains Carla Hemlock, a Mohawk fiber artist [Cat., p. 20].

The legacy of Native women's art across the generations has four characteristics: abundance and generosity, abstraction, invention, and hybridity.

First is the aesthetic of *abundance and generosity*. Abundance in expenditures of time and material is illustrated in *Inuit beaded parka* [Cat., No. 26], of the late 19th century. Such parkas required 160,000 beads each. Both abundance and generosity resulted in the Northern Plains quilled *Young Man's Vest* [Cat., No. 53]. Consider the number of porcupine quills that had to be gathered and processed to fully cover this vest. The young man for whom it was made surely understood the love and generosity with which it was given.

Inuit beaded parka
Cat., No. 26

For millennia, *abstraction* was almost exclusively the domain of Native women artists, while figurative art was produced exclusively by Native men. One of the oldest works in abstraction in the exhibition is a *Mimbres bowl* [Cat., No. 28]. A later example is the work of Mary Sully (Dakota, 1896-1963), who painted "personality portraits" of celebrities in abstract triptychs [*Lawrence Tibbett*, Cat., No. 43]. Other examples include painted *Arapaho envelopes* [Cat., No. 42], and beaded *Arapaho bags* [Cat., No. 41]. Per Teri Greeves, co-curator of the exhibition, abstraction is a feminine way of seeing and depicting the world, regardless of the technology.

Invention, too, drives legacy – in particular the transformation of materials from one state to another. "What Native woman first looked at a porcupine and said, 'Maybe I could make art out of those sharp quills?'" [Cat., p. 65]. For centuries Native women have used their knowledge of science, technology and the natural world to transform raw materials into works of art. For example, Pueblo women have made baskets for at least two thousand years – *Ancient Pueblo Basket* [Cat., No. 29], and continue to do so today. They mastered material science to determine what materials to collect, when and how they had to be processed, to endure daily use. "When women invented basketry they made art possible," said Otis T. Mason, an American ethnologist and Smithsonian Institution curator [Cat., p. 67]. Basketry inventions continue today. See *Hearts of Our Women, Shan Goshorn*, [Cat., No. 30].

Finally, legacy brings *hybridity*, the blending of new materials into existing art forms, the reinvention of tradition. Europeans brought new materials and tools, including steel needles and beads, which replaced quills. But this didn't start with the arrival of the colonialists. Dentalium (seashells from the West coast) and copper (from the Great Lakes) were precious materials traded across the continent prior to the arrival of Europeans and incorporated into existing art forms. An example of hybridity is the Dakota/Nakoda woman's outfit *Give Away Horses*, Joyce, Juanita, and Jesse Rae Growing Thunder [Cat., No. 6], which incorporates hide, quills, and beads. Both beadwork and embroidery illustrate the success Native women artists have had in maximizing the possibilities presented by new materials while preserving their legacies.

Maria
Rose B. Simpson
1985 Chevy El Camino
Cat. No. 36

Native women artists continue today to build on their strong legacy of abundance and generosity, abstraction, invention, and hybridity, as illustrated by two key works in the exhibition. The first is Mohawk artist Shelley Niro's *Thinking Caps* [Cat., No. 49], which combines beads with photo collage to evoke the stages of a woman's life. The second is *Maria*, Rose B. Simpson [Cat., No. 36], a customized 1985 Chevy El Camino inspired by traditional Tewa black-on-black pottery.

As these artists make their own art, they hold themselves accountable for passing on their technical and cultural knowledge to the next generation, so that the legacy continues. In the words of Yvonne Walker Keshick, one of the most outstanding Anishinaabe quill artists of today, "I believe it is truly our responsibility to teach others all of the best things of our culture. Teaching! This is what our elders did for us and it is what we as elders have to do for our young people" [Cat., p. 67].

JOAN HILL: A LIFETIME OF PAINTING AND SHARING

Sara Wagner

At 88 years of age, Joan Hill is the oldest artist with work featured in *Hearts of Our People.* Yet her vitality and energy make this remarkable woman seem decades younger, and it was a delightful privilege to be able to speak with her. Joan has a fierce love for her family, her ancestors and her Native background, and her art reflects this affection.

A member of the Muscogee Creek Confederacy, Joan has Creek and Cherokee heritage and lives in Muskogee, Oklahoma. Hill's work selected for this special exhibition, *Women's Voices at the Council* [Cat. No. 114], is her tribute to the significant and powerful roles women play in her community.

Joan wanted this painting to represent women of all ages, birth to old age. Look closely to see the baby peering over the shoulder of a woman in the background. The stunning central figure represents the *Beloved Woman*. *Ghi-ga-u*, the Cherokee word for "Beloved," is the highest honor that can be bestowed upon a Native American woman. This title was given for leadership and deeds of great valor.

