

25 Native American Artists to Know

BY PETALA IRONCLOUD  November 21, 2025 5:39pm



Kay WalkingStick, *North Rim Temple*, 2023

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND HALES, LONDON AND NEW YORK. PHOTO: JSP ART PHOTOGRAPHY.

Native American artists have only recently gained a spotlight within the mainstream art world. For centuries, Native art was siloed on reservations, at trading posts, and in Indian markets, with no dedicated Indigenous commercial galleries either in urban Indian centers like New York City, San Francisco, Tulsa, or Phoenix or in other areas with significant Native populations. But lately they are finding their way into major galleries and institutions from Miami to New York to Venice.

For Native American Heritage Month, we delve into art from 25 Native American, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian artists. While not an exhaustive list, these artists represent a broad spectrum of artistic innovation spanning multiple generations and mediums, from foundational pottery to contemporary Ravenstail weaving. Shattering conventional ideas about fine art while honoring historical techniques and cultural knowledge, they underscore the vitality of Indigenous artists' contributions to contemporary art and the ongoing need to ensure that their voices and visions are centered in mainstream art discourse.

Sara Siestreem



Sara Siestreem, *transtemporal clam basket*, 2022

Photo : Courtesy of the artist and Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland, Oregon.

Sara Siestreem (b. 1976) is a Hanis Coos artist based in Oregon. The Pratt MFA graduate's works include ceramics, photography, weaving, painting, and installation. *Skyline* (2024) is a series of traditional Hanis Coos baskets cast in clay and topped in gold, evoking the commodification of Native culture by modern interior design. *Minion* (2024) is composed of four ceramic black and white ceremonial caps underpinned by cascading scarlet beads, referencing systemic violence against Indigenous women and girls. *Un-ring Bells* (2013) incorporates photographs and representations of oyster shells Siestreem found along the local Coos and Millicoma Rivers' shores long after the extinction of local tribes, the effect of white settlement and industrial fishing. Siestreem's work gestures at both the presence and absence of Native communities and their relationships with the land in modern American life.

15 Native American Women Artists to Know

BY PETALA IRONCLOUD  March 31, 2025 11:34am



PHOTOCOLLAGE BY DANIELA HRITCU.

Native American artists, especially women, have only recently gained a spotlight within the mainstream art world. For centuries, Native art was siloed on reservations, at trading posts, and in Indian markets, with no dedicated Indigenous commercial galleries either in urban Indian centers like New York City, San Francisco, Tulsa, or Phoenix or in other areas with significant Native populations. But lately they are finding their way into major galleries and institutions from Miami to New York to Venice.

For Women's History Month, we delve into art from 15 Native American, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian women. While not an exhaustive list, these artists represent a broad spectrum of artistic innovation spanning multiple generations and mediums, from foundational pottery to contemporary Ravenstail weaving. Shattering conventional ideas about fine art while honoring historical techniques and cultural knowledge, they underscore the vitality of Indigenous women's contributions to contemporary art and the ongoing need to ensure that their voices and visions are centered in mainstream art discourse.

Sara Siestreem



Sara Siestreem, *transtemporal clam basket*, 2022

Photo : Courtesy of the artist and Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland, OR.

A Pratt MFA graduate, Sara Siestreem's practice includes ceramics, photography, weaving, painting, and installation art. *Skyline* (2024) is a series of Hanis Coos baskets nontraditionally cast in clay and topped in gold, evoking the commodification of Native culture. *transtemporal clam basket* (2022) is a 3D print of a handwoven basket. *Minion* (2024) is composed of four ceramic black and white ceremonial caps underpinned by cascading scarlet beads, referencing systemic violence against Indigenous women and girls. *Un-ring Bells* (2013) incorporates photographs and representations of oyster shells the artist found along the local Coos and Millicoma Rivers' shores long after the extinction of local tribes, the effect of white settlement and industrial fishing.



Art

5 Standout Shows to See at Small Galleries This February

Maxwell Rabb

Feb 4, 2025 9:41AM



Sara Siestreem (Hanis Coos), “yes/and (yellow is the medicine)”

Nina Johnson, Miami

Through Mar. 13



Sara Siestreem (Hanis Coos)
feast with my ancestors, 2024
Nina Johnson
Price on request



Sara Siestreem (Hanis Coos)
release the dead fire basket, 2024
Nina Johnson
Price on request



Each of Sara Siestreem’s “minion” sculptures is crowned with what the artist calls the “Aretha cap,” a ceramic dance cap named after Aretha Franklin. Draped beneath these crowns are strings of red abalone, glass beads, and plastic buttons, as well as strips of Japanese indigo-dyed and woven industrial cotton. According to the gallery, these minions are designed to resemble “protective beings,” with the domes serving to “protect women and young people.” Four of these minions are featured in the work *fiesta, forever (blue nights and rattlesnakes)* (2023–24), displayed on the walls of Nina Johnson’s library in Miami for her exhibition “yes/and (yellow is the medicine).”

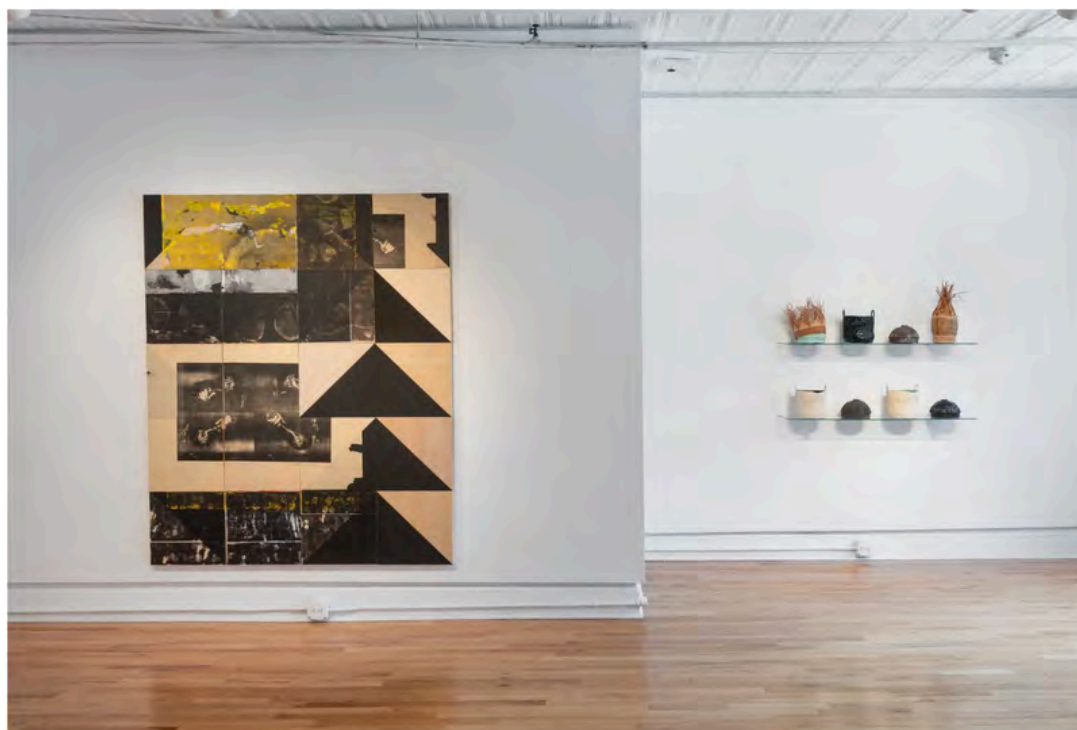
A member of the Confederated Tribes of the Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw Indians, Siestreem weaves traditional practices into her art, as seen in *skyline* (2024), a series of seven slip-cast ceramic baskets with a golden rim. Another piece, *release the dead fire basket* (2024), crafted from red cedar bark, sedge, and sweetgrass, pays homage to her community’s basket-weaving traditions while promoting modern-day healing, community building, and empowerment.

