



Larger
than
Memory

Larger Than Memory: Contemporary Art from Indigenous North America opens on September 4, 2020, and runs through January 3, 2021.

Meryl McMaster, nehiyaw (Plains Cree)/English/Scottish/Dutch, b. 1988, *What Will I Say to the Sky and the Earth II*, 2019, Chromogenic print mounted to aluminum composite panel, ed. 1/5, 40" x 60." Heard Museum Collection, Gift of Kathleen L. and William G. Howard

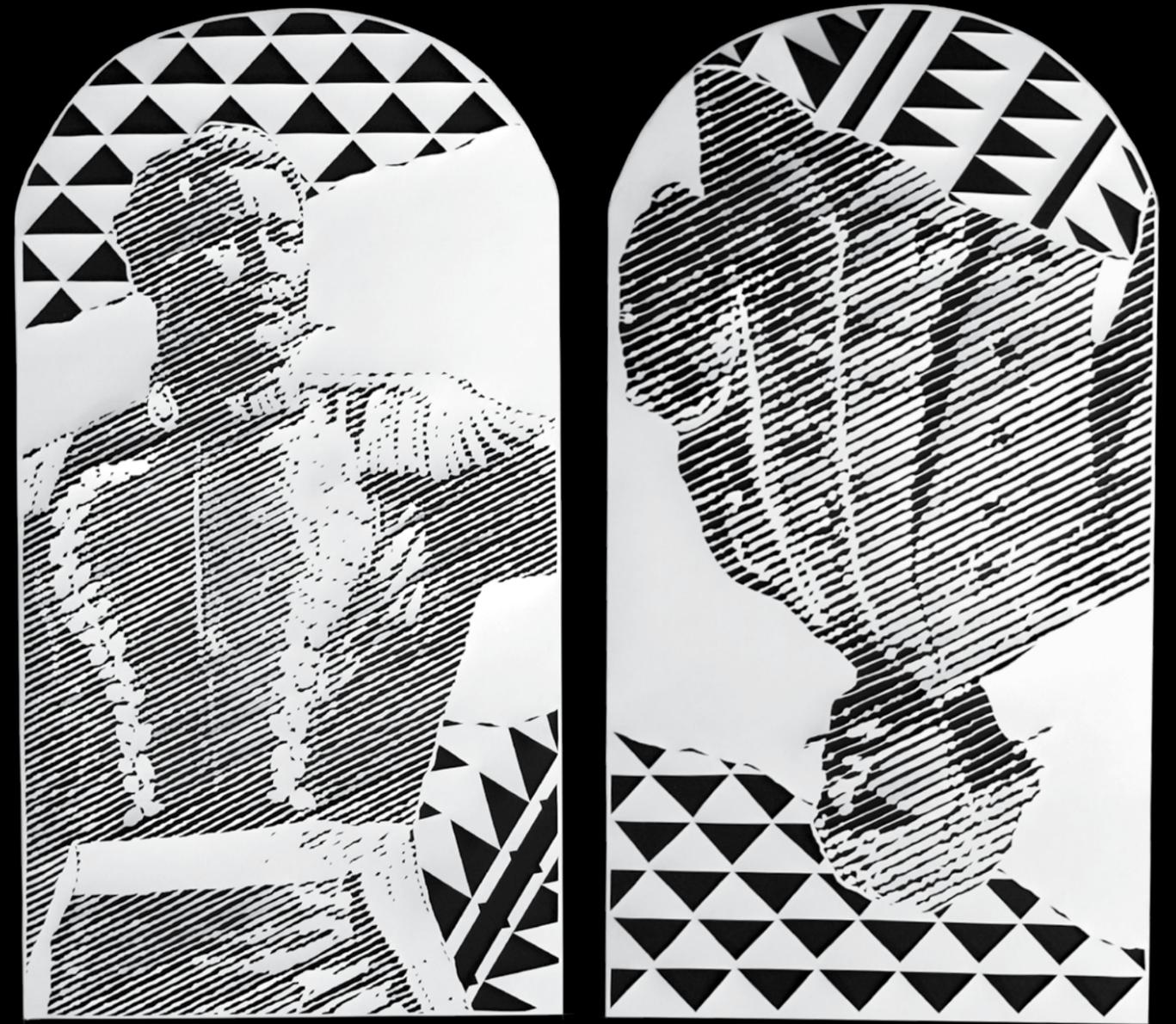
AN EXHIBITION: LARGER THAN MEMORY

BY ERIN JOYCE | FINE ARTS CURATOR

In September of this year, we are launching our largest exhibition of contemporary art to-date. *Larger Than Memory: Contemporary Art from Indigenous North America* is an exciting project featuring works of art produced between the years 2000-2020, co-organized by Diana Pardue and myself. The first 20 years of the 21st century have been a dynamic and transformative period for contemporary Indigenous art in the United States and Canada; from mediums employed, concepts explored, engagement with politics and issues facing Indigenous peoples as well as broader cultural issues, artists have created complex works that challenge the status quo and expand the notions of Indigenous art. The exhibition features 24 artists from across the United States and Canada working in a vast array of mediums including painting, sculpture, video and time-based media, photography, soft sculpture, and performance. Diana and I have worked fervently to identify and select artists working at the top of their field, from established and mid-career artists to emerging new talents. The exhibition will create criticality surrounding the work produced by Indigenous artists, not as a footnote to contemporary art, but as a vital part of the North American and Global contemporary art landscape. The title of the exhibition, *Larger Than Memory*, is borrowed from the poem *Grace* by Joy Harjo (Muscogee), in which she states, “I know there is something larger than the memory of a dispossessed people. We have seen it.” (The poem in full is printed on page 24.) In selecting this title, we aim to illustrate the vast richness, diversity, and imbricated nature of Indigenous contemporary art and identity.