The women's clothing depicted includes both "pre-contact and post-contact adornment. The white-shell bead necklaces and fringed deerhide dresses reflect Muscogee attire until the late eighteenth century, when women began wearing imported European cloth…" [America Meredith, Cat., p. 151]. According to Joan, the women also planted cotton and spun their own cloth. What followed was a new form of ceremonial attire which was a trendsetting combination of new and old styles, demonstrating the cosmopolitan way in which Native women have continued to adopt and adapt throughout time.

Women's Voices at the Council
Joan Hill
Cat. No. 114

Many of Joan's paintings are in public collections, including the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington D.C. She has received more than 250 awards for her work. To know in your lifetime that your work is valued by others is a gift that Joan graciously acknowledges. Her response to that admiration is to be generous in sharing both her art and her time with others. *Women's Voices at the Council* was commissioned for the Governor's Council on the Status of Women in 1990, the same year that Joan donated this painting to the Oklahoma State Capitol's art collection. Joan has also been involved in many organizations over a span of several decades, including her leadership role as a U.S. commissioner on the Indian Arts and Crafts Board.

Joan grew up not knowing much about her Native background. While taking a portraiture course at Bacone College, her instructor, the late painter-sculptor Dick West (Southern Cheyenne), encouraged her to focus her work on her Native heritage. Joan turned to her father, who eagerly shared Creek legends with her. Using her imagination to paint these important and ancient stories delighted Joan. She found it to be a more creative process than portraiture.

Joan also started attending Creek and Cherokee dances with her parents. The first dance she attended was a Creek Buffalo Dance, where she asked the tribal leader for permission to take photographs. She assured him that she would never publish the pictures or exploit the Native people. The tribal leader recognized her father, William McKinley Hill, from their younger years, and they were all graciously invited to stay for the ceremonies and a meal. This dance was just the beginning of the research that inspired Joan to paint numerous tribal ceremonies.

Joan has lived on her family's land for her entire life, and she is deeply connected to her late parents and brother. Joan says she often asked people in her family to model for her paintings. She once asked her dad to run through the yard wearing a robe so she could observe how an older person looked running while wearing a flowing garment. His assistance provided her with the image she needed when creating her painting, *Creek Elders' Dance* (private collection). Joan took a break from her work in the 1980s to care for her aging parents. She considers this time with her parents as a high point in her life. While Joan acknowledges the sadness and tragedy in our world, she doesn't choose to paint those stories. She prefers instead to paint the joy and beauty in life.

Joan Hill remains active in her lifelong Muscogee community. She is grateful that her work continues to be admired around the world, and she eagerly looks forward to seeing the HOOP show when it comes to the Philbrook Museum of Art in Tulsa.

ON TOUR WITH D.Y. BEGAY: A NAVAJO WEAVER COMES TO MINNESOTA

Rose Stanley-Gilbert

Even among so many dazzling images this is one that is sure to stop most Minnesotans in their tracks. It will be on many tours.

D.Y. Begay grew up on the Navajo Reservation in Arizona. When she visited *Gichi-onigamiing* (Ojibwe for Grand Portage Indian Reservation of the Lake Superior Band of the Chippewa), it was winter. She sketched and observed a natural world vastly different from her home.

A long-time weaver in an ancient weaving tradition, she uses naturally-dyed yarns which vary in color. What does that add? Look at the color of the water and consider how many colors of yarn she needed. What must it have been like to try to locate a whole new set of plants for a palette of northern colors? How would it look different if she used synthetic yarns of solid blues and grays? Below the peninsula

there is a hazy white yarn; why do you think she added that? How does her weaving awaken your five senses?

Winter in the North
D.Y. Begay
Naturally dyed yarn
Cat., No. 88
Commissioned by Mia

The Virginia Museum of Fine Art has a helpful 7-minute video *"Hear My Voice" Artist Profile: D.Y. Begay* in which she talks about her traditional process and approach to weaving as a fourth-generation weaver.

NATIVE ARTISTS THRIVE IN DYNAMIC RELATIONSHIPS

Rose Stanley-Gilbert

Relationships of many sorts permeate *Hearts of Our People*. Collaborative relationships brought this special exhibition to life: Jill Ahlberg Yohe, Mia's Associate Curator of Native American Art, and Teri Greeves, artist, independent curator and member of the Kiowa Indian Tribe of Oklahoma, conceived the unprecedented focus on Native women. Then they joined in productive relationship with a 21-member advisory committee of Native women artists and scholars for the daunting task of developing the exhibition, selecting art of Native North American women over the last 1000 years, and organizing and presenting it.

