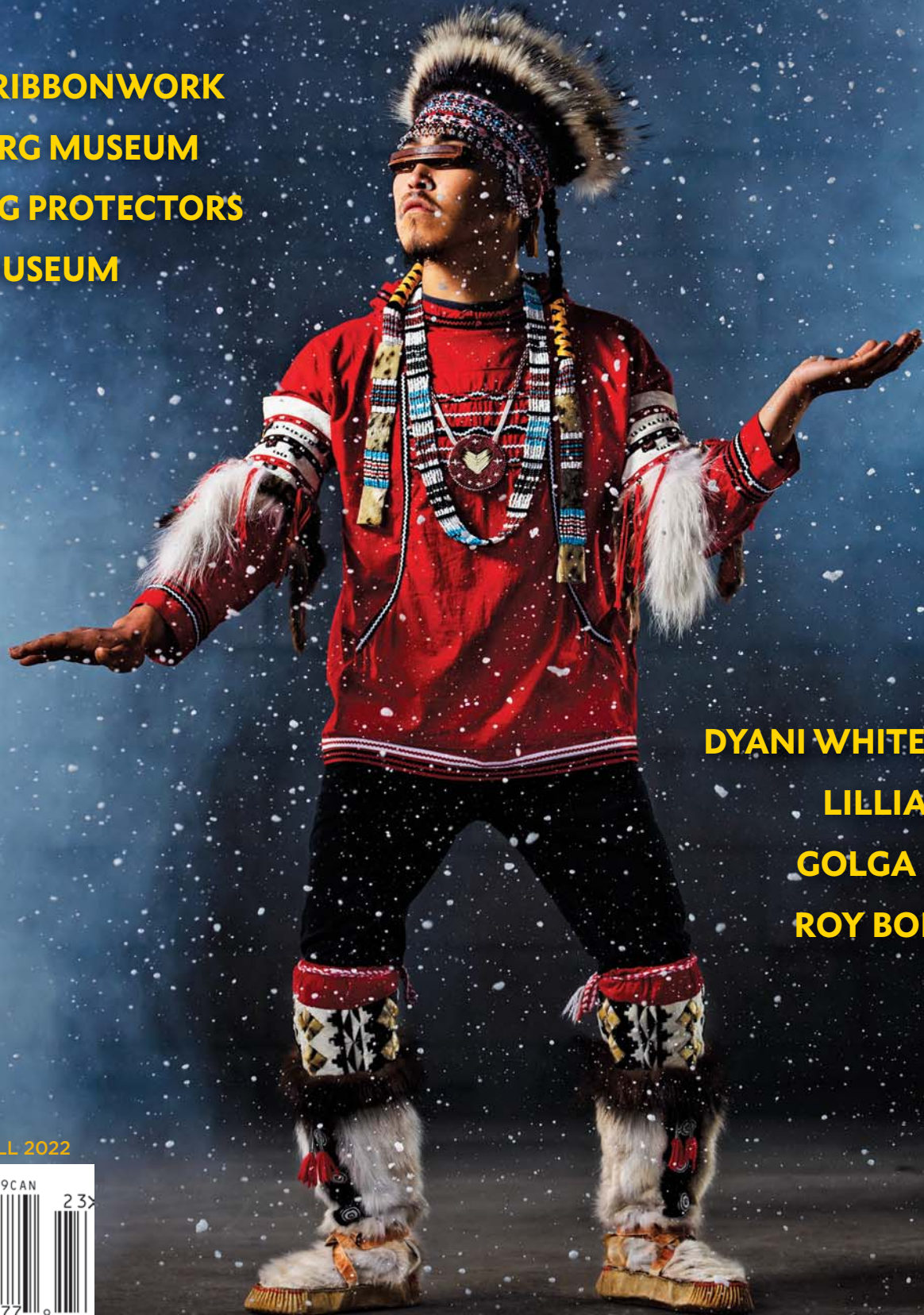


ANCESTRAL, HISTORICAL & LIVING ARTS by INDIGENOUS PEOPLES of the AMERICAS

# First American Art

MAGAZINE

OSAGE RIBBONWORK  
EITELJORG MUSEUM  
HERRING PROTECTORS  
FIELD MUSEUM



DYANI WHITE HAWK  
LILLIAN PITT  
GOLGA OSCAR  
ROY BONEY JR.

