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SANTA FE

## **SITelines.2018:** *Casa tomada*

SITE Santa Fe

 **N VIEW** through January 6, 2019, *Casa tomada* (House Taken Over) marks the conclusion of a trio of SITE Santa Fe biennials, “New Perspectives on Art of the Americas.” Focused on the Western Hemisphere, this series of exhibitions (2014, 2016, and 2018) confronts conceptions of multinational and Indigenous identities, social and political borders as boundaries for inclusion and exclusion, and intersections between cultural epistemologies and visual representations. This year, curators José Luis Blondet, Candice Hopkins (Carcross/Tagish), and Ruba Katrib, with Naomi Beckwith as curatorial advisor, opted to feature 23 artists with ten commissions. This differs from larger groups of artists shown in the previous biennials, but as Katrib said, “It’s a small show with big ideas.”<sup>1</sup>

The commissions include new work by Melissa Cody (Diné), Eric-Paul Riege (Diné), Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds (Southern Cheyenne), and Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun (Coast Salish-Okanagan). The exhibition also generously features 13 two-dimensional works by Victoria Mamnguqsualuk (Inuk, 1930–2016,) and five stone sculptures by Jamasee Pitseolak (Inuk). In *Casa tomada*, the artists received ample space to support large-scale installations. The exhibition’s layout comes across as a layered display of vignettes that provide multifaceted interpretations of rhetoric.

During a walk-through, Hopkins explained that Beckwith steered the curatorial team’s methodology to develop through a focus on language.<sup>2</sup> This strategy reveals itself in the words, imagery, and gestures in the two- and three-dimensional and performative

1. The preview events took place on August 1 and 2, 2018. The biennial opened to the public on August 3, 2018.

2. Press preview walk-through, SITE Santa Fe, August 1, 2018.

artworks by the invited Native American and First Nations practitioners. These artists' individualized styles create a dialogue with the exhibition's title and overarching theme, *Casa tomada*, the name of a 1946 fictional short story by Argentinian author Julio Cortázar that metaphorically critiqued national politics of the time. Adding curatorial context, Blondet offered three more interpretations of *Casa tomada* and translated it as "house under the influence," "drunk house," or even "house under siege," with a military connotation.

Notions of siege clearly take form in Heap of Birds's *Surviving Active Shooter Custer* (2018), two sets of works on paper, with 24 monoprints on one wall and their 24 ghost prints, or visual echoes, on the adjacent wall. Made with blood-red, viscous backgrounds inscribed in thick, white lettering, the prints sample from several sources including rez radio song lyrics like "Navajo Don't You Know Love You So"; United States military code words, where Bedonkohe Apache leader Geronimo's name was recast as an American code for Bin Laden; and a reference to the 1868 Washita Massacre in the sentence, "STOP ACTIVE SHOOTER CADET AUTIE CUSTER."<sup>3</sup> Overall, the installation conveys a feeling of constantly being wrapped in reconfigured meanings of rhetoric. Here, the phrases reveal language's vulnerability to appropriative betrayal, while the ghost prints function as reruns or fading memories. As such, these panels create new cognitive word associations while triggering experiential recollections across time.

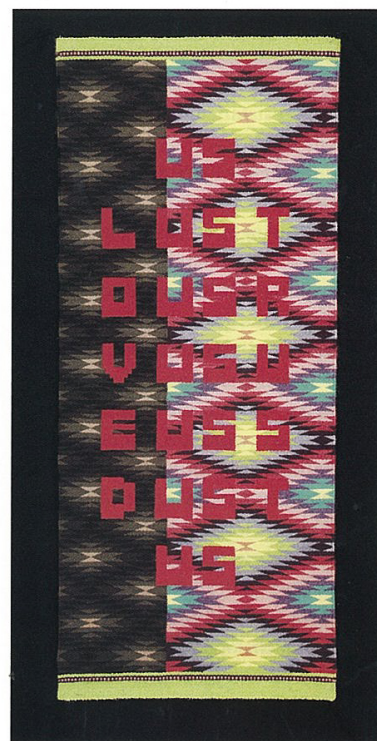
Histories of remembrance and transformation comprise two of the main themes of the exhibition. Victoria Mamnguqsualuk's colored-pencil drawings on paper and embroidered and felted wool panels visualize productive and communicative relationships between animals and humans. A main focus of her work revolves around the Inuit culture hero, Kiviug, who time traveled between

different cultures and eras and even subverted a Soviet satellite during the Cold War years.<sup>4</sup> In Mamnguqsualuk's deftly choreographed illustrations, Indigenous concepts of time as spiral, circular, and overlapping emerge in the human, animal, and spirit beings that move around and through each other's forms. An ethos of energy exchange and collaboration runs deeply in these works, and viewers have the opportunity to grasp the significance of her visual expression in her honoring of home through meaningful imagery.