But relationships also define how and why Native women create, their themes, material choices and inspirations. This exhibition explores several of those relationships: with the spirit world; with the ancestors; with the natural world; and within community.

In *Seal-Gut Parka* [Cat. no. 58], Central Yup'ik (Alaska) artist Annie Oktokiyuk explores several relationships, beginning with the partnership between men and women. Historically, men hunted and women processed and sewed hides, skins, and internal organs to make clothing and containers. Imagine the time it would take to create the pattern, tan, dry and stitch the seal gut, prepare and spin the sinew for thread and then sew it all together with a waterproof stitch. The re-

Seal-Gut Parka
Annie Oktokiyuk
Cat., No. 58

sult? A parka made from intestines that is naturally waterproof and windproof – and more effective than our modern raincoats! The parka also symbolizes community relationship – teamwork in shared goals and caring for others. One seal provides hundreds of pounds of meat that can be distributed within the community. And, on a deeper level, the parka is about relationship with nature: the woman's artistry honors the animal who gave its life to clothe her family and feed her neighbors.

Complementing the parka is Inupiaq (northwestern Alaska) artist Sonya Kelliher-Combs's installation *The Things We Carry* [Cat. no. 59]. Using traditional and modern materials, her work responds to the high rate of suicide within Alaskan Native communities. Elongated pouches, like those worn to carry personal possessions, hang from the ceiling and cast gentle, swaying shadows. What do you think the pouches might represent? What do the moving shadows add to your interpretation? The pouches dangle from strings, referencing the way pairs of mittens are connected to keep them from getting lost. How do the strings symbolically tie into the importance of relationships?

Christi Belcourt's brilliantly detailed *Wisdom of the Universe* [Cat. no. 46], is a painting about relationship with nature – hers and ours. She works as an artist, but also as an environmentalist, advocate and organizer. Visitors will be captivated first by the many species of plants, and then they will find the birds. All are currently listed as threatened, endangered, or extinct in her native Ontario, Canada. This work reaches out to create a relationship with our visitors, to engage them in concern for our endangered world.

Wisdom of the Universe
Christi Belcourt
Cat., No. 46

Pollination [Cat. no. 113] by Emmi Whitehorse is an intimate, quiet meditation on the artist's relationship with nature, and *hózhó*, the Navajo concept combining notions of living in balance, harmony, health, order and beauty. What do you see that reminds you of a harmonious natural world? Things seem to be in motion: squiggles and natural forms float across the surface; while some come toward us, others recede into an orderly blue world. How does the artist imply motion? Whitehorse's family raised sheep, and her grandmother was a weaver. Early on, Emmi learned of color through the subtle shades of the naturally dyed wool. Her work also relates to the natural world where she explored the landscape of the Southwest, noting how perceptions of color change with shadows and light, with changes in clouds and at twilight.

When Native women have adopted, adapted, and assimilated ideas and materials, experts of the dominant culture labelled it cultural decline instead of a vibrant response to a changing world. Read the story of the quillwork *Mi'kmaw Chair* [Cat. No. 11, p. 28]. After the decline of the fur trade the Mi'kmaq women of Nova Scotia adapted by collaborating with Victorian furniture makers, using European templates but their own sense of color and design. In 1856, the first synthetic (aniline) dyes were created. Native women embraced the new technology, but made their own aesthetic color choices by mixing quills that were synthetically dyed with their own natural dyes. Their patterns and colors appealed to Victorian tastes, and so enabled them to preserve their communities and way of life.

Beadwork can begin conversations about the importance Native women attach to their relationships with ancestors and future generations. Jamie Okuma's *Adaptation II* [Cat. No. 80] began with shoes designed by Louboutin; in her use of porcupine quills and glass beads, the artist asserts the power of Native women to bridge the worlds of modern style and ancient traditions. The freedom to create one's own identity is a gift for future generations.

Adaptation II
Jamie Okuma
Cat., No. 80

We have looked at many aspects of relationships: the rewards of working with others; partnership between men and women; responsibilities of community; the reciprocal relationship with nature; reaching beyond the community to adopt foreign ways; making a connection to the ancestors and generations of the future. Visitors will find many opportunities to reflect on their own relationships as they make connections with the art in this exhibition.

A COAT OF MANY MEANINGS

Ingrid Roberts

Anita Fields' face lights up when she reminisces about how her grandmother and aunties taught her the Osage, or "Native way" of thinking. She describes it as a value system, like "seeing the world through a special lens." Fields has taken inspiration from past generations of Osage women, and worked to honor and respect her Native American culture, by creating *Wedding Coat (It's In Our DNA, It's Who We Are*) [Cat., No.17)].

