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The Center, with its Great Plains Art Museum, is an interdisciplinary educational and cultural hub that cultivates awareness of and engagement with the diverse people, cultures, and natural environments of the Great Plains. Since its establishment in 1976 as part of all four campuses at the University of Nebraska, the Center has sought to showcase regional voices, stories, art, and research through multimedia education and outreach.

The Museum's permanent collection was founded in 1980 with a generous donation of art and literature of the American West from Dr. John and Elizabeth Christlieb of Bellevue, Nebraska. The collection has since expanded to focus on Indigenous artists and other significant Great Plains themes. Each year, the Museum organizes 6–8 engaging exhibitions that express the diverse voices of the Plains and highlight both the collection and contemporary artists.

Center for Great Plains Studies | Great Plains Art Museum
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Welcome to the 2022 Contemporary Indigeneity exhibition at the Great Plains Art Museum within the Center for Great Plains Studies!

The Museum and Center are proud and honored to sponsor the fourth Contemporary Indigeneity juried exhibition.

Since our founding decades ago, we have showcased the first Indigenous peoples of our region. We have featured writers and speakers who have chronicled the painful histories Great Plains Indians have experienced: dispossession, exile, and destruction of their bison relatives. We have also held events that address the challenges that Indigenous people face today as well as the resurgence of Indigenous languages, foodways, and ceremonies. We have featured the innovative solutions that Indigenous thinkers are advancing to overcome their challenges.

In the last two years, we have renewed our commitment to enhancing the visibility and amplifying the voices of Indigenous scholars, writers, and artists. We believe the Center and Museum have a vital role to play in creating a platform from which Indigenous visionaries on the Great Plains can share their diverse perspectives and aspirations.

Contemporary Indigenous artists who are citizens of their own tribal nations or descended from tribal citizens offer unique entry points into learning about what it means to be Indigenous today. They show us how to create beauty and hope from trauma and pain. They show us what it means to persist and survive against all odds, and then to revive and thrive.

As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, these are powerful lessons for all of us, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike.

Margaret Jacobs
Director, Center for Great Plains Studies

The works selected for Contemporary Indigeneity 2022 come from 28 artists living across the Great Plains and beyond. They creatively utilize a variety of artistic media, ranging from painting to metalwork to beadwork, and much more. In this catalog and in the exhibition, you will hear the artists’ voices conveying their perspective as an artist and the themes they chose to address in their work. We are grateful to these artists for allowing us to exhibit their work and for sharing what it means to them to be Indigenous on the Great Plains.

Ashley Wilkinson
Museum Director and Curator
Juror Statements
In Native American art, there is a visual experience through a cultural practice that provides a connection to tribal representation. Native American/American Indian art is a creative form of inherent knowledge passed through generational knowledge, symbolism, and material use from tribal traditions and influence. The term Indigeneity for most American Indian artists is a connection to their tribal language, culture, and land. The Great Plains Art Museum’s Contemporary Indigeneity juried exhibition is representative of the regional influence and tribal perspective in Native Art in the present.

As a curator who descends from the Kiowa (Cauigu) Plains culture, as a language speaker and traditionalist, the reflection of place and connection represents my interests in Native art. Growing up in a culture of art comes from a quality of one’s cultural teachings and specific knowledge from relatives or cultural bearers. As a fifth-generation scholar in Native American art, garments, beadwork, textiles, and material gathering are my personal preference in research and curation. Unlike non-Native art practice, Native American art and curation rely on the materials often acquired through trade, gift-giving, and suppliers making the artform different in exhibition display. Native American art is the continuation of a culture where tribal influence, land, and time are indicators of the art. Included in the importance of Indigeneity is the theory of color, how it represents the various symbols of locality, classification, and society. The selection of artists was based on the communicative methods in tribal knowledge through lived Native American lifeways experience. The art selected for Contemporary Indigeneity displays the place in time as the world paused for COVID-19. Documentation and note-taking became important for Plains tribal artists, and the exploration of digital content assisted in sharing and passing cultural knowledge. The participants provided color in times of change where darkness could be stated, but tribal art celebrates aesthetics in art through the Indigeneity and Plains tribal culture.

**Tahnee Ahtoneharjo-Growingthunder**
Kiowa, Mvskoki, Seminole
Museum Director and Curator, Kiowa Tribe
Judge or Witness: My reflections on these Contemporary Indigenous Works

In judging this exhibition, I observed three things that tied these artists and their works together. First, the name of this exhibition is “Contemporary Indigeneity.” The word sticks with me. The show is not called “Contemporary Indigenous Art” or even artists, but *Indigeneity*. I find this phrasing particularly apt, because embedded within this title, either accidentally or intentionally, is one of the tenets of many Native American communities—that our artwork is not a thing apart from our existence but an extension of it. In this word, *Indigeneity*, we are reminded that creating, for us, was an extension of the Indigenous lived experiences that manifested itself in tools, clothing, ceremonial items, and more. Art was never a singular, compartmentalized thing as in European concepts. You would never say “Contemporary Europeanism,” and I'm fine with, even proud of, this distinction.

Comparing the ways Native American social structures developed differently from European-based cultures, I realize that art is an important part of both societies, but in such different ways. This differentiation helps me realize why sometimes Native works are undervalued within European-based understandings. Again, a distinction I embrace. This brings me to my second observation. In the works of this exhibition, I see fine examples of Indigenous visual sovereignty, and therefore our Native societal underpinnings, on full display. I see creations that proudly demonstrate the important signifiers found in both our histories and contemporary existence.

Some may think Indigenous artists are too fascinated with imagery from what they consider the past, that we as Indigenous artists don’t push our artistic envelopes enough. But I disagree. I don’t see it as lack of pushing, but rather as a grounding, a remembrance, and an honoring. It is also a powerful foundation for rebuilding.

