

The background of the image is a large, textured, brown, organic sculpture. It has a rough, cracked, and layered appearance, resembling a piece of bark or a large, hollowed-out log. At the bottom of the sculpture, there are two small, stylized faces. The face on the left is light brown with black markings around the eyes and mouth. The face on the right is a darker, reddish-brown color with black markings around the eyes and mouth. Both faces have a serene expression. The text is overlaid on the upper and lower portions of the sculpture.

JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

ROSE B SIMPSON

SELECTED PRESS

[Hyundai Card First Look](#)

## Rose B. Simpson and the Consciousness of Cars

The artist melds lowrider culture, Pueblo philosophy, and printmaking to amplify Indigenous voices.

[Starr Figura, Rose B. Simpson](#)

Nov 18, 2025



Rose B. Simpson working on a Buick Riviera. Photo: Kate Russell. Courtesy of the artist



[Rose B. Simpson](#) is best known for large-scale ceramic sculptures that combine Indigenous materials and references with contemporary ones. Through her work, she explores the rich visual culture of her ancestral homelands in and around Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexico. Recently, Simpson expanded her practice into printmaking during a 2021 residency at Tamarind Institute, the renowned print workshop in Albuquerque, New Mexico. *Maria*, one of the prints she created there, exemplifies her geographically specific, cross-cultural approach to art-making. —Starr Figura, Curator, Department of Drawings and Prints

**Starr Figura: For people who might not be familiar with your work, how would you describe your artistic practice?**

**Rose B. Simpson:** It's been all over the place lately, in a good way. I like to build reflections of my internal workings and my relationship to the world through sculptural objects, primarily using clay and metal, but really mixed media overall. My clay pieces tend to be anthropomorphic, abstracted figurative forms. I also work in metal, in custom cars, in performance, in graphic design, and I love sewing. So...I'm busy.

I feel compelled to translate my journey through evolution and growth as a queer Indigenous person in a post\colonial world.

**Let's talk about the print *Maria*, which we'll be installing. You made it in 2021, and it depicts the Chevy El Camino you customized with black-on-black designs inspired by the Pueblo potter Maria Martinez. Why did you want to see your car in print?**

I felt like when I painted the car, I'd missed some opportunities for design elements. Making the print through [Tamarind](#) gave me the chance to explore alternate designs that I could have used on the car. The designs are a lexicon of our traditional translation of our environment and belief systems. And so, those patterns mean a whole lot. They're not just aesthetic. They're also a language of interpreting the world of this area.

**So, if we looked at the print next to the car, the designs would differ?**

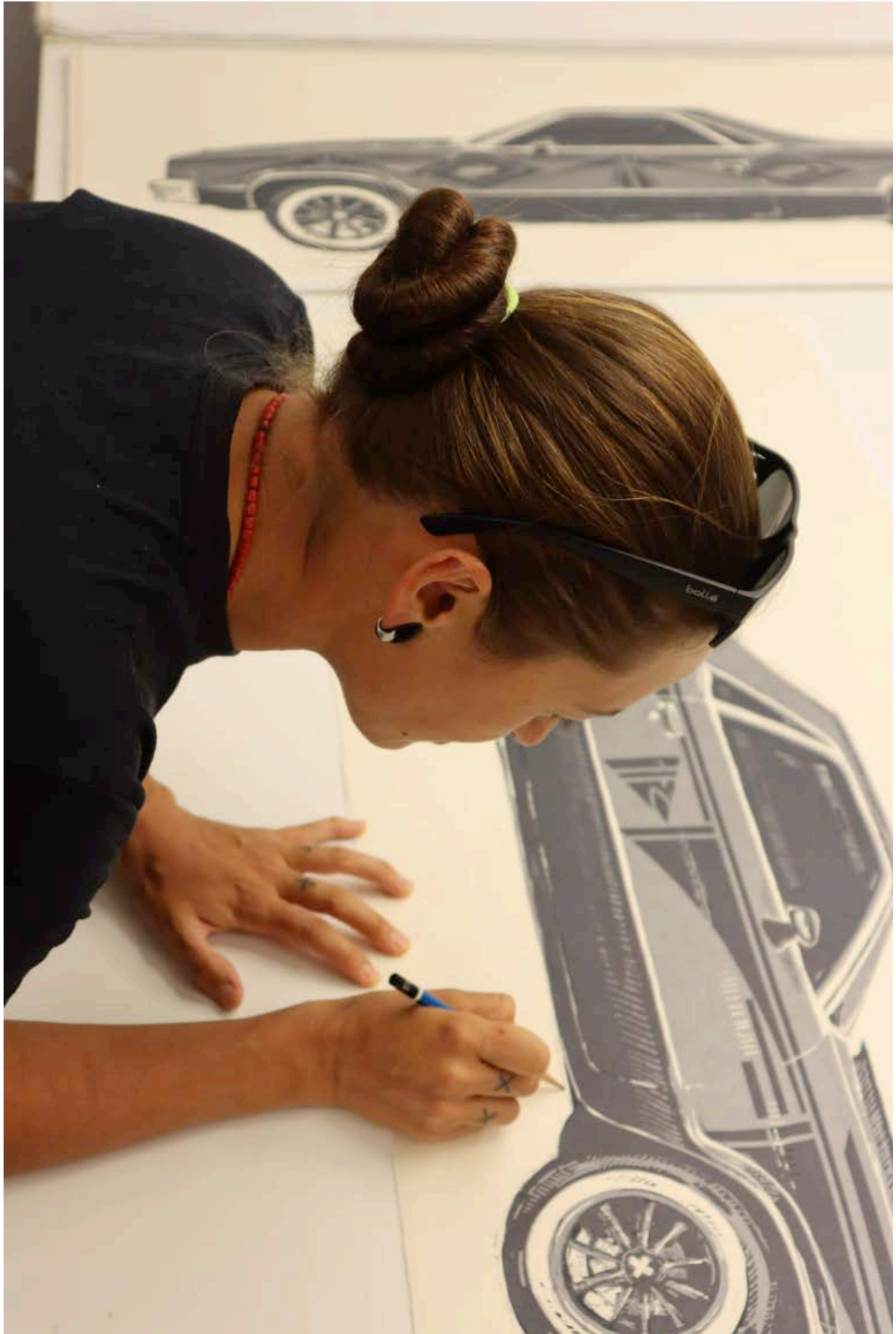
Exactly. It's not a perfect portrait. Since it would be much too hard to repaint the car that way, it's a lot more fun to see what other options there are, aesthetically and conceptually, for the car.

**And this print is a diptych. There are two pieces to it. Can you explain why you chose to make it like that?**

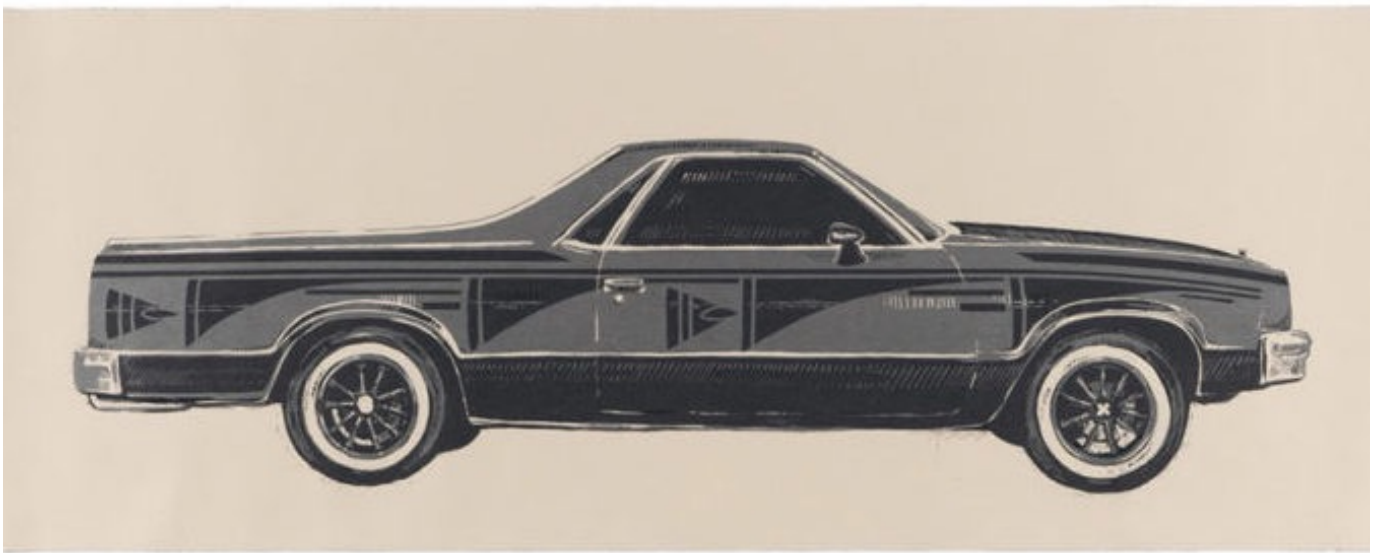
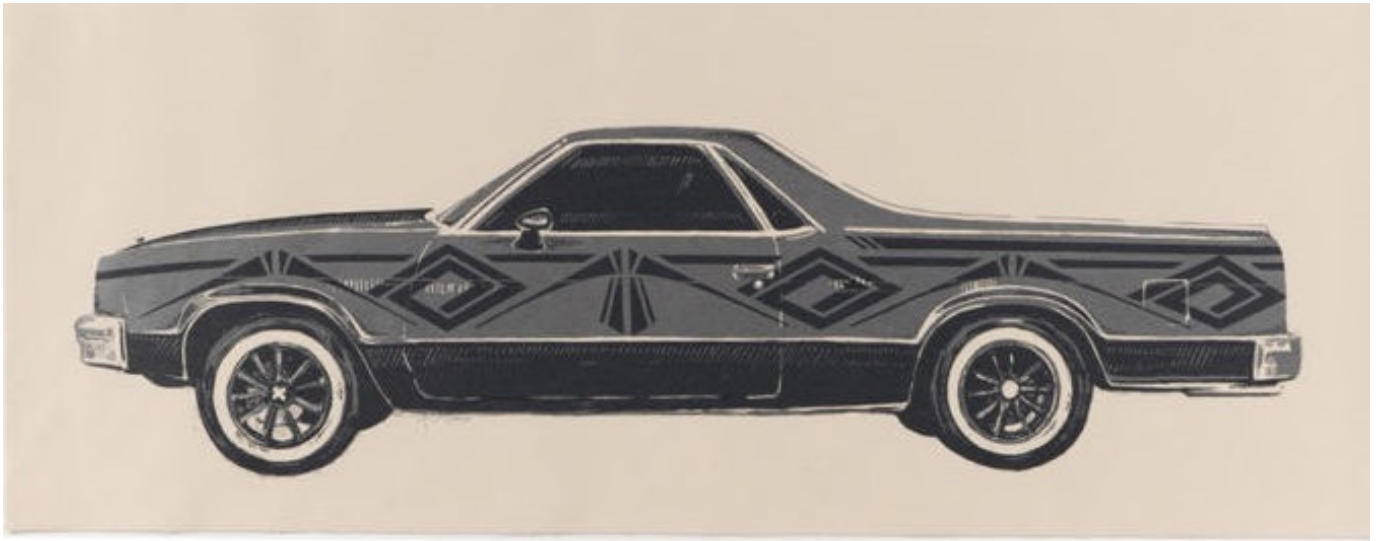
Because I was a little bit bummed out! When I painted the car, I went to great lengths to make sure that both sides of the car had the exact same pattern, that it was symmetrical. And afterwards, I realized what a missed opportunity it was. Each side could have been unique. In *Bosque*, my new car, each side now has its own pattern.

And also, the fact that they aren't on the same piece of paper, that they can be exhibited separately, the curation of the prints themselves becomes a collaboration with the owner or whoever is displaying the work. So they can be facing each other, they can be facing away from each other, they can be stacked. Depending on how they're displayed, the meaning can change a lot, and the energy of them altogether. And that's always exciting for me to see.

They are inherently connected like twins forever—whether they're sold individually, end up in different collections—they're always traveling the world together conceptually, hatched out of the same egg in a weird way.



Rose B. Simpson signing print editions Photo: Audrey Troche. Courtesy Tamarind Institute



Rose B. Simpson. *Maria*. 2021. Lithograph on two sheets; sheet (each): 18 × 46" (45.7 × 116.8 cm), overall (both sheets together): 36 × 46" (91.4 × 116.8 cm). Publisher: Tamarind Institute, Albuquerque, NM. Printer: Tamarind Institute, Albuquerque, NM. Edition: 30. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Deborah Wye Endowment Fund. © 2025 Rose B. Simpson





Maria Martinez, Popovi Da. Jar. 1960. Stone-polished blackware, 9 1/2 x 10" (24.1 x 25.4 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation, and Celeste G. Bartos, Mr. and Mrs. Gifford Phillips, and the Cornelius N. Bliss Memorial Fund

**Right. And looking at the black-on-black design, which is based on the pottery glazed style, specifically of [Maria Martinez](#), can you tell us why she's important to you?**

Maria Martinez is from San Ildefonso Pueblo. And Maria Martinez and her partner were the ones who developed and really [figured out the black-on-black pottery style](#), which is a high-gloss slip finish that's stone polished, and then painted over with the same slip to create a matte versus gloss. And then it's actually a red clay that's fired in a deep carbon reduction, which means it's smothered with a carbon creating material. Lots of times they use manure to make that deep, deep rich black. And Santa Clara pottery, where I come from, also has that carbon reduction firing. But a lot of times the walls of our pots are very thick, and we do deep incision patterns, which is where the pattern comes from, where I come from.

Working on a car, that wasn't necessarily an option. So, the black-on-black ended up being a way to translate a specific aesthetic language onto a car surface of the auto body without too much sculptural interference. And it ended up being pretty cool.

When I went to school for auto body, I wanted to paint the car black-on-black, and my teacher said that wasn't possible. I actually went against the advice of my professors, and painted it that way. So, it's a very unique way of painting: a hot rod black, which is a satin. And then I actually taped it off and then threw a gloss clear over the satin to give it the pattern definition.

**So, they said that you couldn't do it, it wouldn't work, and you figured out a way to make it work.**

I understand now why people don't do that, because it's really difficult to wash, but it worked!

**That's great. Where you're from seems to be very important to your work. Can you say a little bit more about that and how it connects to the El Camino and your work with customizing cars?**

I come from Santa Clara Pueblo, and I still live and work here. Santa Clara Pueblo is adjacent to the town of Española, New Mexico. And Española is a mostly Hispanic town that is flanked directly by two reservations, two Pueblo Indian tribes, which keeps the town pretty squashed between. It can't really grow. But because of our closeness to the town, a lot of my youth culture influence was from that town. Also, ancestrally, we're all related because of hundreds of years of cohabitation in this area. But Española is known as the lowrider capital of the world. So the car culture in Española is as profound and important, as there are more lowriders per capita than, like, Orange County or the Mission.

So that was, as a teenager, growing up, one of the most important things. Also, we're in the Southwest desert so old cars tend to last longer. They don't rust. There are a lot of classic cars available for customization and maintenance and still a lot of old cars running in this area. The aesthetic and the value of old cars was inherent in this area. And there's some heavy cultural history between the Pueblo people and the Hispanic populations that came in as colonizers in the 1500s in this area.

So, making a car that is an El Camino, that is very intentionally a popular car among Spanish populations, and is often used as a lowrider, and turning it into a traditional pottery style from the Pueblo culture and community brings the two cultures that are coexisting here into a conversation, and an aesthetic conversation, that allows an honoring and a moment of communication and finding our common truth as we have grown together through the centuries.

Indigenous people across the country, depending on where they have ended up or who they were in contact with, were heavily influenced by the culture of the specific colonizers of the area. And to deny that influence, I feel, is a disservice to some of the compassion that we have towards the future of this continuing relationship.





Tamarind Master Printer Valpuri Remling (right) and Apprentice Alyssa Ebinger (left) proofing *Maria*

“I found that cruising, driving a custom car up and down Riverside Drive, finding your friends, listening to music, watching the sun go down along the river was an aesthetic experience...just as valuable as any painting on a museum wall.

Rose B. Simpson





Rose B. Simpson (Santa Clara Pueblo). Maria. 2014. Photo: Kate Russell. Image courtesy of the artist

**That was so beautifully put in thinking about the linkages across cultures that are embodied in your work and in this car. I'm also wondering if you see other linkages or connections. For example, with the car and painting it in the pottery style, you're also perhaps bridging industry and craft, and also a traditionally masculine car culture and a more traditionally feminine pottery tradition. Do you think about any of those connections as well?**

Absolutely. You know, I was in graduate school with my first degree at Rhode Island School of Design. I had a seminar with this teacher, Yuriko Saito, and she wrote a book called *Aesthetics of the Everyday*. In her seminar, we read her book and we studied relational aesthetics, and it was the first time that I had found a real way to explain my understanding of aesthetic intention from the cultural lens that I was raised in, where everything is applied aesthetically. For instance, there's no word for art. It doesn't exist over there. It's everything that you do, and how you move, and how you think, and how you speak, and how you relate to the world around you. These are all aesthetic decisions with consequences.

I had already received my masters in ceramics, and I was very invested in the idea of relational aesthetics and performance art, where aesthetics is applied to the present moment. And I realized that the Española car culture that I grew up in is very much that. It is the aesthetic, the value of culture where it transforms our value system in this moment rather than something that is separate from life or separate from community and relationality.

I found that cruising, driving a custom car up and down Riverside Drive, finding your friends, listening to music, watching the sun go down along the river was an aesthetic experience that was transformative and that was just as valuable as any painting on a museum wall. And that was a very good segue and key into what I believe Indigenous aesthetics is. That's something that I was trying to define and explain with my master's thesis.

And also being a woman or a female-representing person in the car world had its challenges—coming from a matriarchal community and society into one that is very objectifying of women—to create this car. *Maria* is actually not a lowrider. She's a street rod. So, she's a race car. She's got a really strong engine, she's super loud, she's powerful, and she's mean. And she is a nurturer, she is a matriarch, she is a female leader who's badass and powerful, which is why, actually, [in her latest iteration](#) at the de Young [art museum], she has a baby in the bed of her car, which is a bike, because I am now a mom, and I have a child. And so, *Maria* is now a mom, and she has her wheels in the back. She carries it around. And that's really important to me that she's powerful, and strong, and fast, and fierce. And she also is a nurturer who is connected to the aesthetic of relationality with place, history, future, and aesthetic consequence.

**I love listening to you talk about her. And it sounds very much like you identify very, very, deeply with Maria. It's something much more than a car for you.**

Yeah. Oh, she's someone.

**She's someone?**

She's someone for sure. And I think that also links back to the objectification of bodies and gender, and the objectification of resources. As a modern Western culture, we've objectified our resources to where we are not in relationship to them, we are just taking. They are there for our entitled access. And so, to give consciousness to what we deem the inanimate begins to reintroduce us to our relationality with the world around us, and again, the consequence of our actions. We think of our appliances and our cars as a series of robots or things without consciousness that we can use, use up, and are only there to meet our needs. And we forget that we are talking to them, we are in a relationship with them.

These prints are a portrait of someone very dear to me. And she is a being, and she has consciousness, and we are in a relationship. I really believe in the consciousness of cars. You get to know them. You introduce yourself, and you ask them who they are. And then you listen, and you learn to listen to that which doesn't speak in the way that people speak.



Rose B. Simpson working on an El Camino. Photo: Kate Russell. Courtesy of the artist



The silenced perspectives are sometimes uncomfortable.  
But we don't grow unless we go into some uncomfortable  
places, and listen to uncomfortable things.

Rose B. Simpson

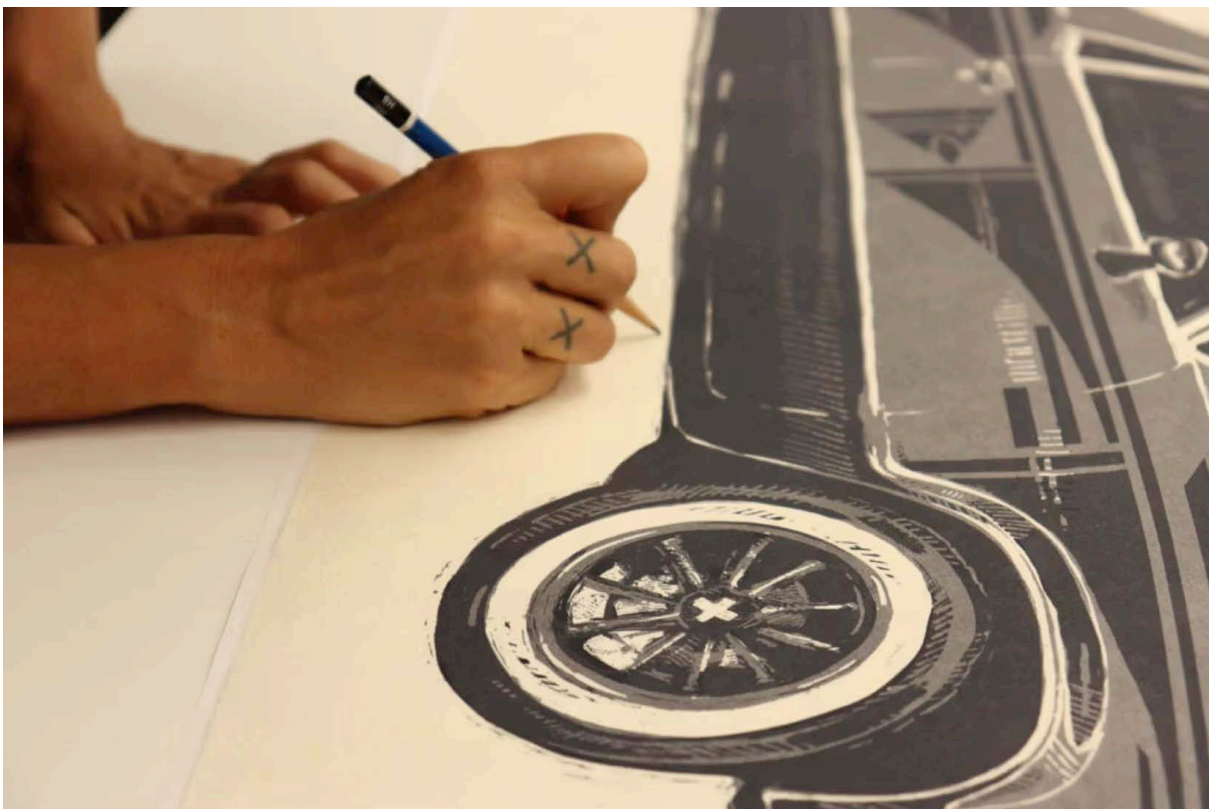
**It's a wonderful way to relate to the world, I really appreciated that. I want to ask you a little bit about Tamarind and what it was like working there. What stands out to you about your experience working at Tamarind?**

Tamarind is a wonderful organization. Artists come from all over the world to print there, and they get to stay on site and really just do an intensive. Right now, they have a master printer whose name is Valpuri Remling. She's incredible. Any artist that gets to work with her has the privilege of working with a magician. I went to Tamarind to do a different kind of piece, and we did another piece called *Let Story Go*. And then she called me at like 6:00 in the morning, and she said, "We're going to do your car. Be there in 10 minutes." (Because I had said it would be fun to do that.) And so, if it wasn't for Valpuri, that idea and that dream of making a print of my dear Maria would not have come to fruition. I feel like that piece specifically is a collaboration between me and Valpuri.

I live about an hour and 45 minutes drive from there, but they let me stay in their apartment with my small daughter. So, my daughter was there in the studio with us while we created these prints, which means even more, you know?

**Amazing. Did you have any background with printmaking before you went to Tamarind? Or had you seen many prints by other artists that you admire?**

I went to undergrad initially at the University of New Mexico, which has a really strong relationship with Tamarind, and I studied printmaking there in undergrad. And so, I already had a really strong love of printmaking and the processes. And I'm a big fan. I collect prints. I like prints more than anything, really. I love the storybook quality of them. I hardly get to do that, because of my career and how I'm set up in the world as an artist, because I don't have the resources of a printmaking studio. So, when they asked me, I was so excited, jumping at the bit to get over there and play with their toys.



Rose B. Simpson signing print editions. Photo: Audrey Troche. Courtesy Tamarind Institute



**A lot of artists are into printmaking because of its democratic tradition; it allows their work to circulate more broadly, or maybe it's the chance to collaborate or to try a new technique. You already knew you liked the process and the technique, but were there any things that you felt might be possible by making prints that weren't possible otherwise in your practice?**

First and foremost, I am a process junkie. I love process. It's everything. When I was studying printmaking in undergrad, I was really interested in [intaglio](#). And I would spend so much time on these plates. And I just fell in love with them; I would toss the paper, like, who cares? The plates are the yummy part. And the fact that each print, no matter how striving for perfection they are, they all have an identity, they all have an individual vibe. The fact that they're numbered and they still feel like they have the warmth of the handmade, in a sense. And I love that about it.

**You've talked elsewhere about how cars "build identity and create empowerment in disenfranchised peoples." Why do you think it is important to create empowerment through art?**

I feel like there is a value system and a privilege in the voice that is heard in colonized worlds, which is a large percentage of our world. A lot of historically enslaved peoples and peoples that were indigenous to colonized places, their voices were silenced. And because of the privilege of certain voices over others, it is really vital for certain voices to be amplified. Perspectives beyond our common narratives are vital for us to really grow and navigate a very difficult and challenging reality that we may be facing. The silenced perspectives are sometimes uncomfortable. But we don't grow unless we go into some uncomfortable places, and listen to uncomfortable things. That discomfort is vital. The shame that people have held, or the low self-esteem or self-image that certain communities have held because of historical trauma that extends through generations, it really causes a lot of harm. And I feel that empowerment can really make lasting change in our world.

*Maria* is on view at MoMA in [Hyundai Card First Look: Rose B. Simpson](#), November 14, 2025–spring 2026.

- [Starr Figura](#)

[Curator, Department  
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- [Rose B. Simpson](#)

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# AMERICAN INDIAN

COLLECTION STORIES

## Serenity Gifted from the Stars

**From Issue:** Summer 2025 / Vol. 26 No. 2 (/issues/summer-2025)

by Anya Montiel



This clay sculpture, entitled "Remind," is now on display at the National Museum of the American Indian in New York. The figure's plus signs and x's surrounding its head and upper body are representative of stars.

"Remind," Rose B. Simpson (Kha'p'o Owinge [Santa Clara Pueblo]), 2022; clay, steel, grout, lava beads; 66" x 35" x 15". 27/848

Photo by Elisabeth Bernstein, courtesy of the artist; Jack Shainman Gallery, New York; and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco

**A** captivating figure now stands in the National Museum of the American Indian in New York. Visitors may find themselves compelled to pause to look at the sculpture, which is much of its intent.

This recent addition to the museum's collection is the inspiration of Rose B. Simpson, a Kha'p'o Owinge (Santa Clara Pueblo) multimedia artist who descends from several generations of Pueblo artists and creatives. Her great-grandmother Rose Naranjo—for whom she was named—was a famed ceramicist who taught her techniques to her 10 children. Her maternal grandmother, Rina Swentzell, was an architect, historian and author with a doctorate in American Studies from the University of New Mexico. And her mother, Roxanne Swentzell, is not only a farmer but also a noted clay and bronze sculptural artist with her own gallery.

While Simpson is perhaps best known for her contemporary clay figures, she works in several different media—metal, automotive design, fashion, poetry and even performance art. “I am a hard worker. I have lots of projects,” she said. Her busy schedule also includes family and community responsibilities. “I have a very hectic life as an only parent to a little girl, and I participate in my [Pueblo] community,” she said. With all these demands on her time, she said, “I oftentimes get myself kind of whirled up in my thoughts and have anxiety for all the things that need to be done.”

Her sculpture, now prominently displayed at the NMAI, was intended to be a personal remedy for such moments of stress. Entitled “Remind,” the clay figure has plus signs and x's surrounding its head and upper body that resemble tattoos yet were carefully painted on with a metallic glaze.

Simpson said these markings represent stars, and the artwork could be a reminder for us all to look up at them to maintain perspective, to remember our lives are part of a greater picture. “When I get too small in my thinking, I get myself more anxious and more worried and more wound up,” she explained. “So if I remember that I am part of something much bigger, it calms me down. ... I can be a much healthier and happier and [a more] stronger and powerful person.” While stemming from Simpson's life and experience, “Remind” is an offering of calm and comfort to all.

#### AUTHORS

##### **Anya Montiel**

Anya Montiel is a curator at the National Museum of the American Indian.



## At the Wheel and Over the Hood

Rose B. Simpson's mixed-media sculptures offer an exuberant blending of ancestral and contemporary culture.

BY JESSICA ZACK AND PHOTOS BY KATE RUSSELL | PUBLISHED: SEP 21, 2025



**C**lay and cars. Cars and clay. It's an understatement to say that artist Rose B. Simpson's connection to both runs deep.

These dissimilar obsessions have made Simpson one of the most in-demand contemporary artists working today. The mixed-media sculptor is renowned for both her sentinel-like ceramic figures and her radically inventive art cars.

Simpson began garnering gallery and museum attention when she was fresh out of art school for her monumental clay sculptures exploring Native identity. In 2014, just three years after she received her master of fine arts

degree from the Rhode Island School of Design, while living in her native Santa Clara Pueblo (Kha'po Owingeh), in northern New Mexico, Simpson wowed the art world with her now-iconic first art car, *Maria*. She had refurbished the 1985 Chevy El Camino and intricately painted it entirely matte black except for its glossy black geometric designs, which visually pop against the flat finish—an homage to the acclaimed Tewa potter Maria Martinez (1887–1980), who pioneered the famous black-on-black style.

For the past six years, Simpson has been working on her second art car: a decrepit 1964 Buick Riviera, which she's calling *Bosque*, that she's been meticulously restoring from the inside out. I had the opportunity to visit Simpson this summer in her auto mechanic friend's Albuquerque garage. There, on a rather hot morning, she was working feverishly to finish the new car in time for her exhibition at San Francisco's de Young Museum, *Rose B. Simpson: LEXICON*. (The show opened August 30 and will run until August 2, 2026.)

Both *Maria* and *Bosque* will be installed in the museum's expansive Wilsey Court, surrounded by a massive mural—33 feet tall by 53 feet wide—that Simpson will create on-site. She planned to paint the new car in the traditional Tewa polychrome palette of cream, cayenne, and black. "It's a New Mexico term for the forested area along the river, which is kind of cool because she's a Riviera," she says of the artwork's title. "I'm trying to get the custom plate. I submitted it to the DMV."

As I watch, Simpson, hunched over in her face shield, spot-welds patches on *Bosque's* massive metal hood. Later, we discuss her life story and artistic journey to this point in her career, tracing back the ancient roots of her creative fixations. These disparate interests—clay and cars—and their powerful hold on her imagination start to make perfect sense.

Clay, after all, runs through Simpson's bloodline; her relationship to it is ancestral.

Cars, on the other hand, are like a first love. And every new car comes into her life with the rush of a new affair.



KATE RUSSELL

Rose B. Simpson in her New Mexico studio.

## POTTERY SHARDS

Growing up in the Santa Clara Pueblo, with a mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother who were all Tewa ceramists, Simpson was aware that



she descended from a mind-boggling matrilineal ancestry of clay artists. Approximately 70 generations of female potters had come before her, dating back to the sixth century.

As a girl, Simpson knew the feel of mineral-rich soil under her fingernails. I can imagine her squeezing and thumb-rolling tiny knobs of red clay that had been discarded by her sculptor mother, the celebrated Pueblo artist Roxanne Swentzell, while she was creating her signature mother-and-child figures.

Swentzell and her daughter would take walks around nearby ruins and occasionally discover pot shards with faded Tewa designs.

“This might’ve been my great-great-great-great-grandmother who made this pot, and it had a whole story, a whole life that happened,” Swentzell said during a 2024 talk with her daughter at the Norton Museum of Art, in West Palm Beach, Florida. Four generations of their family’s work were on view together in the exhibition *Rose B. Simpson: Journeys of Clay*. “Her grandkid probably went down to get water and broke it on the way home.”

What with the clay from the soil her family farmed, the adobe home her mother had built by hand, the pots they’d cook their meals in, and an aesthetic tradition that had been passed down through millennia, creating and imagining in wet earth became a kind of first language for Simpson. It’s a sense of familiarity that predates personal memory.

“Where I come from, the entire context is clay,” she tells me, adding that her eight-year-old daughter, Cedar Rain, seems to have inherited the family gift of artistic talent. “I pulled out some old drawings of mine, and they’re not as good as hers at her age. Boy, can she draw.”

“It feels weird to even call clay a material because it’s more like family,” Simpson says.

“It wasn’t just for fun, though,” she continues. “Clay wasn’t a toy. My mom supported us off clay, so it was always a part of our life, but as kids, we

weren't allowed to touch it because if she gave us her clay, that was our income. So if you got any, it was a tiny little piece, and you respected it."

Simpson's bond with cars might not be ancestral, but growing up just south of Española, the so-called lowrider capital of the world, she was always drawn to them.

Flashy muscle cars are a ubiquitous symbol of strength and freedom, and Simpson dreamed of having her own someday. "I love the power. I love the speed. I love to be carried," she says.

At various points in her life, cars have been a refuge, a flex, a symbol of enveloping safety, and, always, a source of pride. "I grew up in a youth culture that valued cars," says Simpson. "The cruise line was *so* important in my town as a teenager."

Simpson estimates she currently has 14 cars, 15 if you count *Bosque*. "Yeah, I have a car problem," she says with a knowing smile, shaking her head. "My relationship with cars is long, and it's got some codependency."

She swears she recalls being one or two years old and riding in her parents' truck (before they divorced and she grew up primarily with her mother)—specifically, a 1950s dump truck that her father, sculptor Patrick Simpson, had dismantled and shortened while he was a student at the Kansas City Art Institute. "When he put it all back together, it was two inches shorter, and he replaced all the washers with cutout stars and put fake flowers in the [cab's] ceiling," says Simpson.

"I remember sitting on the floor, and the heater element looked like a rabbit," she recalls, "and I'd stick my fingers through the floor and see the road go past."



KATE RUSSELL

One of Simpson's 25-foot-tall sculptures from *Strata* (2024), on display at the Cleveland Museum of Art.

Simpson was valedictorian at the Santa Fe Indian School and received a scholarship to Dartmouth College her senior year. The acceptance letter “burned a hole through my backpack” for several months, she recalls.

In what she calls “the first of so many life episodes clearly revealing where I belong,” she made the decision to stay close to home and study at the University of New Mexico, in Albuquerque, and then the Institute of American Indian Arts, in Santa Fe.

“I remember thinking that if the world ended, I couldn’t walk home from Dartmouth.... I needed to know that I still had that connection to home and that if anything happened, I could follow the river north and end up in my pueblo, where my family is and my context and what’s most important to me,” Simpson says.

By 2009, however, the then-25-year-old had decided to attend RISD. “I wanted to know what it felt like to be anonymous,” she says, even though she recalls being asked by a visiting artist there why someone with her cultural pedigree (70 generations?!) would bother going to grad school for ceramics.

The answer was that Simpson was on the cusp of discovering her own distinct artistic style, something perhaps more easily realized in new surroundings. Using her innate familiarity with clay, she devised a technique she calls “slap-slab,” which she uses with traditional coil building to create powerfully enigmatic, often androgynous human figures.

Simpson’s figures are more experimental and rough-textured than her mother’s work, the seams and fingerprints left visible. They can be larger-than-life and have hollow, watchful eyes. She adorns them in metalwork, cottonwood branches, beads, and leather. Personally symbolic markings (“+” and “x,” which Simpson has tattooed on her fingers) appear often, connecting Simpson’s Native red-clay tradition to a modern aesthetic. At once serene and fierce, her figures can exude a postapocalyptic, *Mad Max* toughness as well as a grounded, quiet power.

For her 2024–25 exhibition *Rose B. Simpson: Strata* at the Cleveland Museum of Art, she created two 25-foot-tall figures, which stood watch in the museum’s atrium. Built of clay, concrete, and bronze, the monumental



figures, decked in beads, intricate headgear, and chains, were installed face-to-face as if “witnessing” each other, and the museum’s visitors.

“Rose’s practice is always centered around the figure as a proxy to address emotional and existential impacts of global humanity,” such as the lasting trauma of colonialism or gender roles, says Jessica Silverman, who has been Simpson’s San Francisco gallerist since 2019. Silverman has seen interest in Simpson’s work from private collectors and museums skyrocket. “We have a waiting list for her ceramics, in particular,” she says. “She’s someone who is on a lot of people’s checklist of desires” around the globe.

In the past year alone, in addition to the West Palm Beach and Cleveland exhibitions, Simpson’s work was shown at the 2024 Whitney Biennial, and she installed two site-specific works, Seed, in New York City—18-foot-high figures placed around a central female figure in Midtown’s Madison Square Park and two life-size bronzes in Upper Manhattan’s Inwood Hill Park, also called Shorakapok Preserve (after the word meaning “the sitting place” in the Munsee language of the Wecquaesgeek). Simpson’s sculptures pay tribute to the island’s history as Manahatta, the ancestral land of the Lenape people.



After buying the Buick for *Bosque*, Simpson discovered there were no aftermarket parts available for the vehicle, adding to the project's epic demands.

## ART CARS

As we talk inside her friend's garage, where *Bosque*, tires and fenders removed, is up on blocks and a drawing tacked to the wall shows Simpson's initial designs for the car's polychrome exterior, Simpson keeps circling back to her RISD experience. She describes a study-abroad trip she took to Kashiwara, Japan, in 2010 and a course that same year called Aesthetics of the Everyday, taught by RISD philosophy professor Yuriko Saito, as revelatory in helping her see clay, and cars, in a new light.

"That seminar was life-changing," she recalls. Simpson hadn't yet discovered the language, or the conceptual framework, to describe her personal ethos, but she found it in Saito's description of "relational aesthetics" and in the Japanese tradition of embedding aesthetic moments in the familiar. It opened her eyes to a way of living creatively in the world without distinguishing between art and craft—or, more meaningfully, she says, between art and life.

"Rose was an exceptional student, and that particular seminar was one of the most memorable teaching experiences I had in my career," recalls Saito, now a professor emerita. "I remember talking with her class about the tea ceremony, which is an established art form but at the same time an example of how a really mundane activity can have a deep aesthetic significance in life, [how] we don't need to make artificial boundaries between art and life. Rose was majoring in ceramics, which can be utilitarian and also fine art. I think she realized that these everyday objects and everyday activities are worthy subjects of aesthetic inquiry."

"When that light bulb went off, I realized I come from a town where relational aesthetics are everything!" says Simpson. "Lowriders *are* art pieces. It's art and it's aesthetics that's applied and intentional and used."

Simpson explains that there are more custom cars per capita in Española than in Las Vegas or Orange County. “I learned to drive when I was 11 and bought my first car when I was 12,” she says. She paid her mother the outstanding \$500 on the Jeep Cherokee she would eventually drive to Rhode Island.

“That Jeep became my identity,” said Simpson, who speaks with a poet’s cadence, delivering the de Young’s annual Bransten Lecture in April. “After a really hard day at school, I would go sit in my car, and it would be really hot, and I’d close the windows and sweat, and it made me feel OK. Those four corners of that car were the corners of my soul, were the corners of my being.”