As a visual artist, Anita Fields produces primarily 3D clay work, but also creates with fabric and textiles. She started working with natural materials at a young age, and she enjoys providing kids with similar experiences through artist residency programs. These observations and interactions with youth remind Fields of her own early hands-on experiences. When she was a young girl, Anita recalls filling mini pie tins with mud and baking them in the hot summer sun of her Oklahoma backyard, much like the process of firing clay in her studio today.

Growing up, Fields asked her grandmother to teach her to sew. Feeling the material in her hands connected her to the sensation of creating and making something, and it still does. She says, "When you have the privilege to create or make things, that's part of it, that you understand that connection and how important it is. It's that continuum of thought, and love, and respect defining who you are." The concept of respect for Osage culture, coupled with legacy and the passing down of traditions to new generations is central to Anita Fields' artistic practice.

Fields participates in the Tulsa Artist Fellowship, where she focuses on textiles. She draws upon the cultural history and tradition of Osage Wedding Coats, and explores these pieces in art form. According to Fields, the Osage tradition of transforming wool, double-breasted military-style coats into elaborately-decorated, adorned tribal wedding coats originated at least as early as the 1700s. The Osage were the primary suppliers of pelts to the French when they came to the United States, and they received the coats in trade. The coats may also have

been given to delegations of Osage who travelled to Washington, D.C. in diplomatic or treaty negotiations. The structured, fitted style of the coats did not complement the large physical stature of Osage men, so the women applied their artistic skills of embroidery, beadwork and ribbon work to transform the coats into highly stylized garments that became a significant part of Osage ceremony and legacy.

Wedding coats were worn by Osage brides in a traditional ceremony of arranged marriage until as recently as the 1950s. Brides also carried a top hat embellished with feather plumes and satin ribbon. The coats and accessories no longer grace the wedding ceremony, though they do play a significant role in another Osage tradition – the drum ceremony, or *I-Lon-schka*. Innovation is at work as contemporary Osage women strive to mirror history and tradition, creating new wedding coats to be worn in the drum ceremony. Multiple generations now work together to assemble these iconic pieces and honor their cultural customs. Respect for the past is transferred to future generations during this process. All of this is extremely important and inspiring to Fields.

Simply entitled *Wedding Coat* (2018) [Cat.no.17], Anita Fields' contribution to *Hearts of Our People* is anything but simple. Her textile creation honors Osage culture and tradition, showcasing the diverse artistic expertise of Osage women. While the coat features traditional artistic skills on the outside, Fields describes the interior silk lining as a "mixed media" explosion of symbolism. She has used a large-scale Epson printer to transfer Osage images, such as historic photos, ethnology reports and newspaper articles, to the interior of *Wedding Coat.* On a personal level, she has also included her grandmother's photograph, roll number and Indian name. It is the combination of innovation and tradition that makes this piece so powerful, "The exterior speaks to the Indigenous capacity to focus on making our world aesthetically pleasing, while the interior reminds us that as we remember our past, we work to make our future beautiful" [Cat., p. 42]. In *Wedding Coat,* Anita Fields respectfully shares important aspects of Osage legacy, as well as the evolution of her Native American culture.

Additional information on the Osage Drum Ceremony may be found here.

Traditional Osage Wedding Attire


Dressed for the Drum Ceremony

MUD WOMAN

Helen Leslie

Nora Naranjo Morse has a broad array of talents and accomplishments: sculptor, jewelry-maker, creator of large-scale public spaces, painter, poet, environmental activist, author and film producer. (Her sister Dolly "remembers watching Nora as a youngster using colors that Dolly would never have thought to use. Dolly says Nora creates magic from things others might consider mundane or from material that has been thrown away" [Those Naranjo Women, Tessie Naranjo, Cat. p. 81]. She is best known for her work with clay.

Early in her artistic career, Nora conceived of her alter-ego, *Pearlene*, a relatable clay figure inspired by traditional Pueblo clowns, who was featured in her book, *Mud Woman: Poems from the Clay*, (The Univer-

sity of Arizona Press, © 1992). In keeping with her values, Nora stopped making the increasingly-popular character when she received an offer to mass produce *Pearlene* figures. Nora's Preface to *Mud Woman*, (pp. 9-16), is a wonderful first-hand account of her life experience, world view and philosophy as an artist.

Nora's work celebrates the beauty and warmth of Pueblo culture but also laments the impact of conquest and re-settlement and the influence of American popular culture on Native people. Her approach is often filled with gentle humor and irony. Through her public installations, short films and participation in conferences, workshops and speaking engagements, she invites others to think about shared histories and the kind of world they want to live in. Her website provides an artful and accessible look at her work.