NO. 36, FALL 2022

\$8.99US \$9.99CAN

23



DISPLAY UNTIL JAN. 9, 2023



# A VISION REALIZED

## The Eiteljorg Museum Revitalizes Its Native American Exhibitions

By Susan Burns

**ORGANIZED AROUND** a bold new approach to presenting Native people's lives through art, the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art in Indianapolis unveiled the renovation of its second-floor galleries on June 25, 2022. The first exhibition, *Expressions of Life: Native Art in North America*, brings together the stunning, striking, and splendid, such as a nine-foot-tall dress and an installation of sparkling discs that evokes both dappled forest light and sparkling river waters. Altogether, the elements of the exhibition convey stories of Native peoples of the United States and Canada.

To thoroughly view the exhibition's objects and digital elements could take an entire day. With the breadth of the collections the Eiteljorg has acquired, along with planned purchases from their annual Eiteljorg Indian Market and Festival and commissions by artists in residence and Eiteljorg Fellows, the objects on display will change at least every few months.

"Some of what we can include is very old and friable—things that are leather, bark, or on paper, such as the ledger art. They can be harmed by light or other conditions, so we plan to rotate them every three to 12 months," says Dorene Red Cloud (Oglala Lakota), Eiteljorg's curator of Native American art. About

20 percent of the exhibition consists of older items of various heritages: family heirlooms, special types of clothing, baskets, furniture, rugs, pottery, carvings, beadwork, and even a cradleboard for a doll. The current exhibition contains more than 100 objects plus digital media works and interactive educational stations.

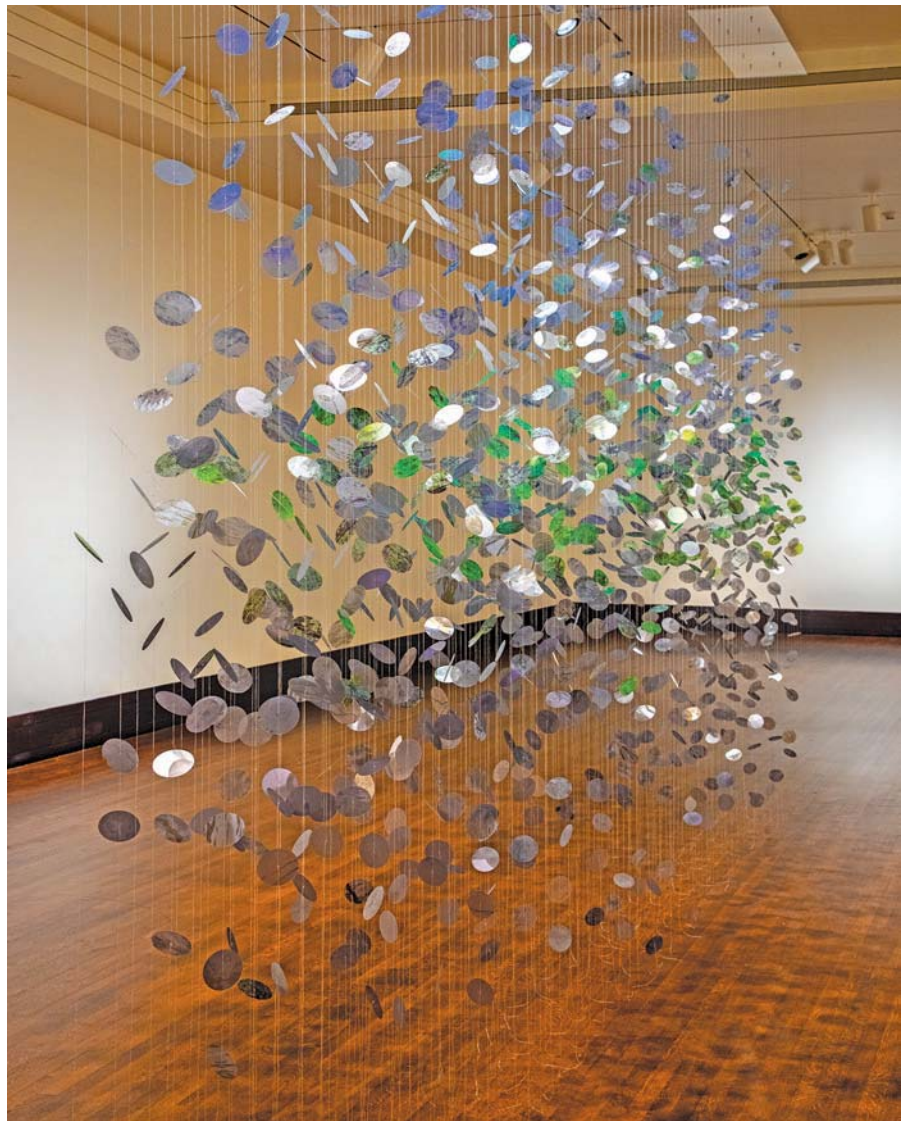
The *Expressions* exhibition is built around three themes that weave through Native life: continuation, relation, and innovation. The themes allow visitors to see the diversity of Native Americans through things "both the same and different," as described by Katrina Mitten (Miami), who is one of the artists included in the exhibition.

