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Givers of Life

The Eiteljorg Museum returns with a second round of their well-received show Powerful Women.

For the last year, the Eiteljorg Museum has been honoring and celebrating women in their artistic accomplishments. Their first exhibition, Powerful Women, featured all Native American women artists, but they've now expanded their vision in Powerful Women II to also include the voices of African American, Latina, Asian American and European American contemporary female artists.

“We thought this was a good time to focus on women artists,” says Elisa Phelps, vice president and chief curatorial officer. “Curator Jennifer Complo McNutt created Powerful Women, and as she began to explore, it became apparent that our collection is rich in strong, female artists.

While the Eiteljorg is known for our contemporary Native American art, we also have a broader contemporary collection.” After the first exhibition, the museum realized they needed two shows to fully convey their message, and thus gave rise to Powerful Women II.



Anita Fields (Osage), *Opposites Attract*, 2005, clay. Gift courtesy of Paul and Grace Markovits. Image by Hadley Fruits Photography and courtesy of the Eiteljorg Museum.

“Women have led the world,” says Phelps, “often behind the scenes and often unrecognized. However, they perceive and exemplify their commitment to their communities and families... For this accomplished group of contemporary artists, creativity is another element of their power and we celebrate them.” McNutt also adds, “Women literally give life to this world. Always have, always will.”



Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (Confederated Salish and Kootenai Nation), *Los Banderas de los Estados Unidos*, 1996, acrylic and mixed media paper collage on canvas. Collection of the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, Museum purchase from the Eiteljorg Fellowship for Native American Fine Art 1999.9.1.

All but one piece for the show will come from the museum's private collection, and includes paintings, sculptures, mixed media and installations by a diverse group of artists such as Hung Liu (Chinese), Kay WalkingStick (Cherokee Nation) and Anita Rodriguez (Latina). Also participating are past recipients of the Eiteljorg's Contemporary Art Fellowship, along with this year's recipient, Anita Fields (Osage).



Wendy Red Star (Crow), Fancy Shawl Project, 2009, installation, mixed media. Collection of the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, Museum purchase from the Eiteljorg Fellowship for Native American Fine Art 2009.9.1. Image by Hadley Fruits Photography and courtesy of the Eiteljorg Museum.

Fields' work with clay and textiles reflects her worldview of her Native Osage culture. "Her work explores the complexities of cultural influences and the intersections of balance and chaos found with our lives," her biography states. "Heavily textured layers and distorted writing are elements found in both her clay and textile works. Fields creates narratives that asks viewers to consider other ways of seeing and being in an effort to understand our shared existence."

In her show piece *Opposites Attract*, Fields depicts a Native figure in clay that embodies many of these described elements and themes. Similar themes can also be seen in *Los Banderas de los Estados Unidos*, an American flag collaged with Spanish and English newspaper headlines by Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (Confederated Salish and Kootenai Nation).

"Smith is both an artist and an activist, a powerful combination," says Phelps. "Her work addresses issues of identity, racism and cultural appropriation. As an Indigenous person, Smith has experienced many situations that are 'us versus them.' She understands how language, especially language of the U.S. government, is used against non-dominant cultures."



Wendy Red Star (Crow), Fancy Shawl Project: Rez Dogs (detail), 2009, appliquéd fabric, ribbon. Collection of the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, Museum purchase from the Eiteljorg Fellowship for Native American Fine Art 2009.9.1.

Another significant piece of work to watch out for is the Fancy Shawl Project by multimedia artist Wendy Red Star (Crow), who combines humor with traditional imagery to convey hard truths about the impact of colonization and the representation of Native peoples. Red Star creates garments that “document things in the everyday life of the Crow reservation—houses, cars, dogs, sweat lodges, tipi poles and basketball hoops,” Phelps says. “[She] describes her work as an invitation to ‘confront and acknowledge a not-so-romantic view of Indigenous people.’ The humor, playfulness and irony conveyed through Red Star’s work are part of its power.”

Ongoing through January 18, 2022, the exhibition will feature this remarkable collection of works by creative women who boldly express their power.

Through January 18, 2022

Powerful Women II

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