WEAVING PAST INTO PRESENT
Experiments in Contemporary Native American Printmaking

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INTERNATIONAL PRINT CENTER NEW YORK
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“For me, the principles of composition and storytelling inherent to printmaking can engage in multiple sites simultaneously, getting the word out about Indigenous presences, experiences, and creativity.”

- Jason Lujan, 2015

The advent of the nineteenth century marked a definitive shift in the lives of indigenous peoples across the North America. As more and more white settlers sought land to fulfill a “manifest destiny,” many Indian groups were forced out of their homelands and pressured to adapt to the hegemony of the white world. Many children were removed from their parents to attend assimilationist boarding schools, and thousands of artifacts and human remains were exhumed for federal scientific collection. In the United States, with the 1871 Indian Appropriations Act, Native sovereignty and treaty agreements were abolished, rendering all indigenous people as wards of the state. Likewise in Canada, the Indian Act of 1867 – one of the first legislative acts of the newly formed Dominion of Canada – similarly stripped indigenous groups of their autonomy while taking control of previously sovereign lands. In addition to devastating many aboriginal communities, these legislative acts reinforced the stereotype of Native peoples as helpless and uncivilized.

Weaving Past into Present focuses on the work of indigenous printmakers who utilize nineteenth-century history as a visual language. This history, when woven into the fabric of contemporary print practices, becomes an alternative and more complex means of expressing “Native-ness” today. Grounding their work in the images, textures, and experiences of this era, artists layer old and new to explore how historic attitudes continue to resonate in popular culture. The process of printmaking is a natural vehicle for this kind of visual juxtaposition.

The artists in this exhibition utilize a number of diverse visual strategies, often referencing urban and popular design to comment on nineteenth-century racial politics and their contemporary legacy. Jason Lujan (Chiricahua Apache) subversively inserts Zuni patterning and Arabic text into a brand logo for American Indian Community Kirin - blurring the line between Native and non-Native as well as high and low art. Melanie Yazzie (Navajo/Diné) appropriates popularized images of Native Americans from children’s schoolbooks and cartoons in her screenprint, Indian Boy Art Project, to challenge how racial stereotypes
are sustained through educational settings. Graphic and minimal, Joe Feddersen’s (Colville Confederated Tribes) *Urban Vernacular* linocuts confront preconceptions of “traditional” Indian aesthetics and modern urban design.

A number of artists in this exhibition reference indigenous knowledge to connect to an earlier time in Native history. Emphasizing the Navajo value of universal harmony between man and nature, Emmi Whitehorse’s (Navajo/Diné) abstract prints, like *Element*, convey the artist’s deeply personal interpretation of a changing homeland through geometry, color, and line. Similarly, Rick Bartow’s (Wiyot) *Little Bear 2* draws from Native American oral traditions as well as personal mythology to reflect on his own experiences of healing and continuity after the Vietnam War. Interested in the subjectivity of abstraction, Jewel Shaw (Cree/Métis) draws and redraws old machinery and other antiquated objects that become abstracted yet personal symbols of “containment, memory and loss.”

Other artists layer past and present as a means of establishing a personal narrative. Finding a “third space” between his Native cultural roots and his upbringing as the adoptive son of white parents, Brad Kahlhamer’s (Unknown, Plains Culture) portfolio, *Skull Project*, blurs the line between fiction and reality – referencing at once contemporary reservation life, punk rock, popular culture, and symbols of indigenous knowledge. Looking to her great grandmother’s journals chronicling the Indian Wars for inspiration, Lynne Allen (Hunkpapa Lakota) layers deeply personal historic text and family photos to more broadly reflect on how a legacy of mistreatment impacts the way we understand Native cultures in contemporary society.
On whole, the works featured in this exhibition connect the material, cultural, and experiential qualities of contemporary life to nineteenth-century histories and personal biographies. These prints negotiate cultural heritage and the contemporary through layering, juxtaposition, and imagistic appropriation – blending photographs, popular culture, and language to assert a new vision of indigeneity that privileges person over place.

Sarah Diver, New York City, 2015

Sarah Diver graduated from the University of Colorado Boulder in 2013 with degrees in Art History, Studio Art, and Chemistry. Her honors thesis was entitled, *The Man and the Myth: Clyfford Still and the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation*. She is currently a Masters of Arts candidate at Columbia University in the Modern Art: Critical and Curatorial Studies program.
International Print Center New York was founded in 2000 as the first and only non-profit institution dedicated solely to the appreciation and understanding of fine art prints. IPCNY expands audiences for prints and the visual arts through exhibitions, publications, educational programs and online services. Innovative programming brings collectors, curators, artists and scholars together to explore the art of the print, from the old master to the contemporary. A 501 (c) (3) institution, IPCNY depends upon foundation, government and individual support as well as members’ contributions to fund its programs. To contribute or for membership information, please contact stephanie@ipcny.org. Touring info: kirsten@ipcny.org.

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