Exhibition Review

*Indelible Ink: Native Women, Printmaking, Collaboration*, presented at the University of New Mexico Art Museum

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*Indelible Ink: Native Women, Printmaking, Collaboration* (February 7 – October 17, 2020) features nine Native women printmaking artists. The exhibition aims, “to celebrate Native women artists and acknowledge[] their impact on printmaking and creative partnerships.”

Upon entering the University of New Mexico Art Museum’s (UNMAM) Raymond Jonson Gallery, a freestanding title wall, positioned in the center of the space, provides a dramatic contrast to the larger gallery (Figure 1). Overall, the exhibition design is simple but effective. From the title wall, painted in a dark inky-blue, to the orange accent marks that reference

![Exhibition shot, southeastern portion of gallery, *Indelible Ink: Native Women Printmaking, Collaboration*, University of New Mexico Art Museum, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 2020, digital image. Image courtesy of Stefan Jennings Batista.](image-url)
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printmaking registration, the design helps guide museum visitors to key areas of interest. Each of the artworks is placed on paper-white walls and is arranged in groups of works by artist. For every grouping of artworks, an accompanying extended label is placed and provides fragments of transcribed interviews between the artist and the curator, Dr. Mary Statzer. Curated in less than a year, *Indelible Ink* reflects a tremendous commitment. Statzer set out to interview each of the nine Native women artists featured in this exhibition, in addition to reaching out to and researching five print workshops.¹

One of Statzer’s biggest inspirations for *Indelible Ink* is the first major-museum exhibition to highlight the contributions of artists who identify as Native women, *Hearts of Our People: Native Women Artists*, which debuted at the Minneapolis Institute of Art (MIA) (June 2–August 18, 2019) and traveled to three other venues.² *Hearts of Our People* exhibited over 115 artworks by artists from the United States and Canada, representing a trans-historical selection that spanned 1,000 years. Additionally, the exhibition presented a broad range of artistic practices crisscrossing from traditional to contemporary explorations in pottery, painting, textile, photography, installation, sculpture, and digital media. Jill Ahlberg Yohe, MIA’s associate curator of Native American art, approached Santa Fe-based Kiowa beadwork artist and independent curator, Teri Greeves, to help produce this groundbreaking exhibition. Greeves, finding it imperative to have polyvocal collaboration, asked for an advisory board comprised of almost two dozen Native women from all over North America, with the addition of a few non-Native women scholars.

Statzer did not have this level of community collaboration for *Indelible Ink*, but felt it was long overdue to have a similar exhibition in one of the university’s galleries, especially given the art museum’s recognized areas of collecting and UNM’s scholarly specialization in Native American Studies. As a white curator, Statzer found critical advice from artist, Dyani White Hawk (Síčáŋǧu Lakota, b. 1976), who received a special note of thanks in the gallery for her invaluable suggestions during exhibition planning. For Statzer, presenting multigenerational printmakers from across the U.S., who create lithographs, monoprints, photogravure, and letterpress prints, became one key aspect of *Indelible Ink*. The other crucial element is each artworks’ traceable ties to five print-making studios in the mid-western and western United States. The focus on two-dimensional printed media draws from the curator’s own specialized interests. As a printmaker herself, Statzer realized a tremendous opportunity to utilize her knowledge of the medium and further strengthen the art museum’s close ties with the Tamarind Institute and beyond. It was imperative for Statzer to highlight each of these studios since all 34 artworks were created in and through creative partnerships with these presses between 1993–2019.
Located on the wall flanking the staircase, exhibition didactics formally introduce the printmaking studios where each of the artworks were collaboratively made during the artist residencies (Figure 2). The studios include Crow’s Shadow Institute of the Arts, Fourth Dimension Studio, High Point Editions, Sister Black Press, and Tamarind Institute. To help guide the general museum audience without knowledge of printmaking, the exhibition features this wall to offer key information about each studio: the location, founder, mission statement, interview with printers, and commitment to diversity are neatly laid out in vertical columns of text. Enlarged versions of each studio’s chop mark sit in orange circles above each column. Chop marks — unique stamps usually placed at the bottom edge of the print near any signature or title information — help curators, archivists, collectors, and other printmakers identify which workshop produced a print. Viewers lacking information about printmaking may overlook this small but useful detail when examining prints. This educational moment creates space to become more familiar with printmaking and the extensive process each artwork undergoes from studio, to artist’s and collaborator’s hands, to image development, to preparation and printing, and to final marks of completion that indicate the artwork is a product of extensive collaboration and labor.

