

NEW VISION

Revamped galleries showcase Native art in fresh ways

By RYAN TRARES | DAILY JOURNAL
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Reflected light cascades at the center of the gallery, as the language of Native Americans who had originally called Indiana home welcomes visitors.

Speakers embedded in the wall offer greetings from Miami, Potawatomi, Delaware, Shawnee, Peoria and Kickapoo people. The words seem to flow like liquid water, emphasized by the suspended digital prints hanging from the ceiling in artist Hannah Claus' "watersong: peemitanaahkwahki sakaahkweelo."

Instantly, it becomes clear that the newly opened Native American Galleries at the Eiteljorg Museum offer an experience unlike anything that has been offered before.

"We wanted the art to tell the story, and the artists to be the experts," said Dorene Red Cloud, associate curator of Native American art at the museum. "Native peoples are the authorities of their own stories and Native art is not a continuum."

"We hope that people who maybe aren't as aware of Native art develop an appreciation."

In the new galleries, the Eiteljorg has unveiled a stunning space for local residents to discover Indigenous art. Unique room design, all-glass cases and digital interactives offer the chance for people to explore the creations of Native people in a one-of-a-kind way.

The renovated Native American Galleries presents the artistry of Native people.

A new exhibition, "Expressions of Life: Native Art in North America," helps usher in this new era for the Eiteljorg. Different displays and groups showcase a breadth of artistry — from painting and sculpture to beadwork to

textiles — in a way that allows people to interact and immerse themselves in it.

"After experiencing the new Native galleries, Eiteljorg Museum guests will better understand that Native peoples are part of our local communities today; they are not peoples who exist only in the past or live in faraway places," said John Vanausdall, Eiteljorg president and CEO. "Through the new galleries and exhibition, guests will see the strong connections between customary art and today's contemporary Native artworks, and appreciate the tremendous depth and variety of expression in Native art."

The new Native American Galleries are the culmination of years of planning, preparation and construction. Since the museum opened in 1989, Native artwork had been arranged throughout the second-floor space by geographic region.

Artwork was arranged in bulky wooden cabinets that presented the pieces more like specimens than dynamic works of creativity.

But as museum leadership reexamined its layout and the ways it wanted to present Native and Western art, it felt compelled to redesign the galleries.

Redesigning the Native American Galleries fell within the museum's Project 2021 capital/endowment campaign. The \$55 million project also included projects such as reinstalling the museum's Western art galleries in 2018; renovating the children's discovery area in 2021; expanding the multipurpose facility, the Allen Whitehill Clowes Sculpture Court, in summer 2022.

To approach the project, museum curators and its Native American Advisory Council carefully planned the best concepts for new galleries. They worked with Origin Studios, a firm based in Ottawa, Canada, to design the reimagined space.

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From top: "Dance From the Deep" by Susan Point is part of the new exhibition "Expressions of Life: Native Art in North America" at the Eiteljorg Museum. // The exhibition helps open up the new Native American Galleries, a redesigned space that will better tell the stories of Native and Indigenous people. RYAN TRARES | DAILY JOURNAL



Clockwise from top left: "Watersong: peemitanaahkwahki sakaahkweelo" by Hannah Claus greets visitors to "Expressions of Life: Native Art in North America" at the new Eiteljorg Museum Native American Galleries. // "Canoe" by Patrick Maranda is part of the new exhibition. // A weaving by Jackson Dean is part of the exhibition. // The redesigned space will better tell the stories of Native and Indigenous people. RYAN TRARES | DAILY JOURNAL

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"One of the things we always try to do is work from the collection out," said Michael Plamondon, lead designer of the project for Origin Studios. "We asked the team here to get a sense of all of the objects and all of their collection, how they thought they'd organize throughout the space. And then we tried to create an atmosphere and an environment that really allows people to focus on the collection."

The new exhibition, "Expressions of Life: Native Art in North America," gave curators and artists an opportunity to best utilize and showcase these improvements.

Karen Ann Hoffman, an expert in raised beadwork from the

Oneida Nation of Wisconsin, is one of the artists whose work is featured in the next exhibition. Bringing different works from Native Americans throughout the continent serves to lift up their voices in a way that's never been done before.

"Our art speaks — speaks of Life, Death, the proper ways to move between the two, and beyond. With strong breath, our art speaks the voices of those who came before, through the hands of those who are now, for the ears of those who are yet to come," Hoffman said in a statement. "This new exhibit, 'Expressions of Life: Native Art in North America,' is a rare and courageous celebration of those voices. The curators, artists, mount-makers, curriculum-developers, all gathered in a communal and groundbreaking

way to give full throat to those voices first and foremost. This is what the art deserves."

Instead of grouping the art by Native American tribes or geographic region, the museum arranged the works around themes such as "Relation," "Continuation" and "Innovation" — concepts shared by many Native cultures.

A space within the galleries, "Connected by Water," spotlights Native people from the Great Lakes region.

"Because we are a Great Lakes state, we wanted to have an inclusion of Great Lakes peoples," Red Cloud said.

All-glass cases were installed so people could walk around different pieces, offering an encompassing view of the work while also protecting it. Audio descriptions for visitors with

visual impairments, improved lighting and touch samples were all included to make the exhibition more accessible and inclusive.

Digital touchscreens installed along with the displays offer guests the opportunity to further explore individual pieces. In different galleries, videos ask a variety of creators what it means to be a Native artist. A digital bulletin board offers insight and news into the Native American experience today.

"We wanted to make it fun for everybody, not your typically old exhibition," Red Cloud said. "We want people to be excited about Native art and all of its expressions."

The new Native American Galleries, and "Expressions of Life: Native Art in North America," opened to the public on June 25.