Everywhere one looks are bright colors, stylized imagery, and careful design. From miniature Pueblo decorated pottery to the complex, emotional punch of the painting *Blue-Eyed Chief* by Jim Denomie (Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe, 1955–2022), one sees a dynamic new presentation of Native presence and resilience in North America.

Works on display include not only uncredited, centuries-old items but also pieces made in recent years. Asked about her favorites in the exhibition, Red Cloud says that all are worth noting, but the ones that stand out include *Portrait of a Residential School Child* by 2013 Invited Fellow Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun (Cowichan/Syilx), on loan from a private collector; *LEGO Long Walk* by Ryan Singer (Navajo); *Zitkála-Šá (Reunion) 21st-Century Ledger Drawing #205* by Chris Pappan (Kaw/Osage/Lakota); *Late Mirovian Period Pueblo Jar* by Les Namingha (Hopi-Tewa/Zuni); an untitled ceramic vessel by Jacquie Stevens (Winnebago); and *Beloved*, a ceramic vessel by Christine McHorse (Navajo, 1948–2021).

Many of the pieces are displayed in the open. For the pieces that are best presented in cases or on the wall, transparent vitrines allow for 360-degree viewing and close inspection and replace the old, bulky wooden cases. Touchscreen hubs throughout the space allow visitors to look up what in other galleries would be a wall label. Technology allows for more in-depth information about the artists, the work, even the context of some information. Digital media includes audio of songs, short presentations, and interviews to further bring the artists and stories to life within the framework of relation, continuation, and innovation.

A good example of how the multimedia approach reinforces the themes and brings the art to life is the land acknowledgment in the exhibition's first gallery. Red Cloud describes it: "On the immediate right-hand side wall, before one enters the new galleries, we have a written land acknowledgment dedicated to the Miami, Delaware, Potawatomi, Shawnee, Kickapoo, and Peoria peoples who are the original inhabitants of Indianapolis and Indiana. We also have a projected land acknowledgment that



refers to this land as always Native land, even in the future, that visitors must step across as they enter the orientation space."

Red Cloud continues, "In the orientation space is an installation by 2019 Eiteljorg Fellow Hannah Claus (Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte) *water song: peemitanaahkwahki sakaahkweelo*, which we commissioned from her to be the first artwork our visitors see. The work refers to the Miami emergence story, and Claus consulted with Miami Tribe of Oklahoma scholars George Ironstrack [Miami] and Scott Shoemaker, PhD [Miami], to create this work." Shoemaker was also the Eiteljorg's former curator of Native American art, history, and culture.

Later on in the exhibition, Red Cloud says, "Finally, before the beginning of [the theme] relation, we have a Miami pipe exhibited as a reminder that we are

**ABOVE** Hannah Claus (Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte), *water song: peemitanaahkwahki sakaahkweelo*, 2019, Dura-Chrome™ UV ink printed on JetView acetate film, Gütermann Scala 60 thread, PVA glue, collection of the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, museum commission with funds provided by the Eiteljorg Contemporary Art Fellowship, 2019.9.1. Photo: Hadley Fruits Photography, 2019.

**OPPOSITE** Image of the Eiteljorg Museum's new Native American Galleries, featuring the exhibition *Expressions of Life: Native Art in North America*.



on Miami land. Last but not least, in the main orientation or introduction space of the new galleries, we have greetings from Miami, Delaware, Shawnee, and Potawatomi who are speaking in their Native languages to demonstrate that Native languages are still alive and in use.”

Since it opened in 1989, the Eiteljorg Museum has showcased an extensive collection on its first floor of Western art by and about people of the Plains, Prairies, and Southwestern United States. The second floor provided a glimpse of people who have called the southern Great Lakes area home since time immemorial, using a geographic region as its organizing principle. After 30 years, however, it was time for a change.

The staff, visitors, and tribes have increasingly wanted a revision that gives a more in-depth presentation inclusive of Eastern Woodland Native peoples. In 2016 the museum launched Project 2021, an extensive capital and endowment campaign to support strategic updating. The \$55 million campaign included the

reconstruction and reinstallation of the upstairs galleries, as well as improvements to the education center and gathering spaces in and around the facility.