**Artists of Indelible Ink**

Coming from tribal nations across the contiguous United States, the artists engage the artistic printmaking process in ways that critically challenge “mainstream” and exclusionary North American
settler histories. Ranging from the personal, popular, and political, each of these artists confront marginalizing experiences related to identity, colonization, racism, and sexism. Moreover, the artists are influenced by tradition, family, and Native philosophy, as well as contemporary experience and abstraction venturing away from explicit identity references. Each artwork is a chance for these artists to grapple with their own individual lived realities. *Indelible Ink* is part of a much-needed corrective to institutional erasure and exclusion. Although, it will take continual work on behalf of our cultural leaders to create true inclusion and diversification, this is but one small step in the right direction for UNMAM. Allowing the brilliance of these Native women to exist in a museum space is itself an act of protest against continuing legacies of egregious suppression and often violent historical and present-day omission.

Artists like Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (Salish and Kootenai Nation, b. 1940) prove that Native women artists are a part of the ever-changing, fluid, and hard-to-define definition of “American” art. Smith’s triptych, *Green Chile, Red Chile, and Christmas* (1995) demonstrates the artist’s well-known humor in critiquing “mainstream” art history and white culture (Figure 3). Parodying Andy Warhol’s 1962 *Campbell’s Soup Cans*, Smith creates a grouping of works that conflate familiar understandings of the mass-produced, brand-name food item made for wholesome white American families. With the use of esoteric and localized semiotics, Smith appropriates this product to more readily serve the Indigenous audiences American corporations overlook. First, the three titles together allude to the idiosyncratic question often asked in New Mexican restaurants: “red, green, or Christmas?” This question refers to sauces made from New Mexico-grown chile crops and is served in a variety of local dishes. The red pepper is the riper version of the green pepper and, when mixed together, it is referred to as Christmas. Secondly, Smith’s use of the word “Posole,” as is seen on the can labels, introduces another regional cuisine. Smith allows the legibility of the signature brand-name Campbell’s to fade into the white of the...
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paper — a process of dematerialization that exposes the fragility of white American culture. Smith ties her works to a specific place, as well as local Indigenous food and language to conflate center-periphery relationships.

Julie Buffalohead (Ponca, b. 1972), in an introspective yet humorous way, creates a print combining the planographic techniques of lithography and screen-printing, *The Trickster Showdown* (2015) (Figure 4). Buffalohead uses the artwork to grapple with the contentious duality of her experience as a woman who is both Indigenous and white. The artist recounts:

> I made nine prints at Highpoint Center for Printmaking. *The Trickster Showdown* was probably the one I spent the longest time on. I had been thinking a lot at that time in my life about issues of being biracial, being from my father's Native side and my mother's European side. 

Here Buffalohead creates a literal cultural and racial line, with two animals each facing this division. Referencing the trickster archetype, the artist comments on the ways she has felt constantly in opposition to her own self. The left side of the image presents a small rabbit, the prey, closed inside a small space, whereas the coyote домinates the left side of the work in terms of scale. The rabbit wears a

![Image of Julie Buffalohead's The Trickster Showdown](image)

Figure 4: Julie Buffalohead (Ponca, b. 1972), *The Trickster Showdown*, 2015, lithograph and screenprinting, 27.5 x 56 inches, collaborating printers: Zac Adams-Bliss, Cole Rogers, Megan Anderson, Nuno Nuñez, Kate Goyette. On loan from Highpoint Center for Printmaking. Courtesy of Highpoint Editions and the Artist.
black-and-white Ponca skirt and clutches a miniature star-topped wand in its front claw. Standing on its hindlegs, the rabbit looks as though it is ready to leap into battle while the coyote positions its snout downward to look more directly at its competitor. Wearing a pink, translucent tutu, the coyote does not seem particularly threatening, but the faceoff unquestionably weighs in the predator’s favor. As crucial characters and motifs in Ponca creation stories, the rabbit and coyote are cast against a deep, velvety blue background and work to narrativize Buffalohead’s own dynamic internal struggles — her own process of destruction and creation, respectively. It is unclear if the rabbit and coyote are supposed to represent her conflicted Indigenous and European sides, but the absurdity of the animals wearing a tutu and holding a wand becomes a playful nod to the complex trappings of cultural, ethnic, and gendered performativity. Buffalohead’s own rejection of her Indigenous identity and desire to become acculturated into surrounding whiteness inevitably made her feel like an outsider in both arenas. Buffalohead later in life came to the realization that white culture and society is in fact the source of her status as an outsider. Within her own culture, according to Native philosophy, binaries, taxonomies, and pressures of being white or non-white do not exist.