Siestreem, who earned an MFA from Pratt Institute in 2007, has hosted recent exhibitions at Elizabeth Leach Gallery in 2023 and Cristin Tierney in 2024.

ArtSeen

Sara Siestreem (Hanis Coos): *milk and honey*

By Farren Fei Yuan

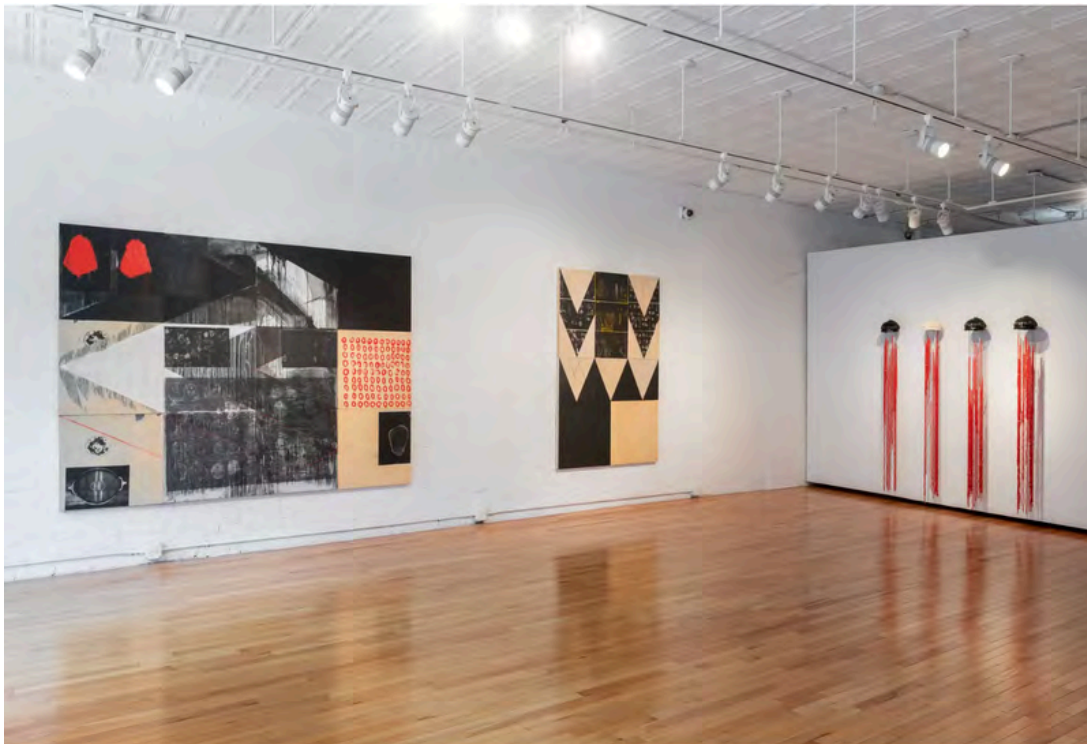


Installation view: Sara Siestreem (Hanis Coos): *milk and honey*, Cristin Tierney Gallery, New York, 2024. Courtesy Cristin Tierney Gallery, New York, NY, and Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland, OR. Photo: Adam Reich.

The first solo exhibition of the Oregon-based artist Sara Siestreem (Hanis Coos) in New York marks her return to the city's consciousness. After earning an MFA from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn in 2007, Siestreem returned to her homeland in the Umpqua River Valley to teach traditional Indigenous weaving to her Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw Indian community. A central piece of this show at Cristin Tierney Gallery, *3/15/2020 minion* (2024), was made collaboratively with her students, mostly young women. Consisting of four slip-cast ceramic dance caps draped with strings of red abalone, glass beads, and plastic buttons, the "minions" swayed ever so slightly as I approached, further animated by their shadows. For Siestreem, they call attention to the presence of ancestral protectors, who are attracted to the scarlet iridescence of abalone.

milk and honey
Cristin Tierney Gallery
September 6–October 19,
2024
New York

The palpable materiality of Siestreem's art is irresistible. Everything desires to be touched. I wanted to feel the texture of the beads and Siestreem's woven baskets, and to work out where the weave begins and ends. This tactility of her art is truthful to the sensory abundance of Indigenous culture, and contrasts with the primacy of the visual in Western art traditions. The baskets emanate the faint scents of medicinal plants—cedar bark, sweet grass, and spruce root—whose olfactory values serve as agents in the Indigenous ceremony of smudging. In glass bat (2024), the mixed-media painting to the left of the baskets, serial images of her hands shaking rattles further introduce a musical rhythm and dancing motion, as if to animate the countless extinct oysters Xeroxed across the composition.



Installation view: Sara Siestreem (*Hanis Coos*): **milk and honey**, Cistin Tierney Gallery, New York, 2024. Courtesy Cistin Tierney Gallery, New York, NY, and Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland, OR. Photo: Adam Reich.

The multi-dimensional experience—albeit only a taste of the wealth of Indigenous ecologies—is the artist's offering to the attentive viewer. Siestreem deftly mediates between the two realms, not only through her singular mastery of both Native and Western art forms but also her command of poetic language. Her haiku-like titles, such as *un-ring bells* (2013–24) or *not enough sweetness in the world to drown you out///so the tsunami came and washed you away* (2024), convey an entwining sense of loss and persistence echoing throughout Indigenous communities as they contend with the ravages of settler colonialism and climate catastrophe. Yet such weighty messages are channeled through the whispering lightness of the lowercase, a minor mode of speaking that unsettles signification, like a soft breeze.

The simultaneous precarity and persistence of memory is also captured in the incantation of hollow forms in un-ring bells: the red ellipses drawn repetitively by hand to form a loose grid, the spectral Xerox scans of oyster shells and an empty Dansk dish (Siestreem's predilection for this technique stems from her teenage zine-making years). This complex eight-foot-wide painting took eleven years to complete; it resists comparisons with the Rauschenbergian flatbed picture plane, the gestural abstraction of Informel, or Morris Louis's drip paintings. Rather, Siestreem appropriates elements of Western art forms only to re-contain them within the geometric language of Native traditions, subverting the former's claims to originality. Her radical juxtaposition of the ancient and modern, the organic and manufactured, questions these binary categories while insisting on the longstanding vitality and contemporaneity of Indigenous art.