When she packed up the car, which had illegally tinted dark windows and a spring-lifted rear, to make the 2,200-mile road trip to art school, “the funny thing is I realized as we were leaving Santa Fe, I could either take my mattress or my subwoofers. I was like, Eh, who needs a mattress?” she recalls, laughing. “So I drove across the country with my subwoofers, and [the car] was covered in stickers, and I drove around playing my music all loud, with my bright yellow [New Mexico “Land of Enchantment”] license plate. Everybody was like, Who is *that*? And I realized nobody has custom cars in Providence.”

Simpson shares this story on a break from welding, and she pauses before putting her face shield on to get back to work. “Relational aesthetics, man.”

Visitors to the de Young, stopping to admire the beauty and novelty of the two art cars Simpson has painted like pottery, will likely have no inkling of the thousands of hours she spent on them—compounding, patching, sanding, grinding, metal-shaping—long before applying any decorative paint.



KATE RUSSELL

Simpson's first custom car piece, *Maria*, a 1985 Chevy El Camino, caught the art world's attention just three years after the artist earned her MFA.

"We should have run screaming when we realized that all the fuses were rusted," says Simpson, who found out after buying *Bosque* that, unlike for *Maria*, a Chevy, there are no aftermarket parts for old Buicks.

"You'll never see the millions of hours underneath that paint," she says.

Surveying the wreck that's still a far cry from a work of art, she adds, "Someone must have rally-raced this. I swear to God, the only good thing about this car was the roof."

People also aren't likely to know that when Simpson returned home from RISD in 2011, she enrolled at a local school, Northern New Mexico College, in automotive science to learn collision repair and classic-car customization. During that period, she met artist Jeff Brock, who was building the art car *Bombshell Betty*, a raw-steel 1952 Buick Super Riviera that has set seven world speed records at the Bonneville Salt Flats, in Utah.

"Jeff was incredibly influential," says Simpson. "I wasn't studying collision repair so I could build something to go in a museum. That was not the intention. I was there to build cars so that I could cruise. But Jeff said, 'Why don't you build [an art] car?'"



“Rose is one of my favorite human beings I’ve ever met,” says Brock, who lives in the tiny town of Truth or Consequences, New Mexico. “I’m honored to have been there and been part of [creating *Maria*], but at the time, I thought, Oh, you crazy woman. You’re taking on way more than you can handle. The car she started with was a wreck. It was so sad how much damage was hiding under the paint, and the more she dug into it, the more I felt bad for her. It was so hard to even get it to the point of being a blank canvas.”

Brock was one of the first people to see *Maria* after her black-on-black treatment. “We were sitting on chairs in the yard right after I brought her home after I had painted her,” recalls Simpson. “She had been a side-of-the-road junker that had been totaled, and now she was absolutely beautiful. We had a cigarette and were looking at the car. And there was this moment when Jeff said, ‘Wow. Look what you did.’ And I realized right then I’d built a relationship with this car. The car called me, and I brought her home. I became sort of a tool in her toolbox of becoming.”

Simpson describes ushering her cars into a new existence—rather than wresting them from nothingness—in the same way she does her clay figures. “I don’t feel like I’m making them; I feel like I’m meeting them,” she tells me.

Hillary Olcott, the de Young’s curator of arts of the Americas, recalls meeting Simpson on a tour of the museum with Silverman back in 2019. “We were chatting and walking through the museum, sort of imagining what opportunities there might be to work together on a project. I told her how much I love *Maria* and would love to have her here in Wilsey Court, in the center of our building. Rose said, ‘I’ve actually just bought this 1964 Buick Riviera that I really want to redo and customize as well. Maybe they could both be here together.’ I said, ‘Heck yeah, let’s do it.’”

Olcott and Simpson are planning for *Maria* and *Bosque* to be parked nose-to-nose inside the museum’s spacious interior courtyard.

“I can’t wait to see them facing each other, almost like they’re facing off for a fight,” says Silverman. “But, knowing Rose, I don’t think it’s going to feel that

way. Knowing how much truth and honesty and awareness and deep sensitivity that is embodied in her, and the vulnerability and intelligence in the work, I think it's going to feel like a conversation more than a battle.”•

***ROSE B. SIMPSON: LEXICON***

- Through Aug. 2, 2026
- De Young Museum, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco
- [famsf.org](http://famsf.org)

## An Artist Asks, ‘Have I Just Become Fuel for the Fire?’

Wary of being reduced to an art world commodity, Rose B. Simpson tries to stay true to herself and her community. Here, her story in five works.

By Zoë Lescaze Photographs by Sean Donnola  
Sept. 2, 2025



### 1. “BOSQUE” (2025)

The artist Rose B. Simpson circled the raw steel skeleton of the 1964 Buick Riviera in her friend’s shop in Albuquerque, measuring the holes riddling the chassis. “This whole thing was Swiss cheese,” she shouted above the rattles and bangs. It was early May and the lowrider had come a long way from the rust-eaten mess Simpson, 41, had begun patching months ago. Now that car — painted, upholstered and tentatively entitled “Bosque,” after the improbable oases that form along rivers in the deserts of New Mexico — is part of “Rose B. Simpson: Lexicon,” a yearlong installation that just opened at San Francisco’s de Young museum, where it joins her first custom car, from 2014.

Simpson’s art is always personal, but “Bosque” fully embodies the two places that shaped her: Santa Clara Pueblo (Kha’p’o Owingeh, as it’s known by its inhabitants), the Tewa community north of Santa Fe where she was raised, and its neighbor, Española, a hardscrabble city where lovingly restored lowriders are objects of fierce local pride. It was there that Simpson — whose mother is Tewa and father is white — first learned to see classic cars as social sculptures. When she was young, she’d cruise the town’s main drag; in a time before everyone had a cellphone, “that’s how you found your people,” she said.

Relations between the reservation and Española have always been fraught, but Simpson’s cars, with their Spanish names and Pueblo paint jobs, are hybrid creatures. The patterns on the Buick — graceful black-and-terra-cotta designs floating on a white background — might appear abstract to outsiders, but they’ve appeared on Pueblo pots for hundreds of years.



Simpson is known for her clay figures, which recall androgynous warriors, seekers and guides adorned with salvaged metal, leather and beads, but those sculptures refer less explicitly to her Tewa heritage than the cars, which she sees as “probably the most Native” work she’s ever done. They also represent a risk for Simpson, who’s spent her career railing against attempts to pigeonhole her as an Indigenous artist. As she told me, “I would love to be seen as an artist who just happens to be Native.”



Simpson's "Bosque" (2025) as a work in progress in a shop in Albuquerque. Sean Donnola

For years, Simpson got by on teaching gigs, construction jobs and local sales in Santa Fe. In the past six years, she’s achieved a rare level of commercial success and international recognition. In January, she will install a bronze sculpture — a monumental mother and child — at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. In March, she’ll present new work in Australia for the Sydney Biennale. Being an in-demand artist often means traveling constantly between shows, residencies, fairs, galas and events around the world. But for Simpson, being rooted in Santa Clara, where she begins most mornings by talking to the earth and listening back, is essential to her practice. In Tewa, the word *nung* means both “earth” and “us.” Mountains, rivers and clouds are sentient beings who observe her every decision. You carry yourself differently, she said, when you’re surrounded by a world of witnesses. “Pueblo culture and belief systems are place-based,” she said as we drove through the dusty brown hills with clumps of piñon and juniper surrounding the village. “So all the ceremonies and the songs and everything are about *here*.” Simpson spends several weeks a year participating in Tewa ceremonies and many more sewing clothes, weaving baskets, making pots and preparing food for these events. “It’s about sitting together and remembering who we are as people — laughing and joking and crying as we work — and as women,” she said. The galleries representing her have learned to mark their calendars with feast days when she won’t leave the pueblo or answer her phone, no matter how rare the opportunity or flattering the invitation. She sometimes chafes at these constraints but cannot imagine being free of them. “I think I might just evaporate if there were no edges,” she said.

A year ago, Simpson had told me she wrestled daily with the “vampiristic” demands of the art world. Now, she said, it’s more like hourly. “I really question how much it’s taking,” she said in the modest home she shares with her 8-year-old daughter, Cedar Rain. Soon Simpson was back to making fun of herself, lamenting the incurable love of free food that makes her say yes to art world dinners she’d rather avoid, but for a moment she was pensive. She struggles with the thought that the energy she funnels into her career might be put to better use in her community.

Underlying Simpson’s concern is the long history of outsiders fetishizing Native cultures. Simpson remembers tour buses trundling into Santa Clara when she was a kid and the visitors who’d take her photo. “I have this insane trigger around white people — or tourists who happen to mostly be white people — feeling entitled to access my space, my ideas, my physical body,” she said. As an artist, she faces a fundamental paradox. She has spent her career excavating the deepest parts of herself, striving to make each work more honest, raw and real than the last. Any truly authentic work she makes, however, will necessarily reveal aspects of that same vulnerable self she’s fought to protect — and a larger belief system she doesn’t want to compromise.



The artist's sculpture "The Remembering" (2020). © Rose B. Simpson, courtesy of the artist, Jessica Silverman, San Francisco, and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. Photo: John Wilson

## 2. "THE REMEMBERING" (2020)

Simpson works with metal, wood, leather and cloth, but "clay is family," she said. "It's where we come from." Her maternal line has been working with it for 700 years.

Both of Simpson's parents, with whom she remains close, are artists. Her father, Patrick Simpson, makes metal sculptures she cites as an influence on her own. Her mother, Roxanne Swentzell, was among the first ceramists in Santa Clara to make figurative sculptures instead of practical vessels. The couple split up when Simpson was a baby and, while she often saw her father in Santa Fe, it was Swentzell who raised her and her older brother, Porter Swentzell, who is now the director of the Kha'p'o Community School.

The family lived on the reservation in an army tent with a garden hose for a shower and no electricity before they moved into an adobe brick house that Simpson's mother built by hand. Simpson grew up storing seeds and gathering wood. They kept bees for candles and raised turkeys for meat. Although Swentzell and her children lived off the land partly out of necessity, Simpson now recognizes her mother's decision as an act of defiance. Simpson felt deeply uncool at the time — her cousins all ate McDonald's and watched TV — but her childhood taught her self-reliance. The first thing she did when she moved into her current home, she said, was to "delete" the dryer. She remains ambivalent about having a refrigerator.

Simpson bought her first car from her mother when she was 12. (It's not unusual for children to drive in Santa Clara as soon as their feet can reach the pedals, she says.) The Jeep became a refuge. Native kids bullied her for being tall and relatively light-skinned. More threatening were the drunken men, friends of a guy her mom began dating when Simpson was about 9, whose advances she dodged by sleeping in her car. She and Porter moved into their own apartment when she was 16.

For Simpson, personal trauma and historical injustices are inextricable. "The Remembering," a work from 2020, speaks to the violence and shame she sees as her tribe's collective inheritance. Three red clay children with narrow slits for eyes stare solemnly ahead. Their jaws are set, their full lips closed. Wooden sticks jut vertically from inside smooth ceramic walls that encase their bodies. The figures' large hands dangle limply from metal chains.

Simpson made the sculpture around the same time that excavations of mass graves were revealing fresh horrors of the Indian boarding-school system that tore apart Native families across the country from the early 19th century through the 1960s. Her great-grandmother and namesake, Rose Naranjo, was among the hundreds of thousands of children who were abducted from their communities and sent to schools where they endured starvation, beatings and other forms of abuse designed to convert them into tractable servants and laborers. "What kind of sociopath, what kind of heartless ... ? How do you take humans and turn them into a natural resource?" said Simpson, her voice brittle. "To break people, you break the children. That's intentional."

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Simpson's performance "Transformance" (2014), staged in a popular shopping area in Santa Fe. Kate Russell

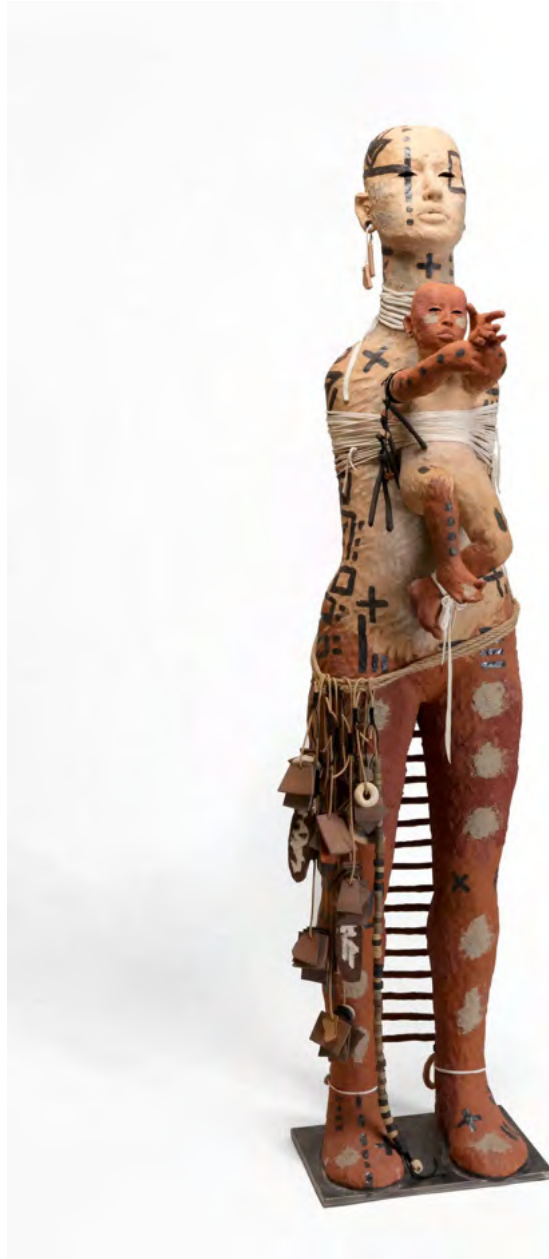
### 3. "TRANSFORMANCE" (2014)

Not long after she returned to New Mexico with an M.F.A. from the Rhode Island School of Design in 2011, Simpson bought a 1985 Chevy El Camino, painted it satin black with glossy Pueblo patterns and equipped it with a drag race transmission and an engine that only grudgingly tolerates speeds under 110 miles per hour. She named it "Maria" (2014). "'Maria' wants to be nuking through the world," she said. Simpson wanted something similar: to be so fast and tough no one could touch her.

For most of Simpson's life, being female felt like a liability. Indigenous women and girls are murdered at rates exceeding those of other groups in the United States. Just recently, Simpson woke up from a nightmare in which a carful of men were pursuing her and a child on her back. Finally, they caught her. "I guess this is it," she remembered thinking. "This is the moment that I disappear."

Masculinity became a survival strategy. "The less I looked like a woman, the more empowered I felt," she said. As a student at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, where she began her undergrad degree before transferring to the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, Simpson immersed herself in skateboarding and graffiti, wore a spike in her septum, stretched her earlobes around nickel-size plugs and slept with a 9-millimeter gun under her pillow. She sang lead in the Native punk band Chocolate Helicopter and the hip-hop crew Garbage Pail Kidz. She sought out romantic relationships with women, partly because they felt safer, and she dressed like the dudes who became her surrogate brothers. "I don't wear anything that impedes me from jumping a fence to get away from the cops," she recalled telling a style reporter who asked about her "fashion sense."

When she finished “Maria” in 2014, Simpson began thinking about women in the car world, who tended to be bikini-clad models perched on the hoods of hot rods at expos and races. She asked herself what a more empowering alternative might be. Later that year, she shut down Canyon Road, a touristy strip of historic adobe buildings in Santa Fe, for an unsanctioned performance. Flanked by Indigenous women and queer friends dressed in custom black leather like a postapocalyptic battalion, Simpson drove “Maria” slowly past the boutiques and art galleries hawking paintings of stoic Indians wearing buckskin and feathers. A heartbeat thudded from the subwoofers as the group marched past stunned onlookers. She called the piece “Transformance.”



“Two Selves” (2023), a work inspired by Simpson’s becoming a parent. © Rose B. Simpson, courtesy of the artist, Jessica Silverman, San Francisco, and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

#### 4. “TWO SELVES” (2023)

Simpson’s daughter was born at home two years later, in 2016. Cedar Rain’s father, an old friend of Simpson’s, does not currently share parenting duties with Simpson. “I realized that my masculine energy wasn’t going to help me in this really difficult scenario where I have this colicky baby who’s crying all night long,” Simpson said. “You have to pull



from a source that's so deep and so old to keep this child alive and keep yourself sane, right? And in that, I found a source of power that I didn't really know was there before." She hoped that by facing her own fears and self-loathing she could prevent her daughter from experiencing them too.

One work that resulted from that process is "Two Selves," a dual-bodied, six-foot-high ceramic self-portrait from 2023. The taller figure's face is careworn — sorrowful, even. Her chin, however, is lifted and her lips are parted, as though she has just glimpsed something hopeful on the horizon. An androgynous child bound to her chest strains forward, arms outstretched. That being "is the little me," said Simpson. "It's like the heart, the vulnerable part that I haven't let speak, that I don't often allow to guide me. And that's the one that's saying, 'This way.'"

When it came time to sculpt the larger figure's face, Simpson had to confront her own. She returned to an exercise she hadn't performed since grad school. Studying her own face — its strong jaw, high forehead and fine creases — she concentrated on the features she hated. Simpson's goal wasn't to convince herself she was beautiful. It was to simply accept what she saw, to hold her own gaze and think, "This is me. This is who I am."



"Daughters: Reverence" (2024), a sculptural installation for last year's Whitney Biennial. Ron Amstutz

## 5. “DAUGHTERS: REVERENCE” (2024)

Simpson sees her sculptures as “Trojan horses of consciousness,” slipping into spaces where they might encourage others to examine their own bruises and blind spots. Still, she often worries she’s deluding herself, especially when she’s confronted with evidence that, for some collectors, her sculptures are little more than trophies. “When I hear people go, ‘Do you have a Rose? *I* have a Rose,’ I’m like, ‘What the [expletive] is that?’” she said. “‘Have I just become fuel for the fire?’” She recently had a dream in which she was gingerly trying to extract herself from a nest of snakes — an almost too-perfect “metaphor for the art world,” she said.

Ever since the Black Lives Matter movement emerged a decade ago, commercial galleries and public museums have been attempting to correct biases, including the dearth of Indigenous work in American institutions. In 2020, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., acquired its first major work by a Native artist, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, who died earlier this year, and who was the first Native American honored with a retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 2023. Just last year, Jeffrey Gibson became the first Indigenous artist to represent the United States at the Venice Biennale. Simpson is wary of the scramble to include Native perspectives that can sometimes result in graceless groupings of artists. When curators propose events to accompany her exhibitions, the standard pitch goes: “‘Let’s find all the Indians in the area and have a powwow or somehow honor the Indians;’” she said. “And I’m always like, ‘When you had an Asian artist, did you do that?’”

Her response to tokenism is to create figures that exist unto themselves. For last year’s Whitney Biennial, she installed “Daughters: Reverence” (2024), a group of four regal figures — in ocher, black, red and gray — adorned in cascades of handmade beads. Simpson made no attempt to smooth or polish their skin, leaving it dappled with hundreds of her fingerprints. The towering figures stood facing one another, seemingly unconcerned with the spectators around them. “They’re not doing something for the audience,” she said. “They’re actually doing work with each other.”

Simpson is slowly trying to do the same, to blot out distractions and external expectations. It’s partly why she’s learning to fly helicopters. “In every single moment, there’s like 1,000 things that could kill you,” she said — the danger forces her to be present. She dreams of someday building one, a winged sister to “Bosque” and “Maria” painted with similar Pueblo patterns. It would be a work of art, but also something of real use. With a helicopter, her tribe wouldn’t have to depend on outsiders to reach remote parts of the reservation. It would be only for them, she said — “not for anybody else.”



THE ARTS

## Artist Rose B. Simpson parks a 1964 Buick inside the de Young Museum

*Artist bought her first car at age 12*



by NOMA FAINGOLD  
August 29, 2025, 3:19 pm



Rose B. Simpson, Rose Simpson and team working on a 1964 Buick Riviera titled Bosque. Crew: Dylan Madri, Wanda Abeyta and Cele Sena. Photo by Kate Russell. Courtesy of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Jessica Silverman, San Francisco and Jack Shainman, New York.

Artist Rose B. Simpson is more than a little preoccupied with vessels.

She views pottery, cars, her figurative sculptures, the womb, and clay — a material she most often uses in her creations — as vessels.

“I think in clay. Clay was the earth that grew our food, was the house we lived in, was the pottery we ate out of and prayed with,” Simpson told a de Young Museum audience at a very personal lecture she delivered earlier this year.

“My relationship to clay is ancestral and it has a deep genetic memory. It’s like a family member for us.”

Coming from a long line of Native American ceramic artists of the Santa Clara Pueblo (Kha’po’oe Ówîngeh), based just south of Española, New Mexico, pottery is in Simpson’s DNA. While she still lives at the pueblo and has her studio close by, she has forged a different creative path, while examining the past, present and future.

Her installation titled, “LEXICON,” which will be on view starting August 30, in de Young’s Wilsey Court, is comprised of three parts:

### Bosque

A 1964 Buick Riviera, making its debut at the de Young, has been meticulously rebuilt by Simpson and painted in vibrant Tewa polychrome.

She named the piece “Bosque,” the Spanish word for forest. Simpson made this customized car into a lowrider, since Española is considered the lowrider capital of the world.

In 2018, Simpson earned an Automotive Science Certificate at Northern New Mexico College in Española with a goal of making sure she can drive her art cars.

Simpson took the Buick apart before transforming it. She found a running engine in Detroit. She did the metalwork, smoothing out dents and patching the numerous areas of rust.

She researched Tewa polychrome (pottery featuring multiple colors, including terracotta and cream, applied to the surface using intricate designs and patterns). She even sewed the interior leather upholstery to match the exterior.



Rose Simpson rebuild of a Buick Riviera, leaving her shop on the Santa Claran Pueblo, loading with Dylan Madri. Photo courtesy of the artist.

## Maria

The celebrated “Maria,” which she modified and customized 10 years ago from a 1985 Chevy El Camino, painting a black-on-black geometric motif, was inspired by Tewa ceramicist Maria Martinez (1887-1980) of the San Ildefonso Pueblo in New Mexico. Martinez popularized the distinct black gloss-and-matte contrast.

“Maria” is a hot rod Simpson occasionally drives. It has been exhibited in a few museums.

“I transformed that car. How many times I sanded it, caressing every inch of that car,” Simpson said. “The car has a heartbeat.”





Installation view of "Rose B. Simpson: LEXICON," at the de Young Museum, San Francisco, 2025. Photograph by Gary Sexton. Image courtesy of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

## Mural

A massive, colorful mural behind the cars, with an expansive geometric design, evokes the environment of the Southwest. It is not a landscape, however. It is a mixture of figurative and familiar symbols.

"The aesthetics will provide a sense of space and place, because they are very tied to her identity and where she's from," Hillary C. Olcott, Curator of Arts of the Americas for the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco (FAMSF), said.

The mural surrounds the two vehicles. It was painted by Simpson and her team during the museum's visiting hours, from August 19-22, with the public watching the work in progress unfold.

The sad part is the site-specific mural will be painted over when the exhibition ends next year on Aug. 2, 2026.

"Rose is continuing her exploration in her practice of the vessel. The two cars are vessels. But she takes it one step further," Olcott said. "The mural is also inspired by pueblo pottery designs and Southwest aesthetics."

Born in 1983, Simpson was raised by matriarchal ceramic artists, including her mother, Roxanne Swentzell. Simpson learned by watching her DIY mother, who turned a toolshed into a house. Simpson remembers mixing mortar for laying bricks when she was a toddler.

Simpson is best known for purposefully raw and imperfect clay sculptures, as well as working across multiple media, including metalwork, painting, fashion, installations and performance.

Her sculptures have a post-apocalyptic "road warrior" vibe. They are often adorned with found objects like brake discs and other car parts. She calls some of the sculptures "beings" or "ancestors."

Her work has been exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney and the Guggenheim museums in New York City, as well as the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C.

Her multiple degrees include an master's in ceramics from the Rhode Island School of Design. This year, she received an honorary Ph.D from that same institution.

Recurring themes in her art examine identity, ancestry, gender, motherhood and marginality. She also looks inward, seeking personal growth through her creativity.

"I still like cars," Simpson said, who bought her first car at age 12.

"I've had a lot of cars in my life. I get emotionally attached to them," she said. "I see opportunity. I see possibility. I see experience. I see beauty. I see cruising. I see connection. I see empowerment. I see being carried. I see being in a safe, beautiful, strong womb. I see an identity."

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*Rose B. Simpson's "**LEXICON**" installation runs Aug. 30, 2025, through Aug. 2, 2026, at the de Young Museum, 50 Hagiwara Tea Garden Dr. Sept. 13 will be a free opening celebration for "LEXICON," as well as a day focused on the four reimagined Native American galleries.*

*Future programming for "LEXICON" to be announced, including possibly partnering with the local lowrider community to stage a cruise around the Golden Gate Park music concourse next year. Information: [famsf.org](http://famsf.org).*



Rose B. Simpson, "Bosque," 2024. 1964 Buick Riviera. Bodywork and customization by artist. Photograph by Kate Russell. Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco and Jack Shainman Gallery





SFSTATION



Sat August 30, 2025 - Sun August 2, 2026

## Rose B. Simpson: LEXICON

at de Young Museum (/de-young-museum-b507) (see times)

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This exhibition brings together two seemingly distinct art forms: Pueblo pottery and classic cars. In 2014, Rose B. Simpson, a mixed-media artist from Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexico, refurbished a 1985 Chevy El Camino, transforming it with a black-on-black Tewa pottery motif. Simpson titled her work *Maria* in honor of renowned artist Maria Martinez (San Ildefonso Pueblo, 1887-1980), who popularized the distinctive black-on-black style. Ten years later, this exhibition debuts Simpson's second customized car, a 1964 Buick Riviera painted in vibrant polychrome. Both cars are presented against an expansive geometric design, evoking the environment of the Southwest and transforming Wilsey Court into a bold, contemporary expression of Pueblo pottery traditions. Through this use of scale and space, Simpson forges connections between the ancestral and contemporary, and forms a new visual vocabulary, or lexicon, to assert her cultural heritage and its continuity.

Image Credit: Rose B. Simpson, *Maria*, 2014. Photograph by Kate Russell. Image courtesy of the artist

**Links:**

Event Details (<https://www.famsf.org/exhibitions/rose-b-simpson>)

**Category:**

Art (/art/calendar), Museums (/museums/calendar)

**Date/Times:**

Sat Aug 30 (9:30am - 5:15pm)

Sun Aug 31 (9:30am - 5:15pm)

Tue Sep 2 (9:30am - 5:15pm)

**de Young Museum (/de-young-museum-b507)**

50 Hagiwara Tea Garden Drive, San Francisco, CA 94118

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# Richmond Review/Sunset Beacon

NEWS FOR SAN FRANCISCO'S RICHMOND AND SUNSET DISTRICTS

TUESDAY, AUGUST 12TH, 2025

ART

## Artist Rose B. Simpson Explores Connections Between the Ancestral and the Contemporary

ON AUGUST 11, 2025 • ( [LEAVE A COMMENT](#) )

By Noma Faingold

Artist Rose B. Simpson is more than a little preoccupied with vessels. She views pottery, cars, her figurative sculptures, the womb and clay – a material she most often uses in her creations – as vessels.

"I think in clay. Clay was the earth that grew our food, was the house we lived in, was the pottery we ate out of and prayed with," Simpson told a de Young Museum audience at a very personal lecture she delivered earlier this year. "My relationship to clay is ancestral and it has a deep genetic memory. It's like a family member for us."



Rose B. Simpson and "Maria." Photo by Minesh Bacrania courtesy of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.

Coming from a long line of Native American ceramic artists of the Santa Clara Pueblo (Kha'po'oe Ówíngēh), based just south of Española, New Mexico, pottery is in Simpson's DNA. While she still lives at the pueblo and has her studio close by, she has forged a different creative path, while examining the past, present and future.

Her installation titled, "LEXICON," which will be on view starting Aug. 30, in de Young's Wilsey Court, is comprised of three parts:

#### **"Bosque"**

A 1964 Buick Riviera, making its debut at the de Young, has been meticulously rebuilt by Simpson and painted in vibrant Tewa polychrome. She named the piece "Bosque" (Spanish word for forest). Simpson made this second customized car into a lowrider, since Española is considered the lowrider capital of the world.

In 2018, Simpson earned an Automotive Science Certificate at Northern New Mexico College in Española with a goal of making sure she can drive her art cars.

Simpson took the Buick apart before transforming it. She found a working engine in Detroit. She did the metalwork, smoothing out dents and patching the numerous areas of rust. She researched Tewa polychrome (pottery featuring multiple colors, including terracotta and cream, applied to the surface using intricate designs and patterns). She even sewed the interior leather upholstery to match the exterior.

#### **"Maria"**

The celebrated "Maria," – which she modified and customized 10 years ago from a 1985 Chevy El Camino, painting a black-on-black geometric motif – was inspired by Tewa ceramicist Maria Martinez (1887-1980) of the San Ildefonso Pueblo in New Mexico. Martinez popularized the distinct black gloss-and-matte contrasting patterns.

"Maria" is a hot rod Simpson occasionally drives. It has been exhibited in a few museums.

"I transformed that car. How many times I sanded it, caressing every inch of that car," Simpson said. "The car has a heartbeat."



Rose B. Simpson, "Maria," 2014. 1985 Chevy El Camino.  
Bodywork and customization by artist. Photo by Kate Russell, courtesy of the artist.

#### **Mural**

A massive, colorful mural, with an expansive geometric design, evokes the environment of the Southwest. It is not a landscape, however. It is a mixture of figurative and familiar symbols.

"The aesthetics will provide a sense of space and place because they are very tied to her identity and where she's from," said Hillary C. Olcott, curator of Arts of the Americas for the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco (FAMSF).





Hillary C. Olcott, curator of Arts of the Americas at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. Photo by Noma Faingold.

The mural will surround the two vehicles. It will be painted by Simpson and her team during the museum's visiting hours, from Aug. 19-22. In other words, the public will have the rare opportunity to watch the work in progress.

The sad part is the site-specific mural will be painted over when the exhibition ends on Aug. 2, 2026.

"Rose is continuing her exploration in her practice of the vessel," Olcott said. "The two cars are vessels. But she takes it one step further. The mural is inspired by pueblo pottery designs and Southwest aesthetics. Rose is intending to transform the Wilsey Court from a sort of void into a whole."

Born in 1983, single mother Simpson was raised by matriarchal ceramic artists, including her mother, Roxanne Swentzell. Simpson learned by watching her DIY role model, who turned a toolshed into a house. Simpson remembers mixing mortar when she was a toddler for Swentzell to lay bricks in building their home.

Simpson is best known for purposefully raw and imperfect clay sculptures, as well as working across multiple media, including metalwork, painting, fashion, installations and performance. Her sculptures have a post-apocalyptic "Road Warrior" vibe. They are often adorned with found objects like brake discs and other car parts. She has called some of the sculptures "beings" or "ancestors."



Rose B Simpson working on her 1964 Buick Riviera, "Bosque." Photo by Kate Russell. Courtesy of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Jessica Silverman, San Francisco and Jack Shainman, New York.

Her work has been exhibited in New York City at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney and the Guggenheim, as well as the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C.

Her multiple degrees include an MFA in Ceramics from the Rhode Island School of Design. This year, she received an honorary PhD from that same institution.

Reoccurring themes in her artwork examine identity, ancestry, gender, motherhood and marginality. She also looks inward, seeking personal growth through her creativity.

"I still like cars," Simpson said, who bought her first at age 12.

"I've had a lot of cars in my life. I get emotionally attached to them," she said. "I see opportunity. I see possibility. I see experience. I see beauty. I see cruising. I see connection. I see empowerment. I see being carried. I see being in a safe, beautiful, strong womb. I see an identity."



Rose B Simpson working on her 1964 Buick Riviera, "Bosque." (Simpson's team includes Dylan Madri, Wanda Abeyta and Cele Sena.) Photo by Kate Russell. Courtesy of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Jessica Silverman, San Francisco and Jack Shainman, New York.

Rose B. Simpson's LEXICON installation runs Aug. 30 through Aug. 2, 2026, at the de Young Museum, 50 Hagiwara Tea Garden Dr. Sept. 13 will be a free opening celebration for LEXICON, as well as a day focused on the four reimagined Native American galleries. Future programming for LEXICON to be announced, including possibly partnering with the local lowrider community to stage a cruise around the Golden Gate Park music concourse next year. To learn more, go to [famsf.org](http://famsf.org) (<http://famsf.org>).



## Opinion

# We Can't Afford to Lose the Institute of American Indian Arts

The threat of defunding this precious, influential university is heartbreaking to those of us who know the worth of the IAIA experience.



Rose B. Simpson August 12, 2025



Detail of Rose B. Simpson, "Heights I, AP 2/2" (2024) on the campus of the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico (photo courtesy Jason Ordaz)

As a rebellious youngster, I didn't want to be the third generation of my family to attend the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) in Santa Fe, New Mexico. I started college at the University of New Mexico, trying to find my own identity, my own community, my own interests — outside of the heavy weight of Tribe, family, and a heritage of artists and philosophers. It took a run-in with the Albuquerque Police Department, and deep faith in the poetic creativity of an Indigenous partner who was unable to study anywhere else, to transfer to IAIA. Almost like running home. I brought my irreverent misfit spirit and found a new family of like-mindeds in the dorms, classrooms, studios, library, in and around the campus, sitting like a sentinel on the juniper-tree dotted outskirts of Santa Fe. As the sky burned low in the evenings, fellow student [Kit Julianto](#) would pull out his hand drum and sing the sun down. I would then retreat to my dorm and parse through what White historians wrote about Indigenous history and compare it with our seminars and my own lived truth.

Among many other attacks on DEI initiatives, First Peoples' infrastructure and livelihood, and environmental concerns, the Trump administration has [threatened to defund IAIA](#). After countless hours of writing letters and contacting senators and congresspeople alongside the retiring IAIA President Dr. Robert Martin, my fellow Trustees, and members of the larger IAIA community to keep the doors open, we succeeded in securing funds. But the institution faces a drastically decreased budget that it will have to utilize to run all programs and continue to offer the safe and healthy learning facility it has come to be known for. It will be with grit and tenacity that we stand by this school and commit ourselves to the dream we hold for it. We know this struggle; we dream of building healing creativity from a state of safety, of peace. Once again, our foundations rattle.

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Installation view of Rose B. Simpson, "Heights I, AP 2/2" (2024) on the IAIA campus (photo courtesy Jason Ordaz)

In 2007, I graduated from IAIA with a bachelor's degree in Studio Arts. The class was small and we were very close. We walked the stage in our varied traditional regalia, proud. I shared studios and long conversations with peers like [Dyani White Hawk](#), and co-founded Humble, an underground art space in a warehouse in Santa Fe, with [Cannupa Hanska Luger](#) and our crew, where I sang in the bands Chocolate Helicopter and The Wake Singers. It is wild to see our roads unraveling before us, together in this world. We now exhibit, curate, lead, produce, make music, and teach, sharing our mutually influential voices far and wide.

After earning my first graduate degree in ceramics from the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) in 2011, I was able to return to Santa Clara Pueblo and live on my ancestral homelands, only an hour-long commute to teach at IAIA. I led seminars, writing courses, and ran the ceramics department before it was headed by the wonderful Daisy Quezada Ureña, now the institution's dean of academic affairs.

IAIA launched a master's program in creative writing in 2013, and after some time at Northern New Mexico College for Automotive Science, I realized the new program was exactly what I had been looking for. A school where the students sitting around the table are of a relatively similar background allows for a natural flow of learning and expressing — something that doesn't happen for the so-called “only Indian in the room.” After being at a place like RISD (which challenged me in ways I value deeply), I was tired of constantly being forced to explain my context, working my way to baseline. At IAIA, context didn't need to be explained — allowing for a different rate of growth and expression. Outside IAIA, I held my breath; I changed the way I stood, spoke, and reached out, because there was something missing. I returned for that second master's in creative nonfiction to write the text on Indigenous Aesthetics I felt was lacking.



Artist Rose B. Simpson (photo by Minesh Bacrania, courtesy the artist, Jessica Silverman, San Francisco, and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York)

During this time of study, I had the opportunity to co-teach a seminar on Indigenous Aesthetics with my brother, Dr. Porter Swentzell; get feedback on my work from influential and talented Indigenous authors like Sherman Alexie and Terese Marie Mailhot; and watch

my contemporaries like novelist Tommy Orange not only make lasting change in the Indigenous literary landscape, but ascertain a solid footing in literature as a whole.

There is no other place in the world where I was equipped to realize that Indigenous Aesthetics does not need to be defined in the language or sources of the colonizer, that there is another way to approach, teach, define, and communicate it. I found my way to this truth — not alone, but through the quality of community that is, inherently, IAIA.

In November of 2023, I was appointed by then-President Biden to the Board of Trustees of IAIA. I wholeheartedly believe in this university. I believe in the power of offering Indigenous people opportunity and space for investigation — both personal and communal. I believe in the power of collective strength to lift the voice of our people, to claim our rightful position as leaders of creativity and aesthetic expression. The threat of defunding this precious and influential resource is not only an added stressor to an actively rebuilding and healing Indigenous community, but is also heartbreaking to those of us who know the worth of an experience like the one IAIA has to offer.

