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**New narratives in Native American Art at Chelsea's contemporary art gallery Sundaram Tagore**



*Gallery view, image courtesy of Sundaram Tagore Gallery, 2023*

*Native American Art Now*

Curated by Leesa Fanning

Sundaram Tagore Gallery (<https://www.sundaramtagore.com/>)

By COCO DOLLE October 9, 2023

On view at the gallery online (<https://sundaram-tagore.shorthandstories.com/native-american-art-now-2023/index.html>)

Since the inception of his eponymous gallery in 2000, Sundaram Tagore has made it his on-going mission to showcase underrepresented artists. This fall's exhibition, Mr. Tagore invited global art specialist and Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art curator Leesa Fanning to focus on new perspectives in native american art.

*Native American Art Now* is one of Tagore's largest and most ambitious exhibitions of the year presenting twenty-two artists from diverse tribal affiliations spanning the United States and Canada. From traditional meanings to contemporary subjects, forms, materials and techniques, this curation clearly aims to subvert the idea that Native art is fixed in the past.

Standing on a pedestal, the exhibition opens with a hybrid ceramic by Virgil Ortiz inspired by both sci-fi and tribal warriors. *Recon Watchman* is part of a series of work that mixes the tradition of Pueblo history and culture with futuristic aesthetics. Further into the gallery space, more traditional glass baskets by Preston Singletary embody the understanding of Tlingit origin stories and mythologies. In the backdrop is *The Seam of Heaven*, an elegant wood and etched glass work by Marianne Nicolson. Widely exhibited in museums, this multidisciplinary artist and activist indulges in references from spiritual content.



*Our Red Nations Were Always Green*, by artist Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds, image courtesy of Sundaram Tagore Gallery, 2023

Bringing his Mohawk influences, Richard Glazer Danay's *Shake, Rattle & Roll* is a large mobile rattle installation consisting of found objects and rattles suspended from the ceiling. Challenging and recontextualizing stereotypes of "The West", Bently Spang's *War Shirt* from his *Modern Warrior* series, is a sculpture that stands like a hanging shirt and presents like an installation piece full of dangling wires and mirrors.

On the gallery walls, a variety of alternative media and art-making processes are presented elegantly expressing the resilience and the hope tied to the pertaining traumas of colonialism.

Welcoming the public is *Spirit Raiser*, a large wall piece by Matthew Kirk, inspired by Diné motifs found in textiles as well as his urban environment. His three-dimensional construction is filled with language from his indigenous and Euro-American heritage.

Standing next to the exhibition statement, a large text-based green monoprint installation by Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds titled *Our Red Nations Were Always Green*, marks the tone for assertive political affirmations. A similar work was acquired by MoMA. Four of his bright colored abstract paintings are also present in this curation as a reverence to nature.



*Works by artists Jaad Kuujus and Dan Namingha, image courtesy of Sundaram Tagore Gallery, 2023*

Another impressive wall piece is the work by Alaska artist Athena LaTocha mixing dark tone sumi inks, lead sheets and modern aesthetics. *Ozark* is made of site-specific materials exploring geology, history and humankind's relationship with nature, land and the environment.

In contradiction, Barry Ace's colorful complex floral and geometric imagery combines contemporary materials and traditional beadwork of the Great Lakes region. His piece *gashkibidaagan* and bandolier bad title *Alterity* incorporates motion-sensor panels that display moving imagery of historical beadworks as pixel patterns.

Norman Akers's painting *Sun Dog and the Ghost Trees*, brings vivid colors and lexicon of symbolic imagery drawn from tribal oral histories and the natural world. In this painting, the Osage nation-born painter, brings to his native culture a profound sense of place. Maker of refined Peyote instruments, New Mexico-born artist Manty Claw's *Morning Blessing*, is a fan and instrument used in tribal ceremonies.



Abstract painting by artist Hock E Aye Vi Edgar *Heap of Birds*, image courtesy of Sundaram Tagore Gallery, 2023

The beautiful floral pattern works of Christi Belcourt are largely influenced by pointillist paintings and First Nations historical beadwork art. Created especially for this exhibition, *The Night Shift*, is an acrylic painting expressing her profound love for Mother Earth, sparkling with nocturnal insects and mystique creatures.

Forming another poetic landscape is Nadia Myre's beadwork. *Light Assembly: Julie* is an ode to painter Rita Letendre, and Indigenous artists of Abenake and Québécois descent, and Myre's mother. Influenced by healing practices, Toronto-based painter Robert Houle, features *Saysaygon*, a diptych with an enigmatic figure and floating forms depicting the Morning Star.

Overall throughout this exhibition, Sundaram Tagore Gallery demonstrates again how curatorial intentions geared to shifting our perceptions and paradigms are important angles in contemporary art. And that meaningful art created by artists engaged in cross-cultural explorations are a continuous refreshing reverence against all standard narratives. **WM**

#### COCO DOLLE

Coco Dolle (<http://www.cocodolle.com/>) is a French-American artist, writer, and independent curator based in New York since the late 90s. Former dancer and fashion muse for acclaimed artists including Alex Katz ([https://www.huffpost.com/entry/artist-muse-photography-art\\_n\\_5accf519e4b0152082fe48a2](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/artist-muse-photography-art_n_5accf519e4b0152082fe48a2)), her performances appeared in *Vogue* (<https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2000-ready-to-wear/miguel-adrover/slideshow/collection#41>) and *The NY Times* (<https://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/10/arts/design/10para.html>). Over the past decade, she has organized numerous exhibitions acclaimed in high-end publications including *Forbes* (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/adamlehrer/2017/03/16/feminism-takes-many-forms-in-coco-dolles-milk-and-night-curatorial-project/?sh=3bb99db62381>), *ArtNet* (<https://news.artnet.com/market/spring-break-los-angeles-2022-2074607>), *VICE* (<https://www.vice.com/en/article/gybxn4/art-trends-independent-curators-v24n5>), and *W Magazine* (<https://www.wmagazine.com/gallery/18-artist-selfies-that-get-under-the-skin>). She is a contributing writer for *L'Officiel Art* (<https://www.lofficiel.com/art/portrait-de-femme-web3-krista-kim-ambassadrice-de-la-conscience-avec-0-metaverse>) and *Whitehot Magazine*. As an artist, her work focuses on body politics and feminist issues as seen at the Oregon Contemporary (<https://www.oregoncontemporary.org/punkdeism>) (OR) and Mary Ryan Gallery (<https://artdaily.cc/news/21120/Corinne-Dolle--aka-Coco---Pop-Intervention---New-Paintings#.YbZPDC-B3Fk>)(NYC).