

AIR, LAND, SEED
and
OCTOPUS DREAMS

exhibition catalog

AIR, LAND, SEED
and
OCTOPUS DREAMS

June 29 – September 21, 2013



516 Central Avenue SW
Downtown Albuquerque, New Mexico
www.516arts.org

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Front cover: Emily Arthur, *Water Moccasin (with Shot)* (detail), 2011, etching chine-collé on BFK paper, 15 x 20 inches

Back cover: Teevee Ningeokuluk, *Shaman Revealed*, 2007, lithograph, 20 x 18 inches

Introduction

It is an honor and a pleasure for 516 ARTS to showcase contemporary Native American artists in global contexts. This series of exhibitions and programs started with professor/curator Nancy Marie Mithlo, who embraced the opportunity to work with 516 ARTS, and helped us develop the project by connecting us with artists, curators, poets and leaders in the Native American community.

For the exhibition *Air, Land, Seed* in the downstairs gallery, Mithlo has assembled a collaborative team, for both the 2013 Venice Biennale and 516 ARTS, who re-envision relationships among artists, curators, scholars, museums and viewers. *Octopus Dreams*, the concurrent exhibition in the upstairs gallery, features Native artists from across the country who were selected to represent Native America abroad in Russia last year and are shown together at 516 ARTS for the first time in the United States. Guest co-curator of *Octopus Dreams*, Suzanne Newman Fricke, references Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith who argues that scholarship too often recreates the colonizing mentality. With these exhibitions, we have sought to challenge this polemic by inviting curators who bring new perspectives and approaches to the forefront.

Air, Land, Seed addresses global tensions between home and exile, drawing from the unique perspectives of the Indigenous peoples of Native North America and selected others to explore these themes. The work of nine contemporary artists engaged in the politicized medium of printmaking/paper are featured with works that question the forced displacements and ideologies that define our collective contemporary existence. Mithlo says, "This reappropriation of colonial markers – flags, boats and airwaves – subverts the control and militarization of indigenous homelands. The artists repurpose these potent icons inscribed in the US Marine credo: 'From the halls of Montezuma, to the shores of Tripoli, we fight our country's battles, in the air, on land and sea'."

Air, Land, Seed is the seventh Indigenous exhibition at the Venice Biennale (1999-2013), for which Mithlo has organized artists, curators and educators to do collaborative exhibits and actions. Directly after the group's participation in the 2013 Venice Biennale, their project continues at 516 ARTS for the exhibition, residency and public events. As part of this project, 516 ARTS presents its first artist-in-residence project in partnership with the NPN/Visual Artists Network. Artists John Hitchcock and Emily Arthur are working with Marwin Begaye and Ryan O'Malley to create *Impact Vs. Influence*, a series of banners, flags and give-aways culminating in the printmaking installation at 516 ARTS.

Octopus Dreams features works on paper by 36 contemporary Native American artists. Curated by Suzanne Fricke and Beverly Morris, the project was originally organized with the Institute of American Indian Arts to celebrate 2012 as the official year of Russian-American friendship. The American Consulate sponsored the show at the Ekaterinburg Museum of Fine Arts in Russia. The artists selected reflect diversity in tribal affiliation, geographic location, gender and age, and share an intricate vision of life lived in different worlds, from the long traditions of their specific tribes to the politics and pop of the world at large.

On behalf of all of us at 516 ARTS, I would like to express our sincere thanks to our generous funders, supporters, civic and community leaders as well as all of the artists, curators and poets involved in this summer's exhibitions and programs. We are proud to present their exceptional work and diverse perspectives.

— Suzanne Sbarge
Executive Director

AIR, LAND, SEED

ARTISTS

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

CURATED BY

Nancy Marie Mithlo
John Hitchcock
Elisabetta Frasca
Paul Baker Prindle
Sarah Anne Stolte



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

A shower of sparks skate across the morning sky.

You think this bottle will open a canyon wall
and light a trail

trampled by gloved hands
as you inhale earth, wind, water,
through the gasoline nozzle
at trail's end,
a flint spear driven into the key switch.