In interviews with Statzer, she noted how many of the artists touched upon the advantages and challenges of working in a collaborative print studio. Andrea Carlson (Anishinaabe [Ojibwe], French, Scandinavian, b. 1979) is one artist who discussed her experience working at Highpoint Center for Printmaking in Minneapolis, Minnesota with Cole Rogers, the founding director and Master Printer. Printing alongside Rogers was a new endeavor for Carlson, who took on the task of re-creating some of her paintings with the screen-printing medium. The works by Carlson in the exhibition, *Anti-Retro* (2018) and *Exit* (2019), touch upon land issues and forces of colonialism that still linger today. Dyani White Hawk (Sičâŋŋu Lakota, b. 1976) collaborated with the same print studio where she focused on representing Indigenous women through traditional dresses worn. Depictions of these dresses symbolize the statuses of women in their collective communities, which they care for and provide a significant link to a greater lineage. White Hawk has the largest prints displayed in *Indelible Ink*, with four prints filling the entire East wall. The dresses in each print represent the ways women care for, protect, stand guard, and nurture the well-being of family and community. As White Hawk stated, “my work is merely part of a greater lineage made possible by the people before and surrounding me.” Like other artists in this show, White Hawk gives homage to her ancestry and cultural traditions.

Additionally, Statzer included a section in the exhibition highlighting White Hawk’s collaboration with Monica Edwards Larson (Anglo-American, b. 1965), which is part of an ongoing Poetry Post subscription from the Sister Black Press studio in Minneapolis. Each year Edwards Larson chooses a new theme and for 2019 she decided to focus on Native women. This choice was inspired by a talk given by White Hawk in 2018 where the artist asked audience members to listen to Native women and pay attention to the atrocities that had been happening to them. Edwards Larson designed the typography and printed work by four Native women poets. The letterpress poetry is beautifully paired with illustrations created by White Hawk and serves to offer a smaller, more intimate, and tactile sensory experience. Inside a plexiglass vitrine, Statzer displayed her own volume of Sister Black Press Poetry Post deliverables from 2019, including an envelope addressed to Statzer and the collaborative poetry book. Although the display of the physical letter to Statzer seemed unnecessary, including the Poetry Post series from Sister Black Press in a three-dimensional display added to the overall two-
dimensionality of the exhibition. The display also incorporated Native women’s voices through poetry, a medium not often encountered inside an art museum.

Working with Fourth Dimension Studio in Santa Fe, New Mexico Ramona Sakiestewa (Hopi, b. 1948), in her interview, explains the spontaneity of technology in printmaking. Sakiestewa’s focus during the printmaking process, informed by her self-taught explorations with traditional Pueblo weaving, constantly oscillates between destroying things and remaking them into something new. The result of her work thus becomes a complex integration of materials and images that are woven to form a final print. The artist’s time at Fourth Dimension Studio was no exception when she created Raven 2 (2017) and Raven 3 (2017) which are deconstructed monoprints with ink and silk thread. Each of these pieces where initially printed with fabric attached to the plate, which produced an intriguing texture, but it was only after Sakiestewa deconstructed the prints and assembled them into raven forms that the prints became more dynamic. Making mention that the ravens were more literal then Sakiestewa is used to working with, she was able to let go a little of her creative control during the collaborative process and create something entirely new and striking. Sakiestewa described collaboration as a divinatory process that communes the feelings and wants of the other collaborators. One such moment of collaboration is displayed in the exhibition. Sakiestewa helped Emmi Whitehorse (Navajo, Diné, b. 1957), another featured artist, with some prints created for another project. Whitehorse intentionally avoids politically charged themes and instead creates artwork that follows Navajo philosophy, including themes such as, “beauty, nature, humanity, and the universe.” Enjoying Whitehorse’s artistic process, Sakiestewa reveals how small printmaking networks are and, through successful collaboration, how mutually enhancing these partnerships can be.