Once, we Native North Americans stood solidly on our land, when suddenly, through acts of unimaginable violence, we were propelled, without full understanding, up into the air above a deep, descending canyon. Finally landing in places unfamiliar to us, our foggy brains tried to make sense of what had happened, even as we clawed at the canyon’s edge to survive, bloody fingers straining and legs swinging wildly behind. After hoisting ourselves up, we were relieved to find we were still alive, but mourned deeply all that was lost. Now, using visual sovereignty, languages, ceremonies, and remaining teachings as cornerstones in our efforts, we are building and repairing. The work of artists, like those featured here, strengthens these efforts.

This brings me to my third observation—the intentionality of the artists. Each artist relates a strong sense of purpose and urgency in their statements. In different ways, they strive to illuminate, educate, and uplift through their works. They bring truth and place salve on the open wounds. As S. Deloria Black Wolf so eloquently writes in their artist statement, “I am back, but I have the smell of graves on my breath.”

How refreshing it was to read the artist statements and discover their motivations. It brought me joy to hear the storied beginnings and how these artists are rooted in history, grounded in purpose, and driven by honor. Although technically a judge for this exhibition, I feel instead that I witnessed the principles guiding these artists’ practices—embrace the wholeness of Indigeneity, lean into visual sovereignty, and create with intention. I am proud of our Native artists today, and especially those in this exhibition.

Dakota Hoska
Oglála Lakȟóta, Pine Ridge Wounded Knee
Assistant Curator of Native Arts, Denver Art Museum
The Individual’s Response to Contemporary Indigeneity

Contemporary Indigenous artists, whether they were creating work in the twentieth or twenty-first century, find themselves as the spokesperson for Native Americans. It’s a situation almost all Indigenous individuals who go out into the world find themselves in. As young artists, when they first find themselves in situations where they are speaking to larger and deeper issues, this can be overwhelming and they find themselves addressing issues they weren’t anticipating. But over time, with experience, exploration, and reflection they are able to address these issues in unique and personal ways. Many of the issues facing Native Americans today are found in the works of Contemporary Indigeneity. The selections from the exhibition reflect issues in real time that garner conversations that are happening across our nation.

For all communities, especially the mass of families within Native America, a major issue is the chronic plight of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Woman (MMIW). The awful reality that women of all ages and in all communities disappear from their families without a trace and/or are murdered, often without law enforcement providing their state and federal resources to investigate these crimes. Indigenous women are 10 times more likely to be murdered than other races and this is the third leading cause of death among them. In all, 85% of Indigenous women have experienced violence in many forms. Benjamin Harjo, Jr.’s Circle of the Missing showcases this issue with representation in traditional dance; Tyra Shackleford’s dress design in Not Forgotten speaks to the issue as well.

A more acute issue currently in Native America is the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has hit Native American communities the hardest in the United States, with Native Americans 3.5 times more likely to be hospitalized with the virus. The loss is astounding as many of those who have passed are elders, who are the community’s culture bearers. This is addressed by Dustina Gill’s The Unforgotten Storyteller, with a beaded mask both representing a mask we all wear, but this mask silencing the words of its carrier. To speak on issues, one must also speak of Indigenous resiliency, and two artists capture this spirit. Benjamin Harjo, Jr.’s Home Sweet Home!? addresses his nation’s efforts to set up checkpoints to control access to his reservation to protect against COVID-19 despite efforts of local states to not enforce such measures. Resilience to overcome this pandemic is showcased in Encinas’s The Originators…still, where the threat of the virus cannot take away his nation from honoring their traditions. This is also reflected in Awanigiizhik Bruce’s Ginanaakonaamin SARS-CoV-2 We (inclusive) are fighting back against SARS-CoV-2, where Ojibwe Spirits are directly attacking the COVID-19 virus through ceremony and spirit.

This brings to heart the conversations of work in Contemporary Indigeneity. It’s the resiliency of spirit. The narration is found through all of the work represented in all of the pieces selected; their messages vary as much as the work.

Joseph Williams
Walpethunwaŋ, Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate
Director of Native American Programs, Plains Art Museum
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The passion behind the purpose is wielding the power to inspire and motivate through the context of creation, giving viewers a glimpse into that Reservation window where I come from. My Art is an expression of authentic narratives, imperative to where I live, blended with energetic pigments, reflecting experiences of my ancestors and relatives. It is true to form, true to self and real on every level because it embodies the essence of my existence from the perspective of my people. I want to represent for my community and be their voice, to tell their story in a way nobody has done before. I create with the intent to uplift those in need, to build my community up with positivity through expression, action, and demonstration.

A piece representing my hometown Busby, Montana. Life is a long way from where it used to be. Reflections of yesterday are distant in the memory but on the flip side we’re still here holdin’ on and rollin’ on. Celebrating today, taking the good with the bad, living our best and not worrying about the rest.

Knowledge is Power and Power is purpose that can’t be defined by purchase. Money can’t buy Wisdom, in this country, you gotta have the Knowledge, then when you have the Knowledge, you get the Power, once you have the Power to make positive change, you get the Respect from the people. Real Power is derived from within, not what’s acquired on the outside. This is the philosophy of our late great Apsáalooke Chief Plenty Coups (Alaxchiiaahush) who stated that “Education is your most powerful weapon. With Knowledge and education, you are the white man’s equal; without it, you are his victim, and so shall remain all your lives.” Recognize, Realize, and Get Wise
My artwork is a symbolic balance of ancient traditions and contemporary concepts depicting our relationship to all things. The drum represents the heartbeat of Mother Earth. The circular shape of the drum reminds us of the cycle of life and the interconnection mirrored between the spiritual and physical worlds of heaven and earth. Within the circle are the four directions; black (west), red (north), yellow (east), and white (south). The four segments represent the number four; four Nations (human, plant, mineral, and animal); four races of humans (black, red, yellow, and white); four human needs (mind, body, emotion, and spirit); four cycles of physical life (infancy, youth, adult, and elder); four classes of animals (mammals, birds, fish, and reptile/amphibians); four seasons (spring, summer, fall, and winter); and four elements (fire, earth, water, and air). The turtle in the center represents kinship, transformation, longevity, fertility, and survival. The umbilical cord and the human baby represent our connection to the tree of life. The tree of life reminds us of our dependence on Mother Earth for food to generate energy to live and grow.

