

North Dakota Museum of Art

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North Dakota Museum of Art Exhibition to Open in New York City

Songs for Spirit Lake at the Rauschenberg Project Space

May 24–June 29, 2013

Rauschenberg Project Space

455 West 19th Street

11 am to 6 pm, Tuesday through Saturday

Free admission

In 2012, the North Dakota Museum of Art was one of ten art institutions in the country to receive the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation's Artistic Innovation and Collaboration grant, a three-year grant designed to encourage artistic collaboration and innovation. Through this grant the Museum commissioned six artists to work with the people of the Spirit Lake Reservation to create a body of art work about the contemporary life of Spirit Lake. An exhibition of the first round of work will be on display at the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Project Space in New York's prestigious Chelsea Art District. The artists have invited the Cankdeska Cikana Drum Group to perform at the New York opening. Artists include: John Hitchcock, Comanche and Northern European heritage is a printmaker and installation artist; Tim Schouten, a Manitoba based painter; Mary Lucier, New York video artist who has completed two video installations about loss in North Dakota, *Floodsongs* and *The Plains of Sweet Regret*; Rena Effendi, a documentary photographer who comes from Baku, Azerbaijan and brings an outsider vision to reservation life; Bill Harbort, a long-time New Yorker who moved to Minot in 1996 to teach graphic arts at the college; and multi-media artist Terry Jelsing of Rugby rounds out the group.

Exhibition Theme

In November 2012, these artists were introduced to the Spirit Lake community through an exhibition of their own work. Installed in the gymnasium at the Cankdeska Cikana Community College in the village of Fort Totten, it was the first contemporary art exhibition ever mounted on the reservation.

North Dakota Museum of Art's exhibition encompasses work that each artist made in response to their conversations with each other and their experiences with the people and landscape of the reservation. In *Songs for Spirit Lake*, the artists explore how people live within the landscape; who the people are; and their patterns of intermingling the past and present in contemporary life through photography, painting, installation, and video. Additionally, the exhibition includes a live performance by musicians from the reservation who, for the first time, will play traditional drum songs together.

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Exhibited in the context of New York City's Rauschenberg Project Space, *Songs for Spirit Lake* invites a new, broad audience to engage with the voices and traditions of the Spirit Lake community as conveyed through the eyes of the artists. This endeavor parallels not only the North Dakota Museum of Art's mission to address global concerns—ideas as relevant to people living on the Northern Plains as they are to people from around the world—but also the legacy of Robert Rauschenberg, who sought to create social and cultural awareness through artistic collaboration and innovation.

About the Artists

John Hitchcock, a Comanche/Northern-European, creates art out of his own heritage and blends humor and pathos. His ideas are based in the loss of language, spiritual beliefs, and culture due to the influence of Indian boarding schools, welfare programs, and the notion of assimilation and control that is reinforced through government systems. He grew up on indigenous lands (U.S. Government lands) in the Wichita Mountains of Oklahoma (a wildlife refuge) next to Fort Sill in Lawton, Oklahoma (the largest field-artillery military base in North America). Today he serves as Graduate Chair and Associate Professor of Art at the main campus of the University of Wisconsin. Hitchcock continues to make collaborative printmaking projects. He also brings the art directly to the viewer by exhibiting in non-traditional venues such as public transportation, billboards, signage, the Internet, and on reservations. The dissemination of printed information through multi-media projects and collaboration is a fundamental part of his studio practice and results in give-away prints, small books, and shippable interactive art.

Bill Harbort worked as a commercial artist in New York for twenty years. He was one of sixteen package designers at Revlon (often working in tandem), an art director for a children's educational software company, and a free-lance automotive magazine illustrator of muscle cars. After tiring of commercial work, he moved to Minot, North Dakota, in 1996 to teach graphic design and illustration at Minot State University—and he loves it. For the last three years, he has been a team member on a Federal grant from the Bureau of Justice, "Project Safe Neighborhood," a nationwide program to reduce gun and gang crime in America through existing local programs that target gun and gun crime by providing additional tools necessary to be successful. Harbort has an active exhibition record and often shows in "lowbrow" galleries. His art is inspired by American visual culture and bits of ephemera, paint-by-numbers, coupons, clip art, and shiny surfaces of plastics and resin. Harbort brings good humor, wit, flexibility, an egalitarian spirit, energy, and joy to his teaching, collaborating, and art making.