Aspects of home also take center stage in Melissa Cody's dynamically colored, woven wool panels. Cody has recently been using her weaving practice as a coping method and abstract release to mourn loss.<sup>5</sup> Her aesthetic is based on the Navajo Germantown weaving style and also the weaving from the 1864 Long Walk, when Diné people dismantled and rewove blankets given as rations.<sup>6</sup> Cody threads words and letter arrangements—poetry—between brightly patterned, geometric areas. She also creates solely graphic panels that represent her interpretations of Diné iconography. Overall, Cody's panels reflect an intertwining of personal, collective, and pop culture histories in vivid, woven compositions.

Eric-Paul Riege created *diyin+*, *hooghan and weaving dance* (fig. 3) for *Na'ashjé'í Asdzáá, Retha, Effie, and Angela* (2018), a symbolic architecture that includes a group of photographic prints on panels, two regalia sets, and a male hogan made of wool looms. His onsite performance created an intimate, new relationship between him and this artwork by honoring Spiderwoman's gift of weaving to the Diné people in a personal dedication and enactment of the weaving process.<sup>7</sup> In this performance, he deeply engaged with Spiderwoman's communal legacy by using his body as a primary media and temporal bridge.

The works of Yuxweluptun and Pitseolak also make strong use of figurative gesture. Yuxweluptun's five sculptures,



ABOVE Melissa Cody (Navajo), *US*, 2015, wool, aniline dyes, 35½ × 13 in., private collection.

OPPOSITE John Hoover (Unangaʼ, 1919–2011), *Great White Heron Spirit Helper*, 1976, wood, collection of the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, OK. Photo: Mariah Ashbacher.

3. Candice Hopkins, "You Might Say That The Masters Never Saw It Coming," in *Casa tomada*, ed. Lucy Flint (Santa Fe: SITE Santa Fe, 2018).

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Melissa Cody in discussion with the author, August 1, 2018.

7. Hopkins, "You Might Say That The Masters Never Saw It Coming."



■ REVIEWS

*Neo Totems* (2018), are arranged in active poses on a large platform. These painted cedar beings call out to viewers in their vibrant movements and visually compelling forms. As such, these abstracted, animal-like figures appear as though they present themselves for the world to see. However, Yuxweluptun's Surrealist-influenced style betrays this notion of extroversion and openness. As much as one can see is also withheld—an act of resistance in the expectation that knowledge will always be shared indiscriminately. The artist's painting, *Floor Opener* (2013), shows similar Surrealist beings performing a potlatch.<sup>8</sup> This scene has a cine-animation quality to it, evoking Tim Burton-like aesthetics.

Pitseolak's five serpentine sculptures in dark green also exude a Surrealist visual language. He infuses his own memories into objects that connect to people. Each work can be considered as grammar arranged in various ways to form new meanings. *Laden Sole* (2004) shows a shoe dragging a weight on a chain, while *Lady* (2011) is a cartoonish high heel shoe. As evidenced in the embedded drama recorded in and between the dialogue of these two objects, unexpected intersections continue to upend the status quo in *Casa tomada*.

Thus, the exhibition exists as a conversation between individual and collective memories visualized in a prominently Surrealist aesthetic. Different worlds collide and visually speak to each other, and visitors act as moderators. As an example of this exhibition methodology, the curators strategically added a local layer to the biennial. They included a micaceous clay cast of the right foot of the bronze Juan de Oñate statue (1993)—an extremity severed by the Friends of Acoma in 1997 from the “trophy” of the Oñate

Monument and Resource Visitors Center (now the Northern Rio Grande National Heritage Area).<sup>9</sup> The group removed the foot to protest the commemoration of the conquistador Oñate (1550–1626). In 1599, a year after Oñate claimed present-day New Mexico lands for Spain, he imposed death and enslavement upon numerous Pueblo people and the dismemberment of the right feet of 24 Acoma warriors.<sup>10</sup> A gesture of historical redress, the display of this Indigenized object with an archive of articles surrounding its existence underscores the curators' commitments to revealing unsettling truths and reminds audience members they are guests on Pueblo peoples' lands. —Michelle J. Lanteri

8. Press preview walk-through, SITE Santa Fe, August 1, 2018.

9. Naomi Beckwith, “If Thy Right Eye Offended Thee,” in *Casa tomada*, ed. Lucy Flint (Santa Fe: SITE Santa Fe, 2018). Reynaldo “Sonny” Rivera created the statue in 1993. After its alteration by Friends of Acoma, Rivera made a bronze copy of the left foot to replace the missing right foot.

10. Matthew J. Martínez, “Remembering 400 Years of Exile,” *Green Fire Times*, August 2, 2014, web; Celina Salazar, “Don Juan de Oñate,” University of California, Berkeley, 1998, web.