

Reno

“The Way We Live: American Indian Art of the Great Basin and the Sierra Nevada”

Nevada Museum of Art

THIS EXHIBITION of contemporary Native American art of the Great Basin and Sierra Nevada at the Nevada Museum of Art has been long awaited by the surrounding Native community and residents of Nevada. It has been an entire decade since anything like this show has been curated—since the 2002 Nevada State Museum’s *Under One Sky* exhibition in Carson City.

Under One Sky opened to a surprise turnout and strong response from the public who stated they wanted to see more. Many artists from *Under One Sky* also show in *The Way We Live*, including Ben Aleck (Northern Paiute), Melvin J. Brown (Paiute-Shoshone), Jean LaMarr (Paiute-Achomawi), Jack Malotte (Western Shoshone-Washoe), Clayton B. Sampson (Washoe), Paul Stone (Paiute-Washoe), and myself.

In 2011, the Nevada Museum of Art, collaborating with Pyramid Lake Museum, called for artwork “addressing issues relating to concepts of the changing environment,” according to the show’s website. The show’s intent was to stimulate new works in various media with the local environment as a focal point.

Other participating artists are Dugan Aguilar (Maidu-Northern Paiute-Achomawi), Farrell Cunningham (Maidu), Black Eagle (Shoshone-Yokut), Billy Hawk Enos (Washoe-Nisenan), Donna Featherstone (Chukchansi), Micqaela Jones-Crouch (Paiute-Shoshone), Frank LaPena (Nomtipom Maidu-Wintu), Judith Lowry (Mountain Maidu-Hammawi-Washo), Ramon Murillo (Shoshone-Bannock), Ray Valdez (Nahua-Yaqui), and Alan Wallace (Nisenan Maidu-Washoe).

The reception opened with a beautiful hand drum performance by Christina Thomas, followed by a panel discussion of participating artists. The museum’s theater, unexpectedly packed, was left with standing-room only. After a lively discussion by artists about the inspiration for their work, it was disappointing that only one question was directed to the artists from the audience. The question was concerning the otherworldly transcendence during the Sun Dance, mentioned briefly by Ramon Murillo. The audience shared an awkward “Okay ... and let’s move on” pause and then proceeded from the theater to the third floor to continue the reception.

Jean LaMarr (Paiute-Achomawi), former Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) printing teacher, led the hand drum performance at the reception, which complemented her two works in the show. *Ni Ya Kway (Down)* represents what she considers the “endurance of cultural traditions in the face of great challenges,” as show curator Ann M. Wolfe wrote. The purple- and blue-hued acrylic painting features an intergenerational group of Paiute



Judith Lowry (Mountain Maidu-Hammawi-Washo), *Edna by Honey Lake*, 1999/2012, acrylic on canvas

woman seated in front of a wooden drum for hand games. The outer edges are framed by photographs of hands belonging to her friends and family. The installation is not overtly political like many of LaMarr’s past works, but, by asserting the importance of native traditions, LaMarr commemorates “the survival of Indigenous people and offers a glimpse of a world where the bonds of culture, family, and community provide the strength and vitality to persevere despite adversity.”

Frank LaPena (Nomtipom Maidu-Wintu) is a printmaker and painter, as well as a dancer and poet. He entwines his personal stories with those of his family and tribe, drawing heavily from Maidu and Wintu oral history, cultures, and worldviews. His piece, *Stewart Indian School*, an acrylic painting on wood, features an abstracted scene from Great Basin Desert, in which he integrates a photo of his 1945 class from Stewart Indian School, a federal boarding school located in Carson City. LaPena exhibits widely in solo exhibitions across the country and is a Professor Emeritus of Ethnic Studies and Art and former Director of Native American

Studies at California State University, Sacramento.

Judith Lowry (Mountain Maidu-Hammawi-Washo) exhibited *Edna at Honey Lake*, a monumental acrylic painting of her paternal grandmother, Edna Evans Lowry, from northern California and Nevada. “Edna appears as a stoic and strong woman, surrounded by her family, as she navigates a culturally complex world as a biracial woman in the American West,” writes Wolfe. Lowry has been featured in many museums around the country including the Crocker Museum, Wheelwright Museum, CN Gorman Museum, and the National Museum of the American Indian.