Terry Jelsing, a North Dakota multi-media artist who, as a non-Indian, teaches or has taught art on two North Dakota reservations. Professionally, he has worked as an artist, arts administrator, teacher, curator, and scenic designer for more than thirty years. He lives on his family's historic homestead near Rugby, North Dakota, where—in a granary turned studio—he works in a variety of media to create two- and three-dimensional artwork and large public commissions. As curator and later as executive director of the Plains Art Museum in Fargo, between 1992 and 1999 he marshaled the transformation of a former International Harvester branch house into an award-winning museum. An accomplished scenic designer and scene painter, Jelsing designed dozens of theatrical and opera productions throughout North Dakota. Jelsing holds a BFA from the University of North Dakota and an MA and MFA from the University of New Mexico. For his MFA thesis project, he built a skateboard park in Albuquerque.

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Tim Schouten is a Canadian artist who, since 1998, has created eleven series of paintings and drawings called “The Treaty Suites Project” dealing with the treaties between First Nations and Canada. Each one of the suites is based on photographs taken at the exact locations where the eleven “numbered treaties” were signed. In one sense, they are history paintings, in another, sites of betrayal, and in still another they exist as evocations of the physical beauty of sacred places. Schouten has a deep interest in the meaning of place. He says, “It seems impossible to speak about the land entirely outside of political context. In most cases my paintings are based on photos of rather unspectacular locales. What the land is and how it holds meaning are things I try to brush up against in my painting. I am concerned with the idea and value of ‘place’ and the idea that history can have a felt presence in a place. My encaustic paintings acknowledge the beauty of the land but they are more essentially about the ways that image and surface can convey significance.” Schouten began his work at Spirit Lake on a North Dakota Museum of Art commission funded by NEA.

Mary Lucier is a New-York based artist who produced numerous multiple- and single-channel video installations. Among her most important works are two commissions by the North Dakota Museum of Art. FLOODSONGS was completed in 1998, premiered at North Dakota and then installed at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The International Art Critics Association named FLOODSONGS the Best Video Installation in an American Museum in 1999. Her second work, The Plains of Sweet Regret, a five-channel video installation, was part of the Museum’s Emptying Out of the Plains initiative. Lucier’s resulting Plains of Sweet Regret is considered by many to be her mature masterpiece. Having delved into two subcultures in North Dakota, Lucier is embarking upon a third with this exhibition. A North Dakota trilogy will cap off her work as, once again, Lucier is invited to enter into the lives of the inhabitants of the Northern Plains and, through art, transform their experience into myth—undeniably the most authentic human experience of all.

Rena Effendi, born in Baku, Azerbaijan in 1977 and currently living in Cairo, began photographing in 2001. Effendi brings a true outsider vision as she sees the sub-culture of the Spirit Lake Nation—or any Indian reservation—for the first time. New York’s Open Society acutely summarized her work for a 2011 group exhibition that “recognizes the brave and difficult work that photographers undertake globally in their documentation of complex social and political issues. Their images provide the world with human rights evidence, put faces onto a conflict, document the struggles and defiance of marginalized people, reframe how issues are discussed publicly, and provide opportunities for reflection and discussion.” In August 2011, the North Dakota Museum of Art opened Effendi’s first solo exhibition in the United States, “Pipe Dreams: A chronicle of lives along the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline that flows from the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean.” Her photographs captured the social and environmental impact of the oil industry on people’s lives—an impact echoed in the current boom in Western North Dakota. Other bodies of work include “Xinaliq Wedding,” “Russia: Mining Town,” “Russia: Therapy Farm,” “Cairo Neighborhoods,” “Afghanistan,” “Chernobyl: Women of the Zona,” “Georgia Conflict,” “Twenty-something in Tehran,” “House of Happiness (Kyrgyzstan),” and “Full Circle: Transgender in Istanbul.”

About the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

The Rauschenberg Project Space is owned and used by the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation to showcase unique aspects of Robert Rauschenberg’s legacy; to provide a platform for RRF grantees; or to create a link to its Captiva, Florida-based Rauschenberg Residency. Following is a schedule for the remainder of 2013:

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Schedule of Upcoming Exhibitions in 2013

- May 24–June 29 North Dakota Museum of Art presents Songs for Spirit Lake.
(NDMOA is an RRF grantee.)
- July 12–August 18 Rauschenberg Residency: Fruits of Captiva
Work from the pilot year of artists at Rauschenberg's home and studio.
- September 5, 6, 7 Machine Project: BIRDBRAIN
- September 26, 27, 28 Machine Project: Butter Aerobics
(Machine Project is an RRF grantee.)
- October 17–November 30 Ballroom Marfa presents Marfa Dialogues/NY on Climate Change
(Ballroom Marfa is an RRF grantee.)