Nora Naranjo Morse's "family's roots go deep into the soil of a small Tewa Pueblo...called Santa Clara" [Those Naranjo Women, Tessie Naranjo, Cat. p. 75]. Nora's sister Tessie still lives in the same adobe house occupied by the family for at least six generations. While cleaving to Tewa Pueblo core values and to her clan's generations-old pottery traditions, Nora has found innovative and uniquely individual uses for and treatments of clay and earth in her creations.

Nora's creation, *Our Homes Ourselves* [Cat. No. 34], is one of a body of work, comprised of groupings of tall clay towers, inspired by her experience of building an adobe home for her family. In a recent email exchange she remarked, "I was acknowledging that a home basically is a large vessel we live in – especially in the Pueblo world where clay and mud to build pots/houses/ovens come from the same source."

She went on, "When I did *Our Homes Ourselves*, I was thinking of community. How historically Pueblo people lived in close proximity. Families lived in small quarters, speaking to the inter-dependence of indigenous communities. Concern for survival knitted us together. And as you may know, Pueblos were some of the first apartments in the United States. I took this cultural inspiration and abstracted the adobe architecture that was familiar to me growing up and created the towers. It's important to note that I was also experimenting with clay combinations. *Our Homes Ourselves* is made of two types of Pueblo clays – Micaceous and Santa Clara clay, both of which I mine and process myself from Northern New Mexican mountains and hillsides. This combination of clays was especially useful because Micaceous clay adds strength to Santa Clara clay, which is less textured and more oily. I wanted the towers to be tall, so I needed a strong clay. At that point in my creative journey, I was seeing how far I could push traditional Pueblo clay, which was ordinarily used for vessel-making. So, there were several inspirations layered into these pieces that came from a cultural/ historical/environmental and creative place. ...our homes represent our culture, our environment and who we are as people...and for me, that speaks to a global acknowledgment of community, which so many agrarian cultures understood completely. As a contemporary indigenous woman, issues of community and natural resource-culling in a respectful manner resonated in a profound way for me. There was a quote from an indigenous elder that went something to this effect – by our houses you will know us."

Our Homes Ourselves, 1999
Nora Naranjo Morse
Clay, paint
Gift of Sara and David Lieberman
2000.76A-I

Nora's 2007 installation, *Always Becoming* [Smithsonian Institution Cat. No. 26/5840], on the grounds of the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C., expands upon the ideas embodied in *Our Homes Ourselves*. See "Always Becoming Sculpture Project" podcasts.

In *Mud Woman*, Nora says, "In the Tewa language, there is no word for art. There is, however, the concept for an artful life, filled with inspiration and fueled by labor and thoughtful approach" (p. 15). In her creations and in her well-crafted life, Nora is fulfilling this ideal of Pueblo existence, building a unique legacy of creative engagement with the world.

Always Becoming, 2007
Nora Naranjo Morse
Installation
Smithsonian Institution Cat. No. 26/5840

FIRESIDE CHAT WITH MARY ANNE BARKHOUSE

Brenda Wyley

In late March, I spent a wonderful afternoon talking with artist Mary Anne Barkhouse, who had just put another log on the fire in her home in Canada, where the bone-chilling winter was overstaying its welcome. I tried to impress Mary Anne by saying *Gilakasla* (Gee-lah-kah-slah) which is a friendly greeting in her ancestral tongue of Kwakiutl. She chuckled, appreciated the gesture and mentioned that her grandfather and her uncle were the last of her family to speak the language fluently and had tried to teach her in her youth.

Born in Vancouver, British Columbia in 1961, Mary Anne grew up surrounded by artists and role models on both sides of her family. A fellow artist introduced her years ago as "my friend Mary Anne who is the most Canadian person I know, as her mother is First Nations and her father is a Mountie!" Mary Anne's mother is from a long line of carvers in the Kwakwaka'wakw tradition, including Ellen Neel and Lou-Ann Neel (both also included in this exhibition). Her father, now in his eighties, hails from a farming family of German extraction in Nova Scotia which includes fourteen brothers and sisters, all still living and some still busy creating embroidery and quilting. Mary Anne is a classically-trained pianist and self-proclaimed "bookworm, punk rocker, metalsmith, installation artist, friend of animals and foe to evil." Her bi-coastal heritage taught her the importance of taking care of the land and the environment we depend on for future generations.