“In departing from the way [mainstream] museums typically have presented Native peoples’ stories, the new Native American Galleries create a space for Native peoples themselves to tell their own stories. Visitors come away from the galleries with a new understanding that Native American cultures are still with us today, and the art they create depicts the past, present, and future,” explains Elisa Phelps, Eiteljorg’s vice-president of curatorial affairs and chief curator.

The ethos of respecting the requests and suggestions of Native perspectives was fundamental, a “nothing about us without us” approach to what has been included and how it is presented. The reinstallation exhibition is the result of the multiyear collaboration of museum staff, the Native American Advisory Council (NAAC), Eiteljorg Contemporary Art Fellows, artists in residence,

and participants in the annual market and festival.

“We have four goals for the galleries in terms of the story we want to tell” says Red Cloud. “First, that Native people are still living. Second, that Native people are diverse. The third goal is that Native art is on a continuum; both older and newer artistic traditions inform the other. Fourth, Native people are the authority of their own stories.”

Phelps explains: “COVID, in a way, actually was helpful to how the staff and Native American Advisory Council worked together, since going to online meetings meant we could meet monthly. That meant we could go more in-depth as things were being designed than twice-a-year, in-person meetings would have allowed.”

“They did a lot of interviews during the planning, gathering a lot of input, really hearing the voices of Indigenous people,” says Mitten, a former artist in residence. “By listening and recording our voices, they developed an exhibition that connects the visitor to our stories of today to what is timeless. Combining past and present art and artists leads to a better understanding of our cultures and the artists who have always been, and encourages people to imagine our future contributions to the world of the arts.”

“The reinstallation has been a topic for many years, even before I was hired in October 2016,” Red Cloud says. “Former Native American Advisory Council member Craig Howe, PhD (Oglala Lakota) and contracted consultant with Origin Studios Jeff Thomas (Onondaga), an artist and curator based out of Ottawa, Canada, were more recent content advisors in addition to our current Native American Advisory Council. Scott Shoemaker and I did a lot of the foundational groundwork on the galleries’ big ideas. He left the Eiteljorg in December 2020 to pursue another opportunity, so I was made the lead curator. As for future exhibitions, we will turn to our current Native American Advisory Council members for input.” The current NAAC members are Shoemaker, Brenda Child (Red Lake Ojibwe), Erin Oliver (Miami



Tribe of Indians of Indiana),<sup>1</sup> Jason Wesaw (Pokagon Potawatomi), Emma Hansen (Pawnee), Gloria Lomahaftewa (Hopi/Choctaw), Donald Fixico (Sac & Fox/Shawnee/Muscogee/Seminole), and Margaret Archuleta (Mestiza).

“I believe that our new Native American galleries’ exhibition will have a positive impact in the curatorial industry as more and more museums will reenvision their galleries and exhibition spaces to be more inclusive of Native/Indigenous groups who are valuable community members and stakeholders,” Red Cloud says. “Non-Native curators are becoming more aware of the fact that Native/Indigenous artists and peoples are the authorities of their own stories. They are the experts whose voices museum visitors want to hear. In the current climate of the DEAI [diversity, equity, access, and inclusion] movement, inclusion of underrepresented groups is paramount, and we will see more Native/Indigenous representation in museums.”

Respecting Native voices also meant confronting some of the painful or difficult aspects of North American Native life. In the orientation area, a brief section gently notes that non-Native people often hold misconceptions about Native peoples. Realities such as wars, forced relocations, boarding schools, and reservation life are represented too.

The museum has taken the renovation challenge as an opportunity to excel by using technology, design with preservation as well as flexibility and engagement in mind, and respect for Native voices throughout. To create the new galleries, the Eiteljorg Museum engaged Origin Studios, kubik maltbie, Richard Lewis Media Group, and F.A. Wilhelm Construction of Indianapolis. The hi-tech cases were built by Click Netherfield Ltd. in Scotland. Support from the National Endowment for the Arts and Lilly Endowment funded the services of professional mount makers, who designed and built physical supports

**ABOVE** Image of the Eiteljorg Museum’s new Native American Galleries, featuring the exhibition *Expressions of Life: Native Art in North America*.

**OPPOSITE** Jim Denomie (Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe, 1955–2022), *Blue Eyed Chief*, 2008, oil on canvas, collection of the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, museum purchase from the Eiteljorg Fellowship for Native American Fine Art, 2009.10.1. Photo: Hadley Fruits Photography.

1. The Miami Tribe of Indians of Indiana is not a federally or state-recognized tribe, but members are related to members of the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma. —Ed.



**ABOVE** Cree artist once known, *Octopus Bag*, 1875–1900, wool cloth, cotton cloth, glass seed beads, metallic beads, silk ribbon trim, collection of the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, museum purchase with funds provided by a grant from Lilly Endowment Inc., 2019.2.256.