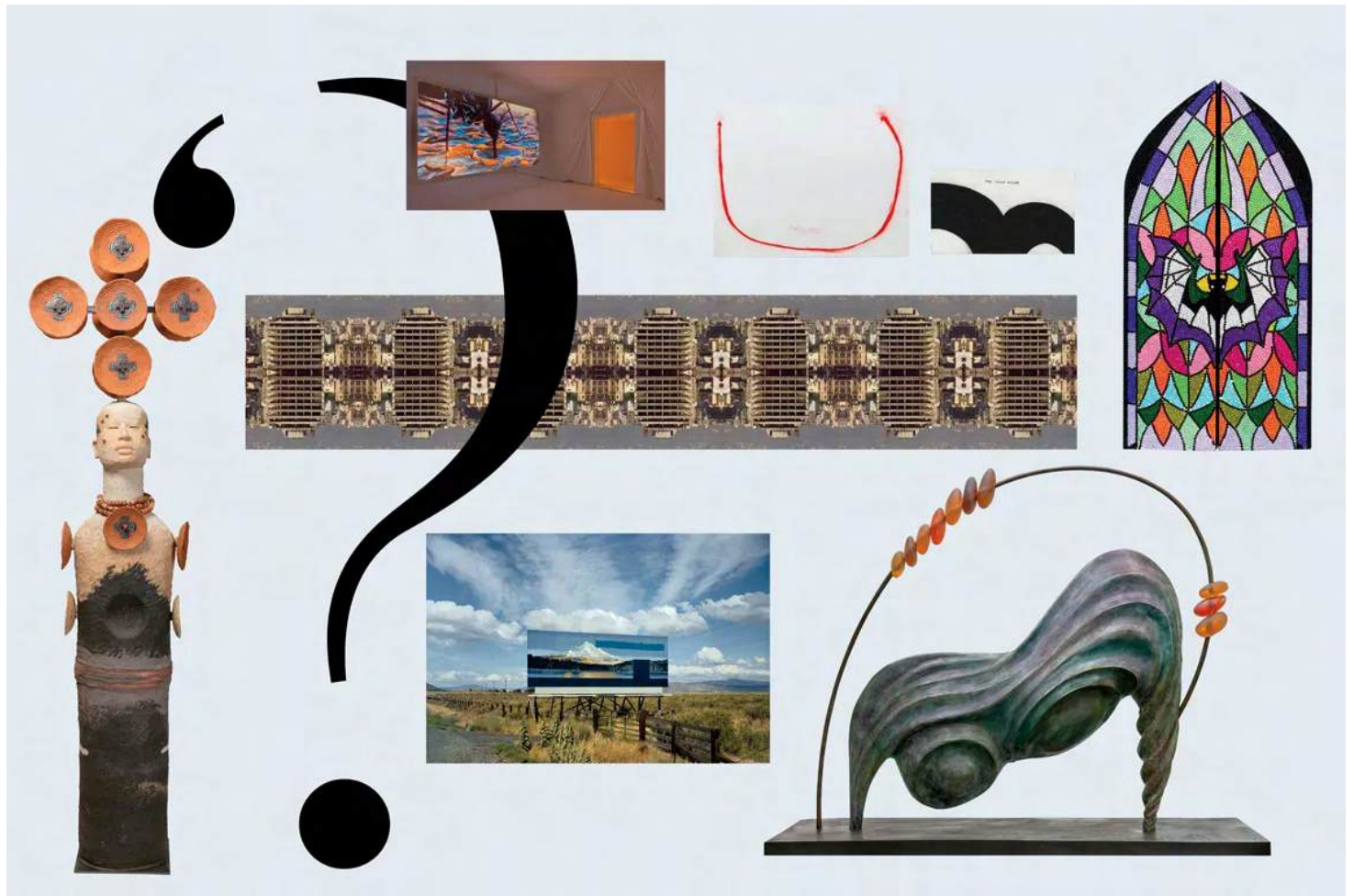
I learned the term “Postcolonial Stress Disorder” in my third year of undergrad at IAIA. I was sitting in a small, theater-style classroom with a projection of a first-phase Ute-style Navajo Chief wearing a blanket — the legendary Native art history professor Stephen Fadden (Mohawk) addressing the class slowly, letting the words sink in, catching our eyes, one by one. In the pauses between Fadden’s words, we were putting our own histories into context. We were nipping the edges of each of our stories. The spaces between our student souls in that dark room, filled with memories and histories, and our very own communal futures, all held in those pauses between us; there was, and is, absolutely nothing else like it.

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## What Is Art Good For?

By *Emily Watlington*

July 8, 2025 5:00am



Graphic By Daniela Hritcu

All artists have wrestled with the question of why they make art. The endeavor can sometimes feel impotent or indulgent, or perhaps motivated by compulsion alone. Yet here we are, continuing a tradition that has spanned the entirety of human history. My ears always perk up when an artist offers or even implies an answer to art's purpose, with their words or with their work, so I posed the question to seven artists with evident opinions. Some responded with words to live by; others turned the prompt into a creative or conceptual challenge—as artists are wont to do. (Still others not included declined to answer, emailing simply, “I don’t know.”) The responses below range, as might be expected, from cynical to sincere, with some managing neat answers and others leaning into the open-endedness that the question—and that art—engenders. —*As told to Emily Watlington*





Rose B. Simpson: *Two Selves*, 2023.

Photo : Photo Addison Doty. Courtesy the artist, Jessica Silverman, and Jack Shainman Gallery

Pretty much any flight I take from Albuquerque requires a layover. I fly a lot, and always choose window seats, alternating port and starboard sides for each leg. Why? To save my neck. I tend to spend the flight plastered to a window, agape and in awe of the clouds, of the altered and natural skin of our Mother far below. It almost always draws tears.

If I don't switch sides, I've learned I will have neck pain.

Occasionally, I find myself tapping a stranger's shoulder, disrupting their TV show to point frantically at something in that limited oval, maybe an eclipse, an eye-to-eye with a lightning storm, a supreme mountain sunset. Usually they humor me, take a gander, nod, smile, thumbs up, and get back to what they were doing.

Sometimes I wonder about how detachment became the status quo. At what point did we decide to prioritize our comfort above our connection to the world around us? How did we lose the capacity to empathize, to feel on behalf of one another or on behalf of our environment? I am digging within my own humanity—my own capacity to feel—to find the heartbreak this stems from.

OK, so there's that. And then there are those who wake up in the morning and ache, those yearning to reconnect with what was lost ... or maybe with what we have never yet known. From this place, the choice becomes to investigate Creation through the creative process, or to perish. For some, without the privilege of access, there is no choice. So much art caters to the intellect, tickles the wit, holds the key to an inside joke. The cost to enter is only \$200,000 in art school debt.

But there is also art that ventures into the magic, driven by a deep desire to know something besides disconnection, to become fluent in the poetry of the supernatural.

Art is about finding our way home to our humanity. We take so many wrong turns, and each one is a teacher.

## Art

### Rose B. Simpson's Soaring Metal Sentinels Watch Over Madison Square Park

The artist explained that the sculptures in *Seed* “transform the nature of a hectic and scary city, in a sense, to a place that’s really safe.”



Elaine Velie April 11, 2024



Rose B. Simpson's *Seed* in Madison Square Park (photo Lauren Weisberg/Hyperallergic)

Santa Clara Pueblo artist **Rose B. Simpson**'s first New York City solo public artwork has arrived in Manhattan. Seven 18-foot-tall figures surround a bronze female form in *Seed*, on view in Madison Square Park through September 22. The installation's weathered steel sentinels are the artist's tallest sculptures yet.

“They transform the nature of a hectic and scary city, in a sense, to a place that’s really safe,” Simpson said at the work’s unveiling today, April 10. She explained that they mimic the energy of the park, a place people go to reconnect with their humanity. “They become these protectors of what they’re looking out for, so that [the inner sculpture] can close her eyes. So she doesn’t have to be worried or *on*.”



*Seed* stands on Madison Square Park's eastern lawn named for American artist Sol Lewitt in front of the historic whitewashed Appellate Division Courthouse of New York State and Sony headquarter buildings, a stark backdrop for the rusty red protectors and their turquoise bronze masks. Simpson first crafted the latter components in clay before casting them in bronze, as she did the central sculpture, which she adorned with a guiding star and raised dots representing sunlight on the woman's skin. The artist's rippling finger marks are still visible on everything transferred to bronze.



The central female form, surrounded by native plants (all following photos by Elaine Velie/*Hyperallergic*)

Simpson is familiar with creating large-scale metalwork, but she was surprised at New York's ability to transform *Seed*'s scale and nature, noting that the cityscape not only dwarfed her installation but made it appear more organic than she had anticipated.

"Sometimes the most powerful things can be incredibly intimate," Simpson told *Hyperallergic*. On the morning of the unveiling, commuters beelined through the park below the towering skyscrapers above. "This space is so full. I feel like even though they're massive to me, they're actually quite delicate and small. This is actually an intimate scale in this place."



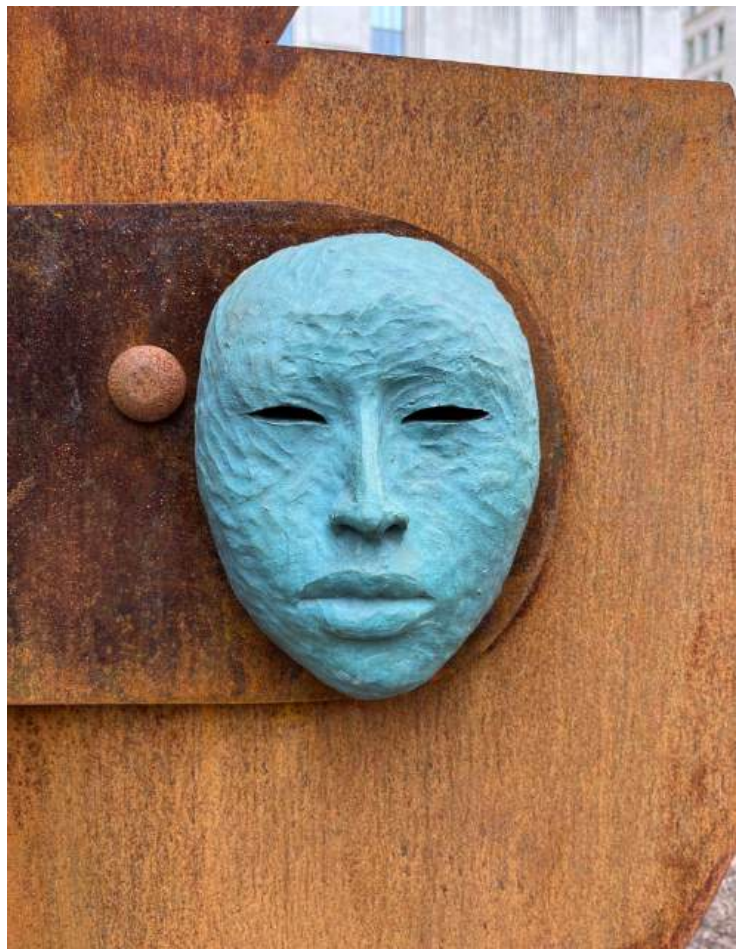


Simpson in front of *Seed*

The seven sentinels are cut from 10 by four-foot steel sheets. Simpson didn't waste an inch; the works could be disassembled and reattached into perfect rectangles, a sort of massive jigsaw puzzle. She punctured the sheets with ovals and angular shapes, forms she attributed to her unconscious replication of the geometrical Pueblo visual language she grew up with.

Chief Curator Brooke Kamin Rapaport of the commissioning Madison Square Park Conservancy explained to *Hyperallergic* that over the next five months, the protectors' weathered steel patina will become more uniform in color, and the columbine, wood mint, wild strawberry, and other native plants surrounding the central form will grow taller and taller. Simpson wanted this effect, which she said will allow the figure to "sink."





Simpson added turquoise bronze masks to her sculptures.

“We all change with life, you know?” Simpson told *Hyperallergic*. “I live in the desert Southwest. My skin and who I am translate the fact that I live in a dry, hot, sunny environment. Our relationship to place transforms the way we live. I think it’ll be really beautiful.”

*Seed* continues in northern Manhattan’s Inwood Hill Park, where two eight-foot-tall bronze sentinels look toward the Hudson River and the woods. Madison Square Park Conservancy worked on Simpson’s project with the **Lenape Center**, which Kamin Rapaport said identified Inwood Hill Park as a meaningful site. According to **legend**, Dutch colonialist **Peter Minuit** “purchased” what is now known as the island of Manhattan from the Lenape people there for just a few beads and other trade goods, marked by a **rock** and accompanying plaque. Simpson’s two sentinels, gazing out onto the nearby river, are planted into the ground a few feet away.



## Rose, Rina, Roxanne And Rose B. Simpson: Four Generations Of Santa Clara Ceramics At Norton Museum Of Art

**Chadd Scott** Contributor

*I cover the intersection of art and travel.*



Mar 21, 2024, 09:08am EDT



Rose B. Simpson with mother Roxanne Swentzell and daughter Cedar touching a sculpture. UNGELBAH DÁVILA

Rose B. Simpson was hoping for a break. A rest from her busy schedule of exhibitions, commissions, gallery shows and installations nationwide.

As one of the most in demand contemporary artists working today, Simpson says “no” more often than “yes”—her gallerists, [Jessica Silverman](#) and [Jack Shainman](#) on her behalf, anyway—but some opportunities remain too good to pass up. Like presenting her work alongside her mother’s, grandmother’s and great-grandmother’s at the Norton Museum of Art in West Palm Beach, FL on view March 23 through September 1, 2024.

“I don’t feel fully understood until I feel like people can see my work in context, and my context is so much community and family,” Simpson (b. 1983) told Forbes.com. “My work

is only one of the words in a sentence that is my matrilineal heritage.”

The preceding word in that sentence comes from Simpson’s mother, [Roxanne Swentzell](#). Swentzell stands as a major figure in contemporary Native American art [in her own right](#).

She’s not surprised by her daughter’s success.

“Rose has always been somebody who’s very naturally talented in anything she does,” Swentzell told Forbes.com. “In elementary school, she was part of an opera performance that was like, ‘Whoa, this girl can sing!’ Then she did flamenco dancing and was asked by professionals to join them because she was that good. She was just good at whatever she put her hands to, her mind to.”

When asked what she received artistically from her mother, Simpson responds with [the freedom to explore the figure](#) in her ceramics. Swentzell’s groundbreaking clay work expanded on customary ways of creating Pueblo pottery by introducing the human body.

How does Swentzell believe she’s most influenced her daughter?

“I nurtured in her that you’re capable of more than you know and to not be afraid of learning, of learning more,” Swentzell said. “I homeschooled my kids; the way I homeschooled them was to take adventures, to explore the world. Try this. Let’s try that. We don’t know how to do this, but let’s try it out. The fear of exploring or going further was diminished because she had that ‘go for it’ mentality. That’s what I wanted to give them—you can do it.”

Do it she has.

Simpson’s revolutionary sculptural works connect the modern with the ancestral addressing themes of the female body, motherhood, gender identity, and the lasting traumas of colonialism. Composed of clay, found objects, and mechanical hardware, they exist beyond the physical realm reaching into the psychological, emotional, social, cultural, spiritual, and intellectual.

Whatever she has become, and wherever her artwork may yet take her, Simpson remains grounded in northern New Mexico’s Santa Clara Pueblo [where she continues to live and work](#).

“She is who she is because of where she came from and she will affect those to come because of where she came from,” Swentzell said. “A lot of the Western world don’t see that perspective, there’s so much focus on individualism. For Pueblo people to stand out as individuals is really uncomfortable and that makes sense to me because we are not alone in this. Because Rose is successful, that means our whole tribe is successful. It’s not just her. She is doing what she is doing because of all the ancestors before her.”

**Mother: Roxanne Swentzell**



Rose B. Simpson with mother Roxanne Swentzell and daughter Cedar. PAMELA SOLARES

Roxanne Swentzell's (b. 1962; Santa Clara Pueblo) ceramic figures created over the last four decades predominantly feature women, sometimes, a mother and child; they express the many emotions of womanhood, including vulnerability and protectiveness.

"I wasn't thinking I'm going to be an artist or I'm an artist, it wasn't one of those moments," Swentzell said of her creative evolution. "You're a little kid, your mom is playing with clay, that stuff looks really cool, I want to touch it, and I started playing with it, just feeling it, mushing it around, tasting it."

Swentzell's beginnings with clay had nothing to do with artistry.

"I had a severe speech impediment as a child; I wasn't able to talk and it was very frustrating for me to communicate," Swentzell explains. "I started to realize that I could make these little things out of clay that would speak for me. It was actually a language for me. I sometimes consider clay my first language because words were not there. I was able to start making these little figurines that would explain to my mother what I wanted her to know. She ended up having boxes and boxes of these clay figures that I would make just to talk to her until I was able to communicate with words."

Swentzell's words in clay would evolve into ceramic figures. A dramatic—and in some quarters unwelcome—departure from "traditional" pottery.

"It was strange. No one had been doing this. I was breaking ground in this area of using figurative clay work," she said. "Some of the tribal people were like, 'What are you doing?' They didn't understand why I was making figures because we make pots. For me, I needed to tell a story and this is how I could do it."



The pushback, which Rose has also received for her even more radically unconventional figures, ties back to the Pueblo ethic of humility.

“It's our life of living within a community, that we're stepping out of line in ways that might be to some people offensive, but it's coming from a good place,” Swentzell said.

“Luckily, I'm able to keep doing the work that I do, and Rose is taking the next leap of that journey, and who knows where it goes for other people.”



Rose B. Simpson (Santa Clara Pueblo, born 1983), 'Genesis,' 2017. Ceramic and mixed media 32 in. ... [+] ADDISON DOTY

## Grandmother: Rina Swentzell

Simpson grew up close with [her grandmother Rina Swentzell](#) (1939-2015; Santa Clara Pueblo).

Rina Swentzell was tough. A battler. Strong. Audacious for her time. An educator who earned a doctorate and an activist on behalf of her community.

“She wasn't scared to argue with old white men,” Simpson said, laughing. “She was incredibly brave and courageous in a world where that wasn't ok. She would question things and say what she thought. I was always impressed, and she was so smart.”

Listening to Simpson talk about her grandmother, it's clear how connected her art making's interrogation of entrenched systems—patriarchy, capitalism, colonialism—and the difficult conversations she raises is to Rina Swentzell.

“She had experienced some really intense hardships with postcolonial stress disorder,” Simpson explains. “She asked questions. Why are things the way they are? She investigated. She challenged those narratives, the common narratives, and she built conversations around why things are the way they are in a really deep and holistic way.”

### **Great-Grandmother: Rose “Gia” Naranjo**

Rina Swentzell and her mother [Rose “Gia” Naranjo’s \(1917–2004; Santa Clara Pueblo\)](#) small, ceramic vases on view at the Norton showcase the traditional Pueblo style of pottery.

Simpson was fortunate to spend much time with her great-grandmother as well. She remembers the two singing together, songs Rose Naranjo taught her.

“She was a survivor. More than a searcher, she was a survivor,” Simpson said. “She was a beautiful person, a very strong woman, and [she was an incredible potter](#). She taught her children how to support themselves and how to have relationship with the clay, to see it as the animate being that the Earth and the clay is and how to relate to it in that way.”

Naranjo had 10 children. She is [the matriarch of a mindboggling artistic dynasty](#) that not only includes great-granddaughter Rose B. Simpson and granddaughter Roxanne Swentzell, but also grandchildren Susan Folwell and [Jody Naranjo](#), children [Michael Naranjo](#), [Nora Naranjo-Morse](#), and Jody Folwell, each one a highly esteemed, awarded and collected ceramicist. And Rina, just to name a few.

The 70-generation legacy in clay won't end with Simpson. She has a 7-year-old daughter.

“I have no doubt she will,” Roxanne Swentzell said when asked if she expects Rose's daughter to carry on the family tradition.

### **Rose B. Simpson Across America**



Rose B. Simpson (Santa Clara Pueblo, born 1983), *Open*, 2022. Ceramic, twine, pearls, and steel 20 ½ ... [+] ADDISON DOTY

In addition to her exhibition at the Norton, Rose B. Simpson had other opportunities come her way this year too good to pass up.

She is creating [nine large-scale bronze and steel sculptures](#) for public display in New York. In Madison Square Park, seven 18-foot-high androgynous sentinel figures will convene around a central sculpture of a young female figure emerging from the earth, standing

guard as her ancestral protectors. Further uptown, Simpson will install two life-size bronze sentinels in Inwood Hill Park, the site where Dutch colonial governor Peter Minuit “purchased” Manhattan Island from the Lenape in 1626.

The sculptures will be on view from April 11 through September 22, 2024.

Also in New York, [she’s been included in the Whitney Biennial](#), the most prestigious presentation of contemporary American art.

For the Cleveland Museum of Art, she’s producing a pair of 25-foot-tall figural sculptures for display in the museum’s atrium. Constructed from her signature clay in addition to metalwork, porous concrete, and cast bronze, the figures’ layers mimic rock eroded through geologic time and the structural materiality of man-made architecture. Intricate welded metal structures mounted to the heads of each figure, intended to cast shadows, mimic the structures of the mind in relationship to time and space.

These will be on view from July 14, 2024, through April 13, 2025.

She has another solo exhibition [coming later this year in San Francisco](#).

What does the artist think of all this attention?

“I just put one foot in front the next, take out my garbage and scrub the floor on my hands and knees and dig ditches and move things with tractors and participate in my community because that’s what matters,” Simpson said. “I’ll keep doing what I do and as long as it is meeting a need for people and people feel moved and feel like it’s helping them heal and grow something inside themselves; I will keep doing what I’m doing if it’s needed.”

It’s needed. On the Pueblo and around the world.

*Follow me on [Twitter](#) or [LinkedIn](#). Check out my [website](#).*



**Chadd Scott**



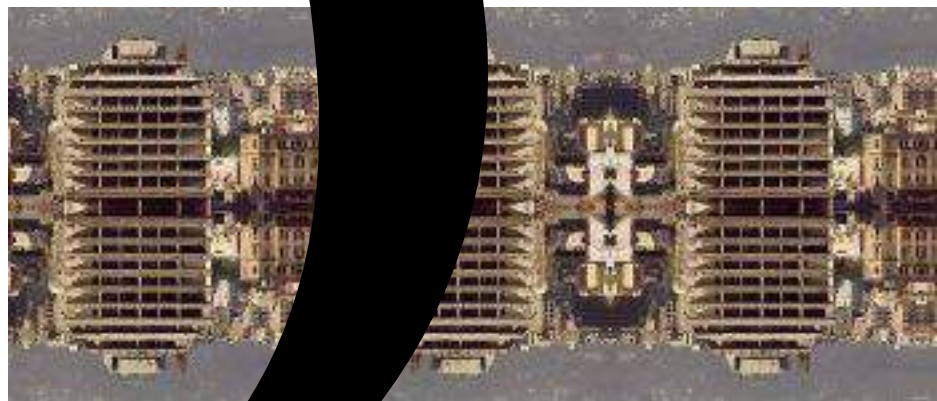
# What Is Art Good For?



Rose B. Simpson:  
*Reception*, 2023.



View of Andrew Norman Wilson's  
exhibition "Hirngespenster (Brain  
Ghosts)" at the Kunstverein  
Braunschweig, 2019.



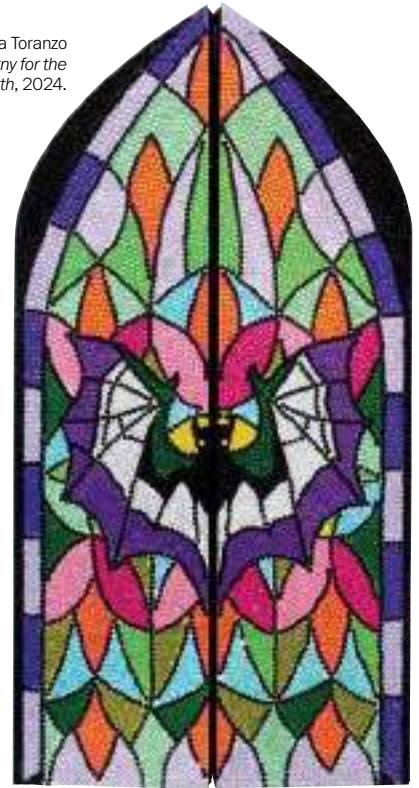
Stephen Shore: *South of Klamath  
Falls, U.S. 97, Oregon, July 21, 1973.*

Simpson: Photo Addison Day/Courtesy Jessica Silverman, San Francisco, and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York;  
Wilson: Courtesy Kunstverein Braunschweig, Shor: Courtesy 303 Gallery, New York ©Stephen Shore



Christine Sun Kim: *All Night*, 2012 (left), and *Too Much Future*, 2016 (right).

Frieda Toranzo  
Jaeger: *Horny for the  
end of earth*, 2024.



Walid Raad: *Sweet Talk: Commissions (Beirut)\_Solidere 1994-97, 2019*.

Seven artists respond to an existential question.

### as told to Emily Watlington

Camille Henrot: 73 /  
37 (*Abacus*), 2024.



All artists have wrestled with the question of why they make art. The endeavor can sometimes feel impotent or indulgent, or perhaps motivated by compulsion alone. Yet here we are, continuing a tradition that has spanned the entirety of human history. My ears always perk up when an artist offers or even implies an answer to art's purpose, with their words or with their work, so I posed the question to seven artists with evident opinions. Some responded with words to live by; others turned the prompt into a creative or conceptual challenge – as artists are wont to do. (Still others not included declined to answer, emailing simply, “I don’t know.”) The responses below range, as might be expected, from cynical to sincere, with some managing neat answers and others leaning into the open-endedness that the question – and that art – engenders.

Kim: Courtesy François Ghebaly Gallery, New York, and WHITE SPACE, Beijing/Courtesy Whitney Museum of American Art, New York/©Christine Sun Kim (2); Jaeger: Courtesy Borolami, New York; Raad: Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York/©Walid Raad; Henrot: Courtesy Hauser & Wirth, New York





Camille Henrot: *Misfits*, 2022.

## Camille Henrot

**I don't think art has any inherent duty;** it's not "good" for anything innately. Recently, though, I went to a talk at MoMA's R&D Salon called "The Age of the Bully." The first speaker was Simon DeDeo, associate professor in Social and Decision Sciences at Carnegie Mellon University. He mentioned that the members of a group best suited to stand up to bullies are those who are highly visible and have access to different communities, classes, and social backgrounds. It got me thinking: That describes artists quite well. Our purpose may lie in being that counterpower – demonstrating alternatives and standing up to governments, institutions, corporations, and so on – to societal bullies.

Artists should also be a counterbalance to trends and conformity. Existing outside the norm is a very precious and important position in society. This is why I'm a bit resistant to the idea that artists should also be community builders – which is not to say we're not involved or politically active. I just think there is value to being slightly outside, on the fringes.

I think too much is expected of art. The injunction that art should heal and redeem seems to me a symptom of late-stage capitalism, an extension of American puritanism. It's an attempt to outsource the responsibility of care and justice to people who are maybe the most willing but are also in very precarious positions. Ultimately, I think art is good for representing and defending a space for complexity, nuance, and exception.

## Rose B. Simpson

**Pretty much any flight I take from Albuquerque requires a layover. I fly a lot,** and always choose window seats, alternating port and starboard sides for each leg. Why? To save my neck. I tend to spend the flight plastered to a window, agape and in awe of the clouds, of the altered and natural skin of our Mother far below. It almost always draws tears.

If I don't switch sides, I've learned I will have neck pain.

Occasionally, I find myself tapping a stranger's shoulder, disrupting their TV show to point frantically at something in that limited oval, maybe an eclipse, an eye-to-eye with a lightning storm, a supreme mountain sunset. Usually they humor me, take a gander, nod, smile, thumbs up, and get back to what they were doing.

Sometimes I wonder about how detachment became the status quo. At what point did we decide to prioritize our comfort above our connection to the world around us? How did we lose the capacity to empathize, to feel on behalf of one another or on behalf of our environment? I am digging within my own humanity – my own capacity to feel – to find the heartbreak this stems from.

OK, so there's that. And then there are those who wake up in the morning and ache, those yearning to reconnect with what was lost ... or maybe with what we have never yet known. From this place, the choice becomes to investigate Creation through the creative process, or to perish. For some, without the privilege of access, there is no choice. So much art caters to the intellect, tickles the wit, holds the key to an inside joke. The cost to enter is only \$200,000 in art school debt.

But there is also art that ventures into the magic, driven by a deep desire to know something besides disconnection, to become fluent in the poetry of the supernatural.

Art is about finding our way home to our humanity. We take so many wrong turns, and each one is a teacher.



Rose B. Simpson: *The Remembering*, 2020.

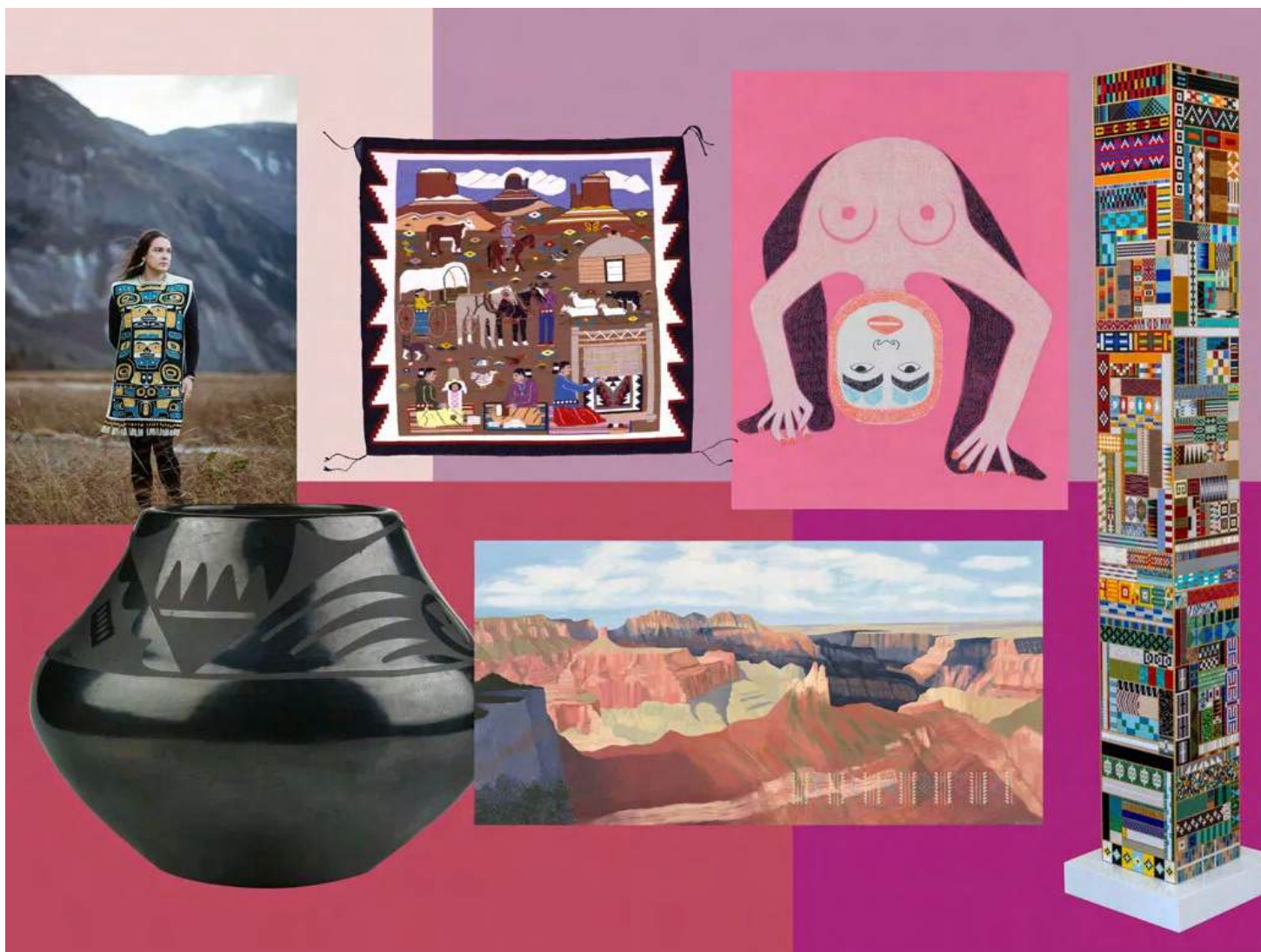
From top: Courtesy Hauser & Wirth, New York; Photo John Wilson White/Courtesy Jessica Silverman, San Francisco, and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

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## 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.

***[Read more of our Women's History Month coverage here.](https://www.artnews.com/p/womens-history-month-march-art/?thumbnail_id=1234735565)***  
***[\(https://www.artnews.com/p/womens-history-month-march-art/?thumbnail\\_id=1234735565\)](https://www.artnews.com/p/womens-history-month-march-art/?thumbnail_id=1234735565)***

## **Rose B. Simpson**



Rose B. Simpson, *Seed*, 2024, installation view, Madison Square Park Conservancy, New York

Photo : Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery. Photo: Elisabeth Bernstein.

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Rose B. Simpson (b. 1983) is a multimedia artist known for her ceramic and metal sculptures, installations, and performance pieces. Her seven **sentinel-like figures** (<https://madisonsquarepark.org/art/exhibitions/rose-b-simpson-seed/>) in Madison Square Park and two in Inwood Park, both in New York, echo the city skyline and invite viewers to self-reflect and consider place and time amidst the frenetic urban landscape.

Born in 1983 in Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexico, Simpson emerged from a matriarchy of ceramicists. Though accepted to Dartmouth, she chose to attend the University of New Mexico to maintain formative ties to the land. She earned MFAs from the Rhode Island School of Design and the Institute of American Indian Arts in ceramics and creative nonfiction and studied pottery in Japan and South Korea. Her work occupies the intersection of red clay pottery and modern technology, pushing the boundaries of Pueblo art.

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Museums & Institutions(<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/museums-and-institutions>)

## Which Artists Dominate U.S. Museums Right Now? We Crunch the Numbers

Based on looking at hundreds of shows in U.S. museums for December 2024.



From left: Hank Willis Thomas, Ming Smith and Simone Leigh. Photo: Makeda Sandford for The Washington Post via Getty Images; Steven Ferdman/Patrick McMullan via Getty Images; Matt Winkelmeyer/Getty Images for LACMA

**Ben Davis** (<https://news.artnet.com/about/ben-davis-93>) December 9, 2024

Back in September, I [looked](https://news.artnet.com/art-world/most-popular-artists-museums-united-states-2537555) at which artists were showing at the most museums simultaneously in the United States. I thought that was useful, so I'm doing it again.

The idea is the same: I looked at more than 200 museums, and counted which artists were on view any time during December (that includes a show like the Baltimore Museum's "Illustrating Agency," which closed December 1). The resulting list includes a little more than 3,400 artist names. Of these, only about 300 appear more than once—a tiny fraction. And of these, a very few repeat multiple times, giving a sense of which voices are most resonating with curators and institutions.



As I said back in September: Because I'm most interested in breadth of influence, I decided not to make any distinctions between bigger and smaller institutions. I rank career retrospectives and surveys highly, followed by special commissions or exhibitions that spotlight a specific body of work, biennial appearances, and then inclusions in thematic group shows.

**Themes:** All the most visible figures are Black and Indigenous. A rhetoric of speaking for and to historically marginalized identities surrounds a lot of the work.

More strikingly, multiple of these figures are nodes in networks of advocacy: Simone Leigh has organized events and conferences, including "[The Loophole of Retreat](https://news.artnet.com/art-world/archives/loophole-of-retreat-venice-simone-leigh-rashida-bumbray-laura-raicovich-2315441) (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/archives/loophole-of-retreat-venice-simone-leigh-rashida-bumbray-laura-raicovich-2315441>)" in Venice, specifically for Black women artists and scholars; Jaune Quick-to-See Smith recently curated the touring show "[The Land Carries Our Ancestors: Contemporary Art by Native Americans](https://www.nga.gov/press/exhibitions/exhibitions-2023/5549.html), (<https://www.nga.gov/press/exhibitions/exhibitions-2023/5549.html>)" which began at the National Gallery of Art.

Hank Willis Thomas has consistently stayed in the [headlines](https://news.artnet.com/art-world/new-book-artist-billboards-for-freedoms-2498159) (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/new-book-artist-billboards-for-freedoms-2498159>) via a progressive artist organization he co-founded, For Freedoms, which organizes billboard campaigns and conferences. Ming Smith emerged from the collective activity of the Kamoinge Workshop, which has itself received museum [attention](https://whitney.org/exhibitions/kamoinge-workshop) (<https://whitney.org/exhibitions/kamoinge-workshop>) in recent years.

**Media:** Jaune Quick-to-See Smith is known for painting (though she makes installations as well). Strikingly, three of the most influential artists emerge from the world of ceramics: Simone Leigh, Virgil Ortiz, and Rose B. Simpson. Back in December, textile art was similarly prominent, via figures like Marie Watt and Suchitra Mattai—though one of September's Museum Artists, Theaster Gates, also got his start in ceramics. A "social craft" upsurge, foregrounding traditional crafts in installations about cultural identity, is a major ongoing theme.

**Crossover:** Finally, it's worth noting that there's quite a bit of overlap in terms of exhibitions. Those that feature more than one of these big names include "By Dawn's Early Light" (about the legacy of the Civil Rights Act, at the Nasher Museum), "For Dear Life" (about illness and disability, at the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego), and "Making Their Mark" (spotlighting women artists, at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive).



## 6. Rose B. Simpson

"It goes back to Indigenous aesthetics," Rose B. Simpson (b. 1983) told (<https://www.joanmitchellfoundation.org/journal/in-the-studio-rose-b-simpson>) the Joan Mitchell Foundation about her philosophy. "There's no separation between art and life and there's no separation between spirit and art and spirituality and religious belief systems. All those things are connected."

Simpson, who hails from a line of ceramicists from Santa Clara Pueblo in New Mexico, has racked up an astounding exhibition history in recent years (including a spot in the Whitney Biennial earlier this year (<https://news.artnet.com/app/news-upload/2024/03/rose-b-simpson-whitney-biennial-1152x1536.jpeg>), which came on the heels of the museum giving her the solo spotlight (<https://whitney.org/exhibitions/rose-simpson-counterculture>) in 2023). Her style is immediately recognizable: She is known for androgynous human figures in clay, their bodies studded with symbolic ornamentation.

For her current special commission in the Cleveland Museum of Art's atrium, she has created some particularly towering figures, clay bodies made to evoke geographic layers, heads adorned with elaborate metalwork headdresses.

### SPOTLIGHTS:

—"Rose B. Simpson: Strata" (<https://www.clevelandart.org/exhibitions/rose-b-simpson-strata>) at the Cleveland Museum of Art, through April 13, 2025

### GROUPS:

—"Illustrating Agency" (<https://artbma.org/exhibition/illustrating-agency>) at the Baltimore Art Museum, through December 1, 2024

—"Infinite Regress: Mystical Abstraction from the Permanent Collection and Beyond" (<https://www.kemperart.org/exhibition/infinite-regress-mystical-abstraction-from-the-permanent-collection-and-beyond>) at the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, Mo., through February 22, 2025

—"Tha Sun Will Set: Contemporary Abstraction and the Body" (<https://www.mfa.org/exhibition/tha-sun-will-set>) at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, through April 6, 2025

—"Making Their Mark: Works from the Shah Garg Collection" (<https://bampfa.org/making-their-mark>) at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, through April 20, 2025

—"That Which Binds Us" (<https://buffaloakg.org/art/exhibitions/which-binds-us>) at the Buffalo AKG Museum, through May 12, 2025

—"Art and Design from 1900 to Now" (<https://risdmuseum.org/exhibitions-events/exhibitions/art-and-design-1900-now>) at the Rhode Island School of Design Museum, Providence, through September 1, 2026



Ben Davis  
National Art Critic

# Three Indigenous Artists on Why Community-Building is Inherent to Their Work

Rose B. Simpson, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, and Jeremy Dennis discuss how their ancestral and physical homes influence their work and why creating a better future requires confronting the past.

BY ARIANA MARSH PUBLISHED: NOV 2, 2023





Every artist's perspective is in some way shaped by the people who have surrounded them and the places they're from. But for sculptor and performance artist Rose B. Simpson, painter, printmaker, sculptor, and collagist Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, and photographer Jeremy Dennis, the idea of home plays an especially urgent role in their work. All three are enrolled Indigenous American tribal members, and their practices don't just honor their individual Native histories, cultures, environments, and traditions, they also seek to ignite conversations about historical oppression and the land theft their communities continue to face.

Both Simpson and Smith have had expansive exhibitions at New York's Whitney Museum of American Art this year, symbolizing what is an encouraging yet long-overdue shift in how institutions are showcasing and giving platforms to art made by Indigenous artists.

A member of New Mexico's Kah'p'oo Owinge tribe, Simpson is best known for her mixed-media sculptures of large-scale beings, which she creates using a traditional hand-coiled method that she learned from her mother, a potter. Five such sculptures, part of a larger work called *Counterculture*, are on view at the Whitney through January 21. Simpson's next show, *Skeena*, opening on November 9 at Jessica Silverman in San Francisco, will debut 10 new beings alongside a hanging wall work.

Smith, a Confederated Salish and Kootenai tribal member, had her first New York retrospective, "Memory Map," at the Whitney this spring, bringing together nearly five decades of her work. Her latest curatorial effort, "The Land Carries Our Ancestors: Contemporary Art by Native Americans," on view through January 15 at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., highlights work by a range of artists who deal with Indigenous knowledge of their natural surroundings.