You think you can return to that place
where your mother held her sleeves above the rising tides
saying, "We are here again
on the road covered with television snow;
we are here again
the song has thudded."

— Sherwin Bitsui



Sustained

By Nancy Marie Mithlo

I encountered my first snake of the season this morning. As I ran beside the Santa Fe River, I saw something glowing in the morning sun, a tiny liquor bottle, empty beside a shallow pool on the river's edge. Just as I reached my hand out to pick it up, the snake, brown, thin, encircled, raised his head. We caught each other's eyes. The snake told me, "This is my territory." I slowly, carefully, withdrew.

My Comanche and Apache relatives would not call this creature a snake. They prefer the term "long people" to describe these powerful messengers who are so quick to be insulted that they will remind you of their presence in sometimes unwelcomed and surprising moments. **Emily Arthur**, what will become of us as we contemplate *Water Moccasin (with Shot)*? Your graceful "long person" caught in the claws of a fierce sparrow is fearless. The snake and the bird, messengers to the underground and to the clouds, these two seem to know more than we do, more than is possible for simple humans. Snake and bird remind us of our powerlessness, of our limitations. They shout "Caution! Danger ahead! Pay attention!"

And yet, these commanding creatures are under siege as well, their lives equally threatened by the irreversible traumas of warfare, consumption, exploitation and degradation that define our contemporary existence. **Ryan O'Malley's** complex mandalas, wheatpasted on public walls, feature



raven's eyes and wings, impossibly duplicated and layered in an offering of sorts, an almost funeral-like gifting to urban decay. **John Hitchcock's** *Chemically Wasted Warhorse*, **Marwin Begaye's** *Redtail Hawk* and **Duane Slick's** *The Great Design* all profile animals caught in some painful parody of their natural worlds. These animals observe us warily; like the snake on my morning run, they challenge us in their silent repose with the consequences of our foolish human actions.

How are we to address these wrongs? How do we respond to the creatures that ask us, "Why?" – each in their own ways, pleading for us to take action and stop this mad destruction of the earth's beauty? The artists of *Air, Land, Seed* forge ahead, following in the long history of social commentary inherent in the medium of printmaking. The multiplicity of prints subverts and confuses the fetishization of singular works of art. The print plays the role of the trickster, shapeshifting into endless variations and forms. These renderings on paper and fabric escape our control: they float as flags, lay like corpses on the floor, move across our eyes as projections and attach themselves to our clothing and our cars. Like a wild storm, prints have a life of their own; their animation challenges our staid ideas of purchase and consumption. Their wildness serve the purpose of the artists featured – to give voice to indigenous realities in the harsh and sometimes brutal times in which we live. These artistic interventions entail some risk. To call out

these harms, as the *Air, Land, Seed* artists have done, certain rules had to be broken.

The *Air, Land, Seed* project expands across time and place. To tell this story correctly, I must stretch my arms around two decades of art making and encircle the globe. The telling of this story does not come naturally; for like many realities of the indigenous world, it is laced with loss and sorrow. I am likely to be overly sentimental. Someone else should ideally tell this story in the proper fashion, and maybe one day they will. But in the meantime, the task has fallen on my shoulders, so listen.

Some twenty years ago, at a time that my youngest child, now a grown woman, was still gestating in my belly, a talented Aboriginal artist named Brenda Croft was invited to show the works of her aboriginal sisters at a venue that most call the oldest and most important international arts exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia. Brenda shared this news with me as we were driving along the lonely highways of southern New Mexico at night, returning from a pilgrimage to the tragic site at which her brother, Lindsay Croft, a famous Aboriginal rights leader, had died in a car accident a year prior. We were contemplative, and somewhat mournful still. The night was long and we were tired, even exhausted. Brenda, ever stalwart, told of how, at this international venue, indigenous women artists would represent the



Tanks, guns, fires and flags are caught at the moment of contact – at war with the sensibilities that define an indigenous existence...

country of Australia and that perhaps Native artists from the States should come as well.