Installation view: Sara Siestreem (*Hanis Coos*): **milk and honey**, Cristin Tierney Gallery, New York, 2024. Courtesy Cristin Tierney Gallery, New York, NY, and Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland, OR. Photo: Adam Reich.

But the most vivid sensation is certainly the gustatory delight of milk and honey. The exhibition title is taken from the name Siestreem gave to her white slip-cast ceramic basket with golden glazed edges, shown concurrently at this year's Armory Show. The significance of milk here harmonizes with the view of a distant thinker, Roland Barthes. Milk is "anti-wine," Barthes writes in *Mythologies*, "because in the basic morphology of substances milk is the opposite of fire by all the denseness of its molecules, by the creamy, and therefore soothing, nature of its spreading. Wine is mutilating, surgical, it transmutes and delivers; milk is cosmetic, it joins, covers, restores."

By casting her baskets with a mixture of milky white clay, Siestreem symbolically nourishes her craft tradition and allows it to spread. At the same time, milk embodies the symbiotic relationship between Indigenous artists and their materials. In the Indigenous worldview, plants and oysters are animate beings; the process of artmaking involves praying and caring for them throughout the year and asking for their permission to participate. milk and honey—both the work and the exhibition—therefore positions the Native weaving tradition as a practice of sustenance, subsistence, and sustainability.

As is characteristic of Siestreem's practice, themes are often developed through different iterations of the same work. For this occasion, the artist has placed seven of her slip-cast ceramic baskets in a row facing the windows to form a new work, titled skyline (2024). Their subtle variations, under the soft glow of contre-jour light, quietly index the passage of time. Siestreem has also alternated the color and order of the dance caps in her minion for different presentations: for example, four white caps at the Armory Show, three white caps and one black at a group exhibition at the Sun Valley Museum of Art (Intertwined: Weaving in Community, April–June 2024), and three black caps and one white here at Cristin Tierney. Playful and duplicitous, Siestreem's work resists explanation: meaning is coded but open, hence always residual. For the curious, her art is generous and nourishing, like milk and honey.

CONTRIBUTORS

Farren Fei Yuan is a writer and curator based in New York..



Art

10 Must-See Gallery Exhibitions during Armory Week 2024

Annabel Keenan

Sep 3, 2024 12:12PM



Stephen Thorpe

We Live Not Only by Day, but Also in Our Dreams, 2024

DIMIN

Sold



Anthony Cudahy, *Dowsing (studio)*, 2024. © Anthony Cudahy. Photo by GC Photography. Courtesy of the artist and GRIMM.

With the dog days of summer behind us, the art world is reemerging and looking ahead to the fall season. In New York, the so-called Armory Week anchored by The Armory Show marks this return. The week brings with it additional fairs, including Independent 20th Century, Art on Paper, and the scrappy, artist-forward SPRING/BREAK.

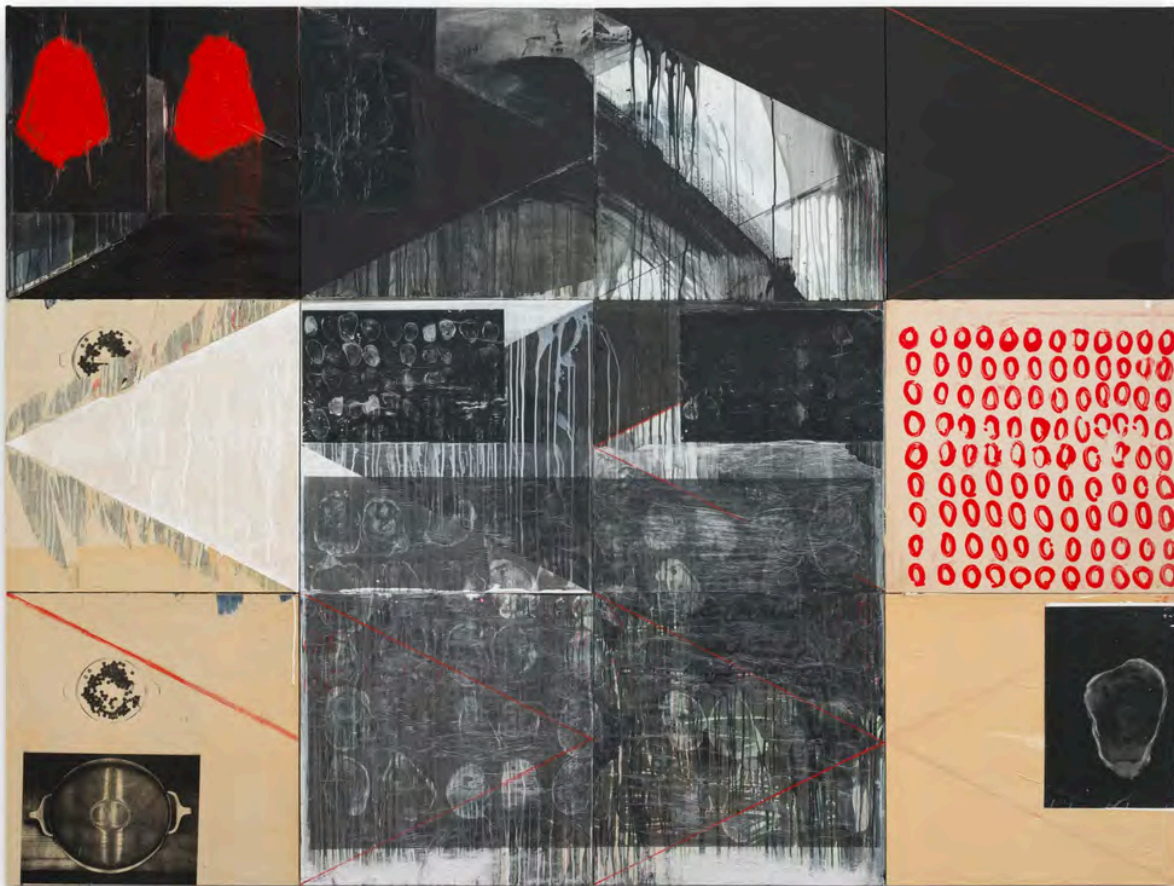
In “Dream House,” New York-based British painter Stephen Thorpe draws inspiration from Carl Jung’s concept of the same name, in which the home symbolizes the human psyche. In this theory, each room is seen as an extension of a different part of the mind—both the personal and the collective. Drawing inspiration from psychoanalysis, sociology, and symbolism, Thorpe blurs the lines between the real and the abstract, illustrating the tensions between the internal and external worlds.

Thorpe focuses on the corners of rooms, at times filling this narrow, intimate vantage point with vibrant imagery, such as landscapes and exotic birds. In Sacred Landscape of Inside Things (all works 2024), for example, the mid-career artist depicts a serene landscape with an expansive perspective. This forms a contrast with works like A Symbol of Solitude for the Imagination and A Place of Reasoning Between the Inside and the Outside, in which thick, expressive swathes of paint cover the walls, perhaps symbolic of the physical and psychological barriers we build around us.