Dennis is the founder of Ma's House & BIPOC Art Studio, a nonprofit and artist residency located in his childhood home and birthplace on Long Island's Shinnecock Indian Reservation, which provides a space for marginalized artists to create and engage with one another. His cinematic fine-art photographs, which comment on the misrepresentation of Indigenous people in American media, probe subjects such as identity, cultural practice, and the history of forced Native assimilation. Dennis's

ongoing project *On This Site* maps out and documents ancestral lands throughout Long Island.

Simpson, Smith, and Dennis recently connected to discuss how their physical and ancestral homes inform their work, effecting change in the art world, and why community-building is inherent to what they do.

**ROSE B. SIMPSON:** I don't think I really knew how impacted by home I was as an artist. I had to leave my ancestral homelands where I grew up and was born, in northern New Mexico, to realize how important it is to me—that it is not just the people but the place that is family to me. I feel like that lack of consciousness around our beings, our physical and spiritual and social existence, keeps us from identifying and having respect for home.

**“I’m so proud of the place I call home, and I try to  
bring that with me when I leave the reservation.” —  
Jeremy Dennis**

**JEREMY DENNIS:** I'm from Shinnecock, born and raised. Everyone there is related. There are about 600 of us, more or less. As an artist and a tribal member, I'm so proud of the place I get to call home, and I try to bring that with me when I leave the reservation. One way I do that as an artist is by making portraits of some of my relatives. I do interviews. Sometimes they share stories of resilience and pride or conflict and strain on the community. There's so much of our important history that isn't represented in photos or paintings or inscriptions. So, my work is about showing that history is always relevant and that how we're living today is informed by the path that our community has traveled and survived.

**JAUNE QUICK-TO-SEE SMITH:** I am a mixture of Métis-Cree and Salish and am from the northern border of the United States in Montana. I was born at the St. Ignatius Mission on the Flathead Reservation, at a time when one in 10 babies born

there lived. My dad was a horse trader and moved around often; when we were down-and-out broke, we had to go to a reservation. My sister was born at Hoopa, and I lived at Muckleshoot and Nisqually. In Nisqually, we had a one-room cabin that didn't have furniture. There were three families of us in there. We didn't have indoor plumbing or electricity. I remember being sick all the time and always being hungry. That was a normal upbringing for someone my age. I knew early on that white people had different lives than we Indian people. It was so distinct. I'm still riffing off of that in my work and with all my Native friends. My home is with them. It is on the reservation. But I've been living here in New Mexico for quite a few years, and it's like another home. I have family everywhere when I get together with all the Indian artists because they are my family too.





JAUNE QUICK-TO-SEE SMITH

Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, *Indian Madonna Enthroned*, 1974, Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Purchased with funds from the Director's Discretionary Fund, Fabricated by Andy Ambrose

**JD:** One experience that keeps recurring for me, unfortunately—and I’m sure we all share it—is I’ll get invited to do a show during November, Native American Heritage Month, and then it’s quiet the rest of the year. I’m always trying to advocate for Indigenous inclusion. We can participate anytime. It’s so important for our art to be institutionalized. When I think about themes of joy and beauty in Indigenous art, I think they come out of approaching difficult subjects and conflicts in our history. When we talk about these things, it’s a form of healing. The arts, especially, bring together different communities, so when I see work about colonization or suffering, I think it’s a step in moving toward a better future.

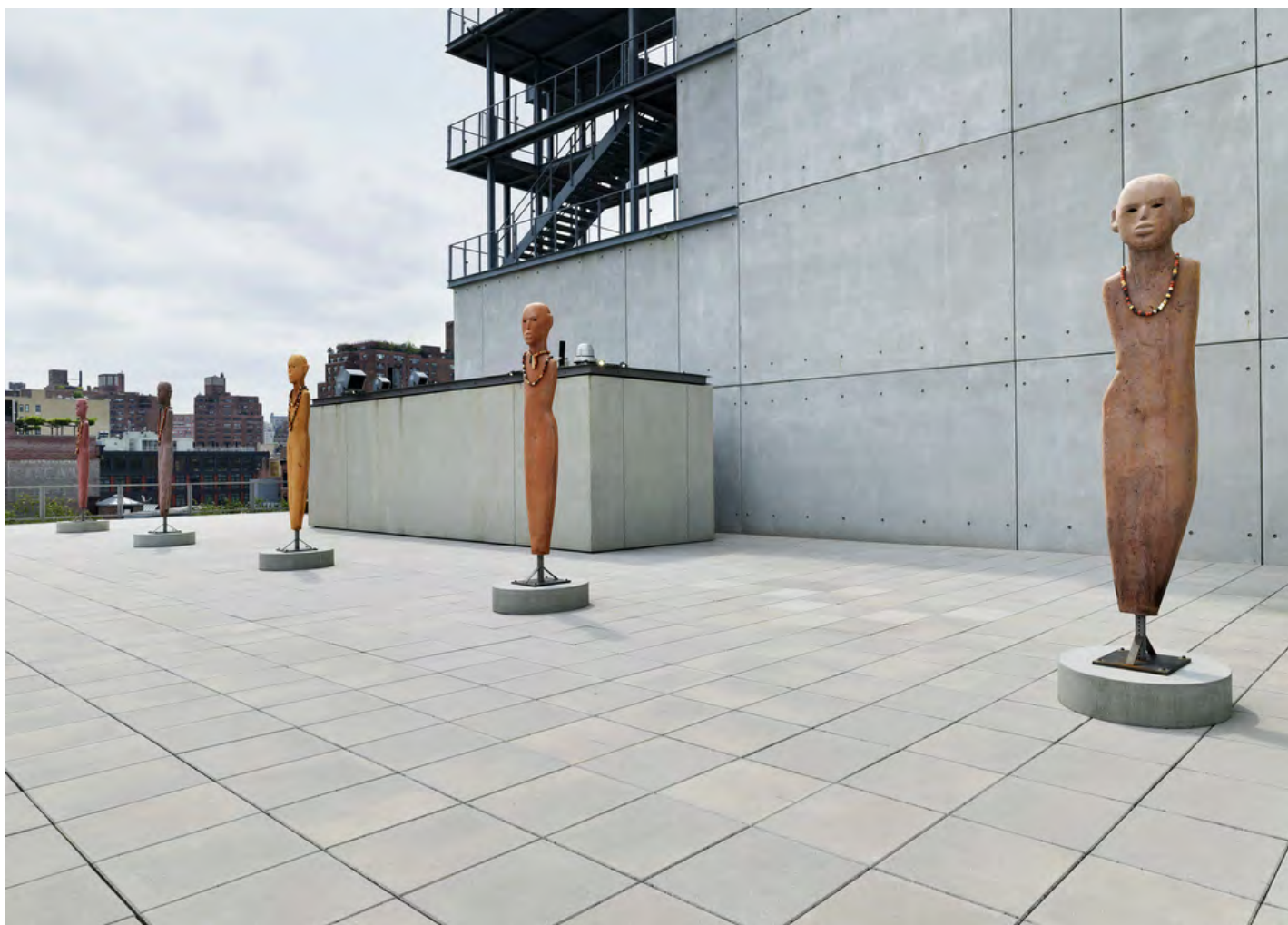
**JS:** In all my 50 years of traveling and lecturing and sharing slides of contemporary art by Native people, George Floyd, Black Lives Matter, and Standing Rock have all changed the scene. All of a sudden, museums and galleries were like, “Oh, we’re not including everybody.” We’ve been saying that for 50 years now! All of a sudden,

though, arts institutions have started giving out fellowships and grants to Native people, and my younger brothers and sisters are all having big, major museum exhibitions. That is so incredible. That never was there for us. Before I curated “The Land Carries Our Ancestors” for the National Gallery of Art, the museum hadn’t had a show on Native art in 30 years. When the Whitney contacted me, I think they were nervous about it. But it actually was a good exhibition; it brought people to the museum, and we got a lot of press, which was shocking to me. I don’t know how long this is going to last, it’s like manna from heaven. But I’m doing it, and I’ll keep doing it if I can get the door cracked so that I can bring my community in with me.

**“We are so dynamic, and we come from so many different stories.” —Rose B. Simpson**

**RS:** I think often about how those artists that came before us really did wedge that door. Someone said to me recently, “The water is rising for us all.” It’s rising, and we’re all floating together. I have the privilege to question whether the institution is the source of all power. Why do we give those colonial institutions the right to say we are someone and what we say is important? The reason that I feel grateful to be included in these exhibitions and spaces is that they reach the people I’m trying to have the conversation with. My work isn’t directed at my community here at Santa Clara; I’m trying to communicate something across a line that hasn’t been open to communication for a really long time. There are all these things—exploitation, stereotyping—that we all have to combat. I’m not Shinnecock, you know what I mean? I am not Salish. I’m a Pueblo person, and I’m from a specific pueblo, and I’m from a specific family. We are so dynamic, and we come from so many different stories. It’s so important to have that full spectrum of Indigenous experience in those spaces.





RON AMSTUTZ

Installation view of “Rose B. Simpson: *Counterculture*” (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, October 4, 2023–January 21, 2024)

**JS:** They stereotype us. I remember when I was going around to all of these galleries and museums, talking about contemporary art by Native people, and they said, “What is that?” And I said, “Well, we are not what you would call traditional. We are not weaving blankets, and we’re not making silver jewelry, but we are making art from our own experience.” That’s the point. We make art from our own experience just like all the white artists do. And there isn’t one style for white artists, but they expect it to be one style for us. Jeremy’s making art and creating Ma’s House and doing all those wonderful things that are community-building. I think each of us in our own way realizes that we have to do some of that, we have to do both things. We tend our work, and then at the same time we reach out to each other and make plans to do stuff together. Part of it is having each other's backs. Part of it is being a support system. Our lives and our work are so fragile because there aren’t millions of us.

“Our lives and our work are so fragile because there aren’t millions of us.”—Jaune Quick-to-See Smith

**RS:** The pieces at the Whitney right now are five from an original series of 12. They are set up outside on the museum’s roof, and they’re called *Counterculture*. The original spot for them was [supposed to be] at Plymouth Rock. What I wanted to say with the pieces was, “You’re being watched.” Most people forget that we’re being watched by things that we deem inanimate. I think one of the main reasons that colonization happened in the way that it did was that colonizers had forgotten they were being held accountable by beings beyond people. I had qualms about putting my work at Plymouth Rock. I felt like I didn’t have the right to speak on behalf of all Native people. The organizers were approached by the Wampanoag community, which said to them, “This isn’t who we want making this work there.” That was a

blessing for me. Who am I, a Pueblo person from New Mexico, having this conversation about an experience that was very much not mine? The work then got installed in Williamstown, Massachusetts, in 2022, where we built some programming around it with the Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican community. It felt really good to move it to where it was wanted. Now the other seven pieces are at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center in Wisconsin. After they were moved, we took some of the clay from where the pieces were originally installed in Williamstown and made beads with the Wisconsin Stockbridge-Munsee community. We sat around and told stories and then fired the beads and made necklaces. That felt like the most important part of the whole exhibit. That piece taught me a lot about how to trust the art itself and where it needs to go.



JEREMY DENNIS

Jeremy Dennis, *untitled* from “Sacredness of Hills,” 2020, Archival Inkjet Print, 30 x 40 in

**JD:** I do landscape photography, portraiture, and staged photography. I have a personal series from 2018 called “Rise,” and it’s all about reoccupying ancestral



lands. It asks, what if Indigenous people never left? What if they'd continued to maintain their footprint and witnessed the transformation of the land, the colonization, the desecration of sacred sites? I also explore home in terms of expansion and abundance rather than being confined to the reservation. That's just one of the unfortunate realities of growing up on a reservation; there are pluses, but at the same time, many tribal members never leave the territory. It becomes a small bubble of where we're supposed to belong. We're supposed to be not only invisible, but also non-existent. I think about what is owed to us and what we can still do to grant us that sense of home. Part of how I do that is through Ma's House, which we started in 2020. It's in an old family home on the Shinnecock reservation that was built in the 1960s by my grandfather, Peter Silva Sr. My mom and her five siblings grew up in it, and I did too, with my older sister. Probably 90 percent of my photography work gets done at residencies, so I wanted to offer that resource and space to other artists. Of course, it opened during a time of racial awakening in the nation, so it became a focus to support BIPOC artists. Since opening, we've had about 30 artists come through. We've had a couple of major exhibits. We've also had weekly workshops by my mother, including a leather-belt-making workshop. As we've been saying, new spaces are very much needed. Jaune, tell us about the show you curated this fall.

**JS:** The National Gallery of Art contacted me to curate a show there through my gallery. For two years, I worked on every committee that they offered, whether it was for the catalog, installation, or design. I had a road map in my head. For one, I wanted to make it about land, because the Land Back movement is front and center right now. I wanted the show to have parity between men and women and ages. There were limitations on the size of the space, so I came up with this idea: At home in Montana, we have checkerboard land. In 1887, the government came to the Flathead Reservation and divided up our land, which had been communal, and gave us allotments, which is not our way of life. Then they took the leftover land, put ads on posters for it in New York City, and invited people to come and farm it for free. So, for the exhibition, I made a checkerboard wall. It was my way of getting almost 50 people in the exhibition instead of 25. That's our secret.

# ROSE B. SIMPSON: Where clay runs deep.

Words Daniel Fuller Photography Kate Orne

Published in No 16 (<https://www.upstatediary.com/buy/>)



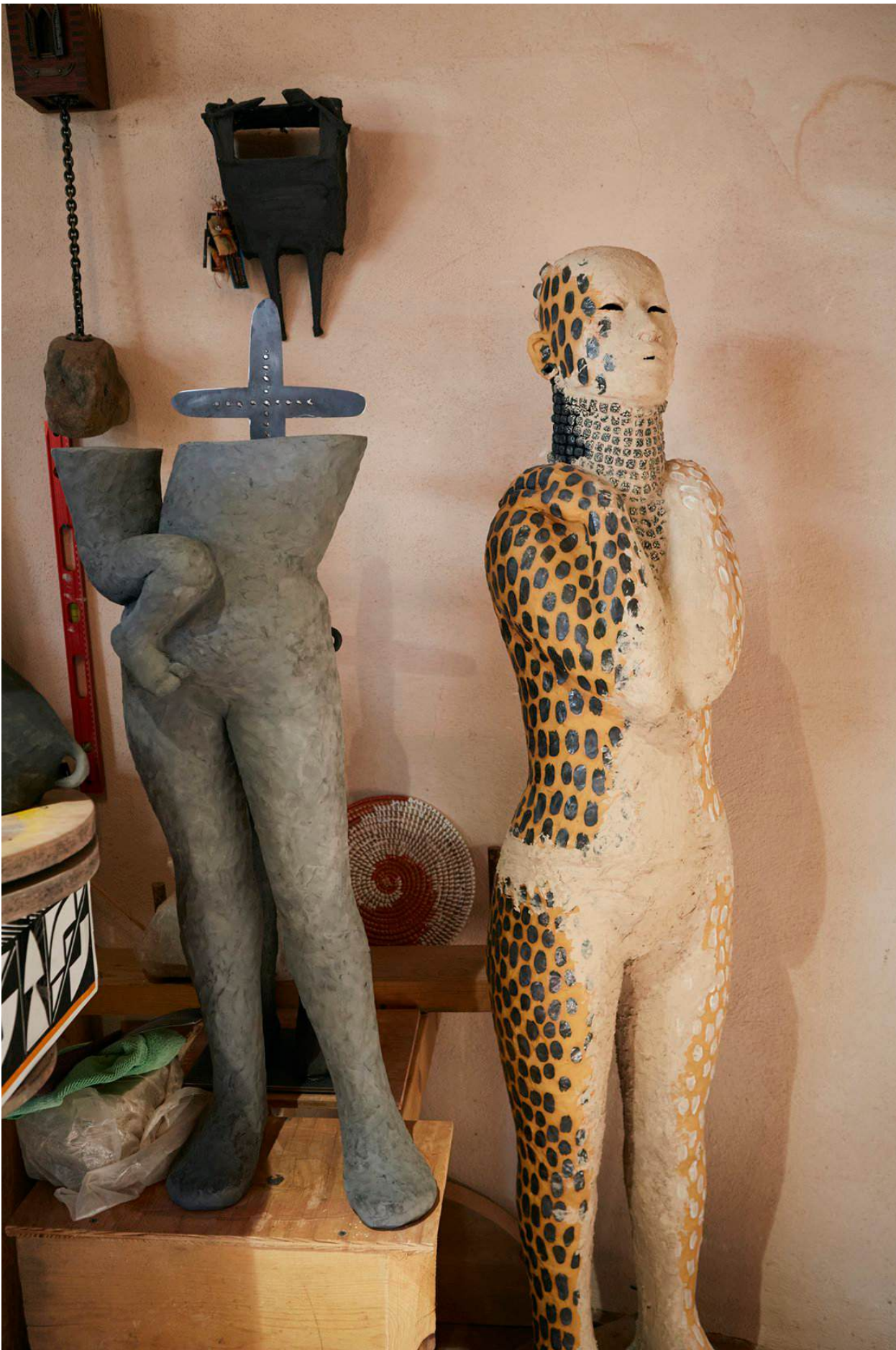
Beneath Simpson's hitech gear, her ancestral line runs deep. Pottery making has been in her family for 700 years.

On the west bank of the Rio Grande, about 25 miles north of Santa Fe, near the mysterious Black Mesa, you will find the Santa Clara Pueblo. Known as “Village of Wild Roses,” it is famous for the distinctive glossy-black over matte-black pottery design pioneered by Maria Martinez. It's here that pottery has been in Rose B. Simpson's family for the past 700 years.

Clay runs deep in her ancestral line. Her late great-grandmother, Rose Naranjo, the matriarch, taught pottery making to all ten of her children. Her late grandmother, Rina Swentzell, was an architect, a potter, and a fierce activist, one of the first people in the Pueblo to get a Ph.D. Her mother, Roxanne Swentzell, is a ceramic sculptor, educator and founder of the Flowering Tree Permaculture Institute. As Simpson and I spoke, I kept thinking of her lineage.

In 2009, Simpson entered the master's degree program in ceramics at the Rhode Island School of Design, in Providence. It was an opportunity to study material, process and technical and conceptual exploration. But there was a disconnect: the school perpetuated the idea of art being separate from life. She described the experience as having “strummed at the rubber band that connected me to home.” Back in the red foothills of the Sangre de Cristo mountains, in the Espanola Valley, clay played a role in all aspects of life. As a young mother, Roxanne Swentzell and her two young children built their family home with adobe. The kids would mix the mud for their mother's brick laying. Clay was the land they farmed. Clay was the dishes they ate off. Clay was where they laid their heads at night. They knew the dirt. It's in their family blood.





Work in progress, *Heights III*, 2023, and *Road Less Traveled*, 2023.

Simpson declined the traditional MFA rite of passage, "After graduating, there was this moment where people were like, 'Let's all move to New York City. See what we can do.' And I was like, 'Nah, I need to go grow some food,'" Simpson returned to the unpaved earth of northern New Mexico to pull weeds and harvest the fields with her mother with a new respect for clay and a new gratefulness for home. Whether true or not, in the 1980s, her town, Española, declared itself the Lowrider Capital of the World. The title stuck.

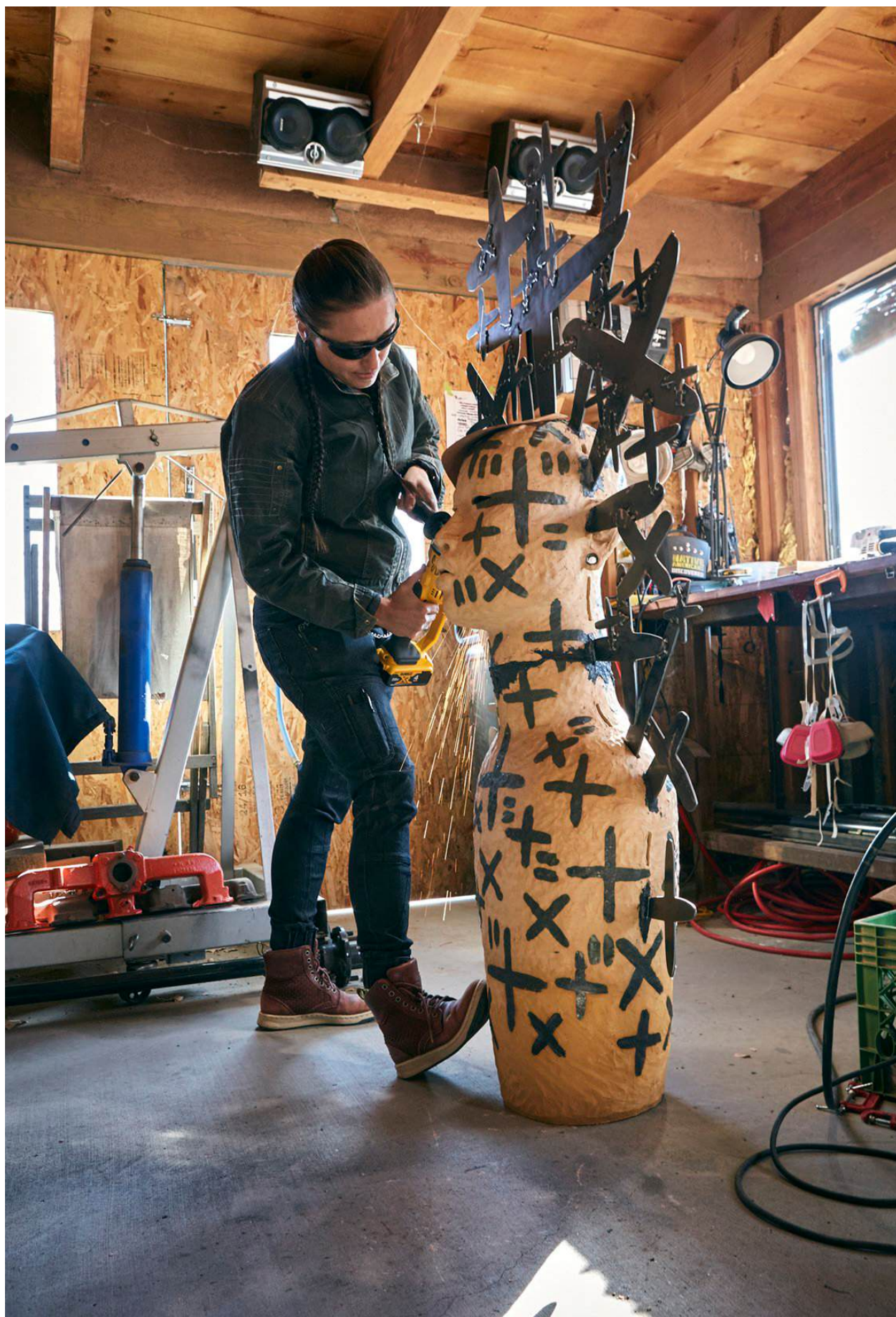
In New Mexico, the Land of Enchantment, Española has complicated energy. It's a poor community in a state with one of the highest poverty rates in the U.S.. Simpson remembered, as a kid, driving through town and passing mobile homes that barely seemed habitable, with plastic over the windows and pit bulls patrolling dusty yards. And yet, parked behind the fences were these cars representing so much more than meets the eye. These modified cars are cornerstones of the community, modes of self-expression, and expressions of faith. They are rolling sculptures, works of art in everyday life. Simpson said, "As long as you can go out and feel a sense of pride, you have something to live for."

Simpson bought her first car at 12 years old. After grad school, her passion for cars inspired her to enroll in an automotive science program at Northern New Mexico College. It was here where she started to work on a 1985 Chevy El Camino that she would later title Maria, named after Maria Martinez.





The 1985 Chevy El Camino that Simpson titled *Maria*, after artist Maria Martinez.





Simpson grinding a new sculpture in her workshop. *Remind*, 2023. It was exhibited in her solo show at Jack Shainman Gallery.

As an artist continuously pushing the limits of ceramic figurative sculptures, Maria is the closest Simpson has come to making traditional pottery. She has a massive engine, and she prefers to go fast, featuring designs created with automotive paint in a satin-black and high gloss geometric design inspired by Tewa community pottery. The patterns mimic the rolling flow of the region's rivers, valleys and mountain ranges. Look at the car from the right angle and the land and landscape reflect in the gloss.

Maria, the El Camino, is a car rooted in Latino cruise culture. She was restored by a woman working in a traditionally male pursuit. She is a pure representation of this remarkable place — an olive branch, an attempt to find common ground. It is ultimately a symbol of strength and survival in the face of the significant complications of history. The Pueblo was first visited when a Conquistador expeditionary force came to the area in 1541. Simpson explained that Northern New Mexico is a "tri-cultural area." Even before the Spanish colonizers, a layer of indigenous colonizers, Athabaskans, modern Navajo, and Apache, were early enemies. Then the American colonizers, pushing west, arrived. They have now all co-existed for centuries — deep, complicated relationships steeped in memories of pain and fear. Maria is an act of empowerment for all disenfranchised people. Simpson describes her commitment to the region: "I don't just represent the tribe; I represent the larger community."

Simpson has continuously inhabited and navigated various worlds. When living in Providence, many cross-country flights were taken for a seat around the Feast Day table. Even now, as her monumental ceramic sculptures are being shown in museums and galleries across the country, she remains in New Mexico. "For Pueblo people, we're place-based. Our ceremonial and spiritual belief systems are place-based, so the prayers, the songs, etcetera, reference actual mountains and physical places here." She is grounded in her spiritual beliefs. Life pulls in many directions, but Simpson is rooted here.



A 1964 Buick Riviera, a future project.





The blue door to her studio.

Pueblo societies have a pervasive aversion to individualistic behavior. There is a continuous reminder that one's work is not solely one's own but a story of the whole community. But Simpson comes from a matrilineal lineage that paved the way towards pushing the boundaries. Artists have been kicked out of the tribe for making art deemed inappropriate. This was necessary after a tumultuous period that included oppression by assimilationists and cultural imperialism by anthropologists and tourists. Pueblo artists used numerous tactics, such as misdirection and masking to make their art, create what they wanted, and control the flow of information to the outside world. But an artist that runs afoul of the tribal council with art that is inconsiderate of the larger community, to this day, can be expelled from the tribe and lose everything they own.

I keep thinking about how art can become an intergenerational voice, rolling down the hill, gaining power, gaining mass as it tumbles. Simpson explained that her great-grandmother Rose (Naranjo) was in Indian boarding schools and, if she antagonized the colonizer too much, her life was in danger. But she pushed. Simpson's grandmother Rina was this brilliant woman who challenged many norms both in and out of the Pueblo community, arguing for the rights of all. In the '80s, her mother Roxanne began making realistic figurative sculptures of Koshares, or Scared Clowns, that went against the custom of keeping these images abstract. It's the push and pull of inching toward a line while still respecting it. Simpson says her culture has created these belief boundaries. Essentially guides that keep one accountable and considerate of the community.



Her studio is a perfect cylinder, at 154 sq feet, taller than it is wide. Every bit of it is in use. Due to the size, Simpson must make her sculptures in parts and then build them outside in the sun. The clay is continuously thrown against a flat surface until it thins, a technique she calls “slap-slab.” She quickly builds up the clay, layer on layer, before it can dry. It's both fragile and immediate: the process demands total commitment. With the impressions of her fingertips, Simpson's presence remains with the works wherever they might travel. The clay records her emotion. I wondered if her russet-colored figures were from clay from northern New Mexico, but they were not. She rarely, if ever, extracts organic matter to be used in her pieces. Her people have already given so much away.



Simpson assembling *Heights III*, 2023.



Her studio is a perfect cylinder at 154 sq ft, taller than wide, every bit is in use.

Many of the works feature a representation of the body. The figures frequently exclude individual characteristics that would distract from their presence. They are stoic. Often leaning or exposing their elongated necks as an act of faith, a willingness to connect. Despite their hollow interiors, seen

primarily through the emptiness of the eyes, the figures are watchful. To commune with them is to fill up that space, to consider your relationship to the gifts offered by the earth. In being a witness of self, we restore sight to all things.

Throughout her exhibition history, the number 12, as in the number of sculptures in a show, has reoccurred numerous times, most recently in Road Less Traveled, her solo exhibition at Jack Shainman Gallery, in New York. The number's significance originates from an old story Simpson heard in Santa Clara Pueblo, which contains many themes and philosophies that have become common in religious, literary, philosophical, and recovery worlds. Be it "the hero's journey" about a character going on an unexpected journey, having their character, faith, strength and skills tested before returning home triumphant or Matias de Stefano's belief that our souls make 12 stops before we are reincarnated. The common thread in each of these stories is faith.

You see the same raw and honest approach in Simpson's work as you do in her social media feed. She often shares moments of shame and vulnerability. When she thinks back to grad school, there was this demand to explain a whole identity, the patterns, the symbolism, the cultural language. It was just as extractive as pulling the clay from the ground. Simpson did not want to lay out her cultural information and call it her art. She desires to be able to share without being made a noun. She is constantly maintaining the chance to be a verb, the opportunity to grow.







Like life, clay is so fragile; it demands you to be present. With so many deadlines and much work to be done, I wondered when there was a sense of peace, a pause, a moment to herself. As it did many times in our conversation, it went back to the empowerment of being behind the wheel. "I've been thinking so much about the idea of throwing a cruise (a key tenant in the lowrider lifestyle, a term for the social activity of driving slow, sometimes aimlessly, sometimes on a predetermined strip). Because they would say, 'Let's go throw a cruise. Are you gonna hit the cruise line?' I keep thinking about now in my busy life and the importance of throwing a cruise. And even if that's wandering off into the hills on foot where you have no destination, you're very present in the moment and have an aesthetic experience. It's applied aesthetics. It's art in the everyday. And a car is a vessel of a spiritual moment. I'm constantly searching for that cruise."

Rose B. Simpson is represented by Jack Shainman Gallery (<https://jackshainman.com>).

Daniel Fuller is a curator and writer based in Atlanta, Georgia. @fuller315

Kate Orne is the founder and editor of UD.

## The Top 50 Exhibitions of 2023

We asked our staff and contributors to look back on a year in art around the world, from major museum shows to unexpected gems in alternative spaces.



Hyperallergic December 28, 2023



Spot some of the artworks in our Top 50 Exhibitions list in Henri Matisse's "The Red Studio" (1911). (Note: The works are not depicted to scale.)  
(edit Valentina Di Liscia/Hyperallergic)

In the midst of a hyper-charged news cycle throughout 2023, we still managed to see a lot of art and celebrate creativity in all its glorious permutations. We asked *Hyperallergic* staff and contributors to send us a list of their favorite art exhibitions and experiences this year and we've compiled this from that call for submissions. The list may be thin on biennials, since we're mostly bored of them (*who isn't?*), but it's heavy on work by artists who continue to drive the conversations that artists, critics, curators, art historians, and the public are eager to have. —

*Hrag Vartanian, Editor-in-Chief and Co-founder*

## 12. *Rose B. Simpson: Road Less Traveled*



Rose B. Simpson, "Remind" (2022), clay, steel, grout, lava beads, 66 x 35 x 15 inches (© Rose B. Simpson; photo courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York)

In her debut New York exhibition, *Rose B. Simpson: Road Less Traveled*, Simpson proved something I suspected when I first saw reproductions of her: She is one of the most needed artists of her generation (she was born in 1983). My admiration has continued to grow in the months since her show because I see that how she lives life and what she makes are not separate. Simpson is an enrolled member and resident of Kha'p'oe Ówîngeh (Santa Clara Pueblo in New Mexico), which is famous for producing blackware and redware pottery. She comes from a family of artists and scientists, who are concerned with sustainable living systems. In order to come into her own, Simpson left the Santa Clara Pueblo and studied flamenco dancing, ceramics, creative writing, and automotive science, among other things. That voraciousness to learn feeds her work. It is out of this cross-pollination of cultures, techniques, chance meetings, and self-determination that Simpson achieves a necessary synthesis of opacity and clarity, mystery and directness. She also resists making her figures culturally specific while committing herself to both telling her story and communicating her ancestral identity. There is nothing universal about Simpson's genderless figures, but they are as necessary as the clay from which they are made. —JY

Jack Shainman Gallery, New York ([jackshainman.com](http://jackshainman.com))

February 23–April 8, 2023

Organized by the gallery





Art

## Rose B. Simpson Harnesses the Power of Community in Life-Sized Clay Sculptures

Sandra Hale Schulman

Nov 20, 2023 5:53AM



The five figures by Rose B. Simpson at the Whitney Museum of American Art are showcased in an outdoor gallery. Cast in concrete, these striking sculptures have hollowed-out eyes that let the light pass through. The statues serve as watchful spirits of the Lenape, the original Indigenous inhabitants of Manhattan. Looking over the city they once ruled, they are stone-faced in silent judgment.

"Counterculture," on view at the Whitney through January 21, 2024, is a series of works that were originally shown at Field Farm in Williamstown, Massachusetts. It's one of multiple outings for the artist this fall season: On the opposite coast of the U.S., she also has a solo show at Jessica Silverman, "Skeena," on view through December 23rd. "Those beings that are standing in the city had a different intent, as they were originally made for Field Farm in Massachusetts," Simpson said, in an interview with Artsy. "I was wondering how well they would do, how they would hold their own in a space like that."



Rose B. Simpson *Daughter 1*, 2023. Photo by Addison Doty. Courtesy of the artist, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco



Portrait of Rose B. Simpson, by Minesh Bacrania. Courtesy of the artist, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco

Simpson grew up in Santa Clara Pueblo, a Tewa tribal community next to the predominantly Latinx town of Española, New Mexico. Over the last few years, she has been fast gaining art world attention, exhibiting at major museums from coast to coast including The Heard Museum in Phoenix and the Hirshhorn in Washington, D.C., as well as at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York.

Simpson comes from a long line of ceramists and even performed in Native American punk rock bands before earning an MFA in art at the Rhode Island School of Design. Her rise in the art world can be attributed to her distinct ceramic and clay work that revolves around the self, rather than focusing solely on broad political, tribal, and social issues relating to Native American identity.





Rose B. Simpson, *Alter-Piece*, 2023. Photo by Philip Maisel. Courtesy of the artist, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco



Rose B. Simpson, *Two Selves*, 2023. Photo by Addison Doty. Courtesy of the artist, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco

“I’ve had work on both sides of the country before, but never simultaneously,” the artist said. The show at Jessica Silverman contains 10 pieces — nine figures and one large wall work entitled *Alter-Piece* (2023), a bas-relief triptych comprising a mask at the center, ceramic shards, and clay sticks. Is it an altar, a battle scene, or, perhaps, a map to the self? The work resists direct explanation, leaving its placement and iconography open to interpretation.

[Skip to Main Content](#) ral work is entitled *Two Selves* (2023) and consists of two figures: one adult-sized, armless figure, with a childlike creature with outstretched hands and kicking legs bound to its

with small, painted talismanic objects. The sculpture, which Simpson sees as part of a dialogue with the wall piece, marks a turning point in her practice. It's the first self-portrait she's made since 2016: "Even though everything I make is a version of myself, this one's a very intentional self-portrait that is reaching for this reflection of itself....The tension in the whole show is between that piece and the wall piece," she said.



Installation view of Rose B. Simpson, "Skeena" at Jessica Silverman, 2023. Photo by Philip Maisel. Courtesy of the artist, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco

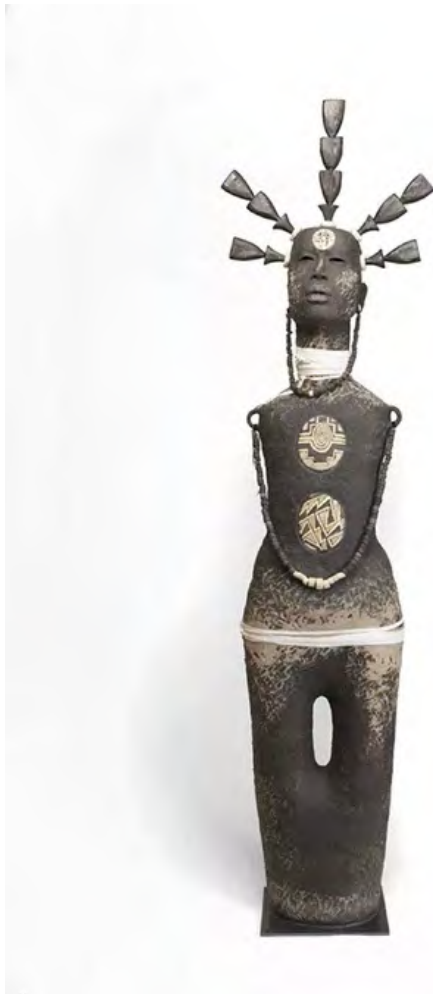
Beyond this dialogue of two works, other figures create a cast of characters, all facing the same direction. Some are created from stacked torsos; others from painted black statues with white stripes

arms made of twine. These sculptures, Simpson explained, represent the community of this central figure: “Her skin, her crew, her squad, her gang, her family, her support system: Her ‘skeena.”

This word, which titles the show, is a Latinx slang term meaning “gang,” Simpson explained: “‘Skeena,’ where I come from, is your crew....It’s the people in your corner, your roll dogs, your squad. The people that would throw down for you.”

The idea has long inspired the artist: “I’ve been excited about this concept for a while, sniffing out where this would come to life,” she said. It was only when she came to Jessica Silverman for support, she said, that she was able to realize the installation fully. “I was happy that she was willing to do a show [of] individual pieces that all create a specific concept. The idea was about how often we forget that we’re not alone in our journey, in our life. We have accountability, but we also have all the support.”





Rose B. Simpson, *Daughter 2*, 2023. Photo by Addison Doty. Courtesy of the artist, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco



Rose B. Simpson, *Reception*, 2023. Photo by Addison Doty. Courtesy of the artist, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco

The placement of figures in the show reflects this approach: All figures face the wall work except for the central figure that represents the artist herself. “I consider that we’re all connected. Every single being, every single thing on this planet,” the artist said. “Whenever I make a piece of art, it’s a piece of me. Even if it’s a portrait of someone else, it’s a moment of my empathic response.” This work, she said, was particularly personal, which meant it was difficult to make. She noted that she was “considering myself very specifically and my fears and all the different emotions that I carry around this journey that I’m on. It was difficult to put that into the work.”

Sponsored

Exhibition Announcement

## Rose B. Simpson: *Counterculture* Opens at the Art Preserve

Watchful figures highlight connections between contemporary lives and the natural landscape at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center in Sheboygan, Wisconsin.



John Michael Kohler Arts Center July 25, 2023



Installation view of Rose B. Simpson's *Counterculture* (2022) at the Art Preserve, 2023; dyed concrete, steel, clay, and cable, 128 x 24 x 11 inches each (courtesy the artist, Jessica Silverman, San Francisco, and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York)

The seven cast-concrete figures comprising Rose B. Simpson's *Counterculture* are intended as witnesses — reminders that the natural world is continuously watching humanity. The work is on view at the Art Preserve in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, through February 25, 2024.

Simpson's sculptures are traveling to different sites across the country. Installed on the grounds of the [Art Preserve](#) at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center, they will observe the Midwest's shift of seasons from summer to fall and into winter.

The feminine-bodied forms aim to show grace in their vigilance and space taking, carrying necklaces made of ceramic beads instead of taking up weapons. Their presence suggests that we, too, should listen and humble ourselves to the natural world, and tune into the ways in which we are responsible for the exploitation of our environment's limited resources.