Later, we learned that Robert Colescott would represent the American pavilion in 1997 as the first artist of color in the Biennale's century-long history. Surely there was some chance that American Indian art could be featured in the same way – free from market constraints, included among the world's best artists. That thought, that idea, that time; led to the show you are now seeing here in Albuquerque at 516 ARTS. That thought, buried like a seed during the long night conversations, from our vigil to a place of tragedy, birthed a movement. From death, comes life.

This impulse for self-representation was so strong that it resulted in nine indigenous art exhibits being launched at the Biennale in Venice, Italy from 1999 to 2013. Two of the exhibits were sponsored by the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian.¹ The other seven exhibits are non-institutional efforts led by a collaborative team of artists, educators and



Venetian supporters, intent on ensuring a place at the table for indigenous peoples.² These independent interventions at the Venice Biennale are known for their commitment to long-term, mutually meaningful, reciprocal projects that honor mentorship.

This year, the artists and organizers responsible for taking *Air, Land, Seed* to Venice chose to address the theme of militarization of indigenous homelands. Tanks, guns, fires and flags are caught at the moment of contact – at war with the sensibilities that define an indigenous existence, that delicate balance between nature and humans out of control and spiraling ever towards some soon to be encountered abyss. But wait, there's a breath of life here in **Dyani White Hawk's** contemplative horizon lives, a good hearty laugh in **Henry Payer's** collages of vintage Indian kitch, a tender recognition of our humanity on **Faisal Abdu'Allah's** composite portraits, a prayer in **Sherwin Bitsui's** poems about water and life. We live after all, and that is cause to celebrate. The images that float serenely by us in **C. Maxx Steven's** *Cultural Landscape Sustained* resonate with irony, a bit of pride and a sense of continuance.

The artists of *Air, Land, Seed* gently remind us that yes, we live in dangerous times, but remember, we are only human.



Nancy Marie Mithlo is an Associate Professor of Art History and American Indian Studies at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. She earned her Ph.D. in 1993 from Stanford University writing on Native American identity and arts commerce in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Her 2009 book, *"Our Indian Princess": Subverting the Stereotype*, was published by the School for Advanced Research Press. Mithlo directs American Indian photography research in New Mexico and Oklahoma, including the Horace Poolaw Photography Collection opening at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian in 2014. Mithlo's curatorial work has resulted in seven exhibits at the Venice Biennale. In 2011-2012 she served as the School for Advanced Research Anne Ray Fellow and as a scholar at the Georgia O'Keeffe Research Center.

1. Mithlo credits *Air, Land, Seed* advisor Patsy Phillips, currently Director of the Museum of Contemporary American Indian Arts, for initiating these interventions. In 2005, the NMAI sponsored artist James Luna at the Querini Stampalia for the exhibit *Emendatio*. See: <http://www.paulchaatsmith.com/james-luna.html>. In 2007, Edgar Heap of Birds represented NMAI in venues throughout Venice for *Most Serene Republics*.

2. See more on the seven independent Biennale initiatives on Mithlo's website: www.nancymariemithlo.com and in her forthcoming book with the State University of New York Press titled *Indians in Venice: Indigenous Arts on the Global Stage*.

Page 8:

Marwin Begaye, *Redtail Hawk*, 2011, woodblock print, 12 x 9 inches

Pages 10-11:

Emily Arthur, *Water Moccasin (with Shot)* (detail), 2011, etching chine-collé on BFK paper, 15 x 20 inches

Dyani White Hawk, *Torn*, 2010, acrylic, enamel, thread, paper on canvas, 38 x 30 inches

Henry Payer, *Air, Land, Seed, Panel 1* (detail), 2013, mixed media collage on paper, 15 x 10 inches

Ryan O'Malley, *Dreams of the Plains (Past, Present, Future)*, 2013, serigraphy, black powder, 26 x 20 inches

Pages 12-13:

Emily Arthur, Marwin Begaye & John Hitchcock, *Equivalencies* (detail), 2012, screenprint and drawing, 44 x 30 inches

Faisal Abdu'Allah, *The eyes of our ancestors' #1-3*, 2013, ink jet print, 36 x 45 inches

C.Maxx Stevens, *Cultural Landscape Sustained*, 2013, QuickTime video, 3 min. 6 sec.