Mitákuye Oyás’iŋ
I'm named after my dead brother and my dead uncle. My brother died shortly after being born. He was the passenger in a booze-related car wreck. My uncle drank himself to death long before I was born. When you take both of their names and combine them, in English, it reads, “The gift of god: Sorrow.”

I stayed away from alcohol until I was eighteen, and then I fell hard. I fell really fucking hard.

I sobered up after seven years. A car wreck shook me. By then I was three/four months into painting. The painting acted as a release valve and helped me work through the remaining hurt.

There are not many artistic opportunities in Rapid City. There are not many Native art galleries that are interested in my work. To that I say “fuck them” and chisel out this life, piece by piece. They gave me nothing so I did the best I could on my own.

When people talk about Native artwork they seem to be referring to ego or persona. They seem to want to think about the old days, about romanticized western tales, of dead Sioux chiefs. The gallery owners want triangle shaped horses and contrasting color patterns. I think what I bring up in my work is the unconscious, and the Self. I’ve painted at least a mile’s worth of canvas over the last four and a half years. I did it, and continue to do it, to simply exist with the scars that rural poverty brings. I think my work is representative of the unspoken, yet loudly crying, calls of hurt that these dead-end communities breed.

Spiritus Contra Spiritum. The spirit fighting spirits. An inward path of creativity and imagination fighting addiction (spirits/booze). Just as Jung said to Bill Wilson (the founder of A.A.).

Only the Wounded Healer heals. When you grow up in the middle of nowhere, when you have no personal connection to a spiritual tradition you can either sink or swim. You can grow from where you came from, or you can numb yourself to the world by grabbing a bottle or a pipe. My (none too impressive) literacy saved me. I found great books about psychoanalysis in my late teens/early twenties. The questions that my parents, grandparents, siblings and cousins—the existential questions they asked were given to me by chance. I had to find some answers. I went inward. The first book that mattered to me, Hero With a Thousand Faces, told me to honor my dreams. Because of that I developed a relationship with the dream-maker over the next five years. I was shown a good handful of visions. They, along with reading and suffering, were key in my reformation. I am back but I have the smell of graves on my breath. I preach knowing full well that maturation came with a mortal wounding to my conscience.

It’s a riff on the Bukowski poem. I’ve known many musicians over the years and they were all delusional in their own way. They were tied to addiction and ego-trips. Despite all of its faults, music has acted as a source of reprieve and will continue to do so for a long, long time. The piece and the Bukowski poem remind me of those rez guitarists. Men who were playing for their lives, men drunk on machismo, men who were secretly fragile, who crumpled with the slightest bit of criticism. Lastly—men who knew how powerful music could be.
My work is autobiographical as it is centered around my own life experiences and interests. Besides the Native American Church (NAC), other subjects I enjoy are Shawnee ceremonials and camp scenes as I am a ceremonial leader at our White Oak ceremonial grounds in Oklahoma. My father was a Road man for the NAC, and I observed and participated in numerous ceremonies, and I also learned about beadwork and feather work from his creations.

I am a direct descendant of Shawnee Chief Blackhoof; my grandmother was Alice Blackhoof Blalock. Further, I paint pow-wow dancers and singers, as well as scenes from contemporary Indian life. I enjoy dancing at pow-wows and watching my children and grandchildren participate in our tribal dances and ceremonies.

Macaw Fan and Gourd
2021
Acrylic and mixed media on canvas
40 x 30 inches
Photo by Bill Ganzel, Ganzel Group Communications
© Ruthe Blalock Jones

This painting depicts a macaw fan and gourd on a red and blue blanket, and is autobiographical in depicting the ceremonial items used in the Native American Church (NAC) prayer ceremony, as observed by the artist in childhood.
Sage smudge smoke fills my work area. I remember how my dad taught me the importance of starting artwork in a healthy and clean mindset. The ideas for artwork I make are carefully planned, researched, and sketched. When I begin making artwork—as a bolt of lightning—everything is set into motion. Every motion is deliberate: which may be a brush stroke, fold, carving, written poetic word, bead, embroidered quill, and/or stitch. My diverse artistic media utilizes my culture, history, Indigenous world-view, and my scientific interests and processes. This all together forms how I process my artwork. I utilize chemistry and mathematics in my art processes: proper measurements with dyeing quills, hair, and feathers; fermenting natural materials to clean; transmuting materials like wood, stone, metal, and/or plastics with power tools, hand-tools, heat, chemicals, and digital fabrication. This is how I create my art and what it is to be a modern Indigenous artist.

Ginanaakonaamin SARS-CoV-2 We (inclusive) are fighting back against SARS-CoV-2
2020
Beadwork, LEDs, and watercolor
10.5 x 10.5 x 2 inches
Image courtesy of the artist
© Awanigiizhik Bruce