Simpson descends from an Indigenous American tribe famous for their ceramics made by women since the sixth century. Her work builds on this tradition with new materials and methods. Each dyed and cast concrete figure stands approximately 10 feet tall. Their textured, earth-toned forms pay homage to landscapes near and far. The figures are adorned with cable and ceramic necklaces that Simpson shaped with fireclay from her native lands in New Mexico.

*Counterculture* was created for and originally installed on the ancestral lands of the Stockbridge-Munsee Community Band of Mohican Indians, in present-day Williamstown, Massachusetts. The sculptures' move to Wisconsin traces the path of forced removal experienced by the Stockbridge-Munsee Community, which today is located on their reservation in northeastern Wisconsin, with members also living in other parts of the state, the United States, and the world.

The Art Preserve showcases the **John Michael Kohler Arts Center**'s renowned collection of artist-built environments through immersive installations and curated displays. Admission is free.

**For more information, visit [jmkac.org](https://jmkac.org).**

*Counterculture* is organized by guest curator Jamilee Lacy in partnership with The Trustees and staff at its deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum, Lincoln, Massachusetts, as part of its Art & The Landscape initiative. The Trustees gratefully acknowledge support for Art & the Landscape 2022 from The Wagner Foundation and from the following individual donors: Janet and David Offensend, Valentine Talland and Nagesh K. Mahanthappa, Marjorie and Nick Greville, Chris Rifkin, and an anonymous donor.



CULTURE &gt; ART, BOOKS &amp; MUSIC

# Indigenous Sculptor Rose B. Simpson Makes Otherworldly Beings to Reconfigure Her Neural Pathways

The mixed-media artist discusses her first solo show at New York's Jack Shainman Gallery.

AS TOLD TO [ARIANA MARSH](#) PUBLISHED: MAR 30, 2023



© ROSE B. SIMPSON. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST, JESSICA SILVERMAN, SAN FRANCISCO, AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK. PHOTO: ELISABETH BERNSTEIN.

**I** make pieces that reflect the journey I'm on. They are sculptural beings that look right back at me, and they help me learn about myself. I listen to myself, I listen to the ethers, I listen to the dimensions, and then I turn what I've been told into a being. Sometimes I don't get the message right away, but the process of making something and seeing the process of doing so reflected back at me helps me to transform the way I'm thinking about or navigating the world. Through this exchange with these beings that come through me, I'm building new neural pathways. Hopefully, when they're out in the world, they can help others do the same.

I'm from Santa Clara Pueblo in New Mexico. My mom chose to raise me and my other siblings here, but I'd go to my dad's house every other weekend in Santa Fe. He's white and is also an artist—a sculptor in bronze, wood, and metal. I went to the tribal day school for a little bit, and then I was homeschooled with my brother from fourth to seventh grades. Because of that, I was immersed in her world.

**I listen to myself, I listen to the ethers, I listen to the dimensions, and then I turn what I've been told into a being.**

My mom has a permaculture institute; it's a nonprofit organization that's based on the study and practice of sustainable living systems like our ancestors'. We didn't have electricity. We grew our food. We ate our pets. We were homesteading. I didn't know it wasn't normal in lots of ways.



© ROSE B. SIMPSON. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST, JESSICA SILVERMAN, SAN FRANCISCO, AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK. PHOTO: ELISABETH BERNSTEIN.

Installation view, Rose B. Simpson, "Road Less Traveled," 2023. Jack Shainman Gallery, 513 W. 20th St., New York, New York.

My mom was also a contemporary artist within our community; she was a potter, but she also made sculptures using the traditional coil method. It's how we hand-build pottery, but she made people instead. She supported our family off her artwork. She would take her pieces to the Santa Fe Indian Market, and sell them and make the money for the year, which wasn't much. This created a neural pathway in my head that you can support your family off your art, like everybody does here.

Originally, I didn't want to work in clay. Then I went to the University of New Mexico, where I studied printmaking, and I took a ceramics course for an easy credit. I was like, "Wait a minute, I got this." I was really interested in youth culture in the late '90s, early 2000s. My passion was drawing the vibe that I was in and around, which involved things like hip-hop and graffiti. I was in a bunch of bands. I was in a hip-hop



group. And later, I began skateboarding and singing in an experimental punk band. I started thinking, Oh, I could make these characters that I draw.



© ROSE B. SIMPSON. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST, JESSICA SILVERMAN, SAN FRANCISCO, AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK. PHOTO: ELISABETH BERNSTEIN.

Installation view, Rose B. Simpson, "Road Less Traveled," 2023. Jack Shainman Gallery, 513 W. 20th St., New York, New York.

I started experimenting with, "What is my own personal experience of being a modern native in youth culture? What does that look like as someone who has a foot in numerous worlds and cares a lot about them?" Craft is a very spiritual process; clay is a super-receptive material. It knows when you're unhappy, it knows when you're happy, and then it reacts to your emotional state. I think I returned to clay, because it helped me be more self-aware.

I went to the Rhode Island School of Design for graduate school. When I got there, I started challenging the process of creating itself. I devised this methodology that I call slap slab. I throw the clay sideways until it's super thin, and then I build with it, layering pieces onto one another [for a shingled effect]. That forces you to be okay with the process itself. You can't go back and fix it or change it, because the walls are super, super thin. I also think about also the environmental impact of art making and how many resources we use. I try to make minimal waste. With slap-slab pieces, there's very little. But you have to be compassionate with what the piece creates itself to be, rather than have this idea of what perfect looks like and want it to fit that mold.

## Craft is a very spiritual process; clay is a super-receptive material.

Much of my work back then was focused on this idea of a warrior and experimented with transforming what it could look like. My pieces had a lot of things tied onto them; they were empowered objects in lots of ways.

Because the slap slab is fragile, I coil-build most of my work, especially the big pieces. The technique comes easy to me, because I watched my mom do it over and over and over again. I think that that was a gift. I often think about our ancestral relationship to clay and the fact that it's embedded in our DNA.

I became a mom six years ago, and it changed my practice profoundly. After I gave birth, my pieces became softer and more feminine; I found power in bringing a life into the world. The patience and dedication necessary of a mother showed me what power, strength, fortitude, and grace really look like.



© ROSE B. SIMPSON. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST, JESSICA SILVERMAN, SAN FRANCISCO, AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK. PHOTO: ELISABETH BERNSTEIN.



Installation view, Rose B. Simpson, "Road Less Traveled," 2023. Jack Shainman Gallery, 513 W. 20th St., New York, New York.

While I was navigating creating for my show, "Road Less Traveled," currently on view at Jack Shainman Gallery, I was allowing myself to look for an alternative to the major neural pathways that I have developed through my life. I realized that the judgments I've held around the concept of courage, for example, have been that it's confrontational, a denial of fear. What I've realized is that courage can sometimes look like vulnerability and humility in moments where we want to be in control. Wow, I can stay in my vulnerability and in my truth even in a scary situation? That's brave.

After I gave birth, my pieces became softer and more feminine; I found power in bringing a life into the world.

There's one piece in the show that's called *Conjured Two*, and it's a head that's sitting on a piece of wood with a cloud of ceramic rings on its forehead. It's about the ability to dream something, and then make it a reality. Specifically, *Conjure Two* is about a new studio I'm building, which is really a dream come true. The base is made from some of the pine scraps from the building process. It's very much an acknowledgement of the fact that something I really wanted is happening.



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Installation view, Rose B. Simpson, "Road Less Traveled," 2023. Jack Shainman Gallery, 513 W. 20th St., New York, New York.

Another piece in the show that I think is really cool is *Release*. It's the tallest piece in the show. It was initially going to be three and a half or four feet, but when I started building it, it ended up getting taller and taller and taller. The idea behind it is about releasing all the thoughts and judgments we hold and allowing something new in. The piece has a necklace for arms and it's clasping at the ground, so it's in a very calm and graceful moment of being.

I don't use glaze on any of my work; the color of the clay is important to me because it's grounding. The markings I use all represent something, whether it's the plus sign, which is the star for guidance; the X, which is for protection; or animal tracks, which represent the path we're on.

I always think that when I cut the eye slits out of the  
clay, [the beings] wake up.

I used to tie a lot of found objects onto my pieces; I have these collections of rusting metal washers and things. I've been making a lot of necklaces with found materials like stone, bone, glass, lava, wood, and leather. I really like the energy that they carry, because they reference our relationship with the natural world. More recently, I've been leaving them out and simplifying things, but I still use car parts often, because cars are important to me—I have a car shop—and they're also vessels.

I am the conduit for this work to be in the world. I always think that when I cut the eye slits out of the clay, they wake up. Sometimes it's really a powerful moment. I say, "Wow, hello, hello." I meet them for the first time, and I wonder what their journey will be. I have to trust that where they go is where they need to do work, because they are in control of their own existence. Where they go is where they wanted to go. There's a sense of faith, I think.



ARIANA MARSH

Senior Features Editor

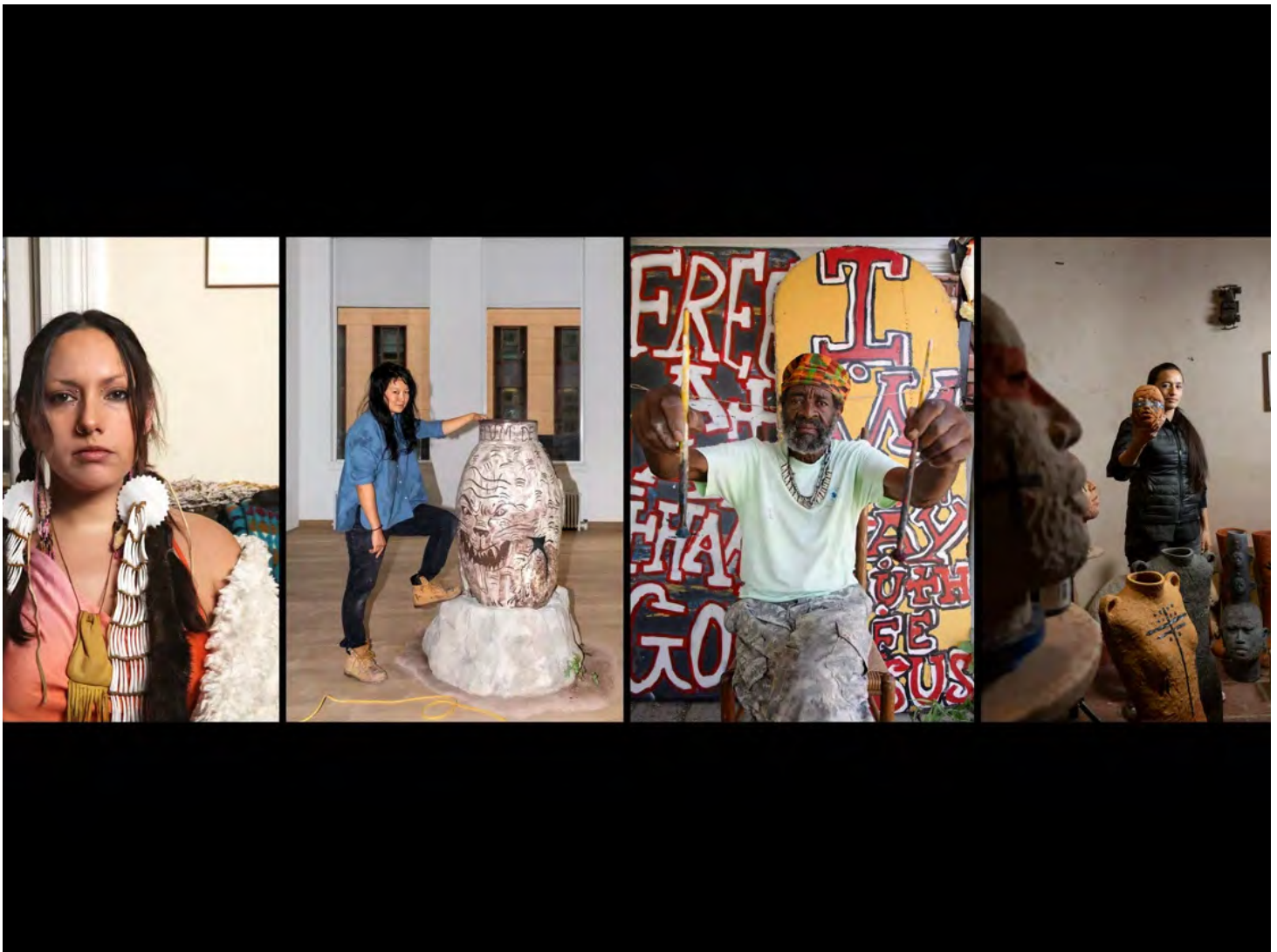
Ariana Marsh is *Harper Bazaar's* senior features editor. Working across print and digital, she covers the arts, culture, fashion, literature, and entertainment—and a bit of everything in between.



## Ruth Foundation for the Arts Announces New \$100,000 Artist Awards

BY **MAXIMILIANO DURÓN**

February 1, 2024 12:23pm



The inaugural Ruth Awards recipients (from left): Kite, Candice Lin, Joe Minter, and Rose B. Simpson.

COURTESY RUTH FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS

The Milwaukee-based **Ruth Foundation for the Arts** (<https://www.artnews.com/t/ruth-foundation-for-the-arts/>) has launched a new artist prize, called the Ruth Awards, which

will go to four artists based in North America each year. The award's inaugural are **Kite** (<https://www.artnews.com/t/kite/>), **Candice Lin** (<https://www.artnews.com/t/candice-lin/>), **Joe Minter** (<https://www.artnews.com/t/joe-minter/>), and **Rose B. Simpson** (<https://www.artnews.com/t/rose-b-simpson/>), who will each receive \$100,000 of unrestricted funds.

Ruth Arts **launched in 2022** (<https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/ruth-foundation-2022-inaugural-grants-1234633069/>) with a \$440 million endowment from the late patron Ruth DeYoung Kohler II and a goal to dole out \$20 million annually. One of its hallmark programs is the Artist Choice grant, which goes to arts nonprofits of various sizes across the country, and each organization is nominated by an artist. The Ruth Awards were not initially planned as part of the foundation's grantmaking but grew organically out of its work over the past two years.

"It is a full circle moment," Karen Patterson, the organization's executive director, told *ARTnews*. "We guide all our grant programs through artists, so it felt appropriate and exciting to provide no-strings-attached funds to artists. ... We wanted to make sure that that amount would have an impact to their lives."

Kite (aka Suzanne Kite) is an Oglála Lakḥóta artist, academic, and composer who is best-known for works that use machine learning and AI to engage Lakḥóta mythologies and knowledge. She will also be featured in this year's Whitney Biennial in the film program.

Lin is a multidisciplinary artist known for creating large-scale installations that look at the histories of colonization. Her work is frequently displayed in different biennials, including the 2023 and 2021 Gwangju Biennales, the 2022 Venice Biennale, Prospect.5 in 2021, and the 2018 Made in L.A. biennial.

Minter is an artist and cultural historian who is best-known for his sprawling didactic artwork *African Village*, which he created on the land adjacent to his home in Birmingham. His work has been collected by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum, the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, the Smithsonian American Art Museum, and the Minneapolis Museum of Art, among others, and was included in the 2023 exhibition "Souls Grown Deep like the Rivers: Black Artists from the American South" at the Royal Academy of Art in London.

Simpson is a mixed-media artist who is based in Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexico, and is known for sculptures that filter Indigenous and matrilinear themes into organic clay forms. Her traveling survey, "Counterculture," is currently on view at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center in Sheboygan, Wisconsin.

“There is an endless amount of imagination with these artists,” she said. “Their work has an exponential quality to it. With an award that is unrestricted to artists who have an exponential way of thinking, it’s just exciting and an honor to see where they go and what how we can support them.”

Patterson also said in creating the Ruth Awards, the foundation wanted to add something to the crowded field of artist awards. In selecting these four artists, whom she said make work that is “bold and sensitive at the same time,” the organization wanted to look at artists who think beyond the finished art object and instead focus on their process. They also wanted to highlight interdisciplinary practices, or more specifically “artists who are adept at applying their imagination to a variety of materials,” she said. “We also wanted to acknowledge the fullness of an artist’s practice.” (Though there are no specific age requirements for winning the prize, the artists were selected in recognition of their existing body of work.)

Patterson continued, “We did want to honor Ruth’s vision of artists, too, which was that artists bring about structural change if you include them in the process. We did ask that of our nominators to think about what type of change the artists are influencing in the world that we see.”

The winning artists were nominated by a group of 12 curators: Dan Byers at the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts in Cambridge, Massachusetts; Ryan N. Dennis at Contemporary Arts

Museum Houston; Adrienne Edwards at the Whitney Museum in New York; Lauren Haynes at the Queens Museum; Katherine Jentleson at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta; Bana Kattan, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; Wanda Nanibush, an independent curator who **most recently worked** (<https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/wanda-nanibush-indigenous-art-curator-art-gallery-of-ontario-1234687592/>) at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto; Sara Raza, an independent Curator; Reuben Roqueñi at Portland Institute of Contemporary Art in Maine; Victoria Sung at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive; Gaëtane Verna at the Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus; and Angelik Vizcarrondo-Laboy, an independent curator and writer.

“We thought about how special that relationship is between a curator and an artist,” Patterson said. “We really thought carefully about curators who’ve gained a reputation with their exhibition-making—being thoughtful and thought provoking—but also who take a relational approach to their curatorial process. We wanted that to come through.”

By way of example, Patterson pointed to “A Movement in Every Direction: Legacies of the Great Migration,” which Dennis co-curated and **has been traveling the country**



[\(https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/legacies-of-the-great-migration-exhibition-preview-1234623533/\)](https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/legacies-of-the-great-migration-exhibition-preview-1234623533/) since it debuted at Mississippi Museum of Art and is currently on view at California African American Museum in Los Angeles. “Thematic exhibitions can be very difficult to pull off,” Patterson said. “They take a lot of research but also a lot of intuition—how works speak to each other. I think Ryan’s exhibition demonstrates that.”

Each curator could nominate up to two artists, and the foundation wanted to make the nomination process easy, with prompts that could easily elicit a response about the curators’ relationship with their selected artists. Those questions, Patterson said, were along the lines of “How does this artist’s character contribute to an understanding of their work?” and “What does it feel like to see that artist across the room at an event?”

Reflecting on how important hearing from artists has been to Ruth Arts’s past two grant cycles, Patterson said the foundation wanted to find a way to give back and support artists anew.

“We always believed that in supporting artists, you’re supporting structural change,” she said. “That can feel very vast and vague and, in some ways, unplaceable, but when we placed artists at the decision-making table for Artist Choice, it changed how we work [and] how we were support organizations.”

She added, “The artists have given us so much in this, and now it’s our chance to say thank you.”



## DOCUMENT

Above The Fold

# With 'Road Less Traveled,' Rose B. Simpson diaries the tension between ancestry and modern culture

Read time **11 minutes**



Installation view, Rose B. Simpson, 'Road Less Traveled,' 2023. Jack Shainman Gallery, 518 W 20th Street, New York, NY © Rose B. Simpson. Courtesy of the artist, Jessica Silverman, San Francisco, and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. Photo: Elizabeth Barnstein.

The artist's New York debut is on view at Jack Shainman Gallery, rendering tangible her relationship with Native identity and cycles of personal struggle

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Text by Monet Wolfe

In the numbered streets of the Chelsea district, buried amongst other galleries, one exhibition sticks out from the rest. The condensed layout of the space at Jack Shainman offers an extra layer of closeness to the already intimate works of Rose B. Simpson's solo debut in New York City, named *Road Less Traveled*.

The title of the exhibition refers to the mental process of creating the curated works. The tension between a culture that centers ancestral memory and a modern society that looks to build over it manifests in Simpson's patterned clay sculptures. The show opens with a piece dubbed *Conjure II*. A large head tilts back on a slab of pine, looking up at a cluster of large white clay rings—a rendering of the hopes and dreams born from challenges overcome in the artist's lifetime. A few of the figures' faces are vague, as well as their bodies, fostering relatability for viewers.

The exhibition's titular piece takes on a more feminine form; it's a full-bodied vessel, resting its hands on its shoulders, arms uncrossed. Its body language appears weighted—by inner turmoil or mere exhaustion. The figure *is* Simpson, depicted in a moment of frustration, as she finds herself pulled between her own beliefs, and those of the people she's surrounded by. A subtle white brush stroke from the sternum down is a reminder: In order to adhere to her spirit, she must pave a path for *herself*.

As viewers follow the course of the show, more figures emerge. Each is distinct in style and shape, reinstating the idea that they are vessels for Simpson's metaphysical desires. Some of them stand at over six feet tall, conveying a sense of empowerment. In a closed-off room, the walkthrough concludes with two figures—*Star Being A* and *Star Being B*—facing towards each other, in conversation.

Simpson's subjects are complex; she uses them to grapple with identity, culture, and cycles of struggle, on both a personal and global scale. Not every sculpture is explained, yet the narratives behind them emerge abstractly, as she meticulously weaves intersectional themes together with the codes of contemporary art. Amid the impersonal tendencies brought on by technology today, Simpson uses the tangible to express emotions we so readily shove away.



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Born and raised in Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexico, Simpson hails from a long line of artists and ceramicists, including her mother, the sculptor Roxanne Swentzell, who similarly uses clay as catharsis. This heritage wasn't simply handed down to Simpson, rather acting as a resource in her multidimensional work.

Simpson joined Document ahead of *Road Less Traveled's* opening to explore motifs of hope and the inspirations that continue to steer her, as she speaks from the driver's seat of her car under the New Mexican sun.

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Left: *Vital Organ: Heart*, 2022 clay, twine, grout. 90 3/4 inches. Right: *Conjure II*, 2022 clay, grout, indigenous New Mexico pine from new studio build. 28 x 12 x 14 inches.

Monet Wolfe: I know this is not your first solo exhibition, but it's your first in New York. What has that experience been like?

Rose B. Simpson: It was good. I got sick, and then I was trying to get over it, but I wasn't getting over it. I was on DayQuil, so it was a trudge—but it *feels* like a big deal and I *know* it's a big deal. I actually think that being sick was a blessing in disguise. You're just trying to get through the day. You just show up and do it.

Monet: Artistry is present in your family's lineage. Did you feel pressure to become an artist?

Rose: I wanted to fly bomber planes [and] join the Air Force, so I took the ASVAB in high school and got good scores. The Air Force called and my mom hung up on them. Boy, I got an earful. My mom was like, 'You just want to play with their toys, but you're going to have to kill people and you're not that person.' So I was like, *What do I do if I don't do that?*

I just started looking for other forms of adrenaline. I started painting trains, [with] spray paint. I was at UNM in Albuquerque. That's where I was knucklehead-ing out, and I decided to take a ceramics course, because I grew up using clay. I took the class, and realized I could make my graffiti characters in clay. That was an *aha* moment. The only pressure, maybe, was that that's what my family does, so I kind of wanted to *not*. I wanted to be different and do something else.

Also, within the Native art world, there's a limited amount of support. A lot of people in the pueblo are selling work to the same galleries and the same dealers and the same collectors. So, there's a little bit of competition. If there's pressure, it's because we're all trying to make money off the same people, and that makes it weird. And there's a little bit of competition in the family—we don't talk about art with each other.

Monet: At the end of the day, it's *work*, right?

Rose: Yeah, it's work. At this point, I'm not in the same circles as a lot of other people in my tribe, so that's nice. But my mom is always doing art stuff, my brother has his PhD in Pueblo Indian

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Studies and he's a tribal council member. We don't tell each other [when we are doing openings and lectures], because we don't want to make each other go. Why would you force people in your family to go to the thing they all do for a living?

Monet: Your sculptures are very intimate. Do you see them as sort of journal entries?

"With my work, I explore ways to make it as inclusive as possible. It's not [so] abstract, and it's not super culturally specific. *How can you make something that can actually reach people—no matter where they come from?*"

Rose: Totally. It's *super* personal and that's so strange. I studied art for a long time and I understand the value of intense critique. The one good thing about art school is when you sit and stare at something that you wouldn't have normally stared at for that long. Being forced to look at it longer than you would have otherwise, you build the capacity to see things more deeply, consider further, and witness deeper.

A really good skill to have is a really deep sense of consideration. When I was studying art, I was thinking about my own reactions to art: what works for me, what doesn't. I had a lot of respect for high craft, for instance, photorealistic painting. You have respect for it, and value it for what it is—but it's hard to access. It's hard to find an empathic response because it's so specific. Things like Donald Judd, where it's super abstract and you need an entire art history degree to understand what's going on, that's *incredibly* inaccessible.

I'm affected by when work is *othered*: objectification and stereotyping and exotification as another sense of exclusivity. With my work, I explore ways to make it as inclusive as possible. It's not [so] abstract, and it's not super culturally specific. *How can you make something that can actually reach people—no matter where they come from?* I'm not saying that I succeed all the time, but looking at myself and trying to erase the boxes that I put myself in helps me recreate something that is still incredibly vulnerable, truthful, and inclusive.

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Monet: Do you have any specific contemporary artists you look up to?

Rose: I'm a big art fan. When I first discovered Wangechi Mutu's work, I was just like, *Aghhh! I'm so glad that you're doing this. You're doing this so I don't have to.* It was this incredible relief. She can be brave in ways that I can't. I love to see her work, or hear her processes, because it's absolutely enthralling to me.

I'm a big fan of my contemporary Dyani White Hawk. Her paintings are so different from mine—the process is careful and meditative. It feels really comforting, because I'm always navigating complicated emotional processes and spaces. Her work is brilliant. It's still contemporary and also abstract, but because of the way that she does it, it roots back into craft and mannerisms. For me, it's not *what* you do, it's how you do it and how you approach it. The nature of her approach becomes medicinal.

Monet: Do you try to emulate it?

Rose: Not necessarily. I think that it's something that helps me. I'm all, *You do that, so that I can make the mess that I make.* [White Hawk's work] is so clean and organized, and mine is all messy and emotional—and that's good. We both do our thing, but her work makes me feel good. I would not live in a house full of my work. No way. I already live in my head. I already live in my heart. I already live in my body. I don't need more of it around. I learn, from my work, about myself, and then I surround myself with work that feels meditative and medicinal and soothing and calming.

But I look to certain things to heal me, like landscape. I love landscapes. I would live with landscapes all day, or I could wander off into the hills, and that would do the trick. No humans, no people.



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Left: *Release*, 2022 clay, steel, twine, grout. 84 x 20 x 18 inches. Right: *Road Less Traveled*, 2022. 63 x 14 x 14 inches.

Monet: It's funny that you say that, because so much of your work is figurines that look like people.

Rose: Well, that's the challenge, right? I'm diving into the challenge, but I can't be there all the time. I would die. I would drain. I would empty out all the way. I would have to go to places [to gain] respite and peace. Hence, the landscape painting, or simple geometrics.

Monet: Do you see only yourself in your work, or do you think of the figures as characters you inhabit?

Rose: I suppose they're all pieces of myself, you know? They're all aspects of the multifaceted being that I am. They're all the ways that I see myself. I don't feel like I have the right to tell anyone else's story.

Monet: There's an interview where you say that your work is part of your hopes and dreams, and I wanted to ask about what those are. Is there any one dream that is recurring in your work?

Rose: I was talking to my cousin about this this morning—about the doom and gloom of the world: intense weather and climate change and ailments of toxic shit. I look forward to approaching the challenges that are to come with our journeys as humans on earth—where I watch without judgment and stay in my faith. I stay believing that everything happens for a reason, and if I am able to witness deep enough I will find out what that is. But if I'm filling space with my thoughts or fears about something, I'm missing out on the opportunity to learn what it has to teach me. I look forward to not what I [will] have, but to changing how I exist in the world.

I could talk about all the things that have hurt me, and all the horrible things that have happened and will happen. I'm getting tired of it. I want something else. I want to walk through the world differently, because I'm almost 40 and I've spent a lot of my life complaining. It's exhausting. I've missed out on so much wonder, because I've spent my life in self-righteous victimry and entitlement. My hope would be that I can change that mannerism for myself, and emulate that for my daughter.

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Monet: Do you think you'll have these conversations with your daughter, too?

Rose: We already do! It's fun, because she's six. She'll be like, 'That looks gross!' Maybe if I say, 'That might be delicious, I should try it,' it's going to change her attitude—instead of assuming everything is going to be crap, right?

We were headed to the airport. I was like, 'I need you to get all your stuff together, because tomorrow there's going to be traveling and it's going to be a hard morning.' And she was like, 'Well, if you say that, it's going to be true.' I was like, *Thanks for the reminder*, because it was true, you know? It's cool to see it, and that kind of helps me. Like, how do you explain that to yourself as if you were a six-year-old?



Arts

# Leaving Fingerprints Behind

Artist Rose B. Simpson enters her vulnerability era with bi-coastal shows and upcoming PBS doc appearance

Expand



A scene featuring Rose B. Simpson in her beloved El Camino, "Maria," from an upcoming episode of the docu-series, *Art in the Twenty-First Century*. Simpson named the car after artist Maria Martinez. (Courtesy of Art21 and PBS)

By [Alex De Vore](#) March 08, 2023 at 12:00 am MST

Within a sea of notable Native and New Mexican creators, Santa Clara Pueblo multimedia artist Rose B. Simpson has made a name for herself through a combination of gorgeous, empowering pieces, a family-born knack for clay and ceramics and an outspoken attitude that accentuates a growing need to let her guard down.

As time has gone by, Simpson says, her opinions on openness and sensitivity have evolved, leading her into a new period of vulnerability that not only challenges her as an artist, but as a person navigating the arts world as a New Mexican, a Native person and a parent.

Now, with a new show dubbed *Road Less Traveled* at New York City's Jack Shainman Gallery, Simpson will also appear in an episode of the documentary series, *Art in the Twenty-First*

*Century* on April 7 via PBS. With her growing notoriety, plus representation in New York City, San Francisco, Santa Fe and beyond, it seemed like a great time to catch up with Simpson and gain a little insight into the working mind of one of the more prolific and universally respected artists going today.

Oh, and did I mention she loves lowriders?



From Simpson's *Road Less Traveled*, currently up at New York City's Shainman Gallery. (Courtesy of the artist, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco. )

*This interview has been edited for length and clarity.*

**SFR:** I wanted to start with legacy, because in your segment in *Art in the Twenty-First Century*, you talk about connection to ancestors; seeing their fingerprints on buildings and ruins, then making it a point of including your own fingerprints in your work. Is this concept of legacy an important one to you?

**Rose B. Simpson:** I think more of fingerprints representing the present. So, when we see fingerprints on the walls at an ancestral site, for example, that's evidence of a very lived presence. I don't see history. I see vibrance, I see life, I see a living experience. That's basically why I'm invested in leaving the process visible in my work. I do it intentionally to make people aware of the process and the present experience.

I think in a time where we're about fast products everywhere, we've built a world where we don't want that human touch—we want this sterile, artificial, disconnected thing. OK, that's not true for everyone, but it feels like we do need some of that really raw and rough humanity to have a little bit of compassion and empathic response to being human

**You're a parent, too. Have legacy and ancestry taken on different meanings because of that?**

I think that I'm more invested in a future than I used to be. I used to be kind of like, 'Let it all burn!' And now I'm like, 'Woah, wait a minute!' I'm fully aware of this feeling of love that...on a really enlightened day, I'm like, 'There is no death!' It's all connected, and I don't fear death, or transformation. But I also love this body, this life; I love this feeling of love and I think, 'How cool would it be to survive in this form?' I'm finding there's a lot of power and strength in softness and staying vulnerable.

**You talk about inherited historical trauma in the documentary, and then about how your work has showcased concepts of empowerment. Are feelings of empowerment still on your mind as you continue your practice or as you think about your place in the world being a parent? Is there ever a moment when you can dust off your hands and say, 'I now feel empowered?'**

I feel like if I ever have an answer to that, I've finished with life. As long as we keep questioning what we think is true, we keep living. If we get super solid, and it's, 'This is the truth! This is the answer!' there's no point anymore. But I hope I keep changing my mind. If I stop questioning myself, stop challenging myself, if I get too comfortable, it's time to take to me out to the hills.

What I'm learning currently is...my default setting has been self-righteousness and figuring out the best mode of self-righteousness, but the challenging thing to do now is to stay in the space of, 'I don't know.' In that space, I'm finding wonder, and I'm watching instead of dictating this reality. That space has been scary, because it's vulnerable and I'm not in control—and it's fun to be in control—but it's probably the hardest thing I've done. When I do make it there, it's absolute bliss.

**In a recent interview with *Vogue*, you talk about how you come from 70 generations of clay artists. That's a seriously long time. How do you quantify that, and how do you carve out your own space within so many generations? Do you even feel a need to do that?**

I used to think it was a big deal until I went and studied [ceramics] in Japan, and their clay history goes back to 1300 BC; so we're actually a very young clay community. I think that really helped. Yes, mostly I think about the matrilineal line in that the mother actually makes the daughter's eggs as she makes the daughter. I'll make my grandchildren through my daughter; I was an egg inside my mom's mom—my mother's mother made me. It's fascinating when you think about [my family's] clay line because it's similar to that direct line to ancestry, and it doesn't go through the father's side, whereas in Japan, that's more of a...men mostly did the clay, historically. So there's a reason I do clay, because my mom and her mom and her mom and her mom and her mom did it.

**Right, and your mother, the legendary Roxanne Swentzell, appears in the documentary segment, and you both talk about collaboration, or 'leapfrogging' as your mom puts it. So maybe it's less about your own specific thing and more about being part of something?**

I think so, and sometimes I wonder who really is in charge, y'know? I thought that was cool on *Art in the Twenty-First Century*, that it was so family focused, because it really is. They followed me around for a long time, all over. They got to see all of my life, and I think a lot of it *does* revolve around family, and maybe I don't realize that's a thing until I have these other eyes on it and people saying, 'This is fascinating.' But it's just my normal, and I'm so family oriented—not, like, nuclear family, but community. I wouldn't ever want to leave Santa Clara. It's got its good and bad, but I'd never want to leave here. My managers on each coast are like, 'Would you want to move somewhere more convenient for your career?' And I say if I'm moving, I'm moving farther up the mountain here.

**Speaking of, you say in the documentary that you're 'of here,' but describe not always being comfortable in New Mexico. How does tension like that play into your practice?**

If I'd figured out how to be at peace, if I'd found inner-peace, I don't think I'd have made art. One time I considered moving to Hawaii because I had some good friends out there. I even sold my bed and was sleeping on the floor, ready to split. I thought about those ideas of Hawaii—and my friends are Indigenous Hawaiians who face challenges and historical trauma, I'm not saying it's just been easy for them; but it's so beautiful there, and I was thinking about what do you make when life's just good? Where does your art practice go when you have a sense of comfort and ease? I didn't move because I realized I'd only become part of the problem, even though I wanted to help...My physical presence in their homelands would...it wasn't my battle, and I knew I had to start at home and clean my own backyard.

Let me tell you a story: I had a conversation with my daughter about icky feelings. She's 6, and she was feeling like I don't want to play with her, I don't want to do the things she wants to do. So I asked her, 'How does that make you feel?' Eventually I was telling her how every morning, when I drop her off at school I feel fear—because we live in America and I don't want my daughter to get shot. So instead of going to the story in my head, I've been like, 'Time out, brain!' I'm so great at building these horrible storylines about what could happen, but I ask myself, where is this in my body? Where is the physical experience of a feeling? If I



go there and stay with it and watch it run its course, I almost can't wait to see what these icky feelings are doing in my body and how they transform. I've spent my life trying to avoid those feelings, and it's interesting to find intrigue or just be fascinated by that, to go searching for them and that becoming a habit, almost like a fun thing to do; to find where your feelings are in your body. Sometimes I'll be lying in bed—I have insomnia—and I'll be thinking about my day, all the thoughts and feelings, and I'll find a really yummy awful one. And I say, 'Let's go there; I felt like shit; that's delicious; let's see what's there.' Because there's gotta be something cool to find. Maybe that makes me masochistic, but I feel true change from that process.

**When you can channel that into the work, does it come with a sense of release?**

When we talk about the practice itself, I feel like I'm more in a state of listening. I wait for it to come, it comes so fast, with so much. It's almost like the difference between writing with a pen versus typing. When you're thinking really fast, it's easier to type, you get it out faster; but sometimes my art process is that I have some thing that needs to come through, but I'm stuck here with a pencil. And it slows down, you have time to think about it. I was laughing because I spent like nine months, 10 months working on this solo show I opened in New York last week, but then by December, I was kind of over that idea. I have a different idea, other projects—God forbid a project lasts over a year. It's funny, if I do a proposal, by the time it goes through, that idea is old news.

**You talk about challenging yourself, not taking the easy route. With that in mind, can you describe your current process and body of work? How much of it is an organic evolution versus a considered plan you're attempting to execute?**

I don't know what you mean by plan in the big sense of things. I have a sketchbook, and because of the nature of my [clay] work, I have to engineer a bit. It takes forethought, I don't want them to break. I have to think, is it gonna work, is it gonna be user friendly? They're installing a piece of mine in Philadelphia today, for example, but I'm confident it's going to be an easy install because I've thought this through. I spend a lot of time thinking about the engineering of something, especially the ceramics, because there are things I have to do to make sure they're stable.

But plastics, acrylic paints, things like that feel icky to me, so I spend a lot of time experimenting with materials. For instance, I'm building a studio, and we ended up using concrete. It's so interesting to me how concrete can be an art material for sculptural things.

Or I did a residency at the [Fabric Workshop and Museum] in Philadelphia, where you basically go and they say, 'What do you want to try you've never tried before?' They have this whole group of people who help you with everything, and they have these bins that...every artist who goes through a residency there, they follow them around and pick up the things you try that didn't work, and they put it in this bin—and artists can look at any of those

things. You can open the box and see the process. That opportunity, when you get stuck in a rut, it helps you to play and to see.

**Let's talk lowriders and muscle cars, because you're famously into the artistry of such machines. How's the car going? Is part of what draws you to cars that it's an ongoing project?**

I am working on a new car—me and my buddy, who I hire part time—a '64 Buick Riviera with hydraulics. It's funny, though, we hit the switches and the glass fell into the door, so I guess we're at that stage where we need window regulators.

It's so funny when people [present a car] as an art piece, and they're like 'Finished in 2014,' because it's always a work in progress, and it's a lot of fun. I have a story about when I drove 'Maria,' my El Camino, to Tucson for a show. So, on the way back, I blew the engine right near San Felipe on the way out of Albuquerque, and I couldn't get a tow because the engine was blown and the drive shaft wouldn't spin. I had two buddies in the car, but we also couldn't move it, and there were no rocks to throw behind the wheels to stabilize it, only pebbles. So I crawled underneath and disconnected the drive shaft and used it behind the wheel, but the fun part was sitting on my phone getting excited about the next engine to put in. We took the engine apart and that engine has been in all kinds of art pieces.

I dunno, I think I like cars because they're a process, never done, never fully finished. I think I find solace in engineering. I think because my emotional state and my mind is so wild most of the time, the simplistic dependability, the way an engine works, is very satisfying to me. And I like to know how things work. For example, I have a hybrid Jeep Wrangler, and I have no idea how that thing works. At one point there was some recall for something, and I took it to the dealership, but they couldn't deal with it, so I got my buddy to hook up that machine, you know, where it does the car computer and tells you what's wrong—and there was a Chrysler paywall to do it. I was like, 'No bro, this is not my zombie apocalypse vehicle. It's a nice dependable mom car.' But I need to have my backup.