Mia's *Hearts of Our People, Native Women Artists*, will feature a work by Mary Anne Barkhouse titled *Sovereign* [Cat. No. 79]: a bronze red fox relaxes in a regal, comfortable pose on a green velvet, upholstered *chaise-longue* created in the French style from the era of Louis XIV. Mary Anne designed and sized the couch specifically for the fox sitting on it and worked with a fine woodworker and textile artist to create it. She chose this time period as it coincides with the beginning of the colonial fur trade (represented by the fox) and the arrival and intersection of European cultures in Canada in the 1600s (represented by the couch). That historical moment calls out to her the profound implications of 17th-century events that still resonate today. Mary Anne remarked that "the beautiful opulent design of furniture coming out of Europe during this time of colonization, while being in stark

contrast to the wildness of the indigenous animals of Canada, also correlates to the luxurious textures found in the boreal landscape."

Mary Anne likes to tell stories through her art, and to use the attributes of animals to set the stage for starting a discussion. People are physically absent from her installations, but very present, indeed, in the nature of her domestic settings. She's also very interested in wildlife and the workings of environmental systems. She sets the stage for people to come look at the artwork and consider why animals are there. Each viewer will come to the work with a unique perspective, and, she hopes, in doing so, will enrich the circle of discussion.

I asked Mary Anne what she hoped viewers might take away from her work. She replied that she would like people to give thought to issues around land and "how fortunate we are to live in a land that, despite human industry, is still so vital and has so many characteristics and textures." If people think of nothing else when they view the fox relaxing on her *chaise-longue,* she hopes they will ponder "the intrinsic value of the land and all it has to offer and appreciate their own situations especially in urban surroundings with ecological devastation." She added that we should be "mindful of the environment and aware of how the land and animals can respond and bounce back," when nurtured. Now residing in Ontario, far removed from the cities she once occupied, Mary Anne lives more intentionally among Canada's native animals who are the "stars of her work!"

Mary Anne remarked that she's been fortunate to grow up with "a real sense of stewardship, to be a good land citizen and ensure that things are sustainable for future generations." Further, she remarked that "we are at a point in history where people are having important discussions about how to respect each other and how to develop the contemporary arena of First Nations art as opposed to taking it out of museums." She hopes that "non-Natives would approach Native art with a spirit of openness of mind to accept versions of events and truth that might be contrary to their own learned experience." Sounds like a central theme of Mia's *Hearts of Our People*.

THE POWER IN NATIVE WOMEN'S ART

Linda Krueger

Non-Natives may be surprised to learn via *Hearts of Our People* the degree to which Native women, artists in particular, hold power in their communities and culture – personal, physical, political and social. According to co-curators Jill Ahlberg Yohe and Terri Greeves, it all starts with a distinctive Native worldview: "the ability to create life holds sacred power, and life-creating women are considered inherently powerful whether their nations are matriarchal or patriarchal" [Cat., p. 25]. Cherish Parrish's homage to this power is her black ash basket tribute to the pregnant female form entitled *The Next Generation – The Carriers of Culture* [Cat., No. 115].

The Next Generation – The Carriers of Culture
Cherish Parrish
Cat., No. 115

Physical, personal and socio-political power enable Native women to create, and powerfully imbue, their art. Native art can be hard work. Consider the beautifully-painted sunburst *Buffalo robe* [Cat. No. 103]

created by Mrs. Tall Woman (Hanska Winyan) Charging Thunder, a Sihasapa (Blackfeet Lakota) woman living on the Standing Rock Reservation. This artist prepared the hide before applying the paint. This required soaking it to remove the salt; anchoring it to a rack; removing any remaining flesh; scraping it to a uniform thickness; softening it by applying brains, bone marrow and grease; and, perhaps, smoking it. These processes required great physical strength. Other Native women artists needed physical strength to procure and prepare their materials: consider digging clay for pots, harvesting plant materials for baskets or shearing animals, carding and spinning for weaving.

Many contemporary artists require physical strength as well. *Maria* [Cat. No. 36] is no mere empty shell. Rose B. Simpson, herself, detailed the car, but also modified the original very "hot" 1985 Chevy Camino into a powerful "muscle car" (and even offered to drive it across country to Minneapolis for its appearance at *Hearts of Our People*).

Personal power describes the ability to provide economically for families and communities. The exhibition includes many examples. Mary Kawennatakie Adams' story is particularly illustrative of an astute businesswoman. Her mother died when she was ten, and her father left tribal lands to find work in New York City. She was left to support herself and an older brother. She made and sold baskets to the local trading store; then she doubled her income by accepting payment from the store in loose cigarettes which she then resold. From this inauspicious beginning, Adams became a basket artist who was able to provide financially for her own twelve children. Never willing to settle by producing strictly utilitarian baskets, she went on to produce unique works of art such as the *Pope Basket* [Cat. No. 89], with 150 miniature baskets woven into a large basket. The original was presented to Pope John Paul II. The one in the exhibition is a replica made for the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Native women artists often wield the power of healing for themselves, their families and for others, particularly to overcome the effects of oppression within the family and community. At first glance, Lou-ann Neel's work *Childhood* [Cat., No. 96], is a portrait of her nephew, dressed in regalia for his naming ceremony. On closer examination it is a collage of school photographs of First Nations children taken from their homes to residential schools. Neel states she wants to "ensure children never have to wonder whether they are loved or whether they belong" [Cat., p. 265].