Ojibwe Spirits are attacking COVID-19. Animikii (thunderbird) and Mishispishiw (water panther) are some of the most powerful spirits under Kizhe-Manidoo (Creator). They represent synergistic, diametric force which is exemplified in Anishinaabe spirituality. These spirits are akin to the qualities of water. The water from the skies to underneath the earth. Water is synonymous with life. These spirits are who we look to for guidance and healing with the most pressing issues. In the past, these spirits were petitioned to ask from the Creator to heal us from smallpox and many other deadly diseases. In this case, we are fighting the Coronavirus pandemic. Within this art piece, these spirits are coordinated in attacking the coronavirus. This theme personifies our carefulness, strategies, and prayers working to overcome these uncertain times.
My practice traverses traditional Indigenous knowledge systems. In learning the teachings of the past and applying them to my practice, I aim to explore how Indigenous art/knowledge reveals understandings of cultural evolution. Generational knowledge connects me to my past, helps me find meaning in my presence as I look toward the future. As I create art through these traditional art practices, I feel connected to my ancestors. Through meditation, and spiritual material imburement of my art, this brings me a sense of bringing power back into my own being. Interweaving these various types of crafts, I want to create a new visual language, a language which preserves tradition and creates a discourse that has people question their own preconceptions of Native American art and craft.
Connectivity is at the heart of Albertine Crow Shoe’s practice as Jeweler/Artist, drawing on her Indigenous background. She is a traditional knowledge keeper in her community. Ms. Crow Shoe is a full-time Jeweler/Artist, born and raised on the Piikani Nation, part of the Blackfoot Confederacy in Southern Alberta. She received her formal training from Alberta College of Arts (Arts University) and holds a Bachelor’s degree in Management from the University of Lethbridge. Ms. Crow Shoe incorporates Blackfoot symbolism and designs into her work that bring Blackfoot culture to the non-Native world. These images invoke memory and history. Through her work, she has gained recognition as being awarded the first Indigenous female to be offered Artist in Residence and a solo show at the Glenbow Museum, both in 2019. She has been juried into one of the most prestigious and largest art shows in the United States and Canada called the Santa Fe Indian Market that is exclusive to Native Americans and First Nations peoples. Pieces of her work are in the permanent collections at the Glenbow Museum and the Royal Alberta Museum as well as with private collectors in Canada and the United States. Her pieces have also been chosen to be a part of exhibits with the Alberta Craft Council, the Royal Alberta Museum, and a virtual exhibit with the New Mexico Museum of Art. Ms. Crow Shoe has mentored under master silversmiths from the Navajo Nation in Arizona and New Mexico. She was awarded a grant from Canada Council for the Arts to further practice the art of silversmithing. Albertine is a leader in her field as a First Nation’s Silversmith and is much grounded in her Piikani Blackfoot people’s culture and ways of knowing in Alberta.

This is a traditional Blackfoot Horse Mask, made using brain-tanned elk hide with black pigment paint, sterling silver disks representing Hail Stones, porcupine quill around the eyes, black and white horsehair representing night and day, brass beads, cow bone, sterling silver motif representing the Morning Star, and Red Pheasant feathers.
From 800 AD to 1700, Caddo pottery was an incredible and well-known tradition in the North American Southeast, traded far and wide, even overseas. Knowledge of this cultural history disappeared as the Caddo tribe was decimated from diseases and colonialism. Our last Caddo potter, a matriarch of my tribal namesake, stopped making pottery around 1908 and our tradition was almost lost. I hope to bring that unsung ceramic legacy back to the light.

Most people don’t see our ancestral pottery because our pottery was used at the end of its life as a burial offering. In that way, these culturally sensitive pieces cannot be put on public display. It is important to me to respectfully capture the skillfulness and intricate details and methods of our tradition in order to reintroduce its importance and create new admiration for our tribe. However, I also feel deeply that our tribe’s representation and communication through the design and creation of pottery would have evolved over time with the introduction of new situations and environments. For that reason, I also strive to present a new ceramic and sculptural interpretation from my own experiences as an ambassador to my Caddo tribe and its ancient cultural identity.

East Meets West
2020
Clay, Spiro engraved, with river cane
12 x 12 x 12 inches
Photo by Bill Ganzel, Ganzel Group Communications
© Chase Kahwinhut Earles

Hand built, hand burnished, kiln fired, then smoke smudged, then engraved.

This piece uses the ancient Spiro (Caddo) culture design and makes it new and modern and is embellished in an Asian culture way with the cane handle, but in this instance the cane is Rivercane indigenous to the Caddo homeland.
I am grateful to be able to represent my Omaha people, Historically and in a Contemporary way. Recording our Lifeways is truly an Honor.

COVID-19 cannot stop the Umóⁿhoⁿ from dancing.

This work depicts check points on the Omaha Rez during COVID-19.
My art aims to capture aspects of Indigeneity that I feel are not widely represented. I seek to capture the story of my self, and of my people, beyond romanticized historical depictions, anthropological definitions, and both white and Indigenous notions of “tradition.”

One theme that I am especially passionate about is queer identity. Growing up queer on the rez, in a rural community, I never saw queer representation, I never saw queer people, and I had no idea about the long history of queer identities amongst Indigenous peoples, including my own tribe. Realizing there were others, and discovering historical queerness was a major moment in my life, and the development of my art.

Other influences on my art include animation, graphic novels, popular culture, science fiction, and Euro-American art history.

I work in a variety of styles and mediums, but my favorite would have to be ledger art. I feel that ledger art is a long, unbroken tradition that can be traced back to the old winter counts and rock art of our ancestors. Through ledger art we see the history of our peoples, records of their visions, cultural practices, and the daily lives of the artists. Though my ledger art often breaks from convention, I feel it is still true to the tradition of capturing my history, the history of my people, my daily life, spirituality, and visions of the future.

Madonna and Child
2021
Acrylic and ink on vintage City of Butte ledger
17 x 14 inches
Photo by Bill Ganzel, Ganzel Group Communications
© Michael Fast Buffalo Horse

Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwestern Galaxy
2021
Ink on vintage City of Butte ledger paper
14 x 17 inches
Photo by Bill Ganzel, Ganzel Group Communications
© Michael Fast Buffalo Horse


“The year is 2321. Indigenous people have been pushed into space so that the Earth can be turned into a National Park for space tourists. The Blackfeet ride across the stars, capturing rockets and battling space colonizers.”
I have created art in some form since around 1974. I have been a freelance artist, graphic designer, and painter since 2000. I received my BFA from Kansas State University in 1999. I have been a seamstress for over 30 years and make traditional Otoe-Missouria and Iowa southern cloth regalia and jewelry. I also design contemporary earrings featuring historical maps and photographs of Otoe-Missouria and Iowa lands and people.