The Crow’s Shadow Institute for the Arts (CSIA) hosts three to six artists-in-resident a year. In 2013, Sara Siestreem (Hanis Coos, b. 1976) had a residency at the CSIA where she produced a series of prints, including FIRST BASKET (2013), a piece that memorialized the first basket the artist created in 2011. For the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua, Siusla, and other Indigenous tribes, the weaving of the first basket is a symbol that mark the beginning of a life’s work. Siestreem wanted to document contemporary weaving traditions for future weavers. Her experience at the CSIA went beyond combining drawing gestures and paint motifs in the way she incorporated and visually archived traditional Indigenous weaving practice. Artist Marie Watt (Seneca, b. 1967) has also been an artist-in-residence at CSIA five times, the last residency being in 2017. At CSIA, Watt questioned the term “collaboration” and discussed the issues with trendy terms that do not have a definite meaning and often have confusing expectations. Watt defined herself more as a collector than a collaborator. There is no set outcome but rather, a space to gather and come together.

Wendy Red Star (Apsáalooke Crow, b. 1981) is a multimedia artist, known for photography, video, fiber art, performance, installation, printmaking, and sculpture. Red Star works with public and private archives and intergenerational narratives and modifies the information she gathers to provide unexpected visual stories. Backgrounded with a tornado-like application of painterly brushstrokes, Red Star’s print, The (HUD) (2010), presents an assortment of stacked homes built on the reservation in the 1970s. As part of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), a government initiative to create affordable housing, Red Star grew up around this simple architecture on the reservation. While creating these
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prints at CSIA, Red Star chose to incorporate images of these homes, with their random colors of paint that Red Star calls, “Easter-egg colors,” as a commentary on the reservation’s socioeconomic marginality. The paint colors chosen and the architectural designs used were the cheapest the government could come up — inevitably producing a particular aesthetic for the reservation.

Epilogue

Somewhat of a missed opportunity, the small space of UNMAM lower gallery limits the ability to include any additional educational materials that could further enhance the visitor’s experience. Object-centered learning — such as art studios and kids’ corners — generally enhance museum experiences. As museum educator Patterson Williams stated, “museums are non-directive educators, and the visitor (potential learner) is there by choice.” Most exhibitions use visual experience to teach visitors about a specific topic; however, not every person is a visual learner. That is when museum curators and educators come together to provide meaningful and accessible interpretation through extended labels, multi-sensory experiences, and dynamic programming (i.e. panel discussions, symposia, curator-led tours, hands-on art activities) to further engage visitors with the curatorial message and purpose. For Indelible Ink, the addition of printmaking tools and videos of the artists working in the studios would have provided a greater learning opportunity for visitors. In terms of student engagement, it would have been exciting to have art studio or art history graduate students discuss a particular printmaking process, provide demonstrations, or expand upon the print-making medium’s connection to contemporary Indigenous artists.

Indelible Ink methodologically centers upon collaboration and polyvocality in multilayered ways. The multigenerational artists carry with them various levels of experience, expertise, styles, traditions, geographies, histories, etc. Each of the interviews with the curator allowed the artist’s voice to resonate in the gallery in a meaningful way, permitting a level of connection between artist, curator, and visitor. The level of collaboration undertaken by Statzer in the exhibition planning process really worked to celebrate the connectivity and camaraderie so often associated with printmaking artists. As a teaching museum, the print studio wall successfully introduced a new dimension to each of the two-dimensional works. Bringing in the studios and the associated team members challenges the mythologies around artist as sole creator and genius. Rather, understanding how, where, and who was involved in the making of these artworks helps to underline the importance of relational networks both inside the studio and in each artist’s personal life.

Additionally, the exhibition, although well intentioned, veers into the realms of essentialism. Focused and revisionist exhibitions like Indelible Ink are cropping up in institutions across the U.S. in concerted efforts to diversify and serve underrepresented audiences, but what exactly will be the long-term impact? Such exhibitions can be seen as political acts of resistance that attempt to eradicate the forces of elite, white, patriarchal cultural institutions. Historically, these institutions egregiously exclude women of color, but it is imperative to remain mindful that identity-centric exhibitions work to reify the center-periphery paradigm. Curator and arts writer Maura Reilly, in Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating (2018), notes that, “While revisionism is an important curatorial strategy, it nevertheless assumes the white, masculinist, [Euro- and Amero-centric] canon as its center and
accepts its hierarchy as a natural given.” This process of continued subordination forces cultural leaders to remain vigilant not to see these exhibitions as correctives, but rather as first steps for more permanent change.