I combined my abstract landscapes and cultural images with Paiute staples like willow, pine nuts, and dried cattails. The series is named for the seasons: *Yubano (Fall)*, *Tommy (Winter)*, and *Tamano (Spring)*. These all tell stories through an abstract vision of the Nevada landscape, seasonal colors, and personal petroglyphs. In my presentation at the reception, I described the inspirations of the willow, pine nuts, and petroglyph images, beginning with the creation of my son’s Paiute baby basket. The whole family made parts of the basket from beadwork, willow frame, basket hood, and deer hide. This process led to my combining mixed media with organic and culturally significant images onto canvas. I have exhibited at the Nevada State Museum, High Desert Museum, Portland State University, and the Museum of Contemporary Native Arts in Santa Fe.

Ben Aleck (Pyramid Lake Paiute) showed *Kooyoee Panunadu (Pyramid Lake)*, a mixed media work featuring the lake’s endangered *cui-ui* fish, *Chasmistes cujus*, among blue tones, water splotches, willow, and wild sugar cane. “His more recent mixed media works draw attention to the environmental challenges faced by the indigenous people of the Pyramid Lake region,” writes Wolfe. Aleck earned his BFA from California College of Arts and Crafts in 1972. Currently serving as the collections manager of the Pyramid Lake Museum, Aleck collaborated with the NMA curator, Ann Wolfe, in seeking out Nevada artists. —Melissa Melero

San Francisco “Real N.D.N.— Native Diaspora Now” Galería de la Raza

REAL N.D.N.,” curated by the Indigenous Arts Coalition (IAC), is a milestone—a community coming together after years of planning—so first a little background.

The San Francisco Bay Area, ancestral home of Ramaytush Ohlone people, has been a destination for other tribes since the 19th century, when Indigenous Californians displaced from their lands sought jobs. The Bay Area was a destination for Indian people in the controversial Indian Relocation policy by the US federal government in the 1950s and 1960s, building an urban Indian community with the Intertribal Friendship House as a nexus. From 1969 to 1971, Bay Area Indians seized the international spotlight by occupying Alcatraz Island.

In 1983, Janeen Antoine (Sisseton Dakota) founded the American Indian Contemporary Arts (AICA), a non-profit art gallery. AICA seamlessly moved from tribally-specific art shows to politically charged installations to seminal traveling exhibits such as “Indian Humor.” In the 1998 Dot-Com boom, the gallery’s rent increased almost three times, so AICA shut its doors. While AICA still hosts events, the San Francisco Native art scene has been without a dedicated, intertribal arts space ever since.

Meanwhile, the San Francisco Arts Council (SFAC) funded a “homeless” cultural center, the so-called Native American Cultural Center; however, according to SFAC minutes, “funds appear to have been misappropriated for individual use.” Through the efforts of Kim Shuck (Cherokee-Sac and Fox

descent), the SFAC finally changed tacks in 2007 and awarded grants directly to individual Native artists and organizations. From this effort, artists established a community organization, the Indigenous Arts Coalition in 2008 “to acknowledge, support, promote, and maintain all visual aspects of contemporary indigenous arts.” The opening of “Real N.D.N.” coincided with the launch of the IAC’s website at: www.iacsf.org.

Several of the “Real N.D.N.” artists are alumni from the San Francisco Arts Institute, the college that proudly offered the T.C. Cannon Scholarship to Native American students, despite the fact that the celebrated Kiowa-Caddo-Choctaw artist only spent two months at SFAI before dropping out and enlisting in the army to serve in Vietnam.

Ostensibly the show asks, “Who is today’s real N.D.N.?” and to dig further, “How do we represent community in our individualized practices and perspectives?” Few works overtly address these questions; the viewer has to read between lines in this slice-of-life view of an intertribal urban Indian community with diverse artistic practices. Painting, mixed media, and photography were interspersed with installations and video. A willingness to experiment could be seen in the media: photocopies, puff paint, Sharpies, and ramen noodles.

Entering the gallery, I was surprised to hear the voice of Hoka Skenandore discussing racism. His interview was part of *Double Speak*, Salt River Pima-Maricopa Richard Castaneda’s “ten-year video in progress,” which most closely addresses the questions of Indian identity.

100 Years of Transformation features Castaneda’s crisp photography. He intersperses photographs of himself in boarding school photographs. The