Pages 14-15:

Duane Slick, *The Great Design 1*, 2010, lithograph, 29 x 22 inches

Emily Arthur, Marwin Begaye & John Hitchcock, *Equivalencies* (detail), 2012, screenprint and drawing, 44 x 30 inches

Ryan O'Malley, *print action for Venice Biennale* (detail), 2011

Marwin Begaye, *Riders of the Storm III* (detail), 2012, lithograph, 22 x 15 inches

Page 16:

John Hitchcock, *Epicentro Retracing the Plains* on the occasion of La Biennale di Venezia 54th international arts exhibition, Venice, Italy, 2011

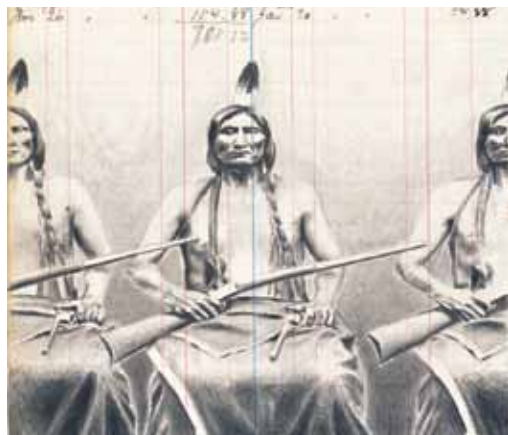
OCTOPUS DREAMS

ARTISTS

Tony Abeyta	Michael McCabe
Lynne Allen	America Meredith
Neal Ambrose-Smith	Ohotaq Mikkigak
Shuvinai Ashoona	N. Scott Momaday
Jamison (Chas) Banks	Daniel Namingha
Marwin Begaye	Eliza Naranjo Morse
Ross Chaney	Chris Pappan
Rande Cook	Alex Pena
Laura Fragua-Cota	George Rivera
Bob Haozous	Mateo Romero
Edgar Heap of Birds	Jaune Quick-to-See Smith
Luzene Hill	Ningeokuluk Teevee
Frank Buffalo Hyde	Charlene Teters
Deborah Jojola	Marty Two Bulls
Jeff Kahm	Emmi Whitehorse
lessLIE (Leslie Sam)	Stephen Wood
Linda Lomahaftewa	Melanie Yazzie
Rhett Lynch	Debra Yepa-Pappan