**Buffalo Clan**
2020
Digital print on canvas
16 x 20 inches
Photo by Bill Ganzel, Ganzel Group Communications
© Tamara Mihą Xege Faw Faw

*Buffalo Clan* is part of a ten-print series that I worked on during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020. The series is called “Flora and Fauna” and began with the seven clan animals of the Otoe-Missouria: Buffalo, Beaver, Bear, Elk, Eagle, Owl, and Pigeon.

**Dream Blanket**
2020
Digital print on canvas
20 x 16 inches
Photo by Bill Ganzel, Ganzel Group Communications
© Tamara Mihą Xege Faw Faw

This is a digital representation of a vision my great-grandfather Wanosa “William” Faw Faw had during a fever dream. The symbols used in the piece represent different events that occurred in his vision.
I came to a point in life where I decided to follow my dream of creating art.
This represents our Storytellers lost to COVID. The image of the dragonflies on the mask represents those in the spirit world.
My artistic practice is motivated by the driving desire from within to revive and preserve legends and stories of Native people. My work is intended to educate the viewer, explain the visual image, and transcribe an oral history into a visual document. The images, produced through the mediums of painting, printmaking, and drawing, are influenced by legends, visual observations, and my own life experiences. Through color, repeated patterns, embedded cultural symbolism, and nonobjective shapes, I can distill the oral histories and worldviews of my Shawnee and Seminole tribes, and those of related American Indian peoples, into a new visual language. Painting and printmaking are liminal spaces in which ambiguous ideas can play upon the mind and defy immediate categorization that governs and stifles deeper conversation and connection in today’s society. History tells us our ancestors were forcibly removed to Indian Territory, yet creating art helped sustain their cultures through the hard years that followed. Humor and play heal our trauma and rekindle connection. Through my art, I lure the viewer into a cross-cultural space that transcends language and time—a space open to possibilities. My hope is that the viewer would be drawn in by my use of color and design, but ultimately observe the finished work and see only the narrative—not the time, research, or involvement by the artist.

In honor of MMIW (Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women). A line drawing of women dancing in a circle in the belief that the missing will be found and returned home.

*Circle of the Missing*

2020
Gouache
20 x 20 inches
Photo by Bill Ganzel, Ganzel Group Communications
© Benjamin Harjo, Jr.

Warring of Fire

2021
Gouache
14 x 10 inches
Photo by Bill Ganzel, Ganzel Group Communications
© Benjamin Harjo, Jr.

Merging two symbols together. The woodpecker, which symbolizes the strength of the warrior, and the spider who brought fire to the people for light, warmth, and cooking.
As a painter, my subjects vary from capturing everyday landscape and wildlife scenery to conveying complex themes that are influenced by my Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara culture and history. Using different mediums has helped me navigate my ability to give my perspective and vision of the world around me. I frequently gravitate toward using horses as connective tissue throughout my work to transfer different themes and emotions. Lively, sad, thought-provoking, or informative, they are the best tool in voicing my opinion due to a deep fondness I have always had for them. Growing up in the country has also influenced my work with its beautiful landscape and rich history. When it comes to creating a piece, these two subjects have always been the best providers for transferring different emotions into my art.

In this political commentary titled *Four Horsemen of Generational Trauma*, each layered painting conveys aspects of a particular trauma that affected and continues to affect members of the MHA Nation also known as the Three Affiliated Tribes. In correlation to the Biblical story of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, each painting is given a separate title to which its overall theme is similar. Conquest, War, Famine, and Death are represented by different horse heads that highlight negative events of that era. With each tragedy and major trauma, I ask the question: will this herald the end of my people through cultural collapse or will we remain resilient?
I am a lifelong resident of Becker County, always living on or adjacent to White Earth Reservation in Northwestern Minnesota. I learned quillwork and quillbox construction from renowned Ojibwe artist Melvin Losh. Other teachers include my mother Susanna Bellecourt Paulson and elders Josephine Potson/Fort Frances and Betsy May/Naytahwaush as well as my namesakes, brother and husband. The prairie which runs along the western edge of White Earth Reservation is my home and marks the eastern commencement of the North American Great Plains. This is where I gather traditional foods and mashkiki-medicine plants. As each summer progresses, my home fills with the presence of these plants.

My work is “slow art”—durable quillboxes painstakingly produced through uncountable hours and intense attention to detail. This is where I bring the struggles of day-to-day life to be converted and remade into beauty and joy. I have been told my work demonstrates an ethereal quality, allowing one to hold the sacred beauty of the natural world in the palm of their hand. Birchbark basketry, ribbon-with-appliquéd beadwork bags, beaded earrings and appliquéd mural blankets round out my creative work for ceremonial gifting. At all times, my commitment to the thriving and vibrant lives of my community and relatives pushes me to learn and pass these teachings on.

This set begins a new, or perhaps old, variation on quillboxes generally seen today with the re-imagined construction design seen here. Each is built with friction-fit for utility; however, these feature a “jar lid” opening.

Designed around and titled Medicine Flowers to honor mashkiki (strength of the earth) gifted to Anishinaabeg everywhere.

Quillboxes have been made as storage containers by Woodlands Indians since the beginning of time—birch bark preserving foods and medicines, sweet grass repelling insects, and porcupine quill “embroidered” designs providing identification of the contents.

The varied “trails” chasing around each canister represent Ojibwe-cultural respect for the differences and individuality found in each human being.

