

# Hearts of Our People Native Women Artists

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Ingram Gallery

Organized by the Minneapolis Institute of Art



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# Hearts of Our People Native Women Artists

Although women have long been the creative force behind Native art, *Hearts of Our People* is the first major exhibition devoted to their cultural contributions. This groundbreaking and comprehensive project—organized by the Minneapolis Institute of Art in collaboration with a twenty-one-person advisory board of primarily Native artists and scholars—features more than 115 objects, including traditional textiles, baskets, beadwork, and pottery, as well as painting, sculpture, video, and installation art made by women artists working in the United States and Canada from ancient times to the present day.

*Hearts of Our People* is organized around three themes: *Legacy*, *Relationships*, and *Power*. In *Legacy*, visitors see ways in which Native women artists acknowledge their lineage while simultaneously addressing the present moment and speaking to the future. Rose B. Simpson (b. 1983) customized her 1985 El Camino with black-on-black designs to evoke and pay homage to the blackware style of Pueblo pottery made famous decades ago by Maria Martinez (1887–1980, fig. 1). *Legacy* also refers to the tradition of passing skills from one generation to another, a notion embodied in a



Fig. 1  
Maria Martinez (San Ildefonso Pueblo) and Julian Martinez (San Ildefonso Pueblo). *Storage jar*, ca. 1940. Native clay, 16 x 23 1/4 in. Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa, Oklahoma; Gift of Clark Field, 1946.46.1. Photo courtesy of Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa, Oklahoma

complete traditional ensemble with intricate bead and quillwork made by three generations of Great Plains Dakḥóta/Nakoda artists: Joyce Growing Thunder Fogarty (b. 1950), Juanita Growing Thunder Fogarty (b. 1969), and Jessa Rae Growing Thunder (b. 1989).

The second section, *Relationships*, presents examples of how bonds exist within the human community and beyond to include animals, the weather, the earth, and other entities the Western world does not typically recognize as having volition or agency. Innu (Naskapi) women in the far reaches of northeastern Canada made elegant,



Fig. 2  
Rebecca Belmore (Anishinaabe). *Fringe*, 2007. Transparency in light box (one of an edition of three). Minneapolis Institute of Art, Gift of funds from Donna and Cargill MacMillan Jr., 2010.56. © Rebecca Belmore

tailored coats of creamy white caribou hide for men to wear while hunting. The coats are thought to mesmerize the animals under pursuit, who then give their lives to the hunters, revealing the reciprocal and respectful relationship between animals and human beings. Michif artist Christi Belcourt (b. 1966) wants viewers to be reminded of the interconnected nature of existence on this planet through paintings like *Wisdom of the Universe* (cover), which features an array of vegetation, insects, and birds that are all on Canada's endangered species list.

*Power*, the third section, features works that reflect political authority held by women and objects created for diplomatic purposes, such as a re-creation of a sweetgrass basket woven by Mary Kawennatakie Adams (1917–1999) for Pope John Paul II in honor of the beatification of fellow Mohawk Kateri Tekakwitha. The poignant photograph *Fringe* evokes the power of resiliency and endurance among Native Americans (fig. 2). A bloody slash across a reclining woman's back represents the systemic trauma inflicted on Indigenous peoples. Despite the gravity of the injury, *Fringe* is also about healing. The scar will never disappear, but it is stitched together with beads that symbolize Indigenous strength and survival. Native women artists have always made vital contributions to the social, political, and cultural landscape.

Katie Delmez  
Curator

Cover: Christi Belcourt (Michif). *The Wisdom of the Universe* (detail), 2014. Acrylic on canvas. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; Purchased with funds donated by Greg Latremoille, 2014, 2014/6. © Christi Belcourt