CURATED BY

Suzanne Newman Fricke & Beverly Morris

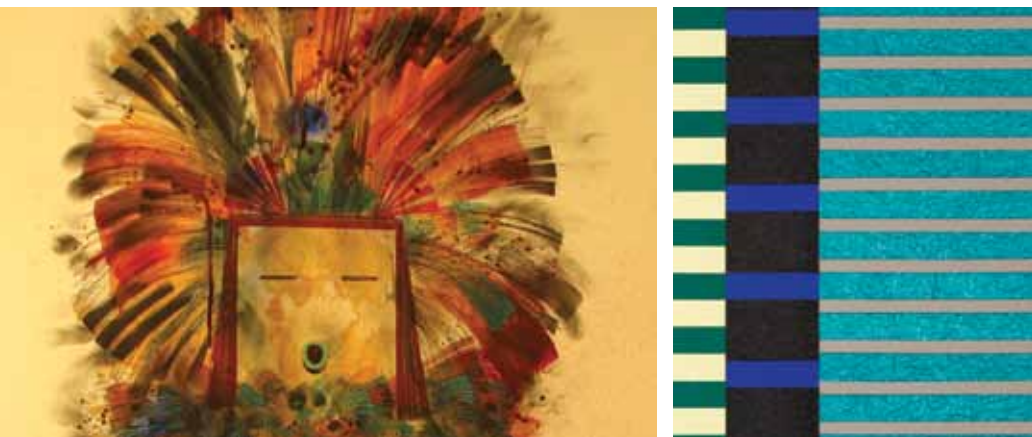


In the Dark Night of the Sea

By Suzanne Newman Fricke

The title for the show *Octopus Dreams: Works on Paper by Contemporary Native American Artists* comes from the work of **N. Scott Momaday** in his 1990 novel *The Ancient Child*. In the book, the Pulitzer-prize winning author tells the story of Locke Setman, a Native artist living in the Bay Area. One night he dreams he is walking by the sea where he sees a half-dead octopus washed up on shore and saves it by carrying it back to the water. Looking at the octopus he muses, "I wonder if, in the dark night of the sea, the octopus dreams of me." With this deft reversal of perspective, Momaday suggests the fluidity of the subject/object relationship while also considering the dark space inhabited by artists. Like the octopus, Momaday's artist lives "in the dark night of the sea" where both the artist and the octopus are alien and familiar at the same time. This inky, watery dreamscape is seen in the rich layered images of Momaday's own acrylic paintings included in the show. The figures in his painting *The Long Walk* barely emerge from the background with the thick brushstrokes unifying the bodies and the space around them into a dense dream state.

All of the works in this show display the same connection between the past and the present, the other and the self. The artists in the show share certain similarities: all are by living artists who are actively working in the field; all have ties to officially recognized tribes; and all work on



Like the octopus, Momaday's artist lives "in the dark night of the sea" where both the artist and the octopus are alien and familiar at the same time.

paper. Yet it is the differences in media, styles, tone and subject that is truly remarkable, a great variety and diversity within the parameters of this exhibition. Seen individually, the works demonstrate the depth and variety in the contemporary Native art world in terms of style, materials and subject matter, but when seen together the works create a dialogue, enhancing the meanings of the individual pieces while retaining their unique voices.

Some of the artists reference their Native heritage directly in their work. **America Meredith** honors her Cherokee heritage in *Stomp Dance*, a linocut print of moccasins engaging in the dance practiced among the Cherokee, Creeks and other Southeastern tribes. Her work celebrates motion and sound, evoking the pounding rhythm of feet hitting the ground. It commemorates the continuation of culture among the Cherokee. In *Touch the Cloud... Take 1*, **Chris Pappan** repeated the image of a Lakota man seated with a rifle in his lap and an eagle feather in his hair three times.



Pappan layered the figures over a copy of a ledger book, a late nineteenth century page covered by calculations, dates, and almost indecipherable words and names written in the calligraphic style of the time. The layering of images, words and numbers, unrelated yet specifying a time, place and culture, give a richness to the print and a connection to the past while the repetition and the digital medium keeps the piece contemporary.

The three Inuit stone cut prints from the printmaking collectives in the Cape Dorset region also reflect the artists' heritage. Many different artists draw and submit images to the printmaking collectives where the drawings become the basis for an annual portfolio of prints. With their bright colors and mythological subject matter these images bring the ideas of the past into the present, such as **Ningeokuluk Teevee's** shaman with a human figure unzipping his face to reveal the figure of an animal underneath. This transformation image set against a bright blue sky suggests a deep connection between the human and animal worlds. The elimination of all references to the contemporary world reinforces the continuation of the past into present.

For other artists in the show, pure abstraction allows for a discussion of deeper ideas, including identity, place, and history. **Jeff Kahm** uses straight lines and precise corners to create images of the hard-lined abstraction; his



patterning and color suggest a visual language now incomprehensible. With great brevity, **Emmi Whitehorse** suggests landscapes, weather patterns, and narrative, all without distinct images. The curves and lines in her work become a discussion of place and time, referencing her homeland in Dinétah through bright colors and shapes as though the scene was viewed from above. **Luzene Hill** uses brown ink and black charcoal to create pure lines and pure brushstrokes, reducing form and eliminating color to offer an unadulterated vision of forms.

