

North Dakota Museum of Art

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“Shared Histories” opens at the North Dakota Museum of Art Saturday, April 17, at 7 pm

Does such a thing as contemporary Indian art exist on the Northern Plains? “Shared Histories,” a new exhibition opening on April 17 at the North Dakota Museum of Art suggests that our northern reservations are shared territory between Indian and non-Indian residents. Cultural traditions, visual life, religion, politics, play and education have intermingled to produce a hybrid art shared by everyone.

The exhibition “Shared Histories” continues through June 13, 2010. The show draws on Canadian artists to the north, one Native, one European. It also includes work by Carol Hepper, an artist of non-Indian lineage who grew up on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation that bridges North and South Dakota but has been a New York artist for the last three decades. All three artists will speak about their work at the opening on Saturday, April 17, at 7 pm.

Keith Berens is an “urban Native” of Indian descent who grew up in Winnipeg and has traveled much of Europe and North America. He draws his greatest influence from early American abstract artists. Tim Schouten was born in Winnipeg, resided on the Canadian East Coast for years before returning to live near Lake Winnipeg.

Yet all make art deeply based in the history, culture, landscape or materials of Native people. All three also make art that grows out of mainstream Western art. They share contrasting ethnic and art history backgrounds out of which come surprising bodies of work that relate to the past and that challenges Northern Plains stereotypes. For example, through his art Tim Schouten, who is not of Indian decent, has spent years tracing the history of the treaties between Native peoples and the Canadian government.

The landscape of South Dakota, remote yet beautiful, has left its mark on **Carol Hepper**, a native of the state. According to New York art curator and critic Diane Waldman, “it has elicited from her an extraordinarily poetic response in the form of a body of work that unites respect for the past with a new means of expression.”

Hepper’s sculptures are three-dimensional structures made from objects that she has found on the family ranch near McLaughlin, South Dakota, the largest city on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation where she grew up. “In her work she has incorporated bones, driftwood, and animal hides without attempting to disguise their origin, alter their nature, or aggrandize their inherent beauty as artifacts of a dying time in history,” according to Waldman. “The animal bones, the hides she has tanned herself, the wood, the driftwood, retain a sense of their history. The tooth marks of the coyote and other scars on the animal skins, the weathering of bone and driftwood remind us of the previous existence of these things; but the sculptures are not meant to represent literally the folklore of the past they honor. Hepper is able to draw upon nature and upon earlier cultures to make a statement that is both timeless and contemporary.”

Tim Schouten’s lyrical landscapes in the Treaty Series are visually gorgeous, luminous and shimmering, and all the while underpinned by troubling questions of land ownership in North America. The artist researches each treaty site, photographing the landscape, digging through historical files in search of the records of treaty enactment, intent upon understanding the layers of conflict and beauty associated with each specific place. For Schouten, landscape is visual place. Landscape is also the dumping ground of human grief. As the critic Marianne Mays eloquently summarizes, “political questions of property and Aboriginal disenfranchisement beat at the heart of these paintings.”

Schouten is a leading Canadian painter who has become known for his encaustic paintings, several of which have made their way into local collections through North Dakota Museum of Art auctions.

Keith Berens is an artist, writer, teacher and curator who lives in downtown Winnipeg. He grew up in The Pas, MB, studied Art History in Winnipeg and Fine Art in Montreal and Vancouver, and graduated from Emily Carr College of Art and Design with a studio major in painting and drawing.

Using thick application of paint, Berens creates abstract painting with three-dimensional surfaces. His paintings resemble plots of freshly tilled soil. The division of his canvases into sequential geometric plots speaks to the distribution of land that took place as governments mapped a nation and assigned it ownership. Berens’ rich paintings create a living archive embodying the stories buried deep inside its many layers. Every crevice, swirl, and valley is a trace of human activity and a signpost in the procession of people who have stamped the land.

The North Dakota Museum of Art is located at 261 Centennial Drive, Grand Forks. Museum hours are weekdays from 9 am to 5 pm and weekends from 1 pm to 5 pm. The Museum shop is open during Museum hours and the Museum Café is open weekdays from 10 am to 4 pm, with lunch served from 11 am to 2 pm. Admission is free. Suggested donation: \$5 for Adults, Change from Children.