Sara Siestreem (Hanis Coos), “milk and honey.”

Cristin Tierney Gallery

Sep. 6–Oct. 19



Sara Siestreem (Hanis Coos)

unring bells, 2013-24

Cristin Tierney

US\$25,000



Must-See New York Exhibitions: Lee Bul, Mestre Didi, and More

The upcoming art season in the city dazzles with vibrant presentations at top institutions and galleries such as The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Friedman Benda, and more.

ERICA SILVERMAN

SEPTEMBER 03, 2024



The majesty of fall in New York brings with it a parade of new gallery exhibitions spotlighting the supreme imagination and unparalleled skill of artists like **Lee Bul**, **Andile Dyalvane**, and more.

Sara Siestreem (Hanis Coos): “milk and honey”

Cristin Tierney



Installation View Of Sara Siestreem (Hanis Coos): “Milk And Honey,” Courtesy Of The Artist And Cristin Tierney Gallery, New York, Photograph By Adam Reich.

September 6 — October 19, 2024

219 Bowery, Floor 2 New York, NY 10002

In an inaugural solo show at **Cristin Tierney** and in New York, interdisciplinary artist **Sara Siestreem (Hanis Coos)**, a member of the Confederated Tribes of the Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw Indians, summons the vital rituals of her ancestors with a modern feminist and ecological perspective. The Oregon-based visionary’s prismatic magnetic exhibition titled “milk and honey” deftly intertwines collage, geometric weaving motifs, and expressive brush strokes, championing social justice in every masterly gesture. The sweeping work *un-ring bells* spans eight feet and took eleven years to develop. A harmony of organic wood with black and white elements gives way to crimson shapes and lyrically dripping paint. A wondrous layering of reclaimed objects such as a fortune cookie message and a fractured string of Cobalt beads evoke a sense of loss in the wake of Colonial brutality.

What we love: The stunning exhibition is presented in conjunction with Sara Siestreem (Hanis Coos)’s presentation at this year’s edition of **The Armory Show** alongside the acclaimed **Elizabeth Leach Gallery**.

Art

10 Art Shows to See in New York Right Now

Artists including Leon Golub, Charles Yuen, Naudline Pierre, and Manny Vega are kicking off the fall art season with must-see shows.



Natalie Haddad, Hrag Vartanian and Valentina Di Liscia 19 hours ago



Naudline Pierre, "Longing For" (2024), oil on canvas, 48 x 96 inches (121.9 x 243.8 cm) (photo Natalie Haddad/Hyperallergic)

It's officially the fall art season and the New York art world was abuzz last weekend with fairs and openings. With so much to choose from it's hard to single anything out, but below are 10 of our favorite shows right now, featuring artists ranging from museum heavyweights (Leon Golub) to Asian-American pioneers (Charles Yuen of the Godzilla art collective), and from technology virtuosos (Rafael Lozano-Hemmer) to brilliant mosaicists (Manny Vega). This will be our only guide to New York City exhibitions in September, but next month we'll be back to our biweekly schedule. And a few great summer shows remain open through this weekend, so before you rush to see the new ones, check out Richard Serra's film and video works at Dia Chelsea, Frank Walter: To Capture a Soul at the Drawing Center in Soho, and the Art Students League of New York's 2024 Juried Selection Exhibition at the Lower East Side's Gallery Onetwentyeight. —Natalie Haddad, Reviews Editor

Sara Siestreem (Hanis Coos): milk and honey

Cristin Tierney Gallery, 219 Bowery, Floor 2, Lower East Side, Manhattan

Through October 19



Various sculptural objects on display at Sara Siestreem's *milk and honey* exhibition at Cristin Tierney Gallery (photo Hrag Vartanian/*Hyperallergic*)

This is Sara Siestreem's (Hanis Coos) first New York City exhibition, and it demonstrates her ease with various artistic registers that include, but are not limited to, petroglyph-style mark making, beading, weaving, abstract painting, and various printmaking techniques. Her process-based art makes you conscious of time, whether as a cumulative effect — as in her weaving, where you can see how things are made and sometimes cast or 3D printed — or in her paintings, where we see layers of line, image, and shape come together to reinvent notions of ceremony, ritual, and ancestral inheritance.

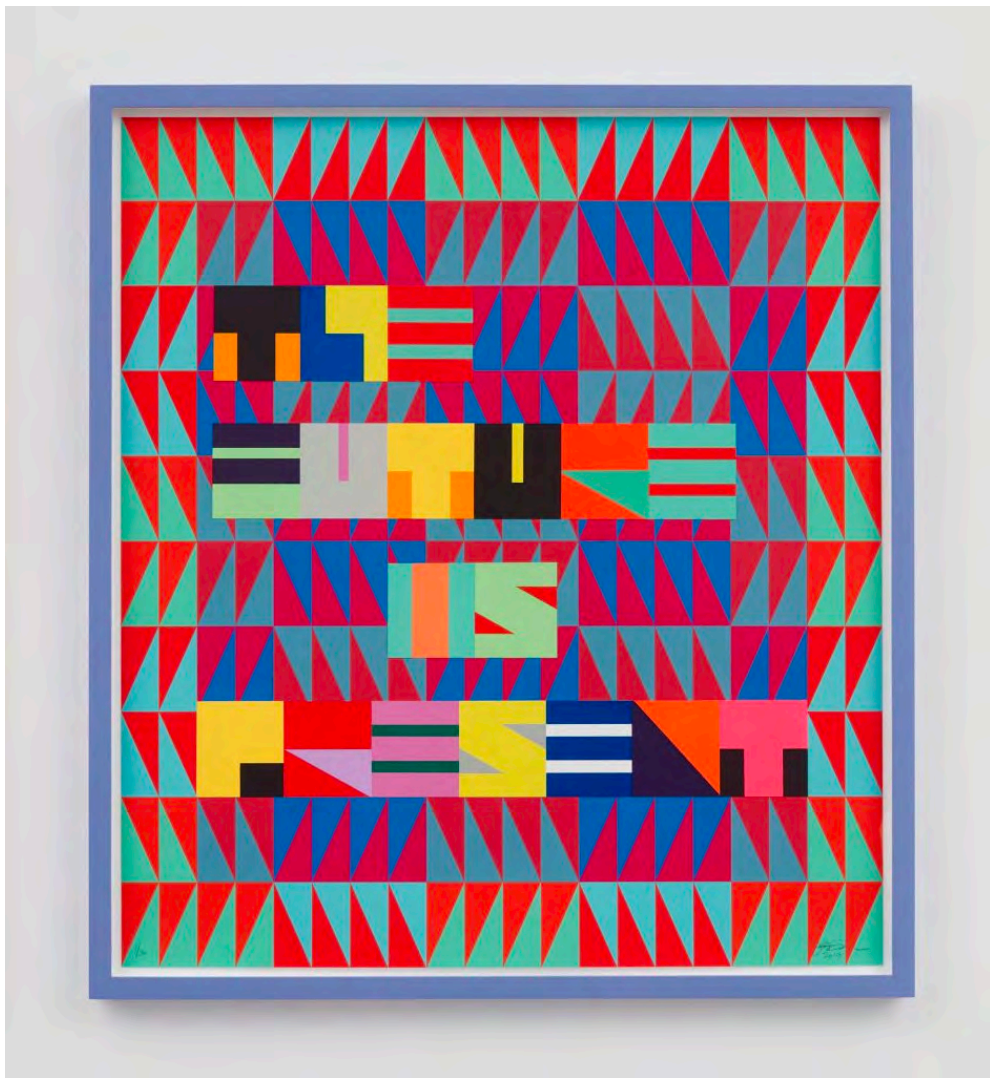
In “skyline” (2024), seven glazed slip cast ceramic baskets are placed in front of the windows, making us aware of the pattern of urban structures across the street from the gallery, which denote another type of rhythm in stacked forms. The three large paintings here are more austere than previous panel works, using graphite, acrylic, Xerox transfer, and other techniques that reclaim cultural forms that went into “hibernation,” a term she's used before, during the 1850s, when her own tribe was dispossessed and persecuted by the US government almost to the point of complete genocide. Each of these art pieces, particularly the baskets and dance caps, renew the promise that art has an alchemical power that can be born from humble yet proud origins, and with the right care it can be woven into gold. —HV