# Rose B. Simpson's "Road Less Traveled"

Alan Gilbert



View of Rose B. Simpson's "Road Less Traveled," Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, NY, 2023. © Rose B. Simpson. Image courtesy of the artist; Jack Shainman Gallery, New York; and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco. Photo by Elisabeth Bernstein.

April 6, 2023

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**Jack Shainman Gallery**  
February 23–April 8, 2023

The new human may not be very human after all, and that's not necessarily a bad thing. As Sylvia Wynter argues, the Western concept of the human—or, more specifically, the category of Man—was created at the dawn of the early modern period to establish distinctions between Europeans and non-Europeans that granted the former the right to enslave and exterminate Indigenous populations in what came to be called the Americas, before quickly pivoting this framework toward Africa. The movement away from divine, Christian authority to a secular and legalistic one rooted this constructed racialism in the developing discourse of humanism. And while the consequences resulting from the designations "human" and "not human" quickly spread throughout the economic networks of the era, they were also generated in the cultural sphere with its race- and gender-specific "overrepresentation of Man," as Wynter terms it.

What is the legacy of this European idea of the human when considering the proliferation of various modes of figuration in contemporary cultural production? Rose B. Simpson's "Road Less Traveled" contains ceramic humanoid sculptures that look simultaneously ancient and futuristic. Do these works represent a human form that exists on either side of the five-hundred-plus-year history delineated by Wynter? In other words, are Simpson's sculptures simultaneously post-human and prior to "the human"? An Indigenous artist from the Santa Clara Pueblo in New Mexico, Simpson mentions in a recent interview for *Vogue* that her family's work with clay extends beyond seventy generations, meaning around a thousand years prior to Spanish incursions into what is now the southwestern United States. Does this position Simpson's sculptures in a temporality long preceding and then running partially parallel to a Western one? At the very least, they participate in the centuries-long contestations between settler-colonialists and Indigenous groups over what it means to be human, including the rights and values that accrue to it.

In any case, the figures in "Road Less Traveled" are the offspring and the ancestors of Simpson's more futuristic-looking earlier work. As such, they both expand and collapse history. If "the human" and "Man" in Western civilization are historically determined categories, then perhaps what has been excluded from the human is what succeeds it. Certainly, technology is playing a role in replacing inherited notions of the human, and previous Simpson sculptures gestured at this with attached scraps of metal or wires—a bit of steampunk aesthetics combined with traditional clay. In the works on display at Jack Shainman, the visions come from within, emanating more from the figures themselves, as opposed to being affixed to their exteriors. *Conjure II* (all works 2022) is a slightly oversized tan head tilted upward on a wooden block with a cluster of loops projecting from its forehead like a waking dream, or possibly a knotty obstruction.

In fact, the majority of the dozen sculptures feature shapes protruding from otherwise self-possessed heads that do not usually read clearly as female or male. Each of the bodies and faces are uniquely covered in marks, and nearly all the sculptures are adorned with a string of stone or clay beads, whether around the neck, dangling from an ear, or attached in place of arms. Black, metallic cross-marks jut outward from the skull, neck, and torso of *Remind*, whereas three small, thin torsos and heads emerge from the crown of *Guides*. The titles of these two sculptures signal the past and the future, which each of the works in the exhibition harbors. Predominantly armless and hollow inside, Simpson's sculptures are vessels for Indigenous culture, familial transmissions, and personal aspirations. As vessels, they also reference the millennia-old traditional ceramic pots and containers from which Simpson's work descends. Three figures installed together—*Vital Organ: Heart*, *Vital Organ: Gut*, and *Reclamation IV*—address this lineage directly with imaginative versions of pottery fused to the top of their heads.

Only one of the sculptures in the exhibition has arms, which it uses to hug or protect itself. The closest to life-size, as well as the mostly recognizably female figure, it is sutured up the middle with grout as if attempting to hold itself together. This slightly anomalous piece shares the show's title and represents the challenges in moving between cultures, temporalities, and traditions. Nevertheless, the equanimity of Simpson's figures is striking. The faces are featureless, even a bit inscrutable in maintaining their claims to a specific knowledge and historical experience. This may be partly why the eye sockets are always hollow in both absorbing and vacating the gaze. Closely accompanying the early modern definition of Man were new formulations of the individual self, ones that current political economies and technologies are putting under duress, and for which "Road Less Traveled" illuminates a different trajectory.

**Category**  
Posthumanism, Sculpture

**Alan Gilbert** is a poet and art writer whose most recent book of poems is *The Everyday Life of Design*.

**Subject**  
Ceramics



# VOGUE

ARTS

## In Her New Show, Indigenous Artist Rose B. Simpson Paves Her Own Path

BY CHRISTIAN ALLAIRE

FEBRUARY 23, 2023



Rose B. Simpson in her studio Photo: Kate Russell/Courtesy of Rose B. Simpson

Indigenous artist Rose B. Simpson has grown up around clay her entire life. Raised on the Santa Clara Pueblo reservation in New Mexico, Simpson was exposed to the material from a young age: Her mother, Roxanne Swentzell, is an acclaimed ceramics artist herself, as are many of Simpson's aunts, uncles, and grandparents. (Simpson says her family has been

working with clay for over 70 generations.) “My mom would give me a little chunk of clay just to get me to go away,” Simpson laughs. “I remember squishing it into a little square and then eating it. I’ve been playing with clay my whole life.”

The artist soon began creating her own artworks with clay. She learned how to mold forms or fire kilns by watching her family members and quickly learned that the Pueblo approach to pottery is one of a kind. (Simpson is an enrolled member of the Santa Clara Pueblo tribe.) “We started experimenting with glazing when nobody was doing that,” Simpson says. “We don’t play by the rules. We’re always looking for new ways to express ourselves.” This contemporary approach to such a traditional craft has been a strong point in Simpson’s recent works: She enjoys adding unexpected details, such as glazes inspired by tattoos or graffiti lines, onto her tall, commanding figures. “I realized [during college] that I can make this something that I care about—I didn’t have to do what my family did,” Simpson says. “It can represent youth culture and experiences that are personal to me. I don’t have to perpetuate stereotypes.”

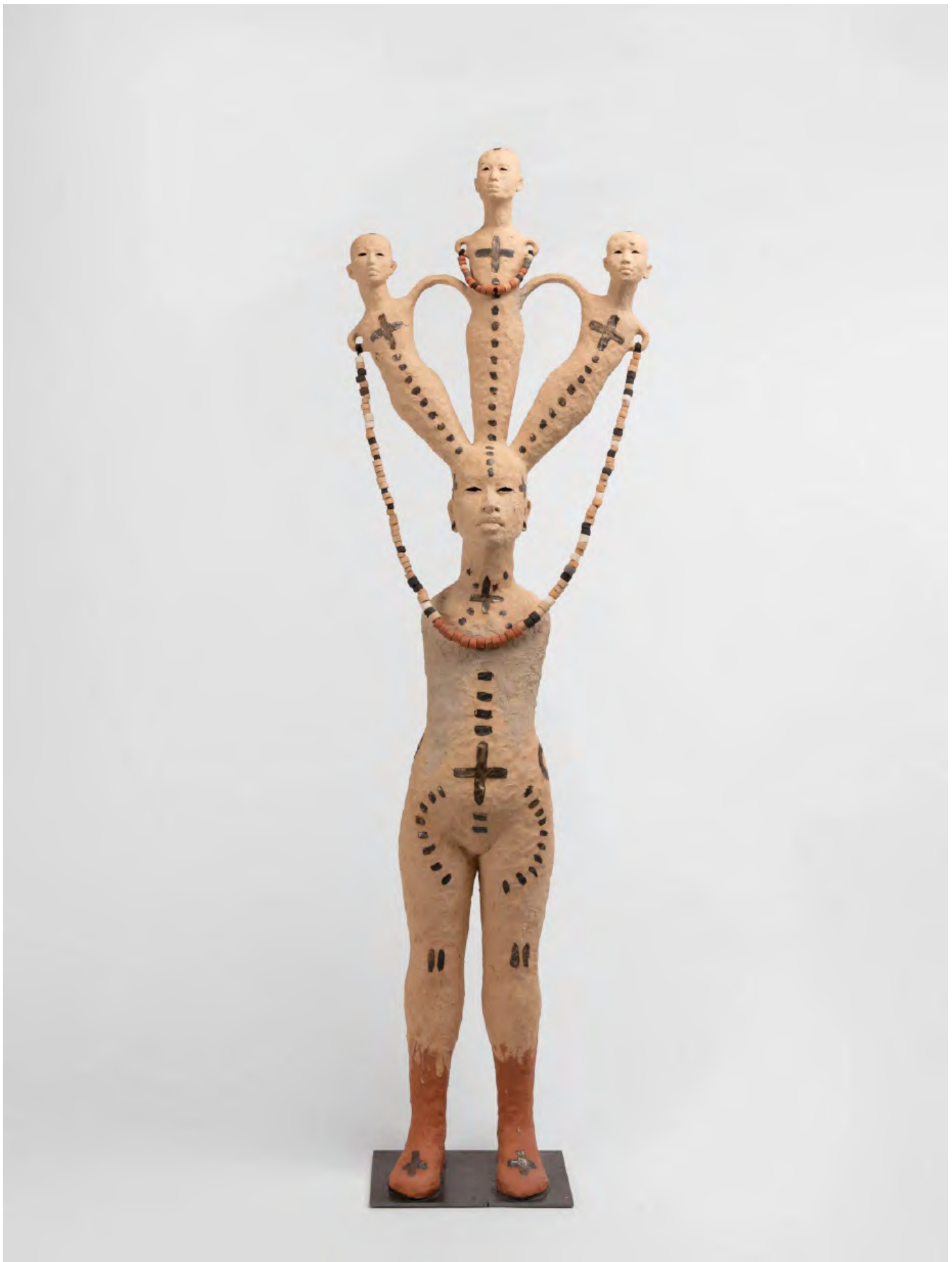


*Conjure III*, 2022 Photo: Courtesy of Rose B. Simpson/Jack Shainman/Jessica Silverman

Simpson's distinctive approach is certainly on full view in her new showcase. Today, the artist presents her first solo exhibition in New York City, titled *Road Less Traveled*, at the Jack Shainman Gallery. (It runs through April 8.) The inspiration for the new body of work stems from the idea of creating her own pathways—challenging herself to work with clay in a manner that feels totally unique to her. She first thought of the concept in 2020, when she began looking back on her work. “I started looking at what the road less traveled is for myself and how can I honor that,” Simpson says. “I began challenging myself and asking, ‘Is there another way to make this?’ You have to resist the urge to make it easy: It’s so easy to put a feather or a drum on something and sell it. But through my work, I pushed myself to do the harder thing.”

Every work in the new exhibition reflects this spirit. Simpson makes an intentional (and successful) attempt at differentiating her work from her family's long lineage of artists. She does so by allowing herself to explore her most wild or experimental concepts through clay.





*Guides*, 2022 Photo: Courtesy of Rose B. Simpson/Jack Shainman/Jessica Silverman

The first piece she made for the show, for instance, is titled *Guides* and is made of clay, steel, and grout. It is a figure with three extra heads floating on top and is inspired by the “mysterious figures” who have been guiding Simpson throughout her life. “In the [past] few years, I’ve had this very clear awareness of having guides on multidimensional planes that are helping me out,” she says. “The more that I’m aware they’re there, the more that I can remember to ask them for direction.”

Her work *Conjure II* features a head made of clay, grout, and New Mexico pine; floating rings hover just above it, representing a cloud of intention. The piece represents Simpson’s relationship with faith. “I believe really deeply in prayer,” she says. “I think about *Conjure II* as remembering how to visualize our clear needs and wants and how to believe in manifestation.”

Simpson started the works on exhibit here in March of last year. Most of them were built, dried, glazed, then fired in a kiln. “I use my mama’s commercial kiln [for most of them,]” Simpson says. “I need to fire them high, because I ask a lot of the clay—and I only fire them once.” All the pieces were built from the bottom up. They’re large in stature, some over six feet high, but hollow like a pot, which in itself holds a certain meaning. “Since they’re hollow, they hold space,” Simpson explains. “I often think about the space inside as holding intention; I want them to go out and do work in the world and be vessels for that intention I’m putting out there. The eyes are also hollow, because I want people to feel like they’re being watched. We’re always in relationship to things that we consider inanimate.”



*Conjure II*, 2022 Photo: Courtesy of Rose B. Simpson/Jack Shainman Galler/Jessica Silverman

The artist's favorite part of creating her work is always the ending, when she adorns her figures with jewelry. (*ID*, for instance, wears a necklace made of trade glass, pyrite, and turquoise beads.) "I'll ask the piece what they want to wear," Simpson. says "Sometimes I'll dress a piece up, and they don't like it. They're like, 'Dude, this is dumb.' I have to listen to them. Wearing jewelry is a form of self-love and self-worth; I like to give them moments of beauty."

When visitors begin walking through the exhibition space, Simpson hopes Indigenous and non-Indigenous folks connect with her figures beyond their aesthetics, though. "I think about how my experiences meet humanity as a whole and all of the things we struggle with," she says. "I have a stronger voice when I'm meeting us as humans, rather than me as a Native person and you as Other." She does want her art to convey certain emotions, however. "I want people to leave braver, slower, and more self-aware. It takes strength and courage to be self-aware," she adds. It's a lesson she's also been trying to teach herself and her own family. "I always tell my daughter, 'Don't behave—be considerate,'" Simpson says. "Be thoughtful and accountable. I think that that's what I'm trying to do for myself. And that's what my work is trying to do."





*Remind*, 2022 Photo: Courtesy of Rose B. Simpson/Jack Shainman/Jessica Silverman

Road Less Traveled is open now through April 8, 2023, at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York.

ART

## Rose B. Simpson Builds A Dream House Where Manifestation Meets Growth

By Katy Donoghue  
February 23, 2023



Photo by Minesh Bacrania, courtesy of the artist.

**R**ose B. Simpson's "Dream House" is currently on view at The Fabric Workshop and Museum (FWM) in Philadelphia through May 7. The immersive installation is the result of an artist-in-residence program with the museum, showcasing some of the earliest examples of Simpson's explorations into collaboration, and what she describes as her most personal show yet.

Taking over the eighth floor of the space, it opens with a vast room against which visitors cast long shadows. They are greeted with the sight and smell of a traditional adobe wall, created onsite and inspired by the Pueblo architecture of Simpson's ancestral land of Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexico. As they enter, a series of rooms follows, which can only be viewed from a window, offering a glance at Simpson's inner world but never a full picture. Secondary spaces are hinted at with sounds and video (the artist's first time working in the medium), making the viewer lean in deeper to get a better look.

Working with the team of artisans at FWM, Simpson imagined interior spaces representative of her inner and outer worlds, creating furniture, textiles, lighting, tabletop pieces, a quilt, a rug, and even films—many for the first time. She is known for her figurative sculptures in clay that touch upon ancestral knowledge, generational healing, and spiritual realms, and "Dream House" is a revelatory, ambitious project, one that invites viewers to self-reflect, a challenge Simpson took on in the making of it.

*Whitewall* met with Simpson in Philadelphia just before the opening of "Dream House," and we discussed getting passed the idea of needing her hand in everything, and opening up to the prospect of collaborating with others while still making super personal work. With her solo show "Road Less Traveled" at **Jack Shainman** opening this week (and up through April 8) and the public work "Countercultures" standing in **Field Farm** in Williamstown, Massachusetts, until April 30, Simpson's sculptures are staring back, daring us to be present, vulnerable, and open to growth.



Installation view of Rose B. Simpson's "Dream House," photo by Carlos Avendaño, courtesy of the artist and The Fabric Workshop and Museum.

**WHITEWALL:** Where did you begin with this project and the residency at The Fabric Workshop?

**ROSE B. SIMPSON:** This residency started during the pandemic, so the first year almost was me and **Karen Patterson** [FWM's former director of exhibitions] texting vigorously. She would ask me things like, "What are you thinking about today? What's exciting you? What are you needing in your life and not getting?" I would send her photos of things I found beautiful in my day, podcasts, things I was thinking about. It was kind of like therapy. It was magical. It really was.

Initially, I was thinking about The Fabric Workshop to highlight my car stuff, because I really enjoy cars and working on cars. It's been strange to find outlets for that in the world. They sent me the building restrictions and you really can't put a car in there. So Karen was like, "What does a car mean to you? Why cars?" And we started digging.

Art is about creating your dream. It is intentionality manifest. What we're doing and putting out there in the world is what we visualize and want to see. I live on the rez in Santa Clara Pueblo, and we live in a little house my great-grandpa built for my great-grandma. Thinking about relational aesthetics and the very reason to do art, to apply arts to everything that we do, that's where the cars come from. It's about, how do you build an empowered experience? So Karen asked, "Where is that lacking in your life?" And I was like, "My home, my house."

And then thinking about dreams and how the home itself is actually a metaphor for your body, your psychological states, the different rooms and places you enter within yourself. So how



do you project out into your lived existence an experience of that?



Installation view of Rose B. Simpson's "Dream House," photo by Carlos Avendaño, courtesy of the artist and The Fabric Workshop and Museum.

**WW:** So how were you thinking of a dream house? A phrase that can be totally on the surface and superficial.

**RBS:** Right! Is it manifesting what you want to be in, or is it showing those internal spaces? What we surround ourselves with is a reflection of what's going on inside. Intentionally, there was this idea that there's access, too. It's like, this is my body, this is my psychological state, this is my prayer, this is my past, this is my future, and who is allowed in there. And there's this idea of voyeurism in a very deep way. That's what art is in so many ways—this window into part of our very intimate beings. My work is very much that.

So much of my work is looking back at the viewer, and this work is very internal. Each room has a subconscious room. There's a room from the windows, and windows from that room where you're able to see into a subconscious space.



Installation view of Rose B. Simpson's "Dream House," photo by Carlos Avendaño, courtesy of the artist and The Fabric Workshop and Museum.

**WW:** Can viewers enter there?

**RBS:** No, you can barely see it. I kept wondering, how do you portray the deeper subconscious spaces? There's access, there's restriction, there's boundaries, and then there's welcoming. There are spaces you can't enter but you can look in. And then there is the last space, where you are welcome to enter with respect; you can take your shoes off and you can come sit within it.

Through the show, we're navigating these internal spaces, these dreamlike feeling spaces, and the last room is about being in the space with each other, doing that work of being aware. It's under a very large window to be conscious of the environment, conscious of the weather, conscious of the sunlight, the moonlight.



Installation view of Rose B. Simpson's "Dream House," photo by Carlos Avendaño, courtesy of the artist and The Fabric Workshop and Museum.

**WW:** You worked in new ways for this show, like with film.  
What was that like?

**RBS:** This is the first time I ever worked with film. The Fabric Workshop provided me with a camera and taught me how to use it. Me and technology don't get along very well, so I did my best. We made a quilt, we sewed a rug, we made something like 25 pillows, we sourced natural wood and made furniture and shelving. It was basically finding delicious things and pulling them in to meet that. It harkens back to the art versus craft and utility being an aesthetic of manner. It brings us back into the aesthetics of function and how we move through the world.



Rose B. Simpson, "Conjure III," 2022, clay, timing belt, shell, twine, grout, 44 x 11 x 11 inches, © Rose B. Simpson. Courtesy of the artist, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco.

**WW:** Were there any new materials you found yourself enjoying working with? Anything about this process you want to continue with?

**RBS:** I think the biggest part of it, the biggest lesson in my life recently, has been collaboration. That is a tool that I've struggled with because my work is so intimate, it's so personal and vulnerable. I feel like my hand needs to be it—that's it. This is mine, I'll be responsible for that. I'm not pulling anyone else into this.

But starting with the "Counterculture" pieces that are on view at the Field Farm in Williamstown, I had to figure out how to complete this vulnerable work and rely on other people. That was the first time I've ever outsourced any kind of labor on my work. So I made these three wooden originals; I sculpted them with a chainsaw because it was way easier to cast wood than clay. They are nine feet tall. We shipped them out and they cast them in concrete. Then I made beads for them, so that I had my hand in them.

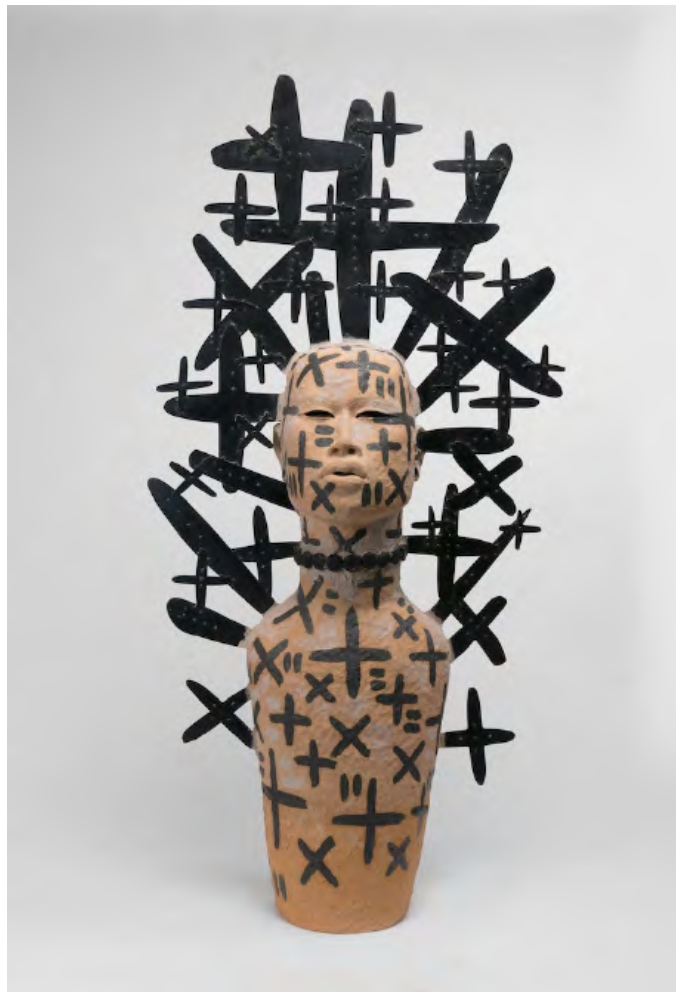


Installation view of Rose B. Simpson's "Legacies," photo by Mel Taing, courtesy of the artist and the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston.

**WW:** So what is collaboration like for you, given that it's so new to your practice?

**RBS:** I'm learning how to have faith in that process and also, to say, "Okay, Rose, you don't have to do absolutely everything." I had to think about how I could do this, to have other people's hand in it and it still feel true. To have such an incredible crew to work with at The Fabric Workshop was so wonderful. Abby Lutz is leading the project, and she's just a magical unicorn person.





Rose B. Simpson, "Remind," 2022, clay, steel, grout, lava beads, 66 x 35 x 15 inches, © Rose B. Simpson. Courtesy of the artist, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco.

**WW:** That need to do it yourself, I wonder if it's like that, too, when you're working on cars?

**RBS:** Yeah. And I'm working on that one, too! Because I have a buddy who is working for me now with car stuff. And I'm like, oh wait, I get to do the fun part? The part I want to do? And then to redo the fuel system, something I'm not excited about, I can outsource that and there's somebody out there that wants to do that?

When it comes to more of the aesthetic parts of it, I can come in it and, like, redo the dash the way I want to. I have a big sense of pride around that. I did it myself!

I have to pick and choose what I want to put my energy into. To trust other people with my vision is big. To collaborate, to delegate. I'm absolutely blown away by the amount of work everybody put in to make this come together. This is all very new for me.

**WW:** When you talk about working in clay, you talk about how the intention you put into the material shows up in the work. So

it makes sense that you do feel the need to do it all, because it matters in the object you're creating.

**RBS:** Right, and so I guess it's a conversation around we're all kind of in this together. And to be like, these people like doing this! They actually want to play with things I want to play with? So it's new neural pathways to start with. When we went to Williamstown and I saw the pieces at the Field Farm for the first time, I had to pull over the car and get out and stand there and feel. My body was like, "Whoa, do I have space in my consciousness and my being for this kind of validation?" It's really like, oh, I gotta grow. I gotta grow.

I stay busy to not feel the things, and when you finally just stop and it hits you, it's like, wow. I'm also scared of what it means to grow into this truth, to let this happen for me. If you build it, you have to grow into it! If you manifest it, then you have to meet it. It's a lot easier to stay simple than to bring in this relational complexity.

I think the biggest gift The Fabric Workshop gave me is community and trust and care and learning and believing in myself and the process.



Rose B. Simpson, "Reclamation IV," 2022, clay, steel, lava and bone beads, leather, grout 88 x 15 x 13 inches, © Rose B. Simpson. Courtesy of the artist, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco.

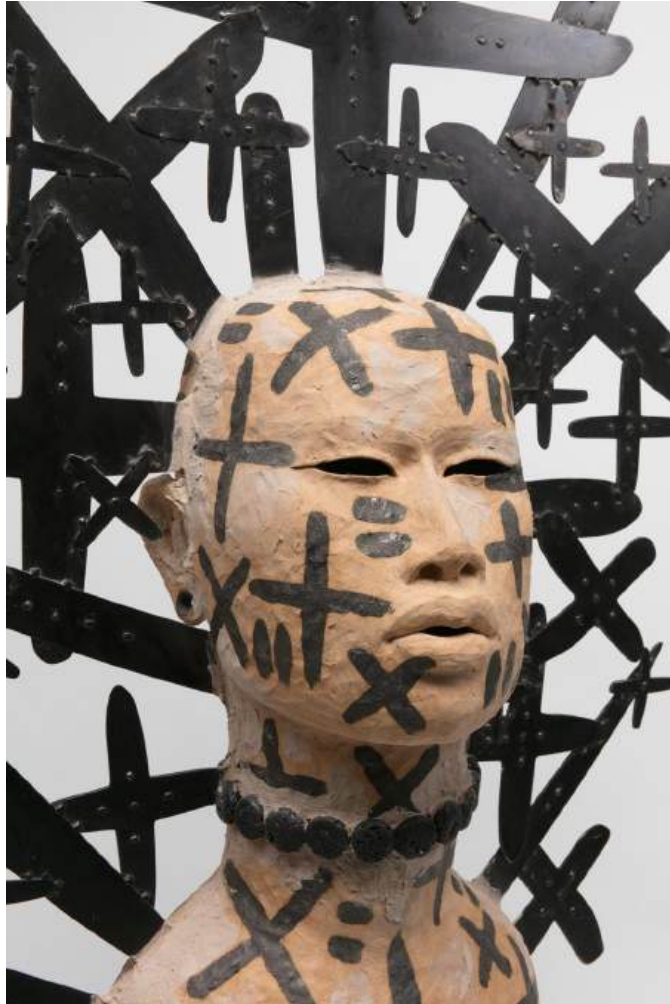
# Finding Art Outside The Mainstream In New York

Chadd Scott Contributor

*I cover the intersection of art and travel.*

Feb 20, 2023, 03:23pm EST

## Rose B. Simpson



Rose B. Simpson, Remind, 2022. JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

New York often paces the art world, but finally catches up with where much of it has been for years in recognizing Rose B. Simpson (b. 1983, Santa Clara Pueblo). Jack Shainman Gallery (513 West 20<sup>th</sup> Street) presents “[Road Less Traveled](#),” February 23 through April 8, the NYC debut for Simpson’s ceramic and mixed-media sculptures.

Simpson has [previously been profiled by Forbes.com](#).



## THE ART NEWSPAPER

**Frieze Los Angeles 2023** // Feature

# In pictures: Frieze Los Angeles goes big with towering sculpture, large-scale installations and more

Many of the works on show capitalise on the soaring spaces offered by this year's new location at Santa Monica Airport

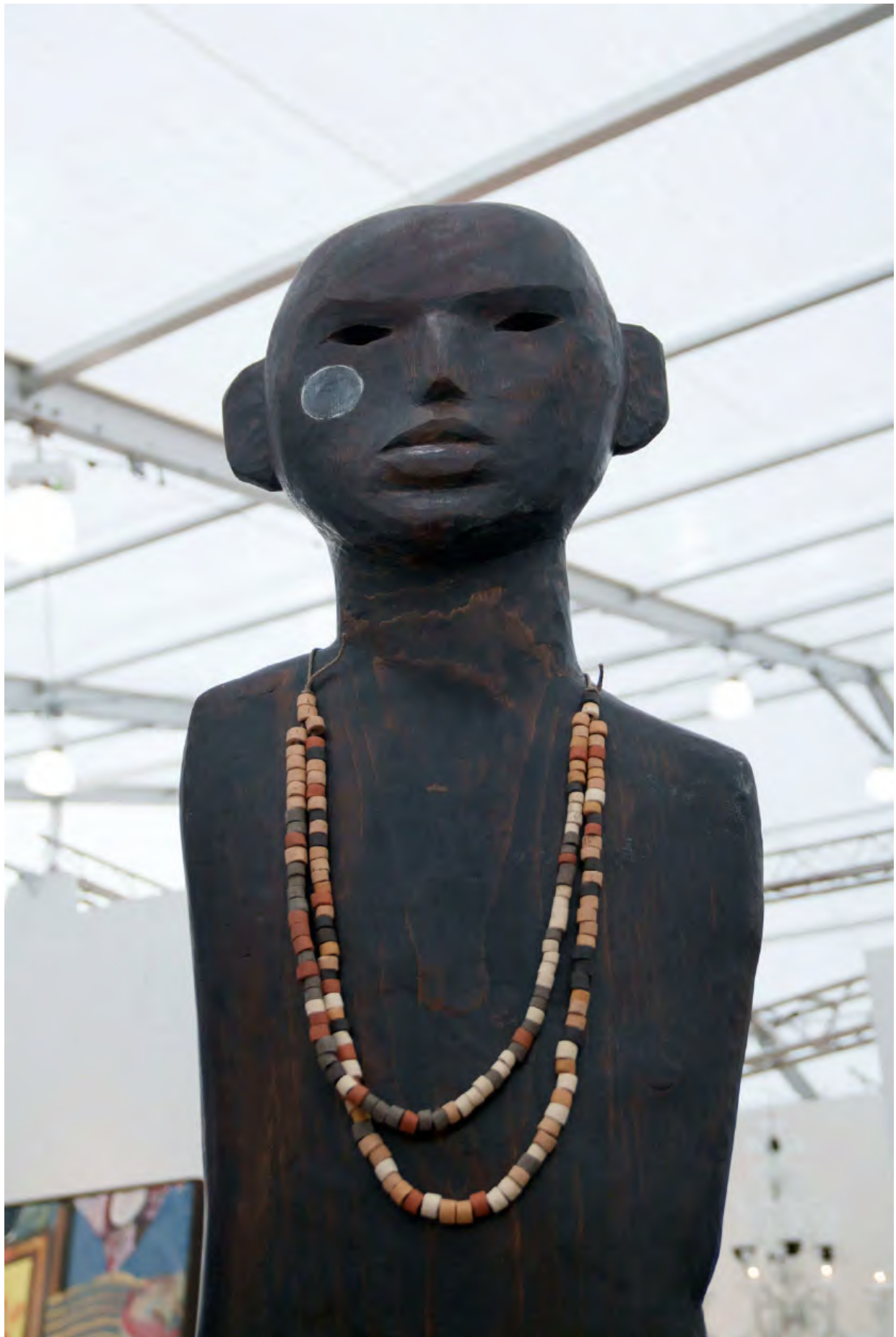
**Benjamin Sutton**

18 February 2023

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Frieze Los Angeles's new digs on the Santa Monica Airport campus have afforded it plenty more room for large-scale works, not only outdoors near the tarmac, but also inside its spacious tent and the soaring Barker Hangar. Plenty of dealers have taken advantage of the fair's ample real estate, bringing towering sculptures like Rose B. Simpson's totemic figure carved from New Mexico pine on Jack Shainman's stand, enormous canvases like Jonathan Lyndon Chase's painting of an interstellar embrace at Sadie Coles HQ and stand-filling installations like Garth Greenan Gallery's presentation centred around a seminal video work by James Luna, the artist of Puyukitchum/Luiseño and Mexican American descent. Some dealers even brought large kinetic and interactive pieces, like Virginia Overton's clanging industrial chimes on the Bortolami stand and Mamali Shafahi's fantastical merry-go-round at Dastan Gallery's stand—which, though tantalisingly inviting, is only strong enough to hold child-sized riders.





Rose B. Simpson, *Counterculture A* (2022), at Jack Shainman Gallery  
Photo: Eric Thayer



FROM THE MAGAZINE

## Doing It Their Way

Native artists are finally gaining visibility in museums and galleries—upending long-held stereotypes in the process

*Written by* **Jori Finkel**  
*Photographs by* **Tommy Kha**  
02.08.23

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Up until recently, you could count on one hand the number of Native American artists valued by the contemporary art world. One of them, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, 83, has called it “the buckskin ceiling”—a rather vivid term for the institutional barriers or systemic racism preventing Native artists from landing regular exhibitions in mainstream art galleries and museums.

That much is finally changing. Thanks to work by artists and activists like Quick-to-See Smith, as well as the larger cultural reckoning that put the “I” in BIPOC, that buckskin ceiling has some serious cracks in it, with animal hides actually making an appearance in big galleries and museums. Also showing up: techno-themed Navajo weavings, abstract paintings inspired by Lakota quillwork, and more, as several artists are bringing ancestral techniques and materials into a contemporary art context, often overturning stereotypes about Native cultures in the process.



Rose B. Simpson

Rose B. Simpson with works in progress. Photographed in Española, New Mexico, December 2022. Simpson wears a **Jamie Okuma** jacket; **Issey Miyake** shirt; **Hermès** pants; her own necklaces and sneakers.

Rose B. Simpson, 39, is also using her access to galleries and institutions—she recently had her first East Coast museum survey, at the ICA Boston—to share something of her deep relationship with land. Like her mother, her grandmother, and generations of artists from the Santa Clara Pueblo, which is north of Santa Fe, Simpson is most at home working in clay, saying it’s “like a family member for us.” But instead of the glossy, thick-walled, red and black pottery the pueblo is known for, her powerful vessels take another form: hollow human figures, sometimes in the shape of a woman holding a child, sometimes androgynous. And she literally roughs up the traditions, in a way, often using a technique she calls “slap-slab” that leaves signs of her handiwork instead of smoothing them out.

She invented this method, which owes something to Japanese aesthetics, when she was a graduate student at the Rhode Island School of Design, one of the few periods in her life when she was away from home. She currently lives on the pueblo and works nearby on a family property that includes a ceramics studio and a metal shop where she fixes up old cars. “This is where I’m happiest, where I’m home, where I refuel,” she says, adding that “for pueblo people, our religion is place-based, so you can’t practice your religion elsewhere.”





Simpson's *Remind* (a work in progress), with her 1964 Buick Riviera.





Courtesy of the artist and Nevada Museum of Art, Reno.  
*Groundbeing IV*, 2021.

For her new show, at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York, opening on February 23, Simpson made a dozen sculptures that feel like “signposts on a self-reflective journey.” Two of the largest figures, in a work called *Vital Organs*, explore “how to trust our instincts,” she says. One of them carries on its head a clay vessel representing a heart; the other, a gut.

But as for serving as interpreter or spokesperson for her culture, Simpson says that’s not her style. It’s also not her job within her family—her eldest brother is the one on the tribal council working to uphold their traditions. “I am not an educator,” she says. “I have the privilege of making these things that go out there into the world to do that work, so I don’t have to. They go out and speak for the pain, and, ideally, that brings awareness to the hard truths of our history.”

**Melissa Cody:** *Hair by Tanya Melendez for Hair Ritual by Sisley at the Only Agency; makeup by Jessica Ahn for Makeup Forever at Tracey Mattingly Agency. Fashion assistant: Ainyne Aiken. Marie Watt:* *Hair and makeup by Cecilia Salinas for Dior. Fashion assistant: Kai Magobenny. Nicholas Galanin:* *Grooming by Cedar Pook. Rose B. Simpson:* *Hair and makeup by Kata Baron for Makeup Forever. Hair and makeup assistant: Kimberly Garley*

# THE DAILY

## **'Thick as Mud' at the Henry Art Gallery shows that mud is more than just a material**

By Taylor Bruce The Daily  
Feb 6, 2023

Mud is more than a material; it is also a subject — the subject of memory, of lives lived and lives lost, of places and their stories. It is both earth and water, and an in-between state that can be used as a metaphor for resolving boundaries and binaries, according to curator Nina Bozicnik.

The new exhibition at the Henry Art Gallery, "Thick as Mud," brings together artworks created by eight artists from around the world and invites viewers to ponder these associations.

The first piece, titled "Sitting Shiva" by Sasha Wortzel, uses chairs webbed with Burmese python skin to illuminate the history of colonial habitation in south Florida, commenting on how individuals transform the landscape. It centers on absence, grief, and loss, and holds a more abstract tie of mud as a swamp, according to Bozicnik. In the background, viewers can hear the audio of a tropical storm.

The exhibition then progresses into the rotunda, where the work of Candice Lin is displayed. Lin's ceramic creatures, created out of mud from Saint Malo, bring up the concepts of colonialism and diaspora, and perceptions around contamination. The creatures are portrayed in a ritualistic and reverent form, and hold perfume infused with animal fat that is lightly scented with rotting vermin.



In another room are adobe drawings on paper created by Christine Howard Sandoval. An artist of Indigenous descent, Sandoval touches on the colonial histories of habitation and forced labor specifically in Spanish missions. Her work focuses on ancestral trauma, pain, and how education and history have erased certain peoples and their histories.

On the other side of the hallway is a video created by Sandoval titled "Niniwas- to belong here." In the video, she moves through the site while touching different elements that show the lives of the people that lived there, according to Bozicnik.

The video itself is extremely powerful. The way that Sandoval moves through the mission is both moving and disorienting, and it feels as if the viewer is the one reaching out to touch these elements themselves.

The largest room in the exhibition features the work of two artists. On the wall are woven tapestries created by Diedrick Brackens. One tapestry features a catfish — a mud-dwelling bottom feeder. The catfish allowed Brackens to create an alter ego for himself while representing his ancestry and personal identity, according to Bozicnik.

Spaced throughout this room are ceramic statues made by Rose Simpson. Simpson's statues represent the strength from vulnerability — as expressed through her breakable materials — and creates commentary centered on missing Indigenous girls.



A ceramic and mixed media sculpture by Rose B. Simpson, named "Protector A," the "x" is a symbol used by the Pueblo tribes in New Mexico to signify protection. Also a woven cotton weavings by Diedrick Brackens named "stud double," part of the "Thick As Mud" Exhibit at the Henry Art Gallery.

Sean Fan

On the left side of the gallery is a room with a tri-paneled video installation titled “Of Men and Gods and Mud” by Ali Cherri. The video challenges the dominant narrative of progress, showcasing mud brick workers set to a background of people reading mythologies about mud and flooding in both English and Arabic.

“The story of the flood as world maker is, in fact, the story of mud,” the video states. “Religion and science converge in the place where earth and water meet.”

The video installation was my favorite part of the exhibition. I was fascinated by the way the videos were spliced together on the three screen panels and loved hearing the stories being told in the background. The way Cherri composed the video was absolutely stunning, and I hope to have the opportunity to watch the video again.


On the right side of the large gallery is another video by Dineo Seshee Bopape that animates a variety of different drawings together. Mud is rubbed on every wall in the room, and in the background, there is a haunting audio clip. It began as a crying sound that turned almost to a wail, which then evolved into a loud pounding that reverberated throughout the room.

