

The Spirit of Standing Rock Continues

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We just travelled across the entire country on the train. On the second night, we passed through Minot, North Dakota. It was minus forty degrees. Minot is about two hundred miles north of Standing Rock and the ongoing resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) continuing in sub zero weather and blizzards.

Robert "Running Fisher" Upham aka "Harlem Indian" water is life/Mni Wiconi, poster, Sacred Hoop Gallery

The spirit of Standing Rock is encouraging a surge in contemporary native art and exhibitions. A fundraiser at the new Sacred Hoop Cooperative Gallery at 55 Bell Street included ceramics, posters, beadwork, paintings, masks, drums, jewelry and graphic art. One whole table was filled with writings about Standing Rock and graphic books that dramatically told the story of the conflicts of whites and natives over several centuries.

But the event focused on the stories of those who had been to Standing Rock. It continued for eight hours! While I was there, the story was both personal and mythic. The storyteller, a large man who compared himself to a bear, had just returned from Standing Rock. He told of the spirit of shared purpose there, of shared resources and shared possessions. In spite of the freezing temperatures, he gave away his warm coat and then nearly froze himself. Then he told a mythic tale from the time when "humans had stopped listening" to nature and the animals stopped listening to each other. He punctuated it with powerful drumbeats that were part of the story. They also ensured we were wide-awake.

At Sacred Hoop, Robert "Running Fisher" Upham aka "Harlem Indian" honored the theme of the DAPL resistance "water is life/ Mní Wičoní" with a large collage that included the early and recent history of the Sioux Indians as text in the background. This artist has also revived the practice of Indian Ledger drawings, the first descriptive images made by Indians in captivity in the 19th century in the margin of ledger books.

The Sacred Hoop Cooperative is the latest addition to native-run gallery/stores in Seattle. Contemporary artist Louis Gong's 8th Generation in Pike Place Market has received a lot of attention. Sacred Hoop is more low profile. Keep a look out for future events on their Facebook page.

Seattle Theater Group with John Feoderov and Tracy Rector, both Seattle-based Native artists, organized a one-night benefit at the Paramount Theater to support the Water Protector Legal Collective, the legal support team for the Standing Rock resistance. Natives and non-Natives exhibited artworks during a concert that spoke of the "connections between land, culture and identity."

If you want to support Standing Rock you can go to Tacoma until February 16 to visit "Protect the Sacred: Native Artists for Standing Rock" an exhibition curated by Asia Tail at the Spaceworks Gallery in Tacoma (950 Pacific Ave. Entrance on 11th St. Mon – Fri / 1pm – 5pm, Third Thursday open until 9pm.) Tail, formerly on the staff of the Tacoma Art Museum, selected a cross section of 26 well-known and young Native artists. She told me that all 452 tribal affiliations recognized in the United States are represented in the Seattle to Portland corridor! She herself is from an Oklahoma tribe.

A large banner by Kaila Farrell-Smith hangs at the entrance to the gallery. A contrast to Harlem Indian's more realistic and text-based homage, Farrell-Smith's *Mní Wičoní Banner*, combines abstract basket patterns, and a political call to action. As the artist explains: "I explore the space that exists in-between the Indigenous and western worlds, examining cultural interpretations of aesthetics, symbols, and place. It is in this space I search for my visual language: violent, beautiful, and complicated marks that express my contemporary Indigenous identity."

Be sure to look for this negotiation between the native and the "Western" (meaning colonial) in every work in the exhibition.

For example, the photographs of Matika Wilbur, just back from Standing Rock, resonate with Indigenous significance as well as the conventions of photographic modernism, in the close up of the hands of "Miss Helen, Last Carrier of the Lovelock Paiute Language." Facing Wilbur's photographs are two realistic watercolors by Yatika Starr-Fields. The artist usually paints intensely colored abstraction, but the impact of joining the protest at Standing Rock led him to record what he was actually seeing and provide an evocative description: "At the time this was painted, these two tipis were the northernmost structures in the whole Oceti Sakowin encampment. That day the air was alive with anticipation, and the scent of campfire smoke and sounds of all kinds echoed throughout the camp. With the setting sun casting its radiance on the changing colors of the distant fall trees and surrounding plains, the Missouri river seemingly created its own dominant horizon between past and present. This sacred hill – where burial grounds are present, and where many actions, prayers, and ceremonies take place – has been reclaimed as our own."

Sara Stiestreem's layered conceptual images represent a matrix of female and indigenous power in the red circles, as well as an emphasis on non-violence (in photographs of hand gestures). Fox Spears bases her abstract color patterns directly on ancient basket patterns that suggest the "pioneering" work of white males in the 1960s. The elegant prints of Martin Oliver and Shaun Peterson as well as Alano Edzerza celebrate traditional styles as well, while also subtly intersecting with the contemporary world.

Some of the artists clearly address the DAPL and its implications. Erin Genia's striking ceramic sculptures such as Facing/Not Facing: Toxic Devastation from Oil combine red clay and black glazes that become literal spills on the earth. Next to Genia is the bold graphic image by her fifteen-year-old son, Samuel Genia, opposing the DAPL.

Perhaps most to the point, as we shake Ryan! Feddersen's oversized "snow globe" Micro Spill, nasty black particles swirl everywhere.

The outpouring of creativity by these Native artists and curators, as they respond to and support the unique spiritual energies emerging among the protestors at Standing Rock, provides an anchor for resistance for everyone. As the story teller at the Sacred Hoop gallery put it. "Stories Heal. Find your Standing Rock and pull yourself together."

~Susan Noyes Platt,

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