Gallery Network

Explore 7 Artworks by Native American Artists From the Artnet Gallery Network

Traditional beading techniques, lithographs, and photography are just a few of the mediums these creators are engaging with.

Artnet Gallery Network, December 26, 2023



Jeffrey Gibson, *THE FUTURE IS PRESENT* (2019). Courtesy of Sikkema Jenkins & Co.

Before we bid adieu to 2023 and welcome in 2024, we at the Artnet Gallery Network pulled together one last roundup for the year of art that intrigued or inspired us. Over the thousands of combined galleries, artists,

and artworks we came across, we found a distinct and exciting presence of art made by Native American artists. From pieces made using traditional, hand-beaded techniques and others showing innovative uses of abstraction in painting, this collection of works by Native American artists certainly caught our eye.

The works below are only a glimpse of everything that can be found with the Artnet Gallery Network, where you can search thousands of galleries and explore diverse art and artists from around the world with just a few simple clicks. And be sure to keep a lookout for our first Artnet Gallery Network deep dive of the year in January!

Sara Siestreem
couplet (2017)
[Inquire Here](#)



Sara Siestreem, *couplet* (2017). Courtesy of Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland.

ArtSeen

Converge 45 Biennial: *Social Forms: Art as Global Citizenship*



By [Tess Bilhartz](#)



(L-R) Narsiso Martinez, Lisa Jarrett, and Julian Gaines, *Assembly*, Converge 45, Parallax Art Center, Portland, OR, 2023.

For *Social Forms: Art as Global Citizenship*, the third iteration of the Converge 45 Biennial, curator Christian Viveros-Fauné sought out art that engages with the pressing questions of its time and that might intervene, somehow, in a reimagining of Portland and other places. Many of the biennial artists seek to give a place form and direction, either as a witness to devastation and change or a conjurer of sometimes hopeful visions.

Peter Gronquist floats a new mark, a simple line, a gesture, up into Portland's skyline with his billboard above the Eastbank Commerce Center. The polished steel backing disappears into a reflection that blurs with the sky, and Gronquist's neon flourish hovers weightlessly. Places are marked by signs and billboards and also subtle imprints like wind on dirt; they are marked by animals and plants who may leave bones or fossils behind; they are marked by climate disasters and industry. In Richard Mosse's immersive video, *Broken Spectre*, the mark is a scar as mercury stains the Amazon River where miners extract gold, and deforestation brutally gouges the rainforest, devastating Indigenous communities along the river.

Jorge Tacla also considers marks of damage in his panoramic painting of the destroyed Syrian city Homs, *Sign of Abandonment/Señal de abandono 34* (2018). Tacla paints primarily in black and white with an oil and cold wax mixture that allows him to make shapes and lines shiver. The architecture jitters, and every so often, rhythmically across the canvas, the jittery forms are rubbed out and dissolve into formless gray clouds. In rare moments the smearing and shakiness crystallize into clear lines, only to devastate with the contours of rubble. Above the city, the clouds hang heavy and corporeal, wrong in scale and density. They hover, briefly holding the dust and remains of the city.



Installation view: *Sara Siestream: Assembly*, Converse 45, Parallax Art Center, Portland, OR, 2023.

Some marks are ephemeral, like the lines left by skates on an ice rink or the brief and often imperceptible impact of a runner's shoe on the ground. There are also the invisible imprints of fragrance or breath that mark a place at the molecular level. In *Assembly* at Parallax Art Space, Sara Siestream's (Hanis Coos) basket weaving materials hang, ready, at the entrance

in *cache eleven: straight to heaven*. As I walk around the gallery, I might inhale scents and bits of intentionally placed olfactory and medicinal plants that reciprocally absorb particles of my own skin, hair, or breath. We all take something with us, and we all leave something behind. I'm reminded of Malcolm Peacock's potent installation that also considers breath and the invisible comingling of molecules.

Peacock's own recorded voice narrates the exhibition, and he begins with a passage about a future when people literally struggle to understand where one person ends and another begins. What follows is an account of distance runners who "rub elbows," exchange breath, and share stories. As Peacock tells it, on a run through the Portland landscape he encounters Edward Gardner (1898–1966), a fellow Black distance runner whose own story structures the exhibition *next in line at the peak of the valley, his spine bent forward as he surrendered to his choices*, at SE Cooper Contemporary.

Peacock records this story as he runs, and his runner's breath is the ever-present rhythm of the piece, sometimes fast and shallow, sometimes slow and deep. As I listen, I'm lying next to another visitor on a large, braided, circular bed, its coils shifting from brown to deep green to gold. We follow Gardner on a 3,000-mile cross-continental marathon as he tackles the profound endurance of the race, harassed by two white men on horseback. Peacock mentions a desire to integrate into the landscape of the Pacific Northwest, but the landscape can be threatening. He finds a companion, though, in Gardner's story, his legend or his ghost, and a kind of fusion takes place between the two runners as their strides connect and they listen to each other's breath. My breath is in that room, too, as is my companion's. Throughout, Peacock substitutes the word "travel" for "run," and "traveler" for "runner", and he guides us on a kind of hero's journey, one that he has been on before and one that Gardner traveled before him.

Marks left on the ice by Amanda Ross-Ho's skates, like Peacock's breath, are a testament to physical demand and commitment. The wobbly lines where she falters and pulls herself back on track tell the story of her performance, *Untitled Figure, (THE CENTER OF IT ALL)* at the mostly vacant Lloyd Center mall. She guides her movements through muscle memory from that bygone era, the era of the American mall and the era when she skated competitively. Her skates repetitively draw a figure-eight, emphasizing its parameters and blurring them as she wobbles, catches herself, and re-finds the circle in this tongue-in-cheek embodiment of nostalgia and dreams.