The last artist featured is Eve Tagny. Tagny’s installation is titled “The Carriers,” and illustrates the legacies of disrupted landscapes and the embodied memory within them. There are three performance videos of varying lengths, as well as an inkjet print and site-specific installations.

In the exhibition, each artist has a different use of mud — either as subject or material — and creates meaning in a creative and beautiful way. “Thick as Mud” opened Feb. 4 and will be featured at the gallery until May 7.

# Rose B. Simpson Thinks in Clay

“Clay was the earth that grew our food, was the house we lived in, was the pottery we ate out of and prayed with,” says the Native American sculptor and rising star.

 Give this article



Rose B. Simpson outside her adobe studio in Española, New Mexico. With what a curator describes as her “‘Mad Max,’ ‘Blade Runner’ vibe,” Simpson builds on — and rough up — pottery traditions from the Santa Clara Pueblo. Minesh Bacrania for The New York Times

By Jori Finkel  
June 16, 2022

ESPAÑOLA, N.M. — The artist Rose B. Simpson was sitting in her 1985 Chevy El Camino inside her metalworking shop, trying to get the car to start. She popped the hood, turned the ignition and then lightly pumped the gas pedal. After she repeated this a few times, the car started to rumble loudly.

It wasn't her everyday car, but closer to a work of art she has made over the last 10 years, here in the self-proclaimed lowrider capital of the world. Simpson repaired large dents by learning how to shape metal at an auto body school. She replaced the engine with one she bought in a racing shop in Phoenix. And she painted the exterior with a black-on-black, gloss-and-matte geometric design and named the car Maria in homage to the celebrated Tewa potter Maria Martinez of the San Ildefonso Pueblo, who died in 1980.

"Maria is as close as I've come to making traditional pottery," said Simpson, 38, an enrolled member of the Santa Clara Pueblo (Kha'po Owingeh), based just south of Española. She belongs to a long line of ceramic artists there going back hundreds of years. But instead of making the sturdy, glossy red or black pottery her pueblo is known for, she's gaining art-world acclaim for her powerful androgynous figures of clay, often with metal adornments that look like jewelry or armor or both.



Simpson and her 1985 El Camino at her studio. Her car, Maria, is painted in the black-on-black Tewa style that Maria Martinez helped make famous. Minesh Bacrania for The New York Times

After showing off Maria ("I have to work on the idle"), Simpson crossed a patio to her ceramics studio on the property, a small adobe structure with a "clean room" for sewing and drawing in back. A dozen of her tender-fierce figures stood in front, crowded together. Some wore beaded necklaces while others were waiting to be adorned with car parts — metal gears and brake discs — like a motley band of warriors preparing for battle.

Several of these sculptures, which she calls "beings" or "ancestors," are now heading to East Coast museums: 11 recent works to the ICA Boston in August, and a new commission to the Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia in October. And on June 18, a series of 12 slender cast-concrete figures will



preside over a property in Williamstown, Mass., known as the Field Farm, part of a public art program run by the preservationist group The Trustees.

Called “Counterculture,” the nine-foot-tall herm-like figures have an otherworldly presence thanks to a startling visual effect: Simpson has carved out holes for eyes that go all the way to the backs of their heads, letting the light — or life — stream through.

“When you see light come through their eyes, it will be like the sky is seeing you,” the artist added, explaining that she was thinking about the global exploitation of natural resources. “I wanted to flip this script to make those resources watch you in an intimidating way.”

Concerned that ceramics at this scale could be fragile, Simpson made her molds for “Counterculture” by carving full-size versions in wood. But even these works began with clay maquettes.



Simpson starts a new sculpture in her studio using the coil method, a traditional pottery technique for building up a vessel by hand. Minesh Bacrania for The New York Times

“I think in clay,” she said. “Clay was the earth that grew our food, was the house we lived in, was the pottery we ate out of and prayed with. So my relationship to clay is ancestral and I think it has a deep genetic memory. It’s like a family member for us.” She remembers seeing her great-grandmother, the artist Rose Naranjo, speaking to her clay, and she said her mother, Roxanne Swentzell, learned to sculpt figures as a means to communicate long before she talked.

While Swentzell makes beautifully smooth sculptures of Indigenous women engaged in everyday activities, Simpson tends to rough things up. She leaves the surfaces of her figures uneven and adds adornments in metal, leather and other materials to create, in the words of the Los Angeles curator Helen Molesworth, “a badass, ‘Mad Max,’ ‘Blade Runner’ vibe.”

Molesworth first saw Simpson’s work in 2019 at the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian while vacationing in Santa Fe. She was so struck by the “mixing of different textures, soft and hard” that she said she wondered if she wasn’t just “blissed out on holiday.” Back home, she was still fascinated and decided to feature Simpson in a group show, “Feedback,” last summer for the New York gallerist Jack Shainman. Next year Simpson will have a solo show with Shainman and another in San Francisco with her gallery of three years, Jessica Silverman. (The gallerists would not provide the range of prices for Simpson’s work.)

While Simpson works in Española on a family property, she lives with her young daughter on the Santa Clara Pueblo where she grew up. She was raised there mainly by her mother after her parents’ divorce. She said her father, a white artist, took her rock climbing and taught her how to sail on a local reservoir. “He had time to play with me, while my mom was surviving,” she said, describing the situation as “extreme poverty.” She went on to praise her mother’s resourcefulness and “deep relationship to the land.”



Simpson threaded ceramic beads to make necklaces for the herm-like figures in “Counterculture.” She has invited Indigenous people to add necklaces made with clay from their lands. Minesh Bacrania for The New York Times

“We grew most of our food. We ate our pets,” she said, mentioning turkeys, chickens and pigs. She also remembered her mother making their shoes by hand: cutting up blown-out tires salvaged from the dump with a jigsaw and then sewing leather straps onto the rubber.

Simpson was home-schooled until high school, when she went to the Santa Fe Indian School, joined the yearbook committee and filled the book with drawings of her classmates in styles inspired by her favorite comic artists, including Los Bros Hernandez of “Love and Rockets.” After college in Albuquerque and Santa Fe, she went on to the Rhode Island School of Design for a master’s degree in fine arts. There she discovered that her more polished, realistic sculptures made for “a visual language that other people weren’t speaking or understanding.”

A turning point came during a school trip in 2010 to Kashihara, Japan. Encountering Japanese aesthetic traditions that prize acceptance of the process over perfection of the form — and don’t distinguish between art and craft — helped her think more seriously about her pueblo’s creative legacy and her own. “I was dropped in a world where I was completely incapable of communicating, which for me was not unlike the Western art world,” she said. “I realized that my artwork had to become way more specific and clear.”



Simpson, right, with her mother, Roxanne Swentzell, at the greenhouse on their property in Española.  
Minesh Bacrania for The New York Times



Her clarity came in the form of a technique she devised that she calls “slap-slab,” which she still uses today alongside traditional pottery methods. It involves throwing a slab of clay sideways on a floor or table until it’s very thin, maybe one-sixteenth of an inch. Then she tears off pieces by hand and affixes them to each other, with an effect that resembles papier-mâché. “You can see the seams, the pinches, the fingerprints, all of it,” she said.

Slap-slab embraces imperfection and intuition. “If you can get into an intuitive place, I believe you can really tickle the intuitive place in others.” It also gave her a metaphor for learning to accept oneself, lumps and all — or “building a muscle of acceptance and finding compassion for the sloppier, more complicated parts of ourselves.”



“Root A,” 2019. Simpson adorns many of her sculptures with metal pieces including car parts. Rose B. Simpson and Jessica Silverman



“Storyteller,” 2021. Some of her figures have grown rounder and carry children on their shoulders. Rose B. Simpson and Jessica Silverman

Almost six years ago, Simpson became a single mother, which has also shaped her work. As hollow clay forms, her sculptures were already vessels to some degree, but now she plays explicitly with the notion of the female body as a vessel, a vehicle for nourishment. Some of her figures have grown rounder and carry babies on their shoulders. One that appeared in “Feedback” is crawling with children — held together by a steel armature that seems equal parts cage and jungle gym. Their faces resemble that of the artist and her daughter. “You can’t tell someone else’s story. You can only tell your own,” she offered.

While she considers her work spiritual, Simpson is careful not to share specifics about the Santa Clara Pueblo’s religious practices or beliefs. “Native people have been subject to so many stereotypes that I



have to be super careful with that — we have seen through history how spiritual work just gets eaten up, spit out, exploited,” she said. “People have been kicked out of the tribe for making art referencing a specific spiritual belief.”

She has developed her own symbolic system, with “+” signs to mark the four cardinal directions, suggesting a journey, and “x” signs to represent “protection.” (From what? “Negative forces,” she said.) The signs are tattooed on her fingers and appear on her sculptures.

Then there is the bold jewelry decorating her sculptures. Miranda Belarde-Lewis, a Zuni/Tlingit scholar and curator who teaches at the University of Washington, sees it as a way for Simpson to convey both ancestral and individual identity. “The strength that she has learned from her mother, the strength to be herself as a Pueblo woman, comes across so loudly in her artworks,” she said. “You can see this confidence in the defiant expression on their faces, but also the amount of jewelry they wear, and the size of their earrings,” she said, adding, “That’s a big thing in Native communities — we love our earrings.”

The idea for “Counterculture,” which will be up for a year, is a cascade of beaded necklaces. Having made some herself, Simpson has also invited the Stockbridge-Munsee Community Band of Mohican Indians, on whose ancestral land the Field Farm sits, to make beaded necklaces out of clay from their land to adorn her sculpted bodies. Her plan is to add more necklaces from Indigenous communities as the figures travel.

“Wherever they go, I’ll be connecting with the people whose ancestral homeland is there to build a sort of relationship,” she said. “Many tribes have been relocated, displaced from their own lands. So I wanted the opportunity to put their clay back in their hands.”



“The Remembering,” 2020. Ceramic, metal, cottonwood sticks and leather. Simpson envisions different ways of safeguarding the human body in her work. Rose B. Simpson and Jessica Silverman



# ROSE B. SIMPSON

BUILDING A DREAM HOUSE WHERE MANIFESTATION MEETS GROWTH.

BY KATY DONOGHUE



Rose B. Simpson’s “Dream House” is currently on view at The Fabric Workshop and Museum (FWM) in Philadelphia. The immersive installation is the result of an artist-in-residence program with the museum, showcasing some of the earliest examples of Simpson’s explorations into collaboration, and what she describes as her most personal show yet.

Taking over the eighth floor of the space, it opens with a vast room against which visitors cast long shadows. They are greeted with the sight and smell of a traditional adobe wall, created onsite and inspired by the Pueblo architecture of Simpson’s ancestral land of Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexico. As they enter, a series of rooms follows, which can only be viewed from a window, offering a glance at Simpson’s inner world but never a full picture. Secondary spaces are hinted at with sounds and video (the artist’s first time working in the medium), making the viewer lean in deeper to get a better look.

Working with the team of artisans at FWM, Simpson imagined interior spaces representative of her inner and outer worlds, creating furniture, textiles, lighting, tabletop pieces, a quilt, a rug, and even films—many for the first time. She is known for her figurative sculptures in clay that touch upon ancestral knowledge, generational healing, and spiritual realms, and “Dream House” is a revelatory, ambitious project, one that invites viewers to self-reflect, a challenge Simpson took on in the making of it.

*Whitewall* met with Simpson in Philadelphia just before the opening of “Dream House,” and we discussed getting past the idea of needing her hand in everything, and opening up to the prospect of collaborating with others while still making super personal work. With her solo show “Legacies” on view at the ICA Boston through January 29, 2023; an upcoming exhibition at Jack Shainman in early 2023; and the public work “Countercultures” standing in Field Farm in Williamstown, Massachusetts, until April 30, 2023, Simpson’s sculptures are staring back, daring us to be present, vulnerable, and open to growth.

**WHITEWALL:** *Where did you begin with this project and the residency at The Fabric Workshop begin?*

**ROSE B. SIMPSON:** This residency started during the pandemic, so the first year almost was me and Karen Patterson [FWM’s former director of exhibitions] texting vigorously. She would ask me things like, “What are out thinking about today? What’s exciting you? What are you needing in your life and not getting?” I would send her photos of things I found beautiful in my day, podcasts, things I was thinking about. It was kind of like therapy. It was magical. It really was.

Initially, I was thinking about The Fabric Workshop to highlight my car stuff, because I really enjoy cars and working on cars. It’s been strange to find outlets for that in the world. They sent me the building restrictions and you really can’t put a car in there. So Karen was like, “What does a car mean to you? Why cars?” And we started digging.

Art is about creating your dream. It is intentionality manifest. What we’re doing and putting out there in the world is what we visualize and want to see. I live on the res in Santa Clara Pueblo, and we live in a little house my great-grandpa built for my great-grandma. Thinking about relational aesthetics and the very reason to do art, to apply arts to everything that we do, that’s where the cars come from. It’s about, how do you build an empowered experience? So Karen asked, “Where is that lacking in your life?” And I was like, “My home, my house.”

And then thinking about dreams and how the home itself is actually a metaphor for your body, your psychological states, the different rooms and places you enter within yourself. So how do you project out into your lived existence an experience of that?

**WW:** *So how were you thinking of a dream house? A phrase that can be totally on the surface and superficial.*

**RBS:** Right! Is it manifesting what you want to be in, or is it showing those internal spaces? What we surround ourselves with is a reflection of what’s going on inside. Intentionally, there was this idea that there’s access, too. It’s like, this is my body, this is my psychological state, this is my prayer, this is my past, this is my future, and who is allowed in there. And there’s this idea of voyeurism in a very deep way. That’s what art is in so many ways—this window into part of our very intimate beings. My work is very much that.



Rose B. Simpson, photo by Minesh Bacrania.

So much of my work is looking back at the viewer, and this work is very internal. Each room has a subconscious room. There’s a room from the windows, and windows from that room where you’re able to see into a subconscious space.

**WW:** *Can viewers enter there?*

**RBS:** No, you can barely see it. I kept wondering, how do you portray the deeper subconscious spaces? There’s access, there’s restriction, there’s boundaries, and then there’s welcoming. There are spaces you can’t enter but you can look in. And then there is the last space, where you are welcome to enter with respect; you can take your shoes off and you can come sit within it.

Through the show, we’re navigating these internal spaces, these dreamlike feeling spaces, and the last room is about being in the space with each other, doing that work of being aware. It’s under a very large window to be conscious of the environment, conscious of the weather, conscious of the sunlight, the moonlight.

**WW:** *You worked in new ways for this show, like with film. What was that like?*

**RBS:** This is the first time I ever worked with film. The Fabric Workshop provided me with a camera and taught me how to use it. Me and technology don’t get along very well, so I did my best. We made a quilt, we sewed a rug, we made something like 25 pillows, we sourced natural wood and made furniture and shelving. It was basically finding delicious things and pulling them in to meet that. It hearkens back to the art versus craft and utility being an aesthetic of manner. It brings us back into the aesthetics of function and how we move through the world.

**WW:** *Were there any new materials you found yourself enjoying working with? Anything about this process you want to continue with?*

**RBS:** I think the biggest part of it, the biggest lesson in my life recently, has been collaboration. That is a tool that I’ve struggled with because my work is so intimate, it’s so personal and vulnerable. I feel like my hand needs to be it—that’s it. This is mine, I’ll be responsible for that. I’m not pulling anyone else into this.

But starting with the “Counterculture” pieces that are on view at the Field Farm in Williamstown, I had to figure out how to complete this vulnerable work and rely on other people. That was the first time I’ve ever outsourced any kind of labor on my work. So I made these three wooden originals; I sculpted them with a chainsaw because it was way easier to cast wood than clay. They are nine feet tall. We shipped them out and they cast them in concrete. Then I made beads for them, so that I had my hand in them.



Rose B. Simpson, in collaboration with The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia, installation view of “Dream House,” 2022, photo by Carlos Avendaño, courtesy of the artist and The Fabric Workshop and Museum.



Rose B. Simpson, in collaboration with The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia, installation view of “Dream House,” 2022, photo by Carlos Avendaño, courtesy of the artist and The Fabric Workshop and Museum.





Rose B. Simpson, in collaboration with The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia, installation view of "Dream House," 2022, photo by Carlos Avendaño, courtesy of the artist and The Fabric Workshop and Museum.

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**WW:** *So what is collaboration like for you, given that it's so new to your practice?*

**RBS:** I'm learning how to have faith in that process and also, to say, "Okay, Rose, you don't have to do absolutely everything." I had to think about how I could do this, to have other people's hand in it and it still feel true. To have such an incredible crew to work with at The Fabric Workshop was so wonderful. Abby Lutz is leading the project, and she's just a magical unicorn person.

**WW:** *That need to do it yourself, I wonder if it's like that, too, when you're working on cars?*

**RBS:** Yeah. And I'm working on that one, too! Because I have a buddy who is working for me now with car stuff. And I'm like, oh wait, I get to do the fun part? The part I want to do? And then to redo the fuel system, something I'm not excited about, I can outsource that and there's somebody out there that wants to do that?

When it comes to more of the aesthetic parts of it, I can come in it and, like, redo the dash the way I want to. I have a big sense of pride around that. I did it myself!

I have to pick and choose what I want to put my energy into. To trust other people with my vision is big. To collaborate, to delegate. I'm

absolutely blown away by the amount of work everybody put in to make this come together. This is all very new for me.

**WW:** *When you talk about working in clay, you talk about how the intention you put into the material shows up in the work. So it makes sense that you do feel the need to do it all, because it matters in the object you're creating.*

**RBS:** Right, and so I guess it's a conversation around we're all kind of in this together. And to be like, these people like doing this! They actually want to play with things I want to play with? So it's new neural pathways to start with. When we went to Williamstown and I saw the pieces at the Field Farm for the first time, I had to pull over the car and get out and stand there and feel. My body was like, "Whoa, do I have space in my consciousness and my being for this kind of validation?" It's really like, oh, I gotta grow. I gotta grow.

I stay busy to not feel the things, and when you finally just stop and it hits you, it's like, wow. I'm also scared of what it means to grow into this truth, to let this happen for me. If you build it, you have to grow into it! If you manifest it, then you have to meet it. It's a lot easier to stay simple than to bring in this relational complexity.

I think the biggest gift The Fabric Workshop gave me is community and trust and care and learning and believing in myself and the process.



Rose B. Simpson, in collaboration with The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia, installation view of "Dream House," 2022, photo by Carlos Avendaño, courtesy of the artist and The Fabric Workshop and Museum.



# DROUGH



Two views of Rose B. Simpson's sculpture *Root A*, 2019, ceramic, glaze, linen, jute string, steel, and leather. 71½ by 20½ by 16 inches, metal base 16 by 16 inches.

Opposite, *Storyteller*, 2021, ceramic, glaze, steel, leather, and epoxy. 67 by 29 by 26 inches.



# TCCORE

Rose B. Simpson's ceramic and automotive sculptures honor Pueblo traditions while anticipating another apocalypse.

by Lou Cornum



The children depicted in *Storyteller* (2021) are building inside a building. Climbing a lattice of thin steel rods, they make their own structure comprising bodies on top of bodies as they ascend the metal structure that on occasion pierces them through. They are gentle and rounded; the scaffolding they unite with is angular, jutting. These little ones encircle a larger totem-like person, covering the sides and top of the head of an elder who, unlike them, has no limbs. The children are a deep orange ochre; the serene figure they climb, a sandier yellow. They are all naked, androgynous, and marked with black symbols, such as the square cross of the four directions and other arrays of thick black lines.

What they build is a world in miniature. The children are an audience, but they also appear to be part of the story itself, seeming to emerge from the body of the storyteller along with the steel rods. All together they make a story about earth, the earth they, as clay beings, come from and contact and change, as they interact with a structure made of this more industrial material—metal.

*Storyteller* is one of the more recent works on view in "Legacies," artist Rose B. Simpson's solo show at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston. Like most pieces in the show, the sculpture depicts figures that appear severe but contemplative, a contrast Simpson evokes by marrying diverse materials—most often clay, steel, and leather. The storyteller is a familiar figure in Pueblo ceramics, usually depicted as a speaker whose mouth is open in utterance, with small children gathered on the teller's body. Simpson's rendition, set in a harsh geometric landscape, is both familiar and alien, speaking to a deep history and an uncertain future. The storyteller looks forward, while the child on the very top looks behind. Or is it the other way around?

Simpson has produced a veritable pantheon of clay beings over the past 10 years. Bearing such hallmark signifiers as slit eyes, absent limbs, and desert tones, these figures serve as characters in a quiet but profound epic that begins in the Southwest—in northern New Mexico, to be exact—but whose relevance extends into the beyond.





Left, Simpson outside her adobe studio in Española, New Mexico, 2022.

Below, *Maria*, 2014, 1985 Chevy El Camino, with bodywork and customization by the artist.

**SIMPSON WAS BORN IN 1983 IN SANTA CLARA** Pueblo, New Mexico. Its residents are a tribal nation belonging to the larger group of Tewa-speaking peoples, who have inhabited what is now northern New Mexico for millennia. In the Tewa language they are known as the Kah'p'oo Owinge. It is said that their ancestors lived in the Puye cliff dwellings before relocating in the 16th

century closer to the ground in the nearby Río Grande Valley. Soon after descending, the tribes of the region first made contact with the Spanish conquistadores, most notorious among them Juane de Oñate, who killed, enslaved, and mutilated hundreds of Pueblo people during his tenure as governor. The memory of his cruelty was one of the bitter grounds for continued rebellion. Through the subsequent waves of settlement and the stranglehold of a capitalist national project, the Pueblo peoples have continued to fight, create, adapt, ascend.

In recent times, the conditions of struggle have unfolded in a landscape marked by climate chaos. This year alone, in the dry lands from which Simpson hails, wildfires have consumed more than 230,000 acres. For scale, the Santa Clara Pueblo covers just about 1,344 acres. The northern New Mexican lands are steadily growing drier and windier, culminating in the perfect condition for ravaging fires. Against this landscape, it is hard to avoid a point that Anishinaabe literary theorist Grace Dillon raised in 2012 – it is almost mundane now to say that, for the colonized, apocalypse has already occurred. In the 10 years since Dillon, who is credited with originating the term Indigenous Futurism, made this observation, it has become a commonplace acknowledgment for more and more people. These conditions feel baked into Simpson's ceramic works – there is a post-apocalyptic tinge to the resourceful way she alludes to this burning, which dries the land from



which she derives her clay. The exposed landscape is still visible in the works' orange color.

Some of Simpson's works, such as *Maria* (2014), feel like an Indigenous retelling of *Mud Max*. The artist detailed a 1985 Chevy El Camino like a fine piece of ceramic, sleek geometric shapes reminiscent of mesas, rivers, and the horizon rendered in deep glossy black on the black matte body of the car. When she presented the El Camino at the Denver Art Museum in 2013, the artist assembled a group of women and youths to walk with *Maria*. This fierce band of performance participants wore all black and swaggered down the road with their "droughtcore" gear: leather straps, soot-black face paint, and industrial-size goggles. They invoked a science fiction imaginary of a world scarce in oil and water; *Maria*'s crew members protected themselves from the unrelenting sun and dust of a parched place where verdant green is a rare sight.

The work is a testament to Simpson's training in automotive science at Northern New Mexico College, and she has said wryly that *Maria* is the closest she has gotten to practicing traditional Santa Clara pottery. She means that she used the Tewa black-on-black style associated with revived Pueblo pottery practices on the auto body of *Maria*. Typically, the black-on-black ceramics begin with a coil-style clay pot that has been glazed, burnished, and then painted with a particular iron-rich solution. The pot is then fired in a pit where powdered manure is poured

View of the exhibition  
"Legacies," 2022–23,  
at the Institute of  
Contemporary Art,  
Boston.

over the flames, giving the pot its distinctive black hue. The burnished sections take on a shine, and the painted sections appear matte. Starting with a readymade and very different kind of object, the El Camino, Simpson applied auto body detailing techniques in the visual style of Pueblo pottery, then situated this new creation in a suggestive narrative accompanied by a collective of warriors assembled by the artist and dressed in layers of black and metal.

The car's name is an homage to the potter Maria Martinez, who lived from 1887 to 1980 in the San Ildefonso Pueblo. A child prodigy of sorts, Martinez learned traditional pottery-making from her mother and aunt, and is credited with reviving the practice of all-black pottery. Maria developed the pit firing process with her husband, Julian; together, they conducted numerous experiments in reviving and innovating ceramic practices. That black appears not only in Simpson's *Maria*, but in the black symbols with which she adorns sculpted terra-cotta figures, for protection and direction.

*Maria* also refers to another local trade and culture: just a mile and a half north of Santa Clara Pueblo is the low-rider haven of Española. This small town is a crossroads of histories and cultural practices from the Spanish, from Mexico, from the Pueblo, and from white America. The Pueblo worlds were shattered by the inroads of Spanish conquest, and it was from literal shards of ancient pots found around their homeland that Maria







Left, *Heights I (original)*, 2022, clay, glaze, twine and silver, 54 by 12 by 10 inches.

*Brace*, 2022 (below), and *Truss*, 2021 (opposite), on view in "Legacies," 2022–23, at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston.

and Julian began to re-create and transform the material culture of ceramic practices. Mindful of those cycles of destructive contact between peoples, Simpson creates homages to survival, visions of transformation. Her work points to the irony of the post-apocalypse – despite the world ending, somehow it continues as well.

This lineage of influence and instruction from Pueblo artists is one of the cultural legacies referenced in the title of Simpson's current solo show. On the positive side, narratives and knowledge get transmitted, as seen in works like *Storyteller*. But there is a legacy of continuing violence as well, against a group of people Simpson sometimes refers to as the "innocents." She often represents the innocents as children, though the violence was directed against Indigenous people more broadly, and even against the landscape. In response, the artist frequently creates figures of protection, like the striking *Root A* (2019). Nearly 6 feet tall, the sculpture stands out from the rest: it is unique for the interruption of space between the leather-strapped shoulders and the head. Instead of a neck, there is absence framed by metal crescents edged with saw-like teeth. Simpson imagined this figure as a protector. In works like *Genesis Squared* (2019), a mother holding her baby stands on a metal plinth adorned with cutouts, the protection taking on the softness of a loving touch. Standing tall, this protector, Simpson has said, is meant to summon, then guard the processes of "justice, healing, and rehabilitation."

#### THOUGH THE NAME INCORPORATES "FUTURE,"

Indigenous Futurism is a mode of expression that fundamentally questions the grammar of futurist aesthetics. Indigenous Futurist works often return to the past in order to transform it, explore histories that should have been realized, or revisit traditional technologies to suit the needs of a changing reality. Paradigmatic examples include the 1999 poetry epic *Star Waka* by Robert Sullivan, in which Maori navigators



From left: Photo Addison Oby; Photo Mel Tang/Courtesy Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston



steer their traditional vessels through outer space, and *The 6th World*, the 2012 short film from Navajo director Nanobah Becker that posits ancestral corn as the key to humanity's interstellar survival. Simpson uses a similar approach, and her references to the post-apocalyptic make her a fellow traveler with the Indigenous Futurists imagining an alternative world and transformed human beings. As artist and as autobody specialist, she creates figures that emerge from a landscape scorched by fossil fuel culture, and is nonetheless still able to create beauty, to protect what has been forged. And she's ready with the tools for repair when it all breaks down.

Many of Simpson's ceramic works are made through a process she calls "slap-slab," which involves her throwing clay against the floor over and over until it becomes stretched thin. These pieces are then shaped into an image of care, as in *Genesis Squared*. While there is reference to the specificities of women's experience, Simpson often presents the human figure as androgynous, even as she evokes experiences most often of women, such as child rearing and the loss of bodily autonomy. In the lengthy artist's statement on her website, Simpson says that her work clusters thematically around "Identity, MMIW (Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women) and relation vs agency in the traditional family unit." These concerns are countered by the futuristic beings who also harken to a time before the expansion of capitalism across the globe, when the work of nurturing was celebrated rather than denigrated and devalued. These figures represent a new humanity, with a strong historical lineage.

*Truss* (2021) and *Bruce* (2022), alluding to architectural support structures, similarly speak of world building. In *Truss*, an armless figure stands on an automobile drum brake, three vertical tubes extending from its shoulders. In *Bruce*, two ashen-gray armless figures leaning chest to chest form a triangle. Shaped from the earth, they lean, and fall, on each other. In this way, Simpson dissolves boundaries between land and figure. Likewise, *Heights I* (2022), which was created for the ICA Boston exhibition, incorporates a tower of two-handled vessels atop an armless figure's head. It resembles simultaneously a ladder and the series of grooved footholds shaped into the soft rock of the cliffs where Pueblos made their homes high above the ground. Here, rising from the figure's cranium, it suggests a reach toward the stars, toward the expanse. The figures that Simpson brings forth from the earth and adorns or builds out with industrial materials have survived recursive world-rending events and face now another post-apocalypse, the wake of a revelation. ●

**Lou Cornum** is a science fiction scholar and assistant professor at New York University. See Contributors page.

#### ON THE CALENDAR

"Rose B. Simpson: Legacies," at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, through Jan. 29, 2023.



ARTS

## Send Off Summer With An Arts Binge Across Massachusetts



Installation view of Rose B. Simpson, *Counterculture* (2022), with artist, At Field Farm in ... [+] COPYRIGHT © 2022 STEPHANIE ZOLLSHAN PHOTOGRAPHY

Santa Clara Pueblo sits over 2,000 miles west from Fenway Park, but Rose B. Simpson (b. 1983) has taken up residence “back East” in 2022. At least her artwork has. Three prominent presentations of her contemporary sculpture provide a taste of [Indigenous New Mexico](#).



Simpson's first public art commission and largest project to date, *Counterculture*, features 12 hollow, concrete-clay forms supported by steel-gauge wire frames that stand approximately nine feet tall. The figures are covered with a dry concrete spray, wear necklace-like adornments consisting of thousands of clay beads and include a steel-post stanchion rooted in the ground with cement.

From the northwest corner of the state in Williamstown, the figures look west across the vast homelands from which native peoples were forcibly removed to make way for settler colonialism. Like mothers looking over their children, the all-seeing, feminine-bodied forms implore visitors to go forward with respect and honor for all that came before.

Simpson's mother, [Roxanne Swentzell](#), could rightly be considered the most influential living Pueblo potter. She was [among the first generation to transition](#) the century's old artform into a contemporary fine art direction by introducing figures.

"I was given the ceramic figure from my mom; ever since I was a kid, I was watching her make ceramic figures and so that was what I internalized clay to be," Simpson told Forbes.com. "What is traditional for me, growing up with a mom who did contemporary figures, is that contemporary figures were normal."

What was also normal for Simpson was making art to make a living. Her mother's pottery supported the family and numerous of her relatives would all be in the Native American art hall of fame if such a thing existed—"Uncle Mike," Michael Naranjo, "Aunt Susan," Susan Folwell, ["Aunt Jody," Jody Folwell](#), "Aunt Nora," [Nora Naranjo Morse](#), ["Grandma Rose," Rose Naranjo](#).

Simpson, however, hasn't simply followed in their profound footsteps, she's innovated a style all her own.

"I started out making my work smooth, making it acceptable because I come from a community of people who are working to support yourself off the tourist trade and if something's not pretty and eye catching and highly crafted then it's not acceptable," Simpson said. "Through my deconstruction of colonization and the implementation of Western values—assimilation—I wanted to challenge that and say, 'I want to talk about our humanity. I want to talk about hard issues. I want my work to get under people's skin and make them sort of uncomfortable.' To do that I had to transform my craft, transform the way that I created my work. My intention is, in a sense, to find emotional states that might be in denial. My work has to be crafted in a way that isn't necessarily 100% comfortable and that's where I break from tradition. That's my role."

*Counterculture* was installed along the horizon line of a meadow at Field Farm in Williamstown visible from nearby Sloan Road. The project was commissioned by [The Trustees](#), the nation's first preservation and conservation organization. The Trustees protect more than 100 sites of ecological, scenic, cultural and historic significance across Massachusetts and in 2016 launched its Art & the Landscape initiative to create site-specific, public art aimed at enriching visitor experiences at its properties.

Nearby to Williamstown in the bucolic Berkshires where *Counterculture* can be seen through November 30, 2022, MASS MoCA in North Adams presents ["Ceramics in the Expanded Field"](#) through January 2023. The group show brings together eight groundbreaking artists, including Simpson, who are changing the way the world thinks of clay.



"Rose B. Simpson: Legacies," exhibition installation view at ICA Boston. ICA BOSTON

Across the state, Simpson again has the spotlight to herself at Institute of Contemporary Art Boston where ["Rose B. Simpson: Legacies"](#) can also be seen through January of 2023.

Simpson's work doesn't look anything like the traditional Pueblo pottery found in New Mexico, but it does honor that tradition, in fact, she believes expanding the tradition is the best way to honor it.

"There is an incredible responsibility if you choose to pursue this direction with your life; you have to understand that there were people that came before me that made it possible for me to do what I do," Simpson explains. "When my mom was branching away from traditional pottery and doing contemporary art and figurative sculpture, that was really strange and difficult for her to do. It was looked at with disdain in lots of ways. Because of that work she did to push the boundaries of expression, I'm able to do what I'm doing. If I had done this work in the 80s, I don't think it would have been accepted. There's a responsibility to honor that work and take it further."



ART REVIEW

## Rose B. Simpson shapes stories in clay and steel

The artist from New Mexico has two new shows: 'Legacies' at the ICA, and 'Counterculture' at Field Farm in Williamstown.

By [Murray Whyte](#) Globe Staff, Updated August 18, 2022, 5:15 p.m.



Foreground: Rose B. Simpson, "Root A," 2019, in "Rose B. Simpson: Legacies," the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston, 2022-2023. (Photo by Mel Taing) MEL TAING

If there can be such a thing as a post-apocalyptic vision of hope, then Rose B. Simpson's earthy, roughly gorgeous sculpture might be it. Sharp and soft, clay and steel, Simpson's figures are products of colliding worlds, material and otherwise.

The Institute of Contemporary Art Boston opened "Legacies," a single-room exhibition with 11 of her works, earlier this month; at its entrance, a resolute female figure stands guard, as if keeping the others safe. Knees locked and arms crossed, its russet-colored skin is tracked with

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impressions of Simpson's fingers, while its head rests on top of a broad circular blade embedded in its clavicles.

With that image in mind, you might be tempted to just go with "apocalyptic," a "Mad Max"-like vision primed for the Thunderdome. Like so much of Simpson's work, any implied violence is softened with solemnity, steadfastness, care. Whatever else it might evoke, the piece, "Root A," 2019, is beautiful, seductive, brimming with intimate markers: Strips of leather wound around its thighs fasten slender clay fragments in place, a string of wooden beads dangle from its belt. The round void where its neck would be invites your gaze and frames your view — looking at it means looking through it, a gateway to the ideas that lie within.

At Simpson's current installation at Field Farm, a Trustees of Reservations property in Williamstown, you can see the same idea at work. In a valley cradled by the Berkshire hills, 12 cast-concrete figures made to look like clay (outdoor works need to be weatherproof) stand like sentinels; strikingly, eyeholes carved through to the backs of their heads allow light to stream through.



Rose B. Simpson, "Counterculture," 2022. Dyed concrete, steel, clay, and cable. (Rose B. Simpson/ Jessica Silverman/ San Francisco/ Jack Shainman Gallery)  
Image Courtesy: Stephanie Zollshan STEPHANIE ZOLLSHAN

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She calls the installation “Counterculture,” a tribute to untold centuries of Indigenous presence here; with its unsettling hollows, the work prompts the idea of an open-ended view, something mostly absent in a colonial framework where American history started with European arrival. Simpson, who is Santa Clara Pueblo Tewa from New Mexico, is looking back — way back, millennia or more — but, crucially, also forward. This is a story with deep roots, mostly buried, and with history scarred by conquest, genocide, disregard. But it’s still being written, a future left to unfold, and Simpson cares equally for both.

You can choose to think of Simpson as a material extremist: Clay, soft and pliable, has been a medium favored by Native American artists of the Southwest for thousands of years; industrial metalwork, cold and hard, has been around a few centuries at most, a byproduct of modernity that followed close in colonialism’s wake.

Their convergence matters in the story she tells. One of her best-known works is a 1985 El Camino — an ungainly hybrid of sedan and pickup truck that had a moment in the late ’70s and early ’80s — festooned with black pottery patterns much-reproduced for the tourist trade starting in the early 20th century. It’s a collision of commodity and culture, a motif begging to be reclaimed. She named the car “Maria,” after Maria Martinez, a Tewa artist who pioneered the tradition as a contemporary form; a print of the car’s working drawing is now on view in the permanent collection galleries at Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts.



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Installation view, "Rose B. Simpson: Legacies," the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston, 2022 - 2023. (Mel Taing) MEL TAING

At the ICA, turquoise walls bracket the low-lit space with a leading prompt — turquoise, the gemstone, is used frequently in Native American craft of the Southwest, particularly that made for the commercial souvenir trade. Curator Jeffrey De Blois told me the color (his choice) wasn't meant to evoke anything specific, but it struck a resonant parallel with Simpson's work. The artist leverages the power of old clichés long used by museums as a matter of course to frame Native American culture as primitive and a thing of the past. Despite significant progress, that element has hardly vanished, giving Simpson ample material so she can unravel false perceptions as she pleases.

Many of the pieces are marked with Xs and horizontal dashes, mysterious runes left unexplained. In "Root A," the face is ornamented with geometric patterning that prompts a conditioned response in seasoned museum-goers. My mind went searching unbidden into deep recesses of memory where countless displays of Native American ethnography, seen over years, are stored.

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Joke's on me — there is no reference point, no explicit antecedent. Simpson's work prompts self-implication; you question not just what you're seeing, but the baggage you bring to it. Simpson can be overt, and she can be sly. One powerful piece, "The Remembering," 2020, groups three small figures, eyes shut, in pale clay jugs up to their shoulders. It's a blunt memorial to the children shunted to abusive "Indian boarding schools" by the US government in its long-term effort to brutally assimilate Native Americans by wiping out their languages and cultures.

"The Storyteller," 2021, takes a cutesy cliché about Native American culture and freights it with dread: The pale figure at its core spews harried-looking spawn that clamber up its head and shoulders and onto a steel armature. The piece is a powerful indictment of neat and tidy histories, told by its victors. The abiding sense is terror-provoked chaos, untold horrors let loose.



From left: Rose B. Simpson, "Storyteller," 2021, "Genesis Squared" (detail), 2019, and "Brace," 2022, in "Rose B. Simpson: Legacies," the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston, 2022-2023. (Photo by Mel Taing) MEL TAING

All is far from doom and gloom here, though. At the core of the display stands "Genesis Squared," from 2019, a mother and infant with echoes of the classic "Madonna and child" images from countless European traditions. Go ahead, take the bait — that's why it's there. But Simpson's version registers as timeless, something that both predates the Christian reference and feels destined to outlast it. The mother figure wears a steel headdress and stands on a

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metal box. Both are scored with patterns and symbols that could as easily be stolen from a far-flung future as an ancient past.

The piece feels like a convergence between two cultures long at odds — if not quite a gesture of reconciliation, then surely one of equivalence, universal and uniting. Whoever you are, wherever you're from, whatever you believe, what matters more than what comes next, and the generation that will carry it forward? Simpson's work roots itself in her ancient culture, but imagines a world, finally, built for all of us.

