

physical/digital: representations of the body

BY ERIN JOYCE | FINE ARTS CURATOR



In 2020, our Members and Donors went above and beyond with extraordinary support that took many forms—from making special gifts to countless acts of personal kindness. To express our deepest gratitude, we developed and unveiled exclusively to Members and Donors an exhibition like no other we have ever done. Curated by Fine Arts Curator Erin Joyce, *physical/digital: representations of the body from the permanent collection* is our first-ever digital exhibition taking place in a virtual environment.

As I began contemplating the exhibition, the reality of our inability to gather and be with one another was a constant presence in my thoughts. With that in mind, I sought to curate an exhibition to look at the ways in which artists from the 20th and 21st centuries have approached representation of the body over the past 50 years. Analyzing and interpreting the ways artists address and

redress the corporeal self in landscapes and spaces asks us to question how we engage with and fit into those spaces—in person as well as in the digital realm.

During this time of remoteness, social distancing and isolation, our corporeal relationship to the world, and to one another, is much altered. The global health crisis has affected our work lives, home lives, friends and loved ones. The crisis has also affected the ways in which we interact with and commune with art and culture. Though many have been unable or perhaps uncertain about venturing out into public spaces, the need for accessibility to art has never been greater. It is through art that we question the world around us, we observe, we challenge ourselves, and we heal. To ensure that we serve our community and create accessibility to our collection in such unprecedented times as these, we embarked on organizing *physical/digital: representations of the body from the permanent collection*, featuring the works of 11 Indigenous artists.

LEFT: Steven J. Yazzie (Diné), b. 1970, *It's Alright if it Makes You Feel Better*, 1998. Oil on canvas, 40 x 48 x 1 1/2 inches. Gift of Leigh and Beryl Sherman. Image by Craig Smith for the Heard Museum.

ABOVE: Courtney M. Leonard (Shinnecock), b. 1980, *ABUNDANCE (Red Algae)*, 2016. Ceramic, 16 x 5 inches. Gift of Loren G. Lipson, M.D. Video still by Craig Smith for the Heard Museum.

RIGHT: Cara Romero (Chemehuevi, b. 1977), *Coyote Tales No. 1*, 2018. Digital print on paper, 41 1/8 x 41 1/8 inches. Gift of Loren G. Lipson, M.D. Image by Craig Smith for the Heard Museum.





Having curated several digital exhibitions prior to coming to the Heard, I knew that even though they can be dynamic, thought-provoking and exciting, there really is no replacement for in-person art encounters. Looking at a two-dimensional or three-dimensional object on a screen suspends the experience and denies interaction. It was a challenge of how to translate these very real physical objects into a virtual environment without sacrificing the experience of them. Through collaboration with our photographer, Craig Smith, and lead preparator Joseph Kolasinski, we built a large turntable that we instrumentalized for the sculptures in the show. The videos shot by Smith allow you, the viewer, to see the works in the round, as though you were seeing them in 360°. Once in the virtual gallery, you'll be able to learn more about each artist and their work simply by clicking on their names, which then takes you to a page devoted to each artwork on view in the exhibition, allowing you to spend real, uninterrupted time with the works that speak to you personally.

The objects I selected for the exhibition depict the human form, which is seen in works like *Auto Immune Response No. 1* by Will Wilson, or Cara Romero's *Coyote Tales No. 1*, and more abstracted human forms like Fritz Scholder's *Indian Dying in Nebraska*, or T.C. Cannon's *Mystic Smile*. The viewer will also encounter animal forms, like coyotes in Harry Fonseca's *Fire*, and Steven J. Yazzie's *Gazer* and *Lego-te*. There are additional works that illustrate the absence of a body, such as Courtney M. Leonard's empty ceramic fishing baskets or Paula Rasmus-Dede's fantastical *Pedaling My Inner Child*.

These works ask us to consider how we engage through remote modalities, looking at movement, transmotion and sovereignty through the expression of form. Through sculpture, found objects, painting, mixed media and photography, *physical/digital* seeks to create broader access to the fine art holdings of the Heard Museum to diverse communities locally, nationally and internationally.

ABOVE: Will Wilson (Diné, b. 1969), *AIR (Auto Immune Response No. 1)*, 2004. Inkjet print, 43 1/2 x 114 1/2 inches. Gift of Lila Harnett. Image courtesy of the artist.



**TO VIEW PHYSICAL/DIGITAL,
SCAN THIS CODE WITH YOUR
PHONE'S CAMERA:**