MONUMENTS ARE OFTEN TIED TO ACTS OF VIOLENCE, THE COLONIZATION OF A PEOPLE AND CORRUPTION OF THE LAND.

Artists in the exhibition include Jeffrey Gibson (Cherokee/Choctaw), Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (Salish-Kootenai), Cannupa Hanska Luger (Mandan/Hidatsa/Arikara/Lakota), and Kent Monkman (Cree), as well as Kanaka Maoli artist Ian Kualii'i—whose extraordinarily timely site-specific cut vinyl installation, *Monument/Pillar*, interrogates, deconstructs and reconstructs the practice of monument making—all in the wake of a global reckoning and reconsideration of the impacts monuments have on the communities where they are installed. Monuments are often tied to acts of violence, the colonization of a people and corruption of the land. The two large-scale works were commissioned for the arches in the Heard Museum's Dennis H. Lyon Family Gallery. One of the works depicts King Kamehameha III, who reigned over the Kingdom of Hawaii from 1825 to 1854. The second work is positioned upside-down and renders the likeness of James Cook, the British explorer, cartographer and captain in the Royal Navy, who was the first European settler to travel to the Hawaiian Islands. Kualii'i creates tension by situating King Kamehameha adjacent to James Cook. Additionally, by inverting Cook, Kualii'i forces viewers to consider their perspective as they enter the gallery.



Ian Kualii'i (Kanaka Maoli), *Monument/Pillar*, 2020, cut vinyl. Approximately 240" x 120." Collection of the artist



Another series of work in the exhibition that engages with tropes of Western art history, but from an Indigenous lens, is the work of Kali Spitzer, a Kaska Dena artist based in Vancouver. A selection of six photographs from her series *Places* feature the artist in nude self-portraits, situated in abandoned and rundown locations. The cis-female nude has long been a device used in art history as a stand-in for multiple concepts such as divinity, fertility, and the land. It is also representative of the cis-male gaze, and echoes notions of objectification of women and their bodies. By picturing herself nude, the artist reclaims her agency of representation and her body, while at the same time, placing her naked body in these forgotten and rundown spaces, Spitzer comments on the fetishization of women, specifically Indigenous women, and the plague of violence and rape that has afflicted their communities.

A sonic video work in the show, *I Lost My Shadow*, made in collaboration by Laura Ortman (White Mountain Apache), Nanobah Becker (Diné), and Jock Soto (Diné/Puerto Rican), is a haunting visual and musical end-of-love poem, one soaked in heartbreak and the vacuous feeling which occurs when a separation happens between two people. The video features two figures: artist, composer, and musician Laura Ortman; and former New York City Ballet principal dancer, Jock Soto. Ortman composed and performs the song, *I Lost My Shadow*, in the film, which originally appeared on her second solo album *Someday We'll Be Together* released in 2011. Meandering through the streets of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, Ortman seems to be in procession to a destination of which we do not know. Soto encounters Ortman entering the subway. Soto follows Ortman up the stairs and onto the train; he then proceeds to



I LOST MY SHADOW
WHILE I WAS AWAY
LOOK
O LOOK

SO LONG I SAY

THE QUAKING OF THE NIGHT
BROUGHT ON WITH DESPISE
FANTASIES ARISE
BLAZIN DISGUISE / BLAZIN THE SKIES

-LAURA ORTMAN, *I LOST MY SHADOW*

dance mournfully in the train car while the melody of Ortman's violin hangs in the air. The two figures act as shadow to one another, following each other but never lining up. They reflect and remember emotions and identities borrowed from one another, while maintaining the elements not returned upon parting. There is a phantasmagoric nature to the work, directed and filmed by Nanobah Becker; it asks questions that it knows will never be answered in a harshly cinematic tableau.

The works in the exhibition are transmutable, shifting perspectival and colonial ways of viewing work by Indigenous artists that are predicated on harmful stereotypical frameworks, and replacing those antiquated notions with engaging and exciting works that discuss love, loss, trauma, hope, and futurism.

LEFT: Kali Spitzer, Kaska Dena/Jewish, b. 1987, *Untitled no. 4*, 2016, Digital chromogenic print, 16" x 24," Collection of the artist

ABOVE: Laura Ortman, White Mountain Apache, b. 1973; Nanobah Becker Diné, b. 1975; Jock Soto, Diné/Puerto Rican, b. 1965.. *I Lost My Shadow*, 2011 Single-channel video with sound on continuous loop, 3:52" Collection of the artists