Mashkikiwaabigwaniin Canister Set – Bezhig – (Medicine Flowers Canister Set – One –) 2020
Fiber – birchbark, sweetgrass and porcupine quills 3 pieces, each 2 x 3 inches, 2.25 x 3 inches, and 2.5 x 3 inches
Photo by Bill Ganzel, Ganzel Group Communications © Penny Kagigebi
My work has always contained a political undercurrent, but more recently I realize that I have the responsibility to tell my own story as a mixed-blood Native person in an increasingly fractious U.S. culture. This has led to deeper explorations into identity politics and how that plays out in everyday Indian communities like the ones where I grew up in northeastern Oklahoma. In my most recent work, I probe deeper into the messy gray areas of Native identity, individually and communally—not to shock or divide, but in an attempt to find a common ground of shared experience.

The building up of something by hand—of seeing the work gradually turn into more than an accumulation of layers of paint or wax or ink—is the satisfying reward of art creation. Just like the dated yet timeless images of my ancestors or even a childhood plastic toy, the process itself creates, for me, a sense of the passage of time. These images are my lifeline to a past and a history that I didn’t discover until well into adulthood, things we rarely spoke about as a family, but that I now realize are a source of inspiration, pride, and ultimately identity.

Clyde the Big Red Indian Decolonises Tulsey Town
2021
Drypoint engraving and digital print
18 x 24 inches
Image courtesy of the artist
© Bobby C. Martin

Tulsa, Oklahoma, is originally a Mvskoke settlement.
Clyde is just reclaiming the rez...

Emigrant Indians #3
2021
3-color screenprint, encaustic, oilstick, collage
20 x 20 x 2.75 inches
Image courtesy of the artist
© Bobby C. Martin

Emigrant Indians? As if there was a choice?
Robert Martinez
Northern Arapaho

Adjusting Expectations
We are here
We have not forgotten
We have been killed but still live on
We fought with you then and we fight with you now
We befriend you then and we befriend you now
We have been forced to adopt your ways but still hold on to our own
We watch TV but still revere nature
We enjoy the movies but love visiting with our tribal elders
We have smartphones but we also keep our sacred objects
We listen to all forms Hip Hop and Rock but still dance and sing to a rawhide drum
We all have white, black, brown and yellow friends whom we treat like family because they are
We are a myriad of different shades and quantum’s of red
We’re familiar with high fashion but still wear moccasins when we want to
We love fast food but we can be fast hunters of our own
We have read the Bible, the Torah, the Koran and we still keep our Ceremonies
We are Producers, Writers, Lawyers, and Doctors and we are Drummers, Singers, Dancers and Artists
We have your problems and we have our own
We are here
We are not what you Expect

My drawings are a continuation of the Ledger Art tradition using my rendered style to illustrate a mix of past and present as commentary on Indigenous issues today.

Hatter
2021
Airbrushed acrylic & oil on linen
40 x 30 inches
Image courtesy of the artist
© Robert Martinez

My paintings combat the old sepia or black & white photos which imply a dead culture. I use bright, “alive” colors to insist that we’re here, we exist, we’re strong, and we have our own stories to tell.

Not An Ornament
2021
Graphite & acrylic on antique ledger paper
16 x 20 inches
Image courtesy of the artist
© Robert Martinez

My drawings are a continuation of the Ledger Art tradition using my rendered style to illustrate a mix of past and present as commentary on Indigenous issues today.
Because of my years of passion-driven research on the Mound Builders, a pre-Columbian civilization that frequented what is now the eastern United States and west into Texas, Missouri, and Kansas, I feel I have a unique and important voice to add to the Native American artistic community.

I am a prolific artist who is passionate about my artwork, and I have a desire to educate the public about the art and motifs of the Mound Builders. My artwork is colorful, eye-catching, and has its own recognizable style.

_A Prairie Dream_
2021
Acrylic and metallic acrylic paint on canvas
30 x 40 inches
Image courtesy of the artist
© Victoria McKinney

How buffalo see the Great Plains and themselves when they dream using Mound Builder motifs. The Dragonflies are considered messengers bearing dreams. I am illustrating the prairies of the Great Plains in a new perspective through the eyes of one of the major mammals of the region using prehistoric motifs and designs from the people inhabiting this area before European contact.

_Three Sisters – Corn, Beans and Squash_
2021
Acrylic paint on canvas
36 x 36 inches
Image courtesy of the artist
© Victoria McKinney

Wherever there was a permanent Native American settlement there were crops being grown to feed the people. The three most important crops were corn, beans, and squash, what became known as the Three Sisters. They were planted in conjunction with and were able to flourish by providing aid to each other. The Mound Builder motifs in the four directional corners represent the villages and people fed by the Three Sisters.
My mission is to assist all students “to succeed in college; to succeed in life; to care for their family and relatives, and to be close to our Creator.” I want to assist Native students to have pride in living their Native culture.

My Otoe people originated in the Great Lakes region and settled in the Great Plains in what is now Nebraska and Kansas. Like other woodland and prairie tribes, we often decorate our dance clothes and other items with floral designs, using ribbon appliqué or beads or paint.

My painting is based on ribbon appliqué on an outfit made for my father. I elaborated on the design to include different colors and placed vines of abstract floral work on the sides of the painting, with the designs classically outlined in white. The floral images are typical of what I and my daughters use in our own dance clothes and art.

My Otoe People lived in what is now Nebraska and Kansas. During the spring and summer, we followed the buffalo herds, and our diet consisted mostly of meat. In the fall, we returned to our villages to harvest corn, beans, and squash. I painted this buffalo thinking about the buffalo hunts of our Otoe people on the Great Plains.

My white buffalo is in the center of a medicine wheel, a sacred circle containing four colors to embody concepts such as four directions, four seasons, four stages of life, with the circle and lines to represent the paths of life and the sun and moon. I used the four colors of black, white, yellow, and red. These colors also made me think of black and white eagle feathers, yellow sunrise, and red sunset.