Finally, Native women have long exercised political, diplomatic and societal influence, epitomized by the *gaswehda* (wampum belt) named *Women's Nomination Belt* recreated by Iakonikohnrio Tonia Loran-Galban [Cat., No. 82]. Among the Haudenosaunee, the clan mother held sovereign authority to select the next chief from her matrilineal line as well as the right to initiate the process of removing him from office. The *Nomination Belt* is the symbol of that right.

Native women held political power with foreign countries as well. *Adornment: Iconic Perceptions*, by Keri Ataumbi and Jamie Okuma [Cat., No. 9], celebrates the role of Pocahontas as an important diplomat between North America and Europe.

Adornment: Iconic Perceptions
Keri Ataumbi and Jamie Okuma
Cat., No. 9

Contemporary Native artists are using their power to influence the retelling of history. Since colonial days, Native women have often experienced violence and continue to do so today. However, their stories are found in no historical reports or contemporaneous press accounts. Rebecca Belmore's photograph *Fringe* [Cat., No. 83], challenges the viewer to reconsider. She poses a Native woman as the odalisque from nineteenth-century European portraits, with an important variation: a bleeding slash from shoulder to hip. The wound is a vivid reminder of the often-untold trauma that Native women endure.

Fringe
Rebecca Belmore
photograph
Cat., No. 83

Contemporary Native artists employ their art to influence viewers on other critical societal issues, including racism, the environment, and Native identity. Jaune Quick-to-See Smith's painting *Trade Canoe for the North Pole* [Cat., No. 109], incorporates the iconic Native image of a canoe, laden with tropical plants and bound for the arctic, to raise the warning of climate change imperiling our future.

Power is, above all else, the ability to make a difference. Dakota Hoska reminds us in her essay *Seven Sisters*: "These are the voices of Native women determined to move themselves and the next generations into new ways of understanding the world around them. It would serve us well to follow their lead" [Cat., p. 297].

SPIRIT OF THE CLAY

Mary Anne Wark

Within and around the earth.
Within and around the hills.
Within and around the mountains.
Your authority returns to you.
Tewa saying

Santa Clara *owingeh* (Pueblo) clay artist Roxanne Swentzell has a remarkable story. The fact that she shares that story with two sisters, six aunts in her maternal line, numerous female cousins and nieces and at least seven generations of women in her family in the same tiny village makes the story even more noteworthy. Unlike many other indigenous people, the residents of Santa Clara were never relocated by the Spanish Conquistadors or American settlers. Across those generations women potters and sculptors in her (Naranjo) family developed deep, meaningful and life-centering relationship with ancestors, community, culture and the earth...and also with Clay-Old-Woman, the spirit of the clay who "lies within the earth and the clay. If people talk to her with respect, she will help them to create beautiful things" [*Children of Clay: A Family of Pueblo Potters,* p. 26, by Rina Swentzell (Roxanne's mother)].

Roxanne remembers digging clay with her mother when she was a small child. She would hold it, roll it and shape it, sometimes forming tiny figures, people and animals and showing her own feelings and thoughts. She says, "art was my first language. As a child I had a speech impediment, and this language problem led me to create clay figurines to express myself Today, these figures still tell my story, even though I have learned to talk since then." Later her life with clay led her to formal training at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa

Fe and at the Portland Museum of Art in Oregon before returning to Santa Clara to raise her family. But it is the spirit that enlivens her work.

The object *Nap* [Cat., No. 36] shows all the technical expertise of making clay while in relationship with the earth and the ancestors. This object is intimate and quiet, showing the bond between children and mother. But the image of Clay-Old-Woman, who is the spirit of clay and not only watches over such work, but lives and breathes life into it, is metaphorically referenced. Swentzell's large figure here is female. The children climbing over her are relatively tiny, suggesting the bond between spirit and earthly dwellers. And those of us who have watched children nap can appreciate the catty-wumpus positions the children are in. Swentzell captures those positions as well as the tired mother catching a wink or two while the children nap.

Nap
Roxanne Swentzell
Cat., No. 36

Swentzell says she feels her ancestors helping her decide what details are appropriate for her work. She knows that all clay is earth, and so she is less concerned about digging her own clay or with using the traditional methods. She uses coils of clay to build her figures which are hollow except for the fingers and toes. But her mastery of working with just the perfect wetness of clay, so that it keeps its shape but remains workable, shows her lifetime of experience. The surface technique involves applying slip, smoothing it by burnishing with a stone or knife before a clear glaze. Some of her work has painted details but not this one.