Installation view: *Malcolm Peacock: next in line at the peak of the valley, his spine bent forward as he surrendered to his choices*, Converge 45, SE Cooper Contemporary, Portland, OR, 2023.

Local galleries and arts organizations have taken up residence in some abandoned sections of the Lloyd Center mall. It straddles past and, maybe, some kind of future. Another transfer of intent and ownership occurs when, driven by conversations around Land Back, the Center for Native Arts and Culture acquires a turn-of-the-century red brick building that houses Marie Watt's monumental *Chords to Other Chords (Relative)*. Watt had extended an open call to Native artists, asking for fliers, slogans, and poster materials. She plasters their words to a panoramic wooden backing that runs the length of the room, and enormous red neon text: "Turtle Island And", glows over the collected ephemera. The small notes demand that I step up close to read them, and the large neon text, no longer legible as words, instead lights the notes. I step back to read the large words, and I step forward to read the small ones, the scale shift making apparent the cacophony of voices participating in this "Turtle Island And."

The chorus of personal notes in Watt's piece is reminiscent of the breath and intimacies exchanged in Peacock's, these small voices over time chip away at the contours of a place and reshape it. Jesse Murry's quiet and moving suite of small paintings shape an internal world. These are paintings about paint and the placement of the hand, abstract but with a disappearing horizon. Corporeality departs, and for a moment, we levitate.

Contributor

Tess Bilhartz

Tess Bilhartz is an artist and writer who grew up in Dallas, Texas and is currently based in New York City. Recent solo shows include *Follow Me Down* at Rubber Factory in 2022 and *What On Earth* at Super Dutchess in 2020. Residencies include the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture (2017) and the Sharpe Walentas Space Program (2013). She teaches art at Borough of Manhattan Community College, City University of New York.



Seba Colluqueo, "Alka Domo," courtesy of the artist and Converge 45.

ART

Explore the Vibrant Art Scene of Portland with Converge 45 Biennial

By Andrew Huff
August 10, 2023



The Converge 45 Biennial Opens This August in Portland

There was a moment, years before the COVID-19 pandemic, when it felt like a new art biennial was popping up every week. Different cities, unique offerings, and the promise of innovation often summarized these ambitious events. With the advent of COVID, there seemed to be a fear surrounding how often people would travel once restrictions were lifted, and how this might influence the ways in which people would experience culture and art post-pandemic. Thankfully, the world is in a place where traveling is safer, but still, there still seems to be a lingering hesitation to restart the need for constant travel; people seem a bit more selective about where they should go, and which biennials and art fairs they should commit to visiting. A relatively new biennial in Portland, OR is making its case as a show that's not to be missed.

Founded in 2015, **Converge 45** has sought to celebrate the city's vibrant arts scene, made up of new, smaller galleries and not-for-profit organizations, as well as established museums, by offering a biennial that is helping shed light on the wealth of world-class offerings throughout Portland. This is accomplished through key partnerships and inventive programs that engage in a city-wide cultural conversation between creative minds and incredible artists.

Their upcoming edition, entitled "Social Forms: Art as Global Citizenship" and organized by writer and curator **Christian Viveros-Fauné**, brings together a remarkable line-up of artists who are responding to the issues of their times through art, installations, and public works. Opening on August 24, 2023 the show will present a series of new commissions and major activations by more than 50 artists at 15 sites across the city of Portland.

We spoke with Converge 45 founder **Liz Leach** for an inside scoop into what to expect at this year's edition, as well as some information about the history of this important organization that continues to innovate exciting programs throughout the city of Portland.



Sara Siestroom (Hanis Coos), "they would prefer to be a cloud, fastened to the rock," 2013-2022, acrylic, graphite, Xerox transfer on panel board, 88 x 176 inches overall, photo by Mario Gallucci courtesy of the artist and Elizabeth Leach Gallery.

WHITEWALL: What was the impetus for creating Converge 45?

LIZ LEACH: Portland has a strong cultural ethos with a number of galleries and non-profit art institutions centered in the Pearl District near downtown and within walking distance of each other. The vibrant energy of the artists and arts organizations in Portland is inspiring. Artist-initiated spaces continue to emerge in Portland, primarily on the east side, such as **SE Cooper Contemporary**.

The more I traveled, the more I realized how rare it is now for a city, of any size, outside of New York City to have a core of visual arts organizations in the heart of a city. This realization motivated me to start Converge 45, art on the 45th parallel, to draw attention to the vibrant arts ecosystem of Portland and the surrounding region. The audience is multifold. First, to invite the residents of the city, many newcomers, to explore the region's abundance in the visual arts. Second, to invite the art world to convene in Portland in August for opening weekend and

beyond. Third, to create opportunities for artists and art students in the region to view the best contemporary art around. Overall, the experience in Portland in the summer and fall is sublime, with the proximity of nature in and near the city.

WW: Have the ideas and goals you set out for the organization changed over time, or have the artists and partners you've collaborated with over time influenced the way in which you have expanded the program?

LL: The goals and ideas for Converge 45 have remained true to the initial vision. Christian Viveros-Fauné is the third Guest Curator for Converge 45. **Kristy Edmunds** was the first, and **Lisa Dent** the second Guest Curator, which was interrupted by the pandemic.

The cycle of mounting an ambitious project that is city wide has influenced the timing of the exhibition to a longer engagement with the Guest Curator. The goal is to develop a rich relationship with the Guest Curator so that the artists, the art community benefit from this interaction as well as the artists in the exhibition who need time to create their work.

The collaborating institutions such as **PICA**, the **Cooley at Reed College** and numerous other non-profits have been generous in their partnership with Converge 45. Portland is and continues to be a very collaborative city in the arts.

Engaging the Portland Art Community with a Free, City-Wide Exhibition

WW: How important is community outreach and engagement, both to the organization as a whole as well as to each artist participating?

LL: Community outreach is critical to the organization, our partners, and the artists in the exhibition. The city-wide exhibition is physically held in every quadrant of the city with the intention to reach into all areas of the city including the outer east side where we will support APANO with their newspaper publication and North Portland where Tavares Strachan and Sam Hamilton will exhibit at Oregon Contemporary. Beyond being physically inclusive we are reaching out to numerous schools including **Portland Public Schools** and all the higher educational institutions in the region as well to inform the students. Sam Hamilton's project *Te Moana Meridian* which will be sited at Oregon Contemporary in North Portland interfaces with indigenous groups and the United Nations. There are also panel discussions and talks scheduled throughout the year that create opportunities to engage with multiple communities.



Richard Mosse, "Broken Spectre," photo by Jack Hems, courtesy of the artist and Converge 45.

WW: When selecting artists to participate, how collaborative is the experience of producing works for the exhibition? Do you have an idea in mind for what an artist will contribute, or is it a bit more of a surprise what you'll end up seeing in the end?

LL: This question is more appropriate for the Guest Curator. However, I do know that several of the artists commissioned for large-scale sculpture installations, including **Malia Jensen** and **Marie Watt** and a few others have been able to realize some ideas that these artists have long desired to make. I also am aware that there are multiple conversations between many of the artists and Christian Viveros-Faune and Converge 45's Artistic Director, **Derek Franklin**. The process is very involved in some cases and lots of details to attend to!