The medicine wheel is a symbol used by many of the Plains tribes. The colors and order will vary by tribe. The buffalo (American Bison) sustained our people for centuries, and every part of it was utilized for food, shelter, clothing, tools, and utensils. A white buffalo is rare and symbolizes a sacred blessing, strength and unity, abundance and plenty.
My approach to art and design is unique, post traditional, and is grounded in cultural symbolism. I love to explore complex harmonious and symmetric forms while working with different intersections of traditional Ribbonwork, florals, and appliqué designs. I use various shapes, lines, and forms in my designs that are inspired by elements of nature and in my art, I have a deep admiration for atmospheric color palettes. As a graphic designer and artist, I am working to further explore the many possible intersections of media and fine arts.

*Skyprints of the Future*

2020
Digital print on canvas
36 x 24 inches
Photo by Bill Ganzel, Ganzel Group Communications
© Jessica Moore Harjo

Throughout the pandemic, a theme of resiliency appeared throughout my pieces of art and designs. In connection with a mural project that was based on the concept of the vitality of our people, I designed this piece. It is meant to represent the resiliency of our people through the many hardships we face and continue to face, recognizing the connection to our seeds and earth as part of our cultural continuance. The concept for the artistic approach of the piece is resonant with a blueprint of information, white lines mapped out with information to inform others. In this piece seeds, food, plants, and nature carry a foundational map to our future generations.
Wade Patton
Oglala Lakota

I’m an enrolled member of the Oglala Lakota Tribe and grew up on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, which now is Oglala Lakota County in the southwest of South Dakota. I was surrounded by a rich culture of art and music. After obtaining a BA in art from Black Hills State University and having a solo exhibit during my senior year at the Sioux Indian Museum in Rapid City, I decided to move away.

It took leaving South Dakota for me to find a voice in my works. Yet, while pursuing other art opportunities on the East Coast, I longed for home. Living on the East Coast, I began expressing what I missed, the beauty and splendor of the Black Hills and the skies of South Dakota. I started to draw landscapes and clouds, as a reminder of home. The spare beauty of the prairie resonates in my work.

Something clicked, not only in my artistic expression, but with collectors and galleries. Their response was unexpected, but welcome. I started sending work back home for exhibits and galleries, and was getting recognition. Finally, I realized how much I needed to return. I missed my family and I wanted to pursue my art in the place where I find the most inspiration. That decision brought me straight into a thriving Native art scene that clearly wasn’t here when I left.

Interestingly, when I moved back people would say, ‘Oh, you’re the cloud guy!’ People didn’t know me, but knew my work. I’m reacquainting myself with the land and my ancestry.

Moving back to South Dakota, I have been fortunate to have more opportunities to pursue my art. I travel the country for art residencies, do solo/group exhibits and art markets, serve as juror of art shows, and teach (young and old) different art mediums across the state.

Electrical Occurrence
2021
Micron ink
24 x 19 inches
Image courtesy of the artist
© Wade Patton
For the first part of my professional career my art was taken to its most simplified form, and then pushed past its essence to a vague resemblance of them. Taking these simplified forms of circles, squares, triangles, and rectangles, I began to experiment. The circle represents the wheel of life, the continuation of life, and the square, triangle, and rectangle represent how the Native Americans were tied down on Reservations. By redoing and redoing and deconstructing in total frustration, I began to pull through and developed a new idea.

My work evolved to a self-developed process I call “Construct, Deconstruct, Reconstruct.” In this process I make simplified hollowed geometric forms (squares, circles, triangles, rectangles, etc.) out of metal, cut them down into abstract segments, and I reconstruct these segments into complex cubist like versions of their former selves with a futuristic appeal. I can create unlimited numbers of one-of-a-kind designs using this process. I have yet to run out of ideas. From the beginning of my professional art career to 2003 I worked with very simplified rattle forms. The rattle is very sacred and used in many private ceremonies like blessing, healing, and naming, just to mention a few. Traditional rattles are made of natural material such as raw hide, dried turtle shell, deer toes, horsehair, and deer antler. This has traditionally been a man’s art form. I get around this taboo by making mine totally abstract and contemporary. Besides a complete update in design, I kept the use of horsehair and deer antler for decorative elements (I could not find contemporary substitutions). Both the horsehair and deer antler are used to pay homage to their critical contribution to my ancestors. The horse gave them mobility, and the deer supplies nutrition after the buffalo was annihilated. My hand-held ceremonial rattle with the deer antler handle barely resembles its traditional counterpart, and the dance rattle with the loop on top for the handle is a combination of the rattle and the dance hoop.

Art is very sacred to me—it keeps me close to my culture and to my Creator. In my culture there is no word for “Art,” it simply is a way of life, it is part of everyday living. When you make something, you put your heart and soul into it and it becomes a part of you; thus, your own style is created. I need to keep nurturing this creativity to keep it fresh and exciting so that it can reap the benefits of esthetic design. Today when I enter my studio, the outside world disappears and the metal and I are locked in a creative dance. When doing design work I let my imagination fly and be free so that I can develop a plethora of drawn ideas.
I am a Chickasaw textile artist. The main influences upon my work are my culture, heritage, and Native community. I specialize in weaving techniques (finger weaving, twining, and sprang) that pre-date European contact. I also work in beadwork, quillwork, and jewelry. I push the boundary of how these techniques can be used to create contemporary art. My work expresses my Indigenous perspective and provides a present-day Native narrative.