The ephemeral nature of exhibitions means they do not provide a long-lasting impact while on display. How will these exhibitions engage local communities, during and after the exhibition? Do staff, board members, donors, guest speakers, museum attendants, scholars, and research assistants reflect the communities UNMAM strives to serve? We must simultaneously recognize the dangers of essentialism and the level of institutional critique offered by such exhibitions. Confronting the colonialist legacies of an institution and being transparent about the ways an institution has actively contributed to exclusivist practices is critical. The next steps will require new levels of accountability and responsibility for all museum staff, board members, patrons, and visitors to avoid any further signs of regression.

DAVID SAIZ is working on an MA in Art History with a Minor in Museum Studies in the University of New Mexico’s Department of Art. Working with Dr. Kirsten Pai Buick, David’s thesis critically examines representations of nude black male models in the work of John Singer Sargent and F. Holland Day, and the ways the artists feminize, exoticize, and fetishize their subjects in a process of reifying their own masculine “American” identities.

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NOTES
1 Introductory text, Raymond Jonson Gallery, Indelible Ink: Native Women, Printmaking, Collaboration, University of New Mexico Art Museum, Albuquerque, New Mexico.
2 In a discussion with Dr. Statzer, she was transparent about the interviewing and transcribing process. She mentioned that all of the artists, with the exception of Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, were interviewed specifically for this exhibition. Smith had other commitments so Statzer utilized previous interviews with the artist from other projects outside the university.
4 Many of the invited artists are part of large networks of printmakers from across the U.S. Each guest artist would be offered the use of a workspace, materials, and equipment in exchange for them sharing their experience, teaching, and donating.
prints to collections. Crow’s Shadow Institute of the Arts (CSIA) is the only studio featured in the exhibition that is located on an Indigenous reservation, the Confederated Tribes of Umatilla Indian Reservation in the foothills of Oregon’s Blue Mountains. The studio was opened in 1992 by local artists, James Lavador (Walla Walla) and Phillip Cash Cash (Cayuse and Nez Perce). CSIA invites three to six artists for two-week residencies to work with Master Printer, Judith Baumann. In 2005, Michael McCabe founded Fourth Dimension Studio in Santa Fe, New Mexico and has been the Master Printer since the studio opened. Highpoint Editions Minneapolis was founded in 2001 by Carla McGrath and Cole Rogers who offer visiting-artist programs, as well as educational and community programing for all ages. Also in Minneapolis is Sister Black Press, started in 2000 by Monica Edwards Larson, which specializes in letterpress, book arts, and design. Lastly, the studio physically closest to the UNMAM is the Tamarind Institute of Art, which is located across the street one block east on Central Avenue in the heart of Albuquerque, New Mexico. Originally started in Los Angeles, California in 1960, Tamarind became affiliated with the University of New Mexico in 1970, as a division of the College of Fine Arts. The UNM Art Museum and Zimmerman Library’s Center for Southwest Research house the Tamarind archive.


6 “[Smith’s] deep understanding of historical issues, coupled with her ability to educate others is a mischievous, poignant, and candid manner, [and] is one of the markers of her success. Her choice to use humor, both overtly and subtly, is another.” See, Dakota Hoska (Oglala Lakȟóta), “Seven Sisters: Native Women Painters Connected through Time by Medium,” Hearts of Our People: Native Women Artists, eds. Laura Silver, Minneapolis, Minnesota: Minneapolis Institute of Art in association with the University of Washington Press, 2019: 289.

7 Mary Statzer and University of New Mexico Art Museum, Indelible Ink: Native Women, Printmaking, Collaboration, exhibition catalog (University of New Mexico Art Museum, Albuquerque, New Mexico: ISSUU, 2020): 11.

8 Ibid, 14.

9 Ibid, 32.


12 UNM Art Museum, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, did create a virtual exhibition tour of Indelible Ink. In this tour the curator provides a few videos talking about the exhibition. In one instance, the work of Dyani White Hawk is connected to a video showing the artist’s time working at Highpoint Center for Printmaking (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gW_Co7hkdM8&feature=youtu.be). The works shown in the video are each featured in the exhibition.