The decision by Christian Viveros-Fauné, who has organized this next edition, to focus on the ways in which artists respond to the challenges of their time, feels particularly pressing in a city like Portland, which has been a hotbed for political turmoil, specifically over the last few years.

WW: Can you talk about working with Christian Viveros-Fauné on this project in this particular climate?

LL: Christian is the perfect guest curator for Converge 45 and Portland at this moment. His city-wide exhibition, *Social Forms: Art As Global Citizenship*, is engaging the community on many levels. The exhibition spotlights the ideas of the artists in the show, whether it be climate change which is addressed in **Richard Mosse's** four-channel film *Broken Spectre* or addressing the horrors of war as in the work of **Jorge Tacla** shown at the **Reser Art Center** in Beaverton and **Yishai Jusidman** exhibiting at the **Oregon Jewish Museum** in the Pearl District; and, of course, the late **Hung Liu's** mini-survey at the museum at **Portland State University**. Regional artists address the challenges in our city and many cities at this time and are featured in the group show at the **Jordan D. Schnitzer** warehouse space in *WE ARE THE REVOLUTION*.



Marie Watt, "Companion Species (Envelop)," 2021, vintage Italian glass beads, industrial felt, thread, 13.5 x 112 inches, photo by Kevin McConnell, courtesy of the artist and Converge 45.

Converge 45 Portland, Art on the 45th Parallel

WW: It seems like a differentiator between Converge 45 and other biennials is how it doesn't just operate as a standalone show, but a city-wide initiative that seems a bit hard to simply define as an art exhibition. Is this intentional?

LL: The inspiration for Converge 45 is from European models such as the **Skulptur Projekte** in Munster, where one gets a map and bicycles around to discover the artworks all over the town and experience the city as well. **Prospect in New Orleans** is also a model. Prospect collaborates with the city's museums and outdoor spaces to mount exhibitions of importance. In both instances and in Converge 45, viewers get a broader feeling of a place than if an exhibition was mounted in one interior space.

WW: What are some of the unique qualities of Portland and its art scene that make it an exciting place to visit?

LL: Portland is much like a European city. One can land at our airport, take light rail into the heart of the city center, and walk everywhere. The blocks are 200 feet long and designed for walking. Nature is close by with forest park, the largest urban park in the country, and with the urban growth boundary we have an abundance of riches in weekly farmers markets throughout the urban core. This lush urban environment is complemented by a vibrant cultural community with numerous events such as literary readings, art openings, music and dance performances. Gardens such as the world class Japanese Garden, Lan Su, the walled Chinese Garden, the Rose Garden along with the proverbial stop at **Powell's bookstore**, the largest independent bookstore in America, create an enriching experience.

WW: I'm sure it's impossible to pick, but are there any projects you are most excited for this year?

LL: I am very excited about the Tavares Strachan neon piece *One Hundred More Fires* showing at Oregon Contemporary and also **Malcolm Peacock's** interactive piece at **SE Cooper Contemporary** as well as the group shows at **Parallax**, **Stelo Arts**, and **PNCA**, and the paintings by **Jessie Murry** curated by **Lisa Yuskavage** and **Jarrett Earnest**, at the Cooley Gallery at Reed College.

WW: How might you define success for this next iteration of the biennial?

LL: For me, the success of this Converge 45 is to see the light go on in people about the significance of art in our world; for people to experience art as a way to confront pressing contemporary issues, to open hearts and minds, and create economic pathways to success. Connecting people to art is what motivates me. Hopefully reaching young people at schools like **Rosemary Anderson** and creating opportunities for them as well as creating opportunities for the artists featured in the exhibition.

Locating Portland as a significant center for relevant conversations about art in the world would be an achievement.

CONVERGE 45

PORTLAND

PORTLAND BIENNIAL



A Naïve Belief in Global Citizenship as an Equalizing Force

Portland's arts biennial, Converge 45, adopts an idealist vision of what it means to be a citizen of the world

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BY CLAIRE VOON IN EXHIBITION REVIEWS, US REVIEWS | 18 SEP 23



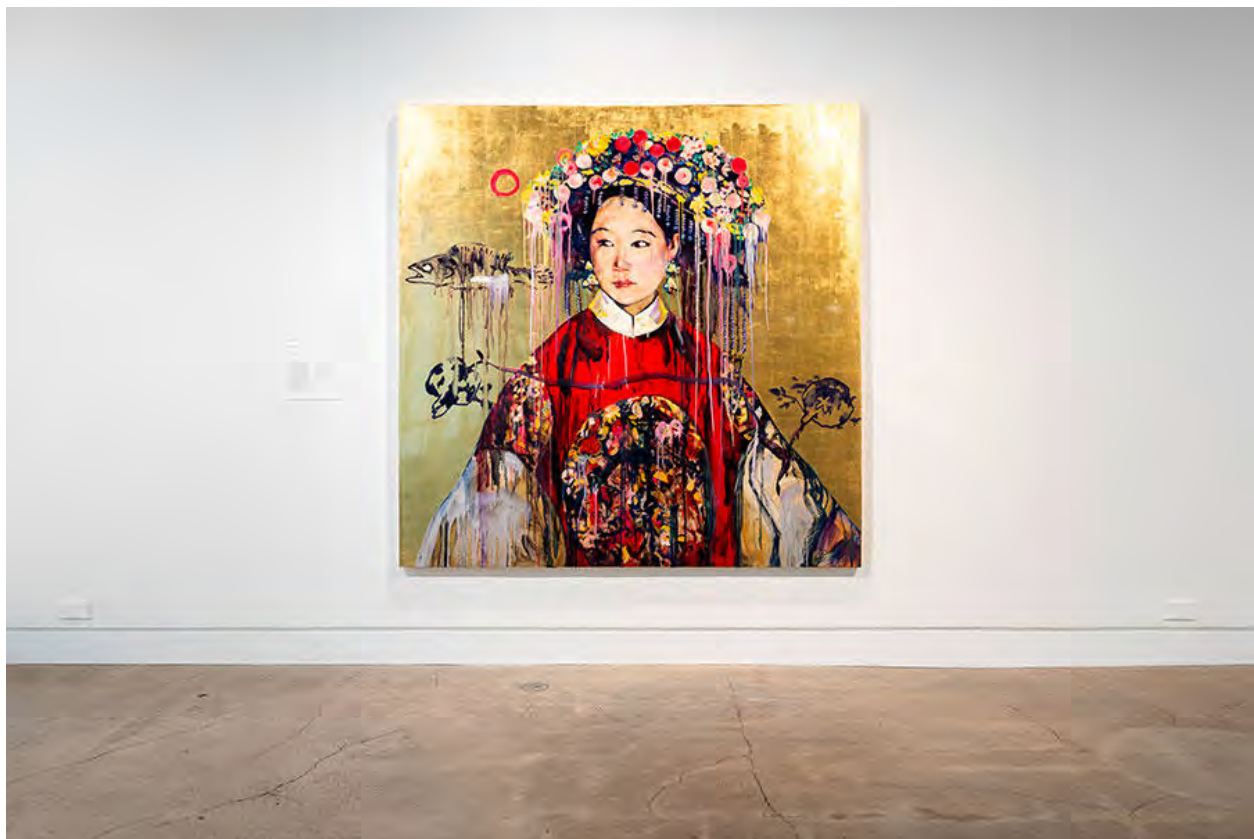
Around the world, signs mark the 45th parallel north, the circle of latitude roughly halfway between the equator and the North Pole. Considering this imaginary line as both a Western mapping tool and an emblem of cross-border unity, it's fitting that this year's Converge 45 – Portland, Oregon's biennial named for the parallel – is themed around art as global citizenship. Works by more than 50 artists, shown in various places around the city, including galleries and institutions, aim to shift our individual perspectives towards a responsibility to collective well-being.