Her awards are many, but the influence of Roxanne Swentzell's remarkable story extends beyond her work with clay. She did not like school and so chose to homeschool her own children and grandchildren. She summarizes how learning takes place: "watch, listen, do" [Cat., p. 80]. She is deeply connected to nature. She suggested that her people return to the old Pueblo diet and has worked with her son, a historian, to study it. That diet has helped cure or prevent many serious illnesses in her community, including heart disease, high blood pressure and lupus. She has also pioneered agricultural techniques of the high desert, working with a group of modern Pueblo women. Her interest in adobe architecture and solar energy are two more aspects of her dedication to ecological and cultural sustainability – caring and being in touch with Mother Earth. Her days are filled with family, farming, storing food, collecting seeds, cooking and participating in community dances, but fortunately she saves her evenings for sculpture.

BEADING THROUGH TIME

Ginny Wheeler

"'The bead lady is coming, the bead lady is coming,' cried the little girl as she ran down the road. Stopping at all the homes in the lane, she poked her head through their open windows, careful not to hit the pies that were cooling on the windowsills, to let them know the bead lady was coming" [Cat. p. 154]. One can only imagine the excitement that little girl felt for those colorful beads and for her own place among the Kahnawake [pronounced ghana wah-gee] women. That little girl was Carla Hemlock, a multi-media artist who lives in Kahnawake territory, a Mohawk nation near Montreal.

This summer, we will be able to see that excitement on display in *Hearts of Our People: Native Women Artists*. Hemlock's *Walking Through Time* won the Best in Class for Beadwork/Quillwork at the prestigious Southwestern Association of Indian Arts (SAWIA) in 2017. She is quick to point out that her work reflects the wisdom and innovation of all the women who have come before her. Hemlock does not think of herself as an artist but rather as someone who "makes things." Her soft-spoken modesty, however, stands in stark contrast to her expressive beadwork.

Walking Through Time is a story of survival – the economic engine that assured the survival of the Kahnawake for over one hundred years and the cultural survival of their Native arts. With the coming of the settlers, glass beads replaced porcupine quills; cloth replaced animal hides. Intricate designs and embroidery techniques learned in the missionary schools replaced geometric patterns. Beadwork adapted and changed, but most of all, it survived.

The Kahnawake observed the newcomers closely: their designs, their tastes, their styles, their business practices. This led to assembly lines, target marketing, and personal branding. By collaborating rather than competing with each other, the Kahnawake created cottage industries to help each family produce its own distinct designs of beadwork. The women were at the helm, but all family members participated in the production. They blended their tradition of collaboration with the newcomers' capitalism to create an international market for their souvenirs. All of this without giving up their distinctive identity or their independence.

By the time Carla Hemlock was a little girl growing up in the 1970s and running from house to house announcing the arrival of the bead lady, the souvenir trade had all but died. Kahnawake women continued with their beadwork – not for the souvenir market but for their own families.

Hemlock began quilting the day she was coaxed into making a quilt for her baby, and she's still quilting today. She attributes her success to the women who taught her the art of quilting and to the countless women who came before her. Hemlock recalls the day she added beads to her quilts. She had just finished a baby quilt for a gift when she noticed an ink stain on it. She found an innovative solution: add beading.

Hemlock's award-winning ensemble began long ago with the purchase of a black hat that reminded her of the hats in Cornelius Krieghoff's paintings like *A Caughnawaga Woman*, 1855, in the McCord Museum in Montreal. For years, she designed an old-style coat in her head inspired by that hat hanging in her studio. One day she just started making the coat, another first for Hemlock. Notice the quilting on the collar.

Each element in the ensemble references the natural world and the passage of time. For example, the ribbons of flowers represent generations of Kahnawake women – one flower at a time, each one connected by a wavy line that suggests a continuum into the future.

Hemlock also marks the passage of time by using a distinctive north-eastern technique called the raised stitch: more beads are strung on a thread than can be sewn flat on material. When the thread is pulled, the beads form an arc creating a three-dimensional flower.

In an exclusive interview with Jill Ahlberg Yohe, Associate Curator of Native American Art, Hemlock describes the connection she feels with those who came before her: “I wanted this coat to have a reflection on who women were and still are. I don’t look at it as the beauty of that coat but as the beauty of our women who walked a hundred-fifty, two hundred years ago. I made it for them.”

Links:

The Language of Beadwork

SAWIA award

Beadwork

A Caughnawaga Woman, 1855
Cornelius Krieghoff
McCord Museum, Montreal