Not Forgotten was designed to bring awareness to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women epidemic. Native women face murder rates 10 times higher than the nation average. The designs depicted in the quillwork and appliqué convey beliefs held by many Indigenous communities about our ancestors and those who are no longer with us.
Gene “IronMan” Smith, an enrolled member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, is an expert in the craft of metal art. He was born and raised in Sulphur, Oklahoma, and currently resides in Purcell, Oklahoma. His mother and father, Edwina Heminger (Oglala Lakota) and Clyde Smith (Choctaw Nation), encouraged him to use his artistic ability to honor their American Indian heritage. Gene especially took to heart a message from his mother: “Respect the ones that came before you, and the ones that paved the way to where you are today.”
My art is fueled by the belief that human beings are more than mere reflections in a mirror. We are soul and spirit. I am thankful for the opportunity to visually document my time with paint, print, and sculpture of natural materials. By sharing my narrative through my art as a Sac and Fox, Muscogee, and Seminole man, the viewer witnesses America’s history and its relationship with the first peoples of North America. I incorporate photography in my art which gives evidence of each soul, family member, and tribe’s existence before America became a nation. Tribal text and designs are also used to memorialize the efforts of all who walk the land before me. I enjoy my opportunities in nature; I draw inspiration and hope from the created natural forms and cycles that give their abundance to all living creatures. I give thanks to Hesaketvmese (the Muscogee word for God), the One who gives breath, for my provisions and life.

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The piece is from a series on Indigenous horse culture that arose from the loss of my last maternal uncle—he taught me to hunt, fish, and introduced me to riding. The piece communicates the special work of the women. The layered application of media gives the viewer a deeper contemplation with the piece. There are fifty stars in the piece.
I make art that strives to provide healing and progress, and that examines our relationship with ourselves, our planet, and our universe.

I create photogram prints of my ceramic works as well as plant life, using the cyanotype process. This photographic process creates an outlined positive image of the work placed on the paper. The erasure of details, aside from outlines, allows for focus on the print of the ceramic piece and its unique pattern. The midnight blue background further reinforces the connection to the night sky. I am incorporating storytelling, recording both personal and global experiences, in the prints by means of careful composition and handwritten graphite additions to the back of the works. The prints of my ceramic artworks capture a fleeting moment of the sun meeting the earth, honoring the sun that powers us and transforming the ceramic sculpture into another form, extending the life and impact of the piece. It presents an opportunity to collaborate with nature, and to experiment with pushing the ceramic artwork in a new direction as subject of the print. The botanical materials collected for printing are shed naturally, gathered in routine pruning, or collected in spaces of abundance, striving to respect the important relationship of plants and humans to care for one another.

**Jarica Walsh**

Osage Nation

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**FAM grass**

2021
Cyanotype photogram on paper
30 x 12 inches
Image courtesy of the artist
© Jarica Walsh

This grass was gathered on the grounds of the First Americans Museum and used to create this record of the grass that has gone to seed. The concept connects to the development of the First Americans Museum and the reclaiming of this land in order to share stories of the Indigenous people that inhabited Oklahoma and those that experienced forced removal to Oklahoma.

**Sister Braid**

2020
Cyanotype photogram on paper
22 x 22 inches
Image courtesy of the artist
© Jarica Walsh

This photogram displays a braid of grass with the ends loose and showing the grass has gone to seed.
I am a Native American photographer based in Texas. I was lucky enough to be born to a family that valued travel, adventure, and photography. By the age of seven I was developing film in a makeshift darkroom with my photographer father. He instilled in me a love of documenting the wonderful world we are privileged to inhabit. As an adult I kept my love of travel alive, documenting with photographs along the way. While completing a Bachelor’s Degree in Accounting and spending many years in a corporate job, I continued to explore my life-long passions: photography and travel. After many years in the corporate world I began to turn my love of photography into a second career by displaying and selling my photographs in galleries, online, and at local art shows. I am interested in adventurous travel, and photographing the beauty in everyday life. My favorite subject matter is nature, whether it is a beautiful landscape, animal, or flower. I believe getting outside is good for the soul. Through my artwork, I try to bring the outside in as much as possible. I am currently blessed to live in the horse country of North Texas which provides me many opportunities to explore nature and capture its beauty.

I love photographing the wonders of nature, landscapes, and wildlife in particular. Through the years I have seen my photography evolve to embrace new and ever-changing subjects. Recently I have been experimenting with photo merging and manipulation to further enhance my art. Although this has yielded many interesting results, I still find photographing nature to be significantly rewarding. I learned from my father, who was also a photographer, that there can be just as much beauty in a photograph of a tiny ant as there is in a majestic landscape. With this in mind I have found myself with an unlimited number of subjects.

**Blizzard**
2021
Photograph
24 x 36 inches
Image courtesy of the artist
© Paula Whatley

Horses huddling in a snow storm.

**Yvnnash**
2021
Photograph
20 x 20 inches
Image courtesy of the artist
© Paula Whatley

White buffalo at rest.
Traditional Quillwork is an art form practiced for hundreds of years before the arrival of Euro-Americans on the Great Plains. Quillwork was used to decorate shirts, moccasins, and jewelry. This distinctive practice has endured over the centuries to become one of the most recognizable art forms of the Great Plains today. Paper quilling also has roots that are centuries old. It is the art of manipulating and arranging small strips of paper into detailed designs. Depending on the desired shape and appearance, it can be rolled, looped, twisted, and curled. Glue is used to secure the paper strips into place. I have only been paper quilling for a year, but I have incorporated traditional Native design and have given the curling and bending of paper a modern twist. I use the paper strips like you would strokes of paint; with each folded piece resembling Impressionist artwork that make my dancers seem to come to life!

Three Fancy Shawl Dancers
2021
Paper quilling
16.5 x 24 inches
Photo by Bill Ganzel, Ganzel Group Communications © TaMara Zephier-Conroy

The Fancy Shawl dance is said to imitate the graceful, swooping beauty of a butterfly; therefore, dancers always hold at least one of their arms out, because a butterfly is never seen without at least one wing aloft.

Sisters
2021
Paper quilling
12.5 x 19.5 inches
Photo by Bill Ganzel, Ganzel Group Communications © TaMara Zephier-Conroy

Connected by the Heart. Forever together they will never be apart.