How might the biennial complicate dominant ideas of global citizenship, which smuggle neoliberal Eurocentric viewpoints through purportedly benevolent acts in the name of some common, essentializing humanity? What does it mean to be a citizen in or of a world upended by climate crises, where personhood and rights of movement are entwined with legal status? Converge 45's artistic director, Christian Viveros-Fauné, has long been thinking about the changemaking power of art: the exhibition's main title, 'Social Forms', directly references his book *Social Forms: A History of Political Art* (2018). Speaking on the opening day of the biennial, Viveros-Fauné described citizenship as 'a fundamental right – a "right to have rights"', quoting former Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren – who was himself channelling Hannah Arendt. Without citizenship, Viveros-Fauné went on, 'the vulnerable, the poor, the refugee don't stand a chance.' There's a lot of truth to this simple but powerful creed – not for nothing is Warren a giant of twentieth-century American liberalism – but there's something narrowing about neglecting the strategies of stateless people who have survived without legal recognition, while the idealization of citizenship as an equalizing status can sometimes feel naive.



Richard Mosse, *Broken Spectre*, 2018–22, installation view,
Lewis & Clark College. Courtesy: the artist and Converge 45;
photograph: Mario Gallucci

Converge 45 adopts such thinking; the results are scattershot. Richard Mosse's *Broken Spectre* (2018–22), a five-channel video documenting the destruction of the Amazon through highly aestheticized and discomfiting footage, leans into an archetype of West-dependent global citizenship. (Mosse is Irish and lives in New York.) The installation at Lewis & Clark College also includes a QR code for visitors to donate to the Yanomami Nation in Brazil. Frustratingly, some of the most memorable works feel distant from the theme, contributing to the biennial's overall feel as a bunch of disjointed exhibitions. These include the late Jesse Murry's deeply moving abstractions at Reed Gallery, which reveal grandeurs that belie their scale; Amanda Ross-Ho's material and lexical explorations of memory through her past life as a competitive figure skater at ILY2 gallery; and Anna Gray and Ryan Paulsen's text-inscribed bricks, scattered treasure hunt-style throughout Converge 45, trailing a chain of shared secrets. The dearth, though, of critical engagements with diverse positionalities in a world of arbitrary borders, cascading displacement, climate migration and passport privilege feels like a missed opportunity.



Hung Liu, *A Question of Hu: The Narrative Art of Hung Liu*,
From the Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family
Foundation, 2023, installation view, Jordan Schnitzer
 Museum of Art at Portland State University. Courtesy:
 Jordan Schnitzer Family Foundation; photograph: Deann Orr

The presentation most directly addressing citizenship and belonging is a compact survey of the late Chinese artist Hung Liu at Portland State University. Liu, whose life was ruptured during China's Cultural Revolution in the 1960s, moved to the US to pursue art, and later acquired citizenship. Her paintings and tapestries memorialize marginalized people like field workers and sex-trafficking victims, in portraits that feel heroic and intimate. Most intriguing is *Official Self-Portraits*, a trio of self-portraits from 2006, each overlaid with a different photo ID Liu received in China. Together they connote the complex ties between her ever-evolving identity and her homeland. Wall text (in English and Chinese) state that they depict Liu as a persecuted youth, an immigrant in a new country, and 'finally as a global citizen who has acquired a full set of rights' – a glib suggestion that America had finally afforded her emancipation. Liu's art is necessary viewing, but it is undermined by such declarations, that reduce her life to an easily digestible narrative of struggle and triumph, rather than examine the compounding, complicated experiences of living and working as an East Asian woman in the US. Jordan Schnitzer, who owns the works on view, said Liu's art appeals to him because it 'shows a defiance,' as he stated during the exhibition's opening. 'Look at those eyes. She's determined to persevere, and not just survive, but thrive.' I recalled this sentiment when viewing tapestries by Portland artist Vo Vo at Parallax Art Center, host to the biennial's most cohesive exhibition. Informed by the artist's comic-art practice, they feature images of wildlife and phrases conveying the exhaustion of survival – a riposte to the idea that there is beauty in struggle. One

weaving of an unfinished brick chamber, *Better out than in* (2023), is an understated portrait of rest and refusal.



Sara Siestreem, *Summertime*, 2021, installation view,
Parallax. Courtesy: the artist and Converge 45

Nearby, ceramic baskets, a weaving and a multipaneled painting by Sara Siestreem, of the Hanis Coos people, are an expansive response to the notion of global citizenship, providing an Indigenous lens through which to consider one's relationship, and responsibility, to the nurturing force of land. Fragrant mugwort and sweetgrass, gathered and braided by Siestreem, adorn one wall as a sensory invitation into the indigenized space. Also at Parallax, Nariso Martinez, a former farm worker, shows portraits of migrant labourers on found produce boxes. Martinez's on-the-nose approach confronts us with the faces of people who are essential to the food-supply chain but often undocumented, underscoring the uneven access to citizenship.

The strongest curatorial statement of Converge 45 is at Oregon Contemporary, where a five-channel video by Portland-based, Aotearoa New Zealand-born Sam Hamilton (Sam Tam Ham) rejects the hegemonic world order in favour of a more equitable network of relations. An experimental opera/interdisciplinary project, *Te Moana Meridian* (2020–22) proposes relocating the Prime Meridian from the imperialist orientation on Greenwich, London, to the global commons of Te Moana-Nui-ā-Kiwa (the Pacific Ocean).

Voices of impassioned orators, filmed inside a parliament and an archive, merge with those of youth of the Lincoln City Children's Choir, seen dancing on a beach. Their sustained, intergenerational chants are a grounding thread through footage that aligns human gestures and nature's rhythms into a cyclic flow. *Te Moana Meridian* is an earnest consideration of something that might seem impossible, and a provocation to imagine what seismic changes we may will into existence. It's an example of what Converge 45 does at its best: affirm that communities can be united beyond arbitrary lines or normalized gestures.

Converge 45's 'Social Forms: Art as Global Citizenship' is on view across 15 venues in Portland, Oregon, and will close on a rolling basis starting in October, and continuing through the end of the year.

Main image: Richard Mosse, Broken Spectre, 2018–22, installation view, Lewis & Clark College. Courtesy: the artist and Converge 45; photograph: Mario Gallucci



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