Some of the artists in the show are overtly political in their work. In **Edgar Heap-of-Birds'** monotypes question race and identity. In *Work the Curve Good Mr. Boss*, Heap-of-Birds uses graffiti style to comment on societal expectations, while in *Smile for Racism* he covers a stereotypical image of an Indian Chief with red streaks like blood, referencing the violence against Native cultures. Some of the art explores intimate topics, such as break-ups and personal identity. In *Sucking Happiness Shaman*, **Bob Haozous** writes a letter detailing the events around an ex-girlfriend's breakdown caused by a shaman who administered a hallucinogenic. Haozous combines image and text to reveal a personal vision of heartbreak. In **Debra Yepa-Pappan's** *Hello Kitty Tipi* the artist includes an image of herself standing in front of a tipi while wearing a jingle dress. The artist, who is of Jemez/Korean ancestry, depicts a Plains scene complete with the artist in braids while wearing a

"The dream becomes a story, a myth. Ritual has a place, so have good and evil, and there is an ineffable intimacy. Nothing is unnatural, and there is no question of right and wrong." — N. Scott Momaday

Plains dress in front of tipis, but uses bright over-saturated colors. The artist's use of digital media allows her to insert herself into a scene that is both historical and fictional, a world of her own making.

The work in *Octopus Dreams* offers a snapshot of the Native art market today, a small sample of a larger world with its complexity, contradictions and eloquent perspective on contemporary life. While the work differs, all suggest Momaday's dark night of the sea, the place that brings together the past, present and future, self and other, and anger and love. In *The Ancient Child*, Momaday writes, "The dream becomes a story, a myth. Ritual has a place, so have good and evil, and there is an ineffable intimacy. Nothing is unnatural, and there is no question of right and wrong." The place of *Octopus Dreams*, then, is that place, between morality, reality and myth.



Suzanne Newman Fricke holds a Ph.D. in Native American art history from the University of New Mexico. Over the past twenty years, she has taught a wide variety of art history courses, including Native art, Renaissance art, Southwestern art and Postmodern art. Her research into contemporary Native art includes an article on Bob Haozous in the anthology *No Deal! Indigenous Arts and the Politics of Possession* and several articles on the artists from the exhibitions she curated in Russia. As a curator, she worked to send two exhibitions to Russia in 2012, which are now scheduled to travel to three other sites in Russia and one in Tokyo, in addition to this exhibition at 516 ARTS.

Beverly Morris (Aleut) served as the associate director of the Institute of American Indian Arts' first Summer Film and Television Workshop in 2004, sponsored by the Walt Disney Studios/ABC Talent Development Program and the National Museum of the American Indian. Morris has taught high school students from Nambé Pueblo how to use video to collect and edit oral histories of their elders and documentary filmmaking at the Girls Film School of the College of Santa Fe. She trained as an oral historian at Colorado College, through a program run by the Library of Congress American Folklife Center. Morris received a BFA from Stephen Austin University.

Pages 20-21:

N. Scott Momaday, *The Long Walk*, 2011, acrylic on paper, 9 x 12 inches
 Chris Pappan, *Touch the Clouds...Take 1* (detail), 2010, archival ink jet print, 28 x 18 inches
 America Meredith, *Stomp Dance*, 2010, linoleum block print, 4/7, 13 x 12.5 inches
 Neal Ambrose-Smith, *Space Cowboy* (detail), 2012, mixed media, 22.5 x 22 inches

Pages 22-23:

Tony Abeyta, *Red Mountain Deity* (detail), 2001, mixed media, 30 x 22 inches
 Jeff Kahm, *Untitled #2*, 2010, acrylic on paper, 15 x 15 inches
 George Rivera, *Trout*, 1998, monoprint, 22 x 30 inches
 Charlene Teters, *Obama Drawing #2*, 2012, mixed media, 30 x 22 inches

Pages 24-25:

Emmi Whitehorse, *Untitled Blue Monoprint* (detail), 2000, 30 x 22 inches
 Bob Haozous, *Dog Crossing* (detail), 1993, monotype, 30 x 22 inches
 Rhett Lynch, *Dancing with Fire*, 2012, monoprint, etching, monotype, 8.5 x 7.5 inches
 Debra Yepa-Pappan, *Hello Kittie Tipi* (detail), 2007, archival digital inkjet print, 8.5 x 8 inches

Page 26:

Lynne Allen, *Moccasin*, 2011, photogravure, 25.5 x 21.25 inches

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