**OPPOSITE** Anita Fields (Osage/Muscogee), *Considering the Earth and Above* (2008), ceramic installation, collection of the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art. All images courtesy of the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art.

to keep artworks stable and secure. Lighting and all the audio-visual devices are cutting edge.

Accessibility for the estimated 60,000 annual visitors is part of the design. Wheelchair users will find room to maneuver and screens within reach. Visitors can rest on the frequently placed benches and couches. Each of the exhibition's areas includes at least one small "please touch" panel for visitors to feel aspects of the art, such as a square of beadwork, basketry, or a section of ribbonwork panels.

Interactive, educational experiences allow visitors to create stencils

for beading or a story akin to ledger art, or better understand the sovereignty of tribal nations by designing a flag. A small loom for trying one's hand at rug weaving is also popular. In a complementary project, lesson plans and related educational resources about Native peoples of the Great Lakes region will be available at [eiteljorg.org](http://eiteljorg.org) in coming months. The Eiteljorg continues to seek donors to support other essential components, such as educational programming and other features.

The diverse ages of items in the exhibition are included thanks, in part, to acquisitions of historical collections such as Richard Pohrt Jr.'s Great Lakes materials purchased with funds from a Lilly Endowment grant. "Many items in the cases have been donated by private individuals and represent all areas of the United States," Red Cloud says. Newer works include purchases from the Eiteljorg Festival and some commissions from biannual Eiteljorg Contemporary Art Fellows.

Terminology has also been carefully considered. Terms such as *regalia* and *historical artifacts* have been replaced with text that talks about special clothing and treasured objects. *Customary art* is another term used to highlight diverse materials and techniques from previous eras. The galleries also include opportunities to help visitors understand that Native people are present throughout the continent and are not "minorities" but sovereign nations with their own cultural practices, languages, and spiritual beliefs.

The new galleries will explore the role of spirituality and religion in Native life. Phelps explains, "The Religion and Cultural Institutions Initiative grant will serve as a catalyst for exploring the role religion and spirituality have played in the American West and the lives of Native peoples and other groups. Individual perspectives and community stories will be important elements as the Eiteljorg prepares for the reinstatement of its Native American galleries in 2022, the exhibition and symposium in 2024, and beyond."

The current exhibitions already include digital media presentations about powwows and the misappropriation of

Native symbols and religious practices. A replica allows a glimpse of how things would be set up for a Big Lodge religious ceremony.

Future growth for the exhibition that Red Cloud would like to see include more portraits of Native artists. “This portrait of Kaa Folwell by Avis Charley, which was the cover of *First American Art Magazine’s* summer issue, is a great example of what we hope to show more of in the future—more examples of strong Native people with their art.” The galleries will see consistent changes to what is on display to allow visitors to see fresh things with every visit, but also to protect the items from the subtle, long-term effects of light and climate.

Respect goes beyond story content to presentations that evoke dignity, even awe, as in the 9-foot-tall sprang-work dress by Tyra Shackelford (Chickasaw), titled *The Lady* (2017). Red Cloud explains, “This piece is after the Lady of Cofitachequi, a Muskogean-speaking female leader who met conquistador Hernando de Soto in 1540. She greeted his army carried on the shoulders of her people and represents the strength and enduring spirit of Native women.” Another item with a reference to an historical event is a vibrant, rainbow-colored basket titled *Ceremony of the Singing Stars* (2017) by Geo Neptune (Passamaquoddy), woven in tribute to those slain in the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando, Florida.

An alternate entrance to the galleries presents visitors with a different land acknowledgment: a ceramic installation by 2021 Invited Fellow Anita Fields (Osage/Muscogee) titled *Considering the Earth and Above* (2008). Made mostly of red clay, two tapered and etched pillars on separate bases stand below random clay shapes suspended from the ceiling, creating shadow play on the wall behind. At the feet of the pillars lay bowls and other clay remnants, piled as if to support the pillars. Across from this work are two pieces created by 2007 Eiteljorg Fellow Gerald Clarke (Cahuilla), *Myaamionki* and *Seekaahkwiaanki*, which refer to the emergence story of the Miami.



Raised beadwork artist Karen Ann Hoffman (Oneida Nation), originally from Wisconsin, offered this observation about the efforts by many people that went into creating the exhibition:

*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.*

*This new exhibition Expressions of Life: Native Art in North America is a rare and courageous celebration of those voices. The curators, artists, mount makers, and 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. It is what will fascinate the audiences. It is what the Eiteljorg had the courage to do. Come. Listen. Engage in the conversation. We are all welcome here.*