**ROSE B. SIMPSON: LEGACIES**

At the Institute of Contemporary Art, 25 Harbor Shore Drive. Through Jan. 29. 617-478-3100, [www.icaboston.org](http://www.icaboston.org)

**ROSE B. SIMPSON: COUNTERCULTURE**

At Field Farm, Trustees of Reservations, 554 Sloan Road, Williamstown. 617-542-7696, [www.thetrustees.org](http://www.thetrustees.org)



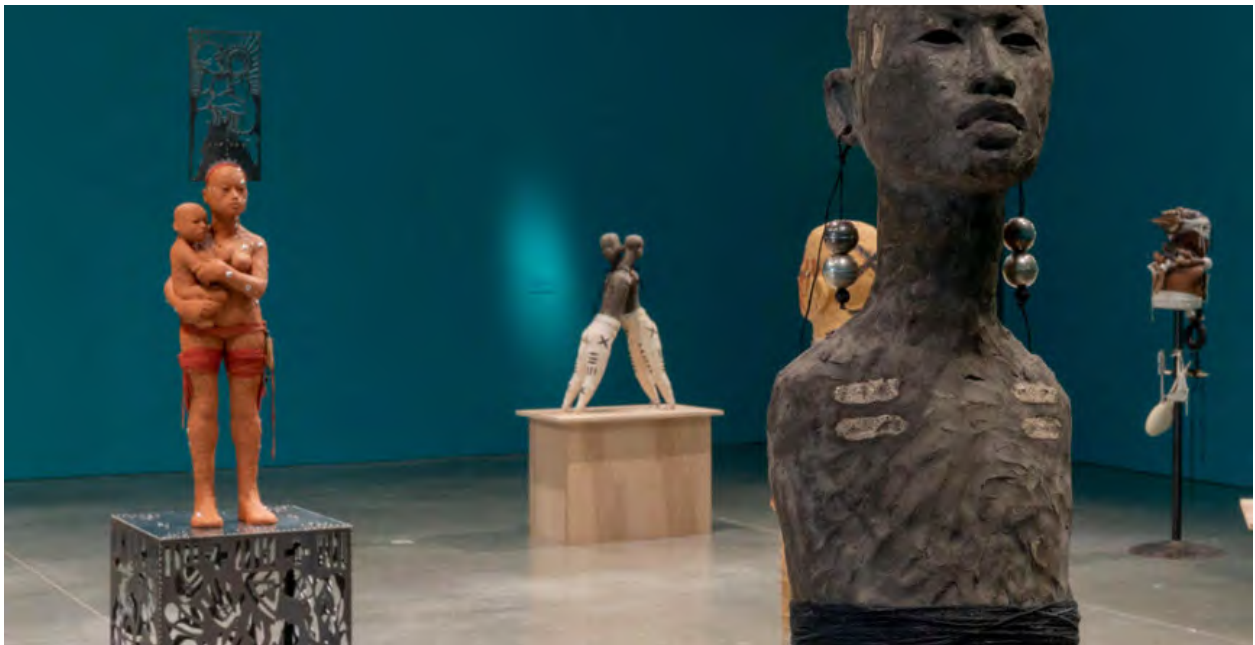
# FRIEZE

## Rose B. Simpson's Kinship in Clay

In the artist's solo show at ICA/Boston, figurative sculptures articulate the social power of family and community

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BY CAITLIN CHAISSON IN EXHIBITION REVIEWS, US REVIEWS | 20 SEP 22



A darkened atmosphere pervades Rose B. Simpson's solo exhibition 'Legacies' at ICA/Boston, like a cloudy sky calling for rain. Figurative clay sculptures appear on raised platforms in the open gallery. Their resemblances disclose familial relations amongst those in the room and, as the title of the exhibition suggests, to relatives beyond. Simpson herself comes from a long line of accomplished ceramicists from Santa Clara Pueblo in New Mexico, including her mother, Roxanne Swentzell, her late grandmother, Rina Swentzell and her late great-grandmother, Rose Naranjo.

# FRIEZE



'Rose B. Simpson: Legacies', 2022, installation view. Courtesy: the artist and ICA/Boston; photograph: Mel Taing.

Although Simpson's sculptures are personal, reflective of her experience both as a parent and a Tewa woman, they are without specific autobiographical or spiritual references. The markings that run up and down the figures are intentionally inscrutable, forming part of the artist's unique symbology. Despite these guarded signifiers, Simpson's work is forthright in her critique of ongoing settler colonialism. *The Remembering* (2020) evokes the trauma inflicted at Native American boarding schools. Three sculpted children are bound with sharpened sticks at their chins. Their hands, modelled out of a smoother and lighter clay, are attached by metal links — as if to suggest their compromised agency under conditions of forced assimilation. The crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls is addressed in *Genesis Squared* (2019), where

# FRIEZE

mother and child appear together beneath the protective rays of a tablita. The laser-cut steel cube at the base of the work features silhouettes of defensive postures that are barb-like in their detail, sharply contrasted by the gentle impressions left by Simpson's hands on the ceramic elements that stand above it. The artist's various treatments of clay – a substance that can be both durable and vulnerable – convey the qualities of transformed strength.



'Rose B. Simpson: Legacies', 2022, installation view. Courtesy: the artist and ICA/Boston; photograph: Mel Taing.



# FRIEZE

The appearance of power in Simpson's work has undergone a shift in the past few years. *Directed South* (2014), the earliest figure on view in the exhibition, is distinct — clad in a heavy armour of thick leather bands and chunky unglazed beads. In more recent works, Simpson's use of sculptural artillery is less obvious, placing emphasis on structural considerations. In *Brace* (2022), two figures are pitched forward chest-to-chest. Their elongated necks tenderly touch, stabilizing one another, and their shoulders, which resemble lug handles, are tied with twine. In *Truss* (2021), a solitary figure balances on a metal brake drum while cylindrical spouts reach skyward from their head and shoulders. One of the few literal references to Simpson's training as an auto mechanic, the work also imparts her skillfulness in construction. A truss improves load-bearing through triangular assemblies of beams, but here Simpson's curvilinear design is closer to an aqueduct. Whereas the artist's earlier works were armed for protection, these newer figures carry force.

The relationships conveyed by Simpson's sculptures in 'Legacies' demonstrate the power of extended community and kin. The artist often twins her figures, a difficult task given that she works primarily with hand-coiled clay instead of moulds. Over time, some of these couples – by design or circumstance – become separated. The companion of *Root A* (2019), for instance, is missing from this installation. Absent figures like this one create a tether to beings and places beyond, and also affirm the significance of pottery as a means to articulate relations in the social world. Simpson's treatment of the hollow interiors of the figures makes space for other forms of interconnectedness. Openings in the clay are necessary during the firing process, but for the artist they also serve as thresholds for intersecting realities – perhaps most directly represented by the ascending heads in *Reincarnation II* (2021). Simpson has often described the feeling of watching her figures 'wake up' as they take shape – by extension, so too might those who find themselves in their presence.

**'Rose B. Simpson: Legacies'** is on view at ICA/Boston through 29 January.

# FRIEZE



'Rose B. Simpson: Legacies', 2022, installation view. Courtesy: the artist and ICA/Boston; photograph: Mel Taing.

## D.C.'s Hirshhorn Museum Announces Massive Acquisition Spree of 95 Works

**2** Rose B. Simpson, *Countdown I*, 2020



Photo : Courtesy Jessica Silverman Gallery

Rose B. Simpson, for example, is the first Native American woman to be represented in the collection. Her work *Countdown 1* (2020) is an armless, footless sculpture of a person made with epoxy, cement, string, leather, and metal that is inspired by the strong ceramic tradition of the Pueblo tribe she comes from.



## Solo exhibit 'Rose B. Simpson: Legacies' opens at ICA/Boston



**Celina Colby**

*Celina Colby is an arts and travel reporter with a fondness for Russian novels...* [VIEW BIO](#)



Rose B. Simpson, *Brace*, 2022. Clay, glaze, steel, and twine. 38 1/2 x 26 x 14 inches (97.8 x 71.1 x 35.6 cm). Courtesy the artist and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco. PHOTO: Addison Doty. © Rose B. Simpson



Dynamic sculpture artist Rose B. Simpson opens her first solo show in Boston at the ICA, running Aug. 11 through Jan. 29. Utilizing ceramic sculpture, performance, installation, metalwork, writing and other media, Simpson reflects on the human condition, particularly under colonial rule.

“Simpson is one of the most compelling voices in contemporary sculpture who consistently asks urgent questions about where we find ourselves in the world today through inventive techniques and materials,” says Jeffrey De Blois, associate curator and publications manager and the organizer of the exhibition. “We look forward to sharing her powerful work with Boston audiences.”

“Rose B. Simpson: Legacies,” showcases 11 of the artist’s works, including some new pieces on view for the first time. The centerpieces of the exhibition are Simpson’s signature ceramic figures, part of a matrilineal clay work legacy and, appropriately, often depicting female subjects. The figures range in scale from life size to miniature and intimate, each sculpture probing consciousness and lived experience.

Simpson was born in Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexico and still lives and works there, now teaching her own daughter how to use creativity to navigate the world. She holds a BFA from the Institute of American Indian Art, an MFA from Rhode Island School of Design and an MA in Creative Writing from the Institute of American Indian Art.

“My life-work is a seeking out of tools to use to heal the damages I have experienced as a human being of our postmodern and postcolonial era — objectification, stereotyping and the disempowering detachment of our creative selves through the ease of modern technology,” Simpson says in an artist statement.

In “Brace,” two figures of clay, steel, glaze and twine lean against each other, creating a triangle shape. The armless figures support each other and look out across each other’s shoulders as though scouting for threats. Here, ancestry and heritage provide a bolster for contemporary issues, with past and present holding each other up.

“Root A” stands 71 inches tall and shows a grounded figure with arms crossed and a circular shape connecting the head to the body. According to the artist, this figure stands tall “for justice, healing and rehabilitation” in the face of significant strife, perhaps even an apocalyptic landscape. In this way, and frequently in her work, Simpson illustrates how ancestral tools and practices can be used to overcome difficulty.

# THE BAY STATE Banner

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“These tools are sculptural pieces of art that function in the psychological, emotional, social, cultural, spiritual, intellectual and physical realms,” says Simpson. “The intention of these tools is to cure; therefore, my hope is that they become hard-working utilitarian concepts.”



Rose B. Simpson, *Root A*, 2019.  
Ceramic, glaze, linen, jute string, steel, and leather. 71 1/2 x 20 1/2 x 16 inches (181.6 x 52.1 x 40.6 cm).  
Rennie Collection, Vancouver.  
Courtesy the artist and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco. PHOTO: John Wilson White. © Rose B. Simpson



Rose B. Simpson, *Legacy*, 2022.  
Clay, glaze, grout, and found objects. Two parts: one part: 39 1/2 x 9 1/2 x 8 inches (100.3 x 24.1 x 20.3 cm); one part: 28 x 6 x 6 1/2 inches (71.1 x 15.2 x 16.5 cm).  
Private collection, Boston.  
Courtesy the artist and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco.  
PHOTO: Addison Doty. © Rose B. Simpson



COUNTERCULTURE

# Indigenous artist Rose B. Simpson's sculptures stand watch at Field Farm

Sculptural installation will remain on view through April 2023

By Jennifer Huberdeau, The Berkshire Eagle | Jun 24, 2022



"Counterculture," a public art project of The Trustees of Reservations, is on view at Field Farm in Williamstown through spring 2023.  
JENNIFER HUBERDEAU — THE BERKSHIRE EAGLE

WILLIAMSTOWN — They stand, 12 silent sentinels, watching over the land.

In this field, they bear witness to the wind as it blows, to the rain as it falls, to the stars in the night sky. They watch the fireflies flit in the dark of night and stand watch over the bobolinks that nest in the tall grasses of Field Farm Reservation, 316 preserved acres overseen by The Trustees of Reservations.

It is here that sculptor and mixed media artist Rose B. Simpson's slender, androgynous cast-concrete 9-foot-tall sculptures will stand, along the horizon line of the meadow, visible from Sloan Road, through April 30, 2023. Her most ambitious work to date, "Counterculture," honors generations of marginalized people and cultures, whose voices have been too often silenced by colonization and in many cases, forcibly removed from their homelands.

"I've been playing around with this idea being a witness, of witnessing; in that we look deeply at so many subjects, everything that we experience," Simpson said, during a recent interview in the meadow, at the foot of her sculptures. "How do we look deeper and ever deeper into those subjects?"

"This piece, initially, was about looking at a sort of the post-apocalyptic landscape for indigenous people. So, they are witnesses of that really difficult history [of colonization] ... these could be put anywhere on this planet and they'd still be, in a sense, surveying that difficult history."

And this piece, she said, is about personal growth, for her, and her audience.

"So much of my work is about teaching myself how to slow down and question every moment, question the things I think I do know, that I'm certain about. I'm questioning, things that I'm told are true, those histories and the perspectives and looking deeper at any situation," Simpson said. "As I work to find that inside myself, I'm hoping the things I make in the investigation into my own personal evolution and growth become opportunities for other people to see that in themselves."

Each sculpture's eyes are purposely left vacant — holes that show the sky and land behind them.

"The eyes go through, the form, all the way through to the back of the head, to sort of wake them up. They are watching," she said. "We were out there, up on the ladder the other day to put the necklaces on and I could see the wind go through, as dust came out of the eye. It made me realize the wind is actually whistling through the eye, that there's so many layers of what's watching you. We generally forget we're being held accountable or responsible by forces that we forget have any power over us."

Simpson, who traditionally works in clay, first created three figures as clay maquettes. She then made there full-scale models from wood, pine she carved with a chainsaw. The finished pine pieces were then shipped to Sculpture House Casting in New York City, where the 12 sculptures were cast in concrete.

It's the first time, she said, she's had someone else make castings of her work. Seeing the sculptures — as a dozen concrete statues of varying colors and individual personalities — for the first time, slowly rising above the horizon line as she drove up Sloane Road, was a moment for pause, Simpson said.

"When I first saw them, as I drove up the hill — they didn't have the necklaces on yet, but they had already been stood up in the line that they're in — I pulled over. I just had to swallow. It's really, really powerful to see them," she said. "I made these originals and then I trusted them in the hands of someone else. To witness my own work, in this way, is a first-time experience for me. And I'm learning a lot from it. I'm trying to make space for the power I feel from it and the immense strength that I witness, as well this reflection in these pieces. I don't know if I'm worthy, those parts of myself that feel really small and insignificant are having to grow to accept it. It's a big growing moment."

Originally planned for the Holmes Reservation in North Plymouth, another property of The Trustees, "Counterculture," was moved to Field Farm after the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe, objected to having art from another tribe on their ancestral land. Simpson, 38, an enrolled member of the Santa Clara Pueblo (Kha'p'oe Ówîngeh) in New Mexico, and The Trustees deferred to the tribal sovereignty of the Wampanoag, choosing instead to move the work to Williamstown.

In this case, Field Farm is part of the ancestral home of the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians, the Muh-he-con-ne-ok (People of the waters that are never still), who now reside in Wisconsin after being forcibly relocated numerous times. The Mohican/Munsee lands extended across six states, from southwest Vermont, to portions of Pennsylvanian and New Jersey, including the entire Hudson River Valley and western Massachusetts and northwest Connecticut, up to the Connecticut River Valley.

"This project would not be possible without the Stockbridge-Munsees," said Jamilee Lacy, guest curator of The Trustees of Reservations' 2022 Art & Landscape program, during an opening celebration at Field Farm.

Changing the location of the sculptures, from a strip of land near the ocean to the woodlands and meadows of the Berkshires, wasn't as much of a challenge, as it was an adjustment for Simpson, who received her MFA in ceramics from the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence and is part of the group exhibition, "Ceramics in the Expanded Field," at Mass MoCA.

"When I first got here, this was unfamiliar turf for me. I'm always inspired by new environment and mostly because I love that sense of wonder when I don't know who these trees are, what kind of grass this is,



what these flowers are. I don't really know. I don't know what poison ivy looks like, for instance. And so I feel really naive. I feel so innocent and I'm in a state of wonder in this environment," she said.

"And so I feel like a visitor and I want to walk respectfully and I have to. I don't know who this tree is. I don't know what that plant is. I don't know how it will affect me. And so I approach it with caution but also care and respect. And when I showed up and saw these pieces here in this field, one of the most beautiful places I ever seen in my life I kept thinking what an honor to be here more than any building, any piece of architecture I could possibly imagine, that this field is the biggest honor I could imagine. And, that these pieces, get to get to last the seasons and watch this place so deeply and so long. They get to be sat on by birds. They get to watch the stars, go through the night, they get silence, they get winds, they get, you know, they get to watch the animals creep through the grass."

As part of the exhibition, Simpson will bring clay, harvested from around the stands of the sculptures, to Wisconsin, where she'll make beads with the community members, that will be added to necklaces that will be brought back and added to the sculptures.

It's a small way, she said, to connect the Stockbridge-Munsees with their ancestral homelands.

It's good to start thinking about what we can do to have reparations, to bring them home, to not just see it as a interesting thing, but as a call to action — as a call to heal, as a call to come home and feel these mountains in your soul, let the ancestors welcome you. Their ancestors are walking here still," Simpson said.

"What it would it be like to be torn from them, like that?," she asked. "I can't even imagine. I have the privilege of living in my ancestral homelands, where my history is so so, so deep there in my yard, in my backyard in my, my family that still lives all around me. I don't, I don't have that experience in the same way."

She is hopeful that work like hers will spark conversations that will help bring healing; help bring the Mohicans back to their homelands.

"I wonder how we can just start bringing awareness," she asked, saying that it's as simple as saying, "Hey you need access to your ancestral, healing waters. How can we make that happen? You need to have a place that is yours to come home to, that you can pray at, that you can commune with your ancestors.'

"That's vital, having a place to listen to go and ask for direction and hear what they have to say, instead of calling across states for answers. That distance between them, that is really hard. We can start looking at ways that we can return some land to those people and start bringing their presence back.

"I can tell the land wants that. The land is calling for its people back."



# THE ART NEWSPAPER

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**Art market // News**

## 'Jack found a rocking chair for me and we talked about his baby ducks for 45 minutes': rising sculptor Rose B. Simpson joins Jack Shainman Gallery

The signing of the artist, who will continue to be represented by Jessica Silverman in San Francisco, comes at a time of increasing—and overdue—recognition of Indigenous artists within the US art world

**Benjamin Sutton** 24 November 2021

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Sculptor Rose B. Simpson Photo by Minesh Bacrania



The artist Rose B. Simpson, known for her richly detailed ceramic sculptures of elongated and stylised figures, is joining the roster of New York's Jack Shainman Gallery. The artist's work across sculpture, installation and performance draws on her heritage as an enrolled member of the Pueblo of Santa Clara in New Mexico, and often incorporates futuristic or even post-apocalyptic imagery. She will continue to be represented by Jessica Silverman in San Francisco.

Simpson's rising profile and newly bicoastal representation comes amid a growing wave of long overdue recognition and elevation of Indigenous artists within the US art world and beyond. One of the year's breakout New York solo shows, for instance, was an exhibition of monumental ceramics by Raven Halfmoon, a Montana-based member of the Caddo Nation, at Ross + Kramer Gallery. And in September, the Choctaw-Cherokee artist Jeffrey Gibson joined London's Stephen Friedman Gallery, his first international representation (in addition to Kavi Gupta in Chicago, Roberts Projects in Los Angeles and Sikkema Jenkins & Co. in New York).

Simpson, who was featured in the summer group exhibition *Feedback* [↗](#), curated by Helen Molesworth, at Shainman's space in Kinderhook, New York, says an interaction with the gallerist during an opening event helped win her over. "My daughter, who at the time was four, was tired from traveling and fell asleep in my lap at this big opening," she recalls. "Jack found a rocking chair for me and came and sat with me, and we talked about his baby ducks for 45 minutes."

The opportunity to show alongside other members of Shainman's roster, which includes many hugely influential artists of colour such as Kerry James Marshall, Toyin Ojih Odutola and Carrie Mae Weems, was also a major factor. "There's an immense honor to enter into a space that, by all ways and means, being a little kid on the rez in northern New Mexico, I never dreamed of," she says.

Shainman, who will be showing two new ceramic figures by Simpson in his booth at Art Basel in Miami Beach next week, described the artist as "a singular voice within her generation, creating powerful works that counter stereotypes through intimate explorations of both personal and communal histories".





Rose B. Simpson, *Considerati A* (2021)

© Rose B. Simpson. Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

With a growing list of projects on the horizon, the support from a major East Coast gallery is coming at a crucial time for Simpson. She is currently an artist-in-residence at the Fabric Workshop in Philadelphia, where she will open a solo show in September 2022; one month prior she will open a solo exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston. Next autumn, in one of her most ambitious public projects to date, she will install [↗](#) a dozen nine-foot-tall concrete figures with ceramic detailing on the Holmes Reservation near Plymouth, Massachusetts, a symbolically charged location as one of the crucial colonial landing sites that set in motion the genocide of Indigenous people in North America.

For Simpson, the Plymouth project is a continuation of her interest in vessels, whether they be ceramic works shaped around an interior space, massive outdoor pieces or *Maria* (2014), the 1985 El Camino car that the artist—who holds a degree in custom auto

body work as well as an MFA in ceramics from the Rhode Island School of Design—adorned with designs inspired by Hopi-Tewa ceramics. “What is really nice about the vessel is the spectrum of potential expression,” she says. “I make vessels that are figurative ceramic works, that are holding intention, but our bodies are also vessels, what we eat out of is a vessel, the car *Maria* is a vessel.”

By all indications, her ceramic vessels are resonating with gallerists and collectors alike. Earlier this month, during the Art Dealers Association of America’s (ADAA) New York fair, the Art Show, Silverman sold all three of her sculptures on opening day for \$35,000 each. Silverman, who gave Simpson her first West Coast solo show in 2019, described her as “a big-picture, hands-on artist, whose androgynous ceramic figures bring a sense of empathy, embodiment and connectedness to an alienated, digitised, conflicted world”.

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# BURNAWAY

"Rose B. Simpson at the SCAD Museum of Art"

By Daniel Fuller

July 14, 2021



View of Rose B. Simpson, *Countdown*, 2021 at SCAD Museum of Art. Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco. Photo courtesy of SCAD.

Defying gravity, the four 8-foot clay bodies of Rose B. Simpson's *Countdown*, her new body of works commissioned by the SCAD Museum of Art, pack a powerful presence. The figures stick their necks out, fully leaning with foreheads against the glass. It's an act of tremendous faith, an assumption that both the glass will hold, and we, the viewer, will catch them if all falls apart. The figures themselves are thin, androgynous, their bodies built from pockmarked clay surfaces. They are impressive, adorned with Native American glyphs and long hanging prayer beads. Their faces are stripped down, eroded to their essential humble cores with stoic expressions. Laid bare, the four figures feel as though they directly gaze at us in compassionate confrontation, a sincere attempt at reasoning. The viewer is left to answer their provocation with a broad tapestry of potential meanings: deeper understandings of nature and death, power and politics, capitalism and strength, art, and beauty. Standing under these sculptures is an emotional journey of mind and body.



View of Rose B. Simpson, *Countdown*, 2021 at SCAD Museum of Art. Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco. Photo courtesy of SCAD.

The exhibition is so captivating, but I can never fully take my mind off the SCAD Museum of Art as a building. The museum is situated in a renovated antebellum railroad complex. The distinctive Savannah Gray Bricks that make up the railway structure and the surrounding freight warehouses date back to 1853. When Henry McAlpin, the owner of the Hermitage Plantation, realized his land was situated on a rare-grey colored clay that was not suitable for crops, he redirected the labor of enslaved people from farming to hand-forming bricks—the resulting materials made the foundation for this art museum in a historically preserved building. The museum building itself conjures irreconcilable issues of monumentality, of memory, life, the hereafter.

In opposite corners on the glass and the walls behind the sculptures sit flattened sundials with their corresponding vinyl design. Alluding back to the exhibition's title this is the *Countdown*, the rare and elusive moment where the world is aligned. The magic hour as the sun rises and falls, where communication and connection happen in the form of perfect synchronicity. I stand, unsettled, waiting beneath these timeless sculptures with the suspense of the sun.



Rose B. Simpson "Artists Explore New Ways of Sculpting the Land"

By Susan Delson

July 23, 2021



A photograph by Gianfranco Gorgoni of 'Seven Magic Mountains' by Ugo Rondinone, a 2016 land art work near Las Vegas.

Photo: Estate of Gianfranco Gorgoni; artwork Ugo Rondinone

In 1969, a young artist named Michael Heizer headed into the Nevada desert 80 miles northeast of Las Vegas and cut a pair of trenches into a mesa, running 50 feet deep, 30 feet wide and a combined 1,500 feet long. Monumental enough to be seen in satellite photographs, "Double Negative" quickly became an icon in the emerging field of land art—art that uses land itself as its material, by marking, sculpting or otherwise intervening in the landscape.

Half a century on, land art is changing. For one thing, it's no longer the exclusive domain of male artists from New York, "talking tough and driving bulldozers" to make "geometric, minimalist gestures in the desert," said William Fox, director of the Center for Art + Environment at the Nevada Museum of Art in Reno. Contemporary artists tend to favor less intrusive approaches, Mr. Fox said, often addressing what he called "real-world, real-time concerns." And they're more likely to be women and people of color, including indigenous artists.

This summer, the Nevada Museum of Art is presenting five exhibitions exploring diverse aspects of land art, from iconic beginnings to new interpretations. The state has been home to 15 or more important works of land art, some of them now gone. "We're acknowledging these major earthworks in our backyard," said the museum's senior curator and deputy director Ann M. Wolfe. "But at the same time we're asking: Who are the artists who've been left out of the land art narrative, and who are the artists shaping the future of the field?"

As a starting point, "Gianfranco Gorgoni: Land Art Photographs" presents images by one of the first land art photographers, who was "on the ground when those pieces were being created in the 1960s and '70s," Ms. Wolfe noted. In 2015-16, Mr. Gorgoni returned to Nevada as the official photographer for "Seven Magic Mountains" (2016), a work by Swiss artist Ugo Rondinone that was commissioned by the museum and the New York-based Art Production Fund. Located 10 miles south of Las Vegas, "Seven Magic Mountains" is visited by about a thousand people a day, said Ms. Wolfe, drawn by its syncopated shapes and Vegas-inspired neon colors.

A model of "Seven Magic Mountains" is among the first works on view in "Land Art: Expanding the Atlas." Grouped under broad themes like Ground, Water, Space and Ruin, some 80 works by close to 50 artists trace an alternate history of the field, proposing different definitions of what land art might be.



*Justin Favela's 'Family Fiesta: Double Negative' (2015) staged a pop-up party at the site of a 1969 land art work by Michael Heizer. Photo: Courtesy of the artists Justin Favela. Photo credit: Mikayla Whitmore*

Northern California artists Daniel McCormick and Mary O'Brien, for instance, specialize in watershed restoration and erosion control, working with woven basket forms that become part of the environment. Aboriginal Australian artist Reko Rennie uses an early land art technique—inscribing the terrain with tire-track circles—for a different purpose, reclaiming traditional territory on behalf of his people. And in the video "Family Fiesta: Double Negative" (2015), Justin Favela wryly critiques Mr. Heizer's pioneering earthwork by staging a pop-up party at the site, filling its minimalist void with color, camaraderie and Mexican *banda* music. "Great acoustics," he later noted.

For artist Rose B. Simpson of Santa Clara Pueblo, N.M., land art was an important context for the quartet of outsize female clay figures, called "Groundbeings," that anchor the exhibition "Rose B. Simpson: The Four." "It's as if they're emerging from or descending into the earth," said contemporary art curator JoAnne Northrup. A fourth exhibition spotlights High Desert Test Sites, an arts organization co-founded by artist Andrea Zittel in 2002 that stages events in desert locations, ranging from "experimental music to ephemeral structures to performances and happenings," Ms. Wolfe said.

All four shows are currently on view. On Aug. 28 they will be joined by "Judy Chicago: Dry Ice, Smoke, and Fireworks Archive," which focuses on a less-known aspect of the celebrated artist's work: a series of performances, called "Atmospheres," that Ms. Chicago initiated in 1968 in response to the monumental land art of that era.

Staged in the deserts where those massive interventions were taking place, the Atmospheres used ephemeral materials like smoke, fireworks and dry ice to "feminize the landscape," as Ms. Chicago put it. The exhibition includes large-scale photographs, videos and documentation of these performances, which the artist continues to create—including one in New Mexico last weekend, just before her 82nd birthday. Releasing colored smoke into the air, she has observed, "softened everything."

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## **Rose B. Simpson: "Flying high: Rose B. Simpson"**

Written by Michael Abatemarco

February 21, 2020



Rose B. Simpson makes her signature sculptures in her studio in Española, photo by Luke E. Montavon/ *The New Mexican*

It's a mild winter day in late January, and Rose B. Simpson, dressed in a dark sweatshirt and jeans, is busy at her potter's wheel, just starting on a new piece. Under her practiced hands, the rectangular clay slab quickly takes on cylindrical form. "I have a running joke with a friend of mine where I say, 'I have to go dig clay,' " says Simpson, who purchases 50-pound bags of it from a company in Albuquerque — unlike some of her Santa Clara Pueblo relatives, who gather clay by hand. "So I go to the store and get out my cornmeal and throw it, and say my prayers," she jokes, tossing up her hand as though making an offering. "What I'm asking my clay to do requires it to be really high-fired. I need it to be really dense and strong because I ask a lot of it."

It's early in the day and Simpson, 36, a recipient of the Women's Caucus for Art's 2020 President's Art & Activism Award, isn't wasting any time. At her Española studio, she's trying to get a head start on a project she plans to complete for the Anderson Ranch Arts Center in Colorado for a two-week residency in early March. The work she's doing now is for an exhibition slated to open in May at The School, an old schoolhouse in Kinderhook, New York, that's managed by the Jack Shainman Gallery.

The studio is attached to her mother Roxanne Swentzell's Flowering Tree Permaculture Institute, at Santa Clara Pueblo. It's a cramped space, no larger than a one-car garage, stacked with bags of pale, flesh-colored clay, and the air is perfumed with its earthy aroma. Bottles and tubes of glue and acrylic paint crowd the shelves next to Simpson's framed master's degree from the vaunted Rhode Island School of Design. ("Conferred with honors," it reads in a stately script.) The cement floor is gouged with deep scars that Simpson explains are from the time when her uncle, sculptor Michael



Naranjo, used the studio. "He was using an angle grinder on his stonework in here," she says. "And he's blind."

In one corner rests an old squat kiln, about waist high, with room enough for clay pieces no larger than 26 inches. That's pretty astounding, considering that much of Simpson's work is life-sized or larger. "You made everything with this kiln?" asked an incredulous Helen Molesworth, the curator of the New York show, when she saw it. Molesworth, who also served as curator-in-residence at the Anderson Ranch in 2019, convinced Simpson to apply for the residency to take advantage of the art center's large, walk-in kilns.

### **The Wheelwright retrospective and beyond**

Simpson, who's been represented by Chiaroscuro Contemporary Art in Santa Fe for most of her professional life, had her first mid-career retrospective at the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian in November 2018. Were it not for the birth of her daughter, Nugget, the exhibit would have opened a few years earlier, cementing Simpson's place as the youngest artist to ever have a solo show at the museum. "I lost my youngest position to T.C. Cannon," she says about the influential Kiowa art star whose life was cut short by a tragic car accident at the age of 31.

The Wheelwright show was the beginning of a new phase for Simpson that led to greater national interest in her work. "It's changed my life," she says. "I'm now represented by a gallery in San Francisco, the Jessica Silverman Gallery. It's just nuts who I've been talking to and connecting with."

If not for the Wheelwright show, it isn't likely that she would have been selected for the exhibition at The School — or for the Anderson Ranch residency, for that matter. But Molesworth saw the show on a visit to Santa Fe with her wife, Susan Dackerman of Stanford University's Cantor Arts Center, and took notice. "She was like, 'We thought we were in dreamy Santa Fe and your work was just good in context, but let's let the Santa Fe wash off and then we'll revisit the photos we took.' When they sat down and looked at the photos, they were like, 'No, it wasn't just Santa Fe. She's good.'"

Simpson's ceramics often betray the hand of the artist, whether she's creating busts, full-sized figures of Native warriors, dolls, installations, or works in her *Ancestor Masks* series. She doesn't try to disguise the fact that the pieces are clay; they're usually dimpled with the impressions of the busy fingers that molded them. Her warrior figures, some of which were shown at the Wheelwright in her 2018–2019 solo exhibition *LIT*, are free from specific tribal associations, offering imaginative interpretations of what a warrior could be. Some of them are based, she says, on her idea of what tribes living in a post-apocalyptic future might look like. They're mixed media works, painted with tribal designs of her own invention, and adorned with beads and jewelry made from metal and stone.

Many of her clay figures are female, but even so, the faces are anonymous, although they often bear a slight resemblance to her own rounded features, with tranquil, knowing eyes.

### **Dreams of speed and flight**

With the award from the Women's Caucus and a flurry of other exhibitions in the pipeline (including an upcoming fall show at the Nevada Museum of Art in Reno), it's hard to imagine that Simpson ever wanted to be something other than an artist. She was born into one of the most prominent families

of Native artists in the country. In addition to her mother and her uncle Michael, other members of the family include ceramic artists Jody Folwell and Nora Naranjo Morse.

But when she was in high school, Simpson had other ambitions. "I really wanted to go into the Air Force. I used to make those plastic models of bomber planes and hang them from my ceiling. I wanted to fly so bad."

She took the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery test (ASVAB) and got high scores. Soon after, various branches of the armed services started calling. "My mom kept hanging up on them. She sat me down and was like, 'You want to kill people?' and I was like, 'I just want to fly their airplanes, man.' "

Simpson hasn't yet satiated that desire. She talks — sheepishly at first, then animatedly — of possibly taking advantage of a Whirly-Girls International flight training scholarship to learn how to pilot a helicopter. "You can do search and rescue and there's a lot of side jobs you could do." She even considered building one of her own, and having the tribe sponsor the project. "I could give the governor rides up the canyon," she says, laughing. "I don't know."

If you know Simpson, you wouldn't have any doubt that she could pull it off. In a room adjoining her studio is a photo of artist Jeff Brock's souped-up 1952 Buick Super Riviera, Bombshell Betty, which broke several land-speed records at Utah's Bonneville Speedway. Simpson practically seethes, recalling her obsession with Brock and how she wanted to break his record and become "the world's fastest Indian." Adjacent to her studio is the auto body shop where she works on her own custom cars. But Maria, her signature 1985 Chevrolet El Camino, isn't there. The car, which she named after Native American potter Maria Martinez, sports black-on-black Pueblo designs in the style of San Ildefonso's sought-after pottery. It's currently on national tour, part of a traveling show called *Hearts of Our People: Native Women Artists*.

### **Art as an act of healing the past**

Simpson approaches the designs for her custom cars as she does all her art, with reverence and respect for her ancestry and empathy for the larger indigenous community. In part, that attitude is why she was selected for recognition by the Women's Caucus for Art.

"I've known about Rose for some time but had never really seen her work in quantity," says WCA president Margo Hobbs, who was impressed by what she saw at the Wheelwright. "It just blew me away. After, I was thinking that I should give her the President's Award because everything she's doing is right in line with what the Women's Caucus, as an organization, supports."

The award is specifically for a mid-career artist who embodies the organization's mission, which, Hobbs says, is to create community through art, art education, and social activism. "It's not just Rose's work, which is so profoundly expressive, but the work she does with her community, with at-risk youth, and the various environmental organizations she's involved with."

For her May exhibition at The School, Simpson saw an opportunity to make a positive statement about a dark period in American history. The sculpture she's working on depicts three youthful figures, standing back to back. At this early stage, they're androgynous figures, and may remain so.

They are meant to represent the souls of children from a bygone era, when Native youth were separated from their families, sent to boarding schools, and forced to assimilate into Western society.

The School was an abandoned schoolhouse that gallerist Shainman transformed into an art space. "Helen [Molesworth] was saying that when she first walked into the building, she could still hear the children's voices in the walls," Simpson says. "When I see it, I can't help seeing a boarding school. Assimilation was a policy of genocide of indigenous people. It was a way to kill us. As a mother, I'm still struggling with it."

Simpson speaks of how the abuse the children learned in boarding schools, particularly in the 19th century, contributed to persistent generational trauma and cycles of abuse. "This is what I've inherited and I'm trying to undo it," she says, fighting back tears. "I'm 36 years old, I have a 3-year-old and I'm still dealing with what happened to my people in the 1800s. And it's only one aspect of post-colonial stress disorder."

But the clay figures aren't really about the abuse. They're about the bonds that children formed with each other in order to survive, and the communities they built together. "It's the survival instinct," she says.

Simpson's work seems to come from a deeper place than ego can reach. She taps into a wellspring of the universal, to the core experiences of being human. It's what makes her work accessible and relatable. "I'm dedicated to being aware all the time. What we do and why. What we ingest, through our eyes even, is what we become. How does different art affect us? What is the intention behind it? It's pretty cool to have a space to build that conversation," she says of the upcoming show. "I see it as an opportunity, an access point, for the art world to share consciousness."

# HYPERALLERGIC

**Rose B. Simpson: "Meet the Art Community of the US Southwest: Rose B. Simpson Believes Culture Is for "Conscious Nurturing"**

Written by Ellie Duke

March 9, 2020



Rose B. Simpson in her studio (courtesy the artist and Jessica Silverman Gallery)

Rose B. Simpson is a mixed-media artist from Santa Clara Pueblo, NM. Her work engages ceramic sculpture, metals, fashion, performance, music, installation, writing, and custom cars. She received an MFA in Ceramics from Rhode Island School of Design in 2011, an MFA in Creative Non-Fiction from the Institute of American Indian Arts in 2018, is collected in museums across the continent, and has exhibited internationally. She lives and works from her home at Santa Clara Pueblo, and hopes to teach her young daughter how to creatively engage the world.

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**How long have you been in Santa Clara Pueblo/New Mexico?**

My ancestry dates back thousands of years to the area. I was raised at the Pueblo and after my first graduate degree, returned to live and raise my daughter. As my spirituality is heuristic, I have to be in place to practice.



**What is the first strong memory you have of art?**

My mother supported her family with her ceramic sculpture. So I remember watching her work from when I was still crawling. She was always telling me not to touch her work. I wanted to “help her” so bad. I don’t think I was aware that there was any difference between “art” and “life.”

**What are you questioning through your practice right now?**

I’m always tossing around the idea that for an art practice, we take resources from the earth, and my hope is that the works that are made make systemic change to benefit the planet. Right now I’m working on building awareness around the energy of colonization, around indigenous culture, bodies, and place.



(Courtesy the artist and Jessica Silverman Gallery)

**What challenges do you face as an artist in the Southwest, New Mexico, or Santa Clara Pueblo?**

Recently, I’ve had opportunities to show my work more extensively beyond Santa Fe and the Indian Art Market sphere. Juxtaposing those experiences, I can see how patronizing and disrespectful a small market like the one in the Southwest can be.

**What is the most impactful or memorable art experience you've had in the last year?**

In June of 2019 I got to participate in a group show at Jessica Silverman Gallery in San Francisco. It was the beginning of my representation by JSG, and a really amazing friendship with both Jessica Silverman and her partner, Sarah Thornton. I was given a solo show in the Fall of 2019, a show that pushed my creative process in some of the most vulnerable and exploratory ways. I fell back in love with my studio process.

**When you are working a project do you have a specific audience in mind?**

My work is intended to translate our humanity back to ourselves. I hope that I can educate some people on issues of unconsciousness around race, gender, and history, and I hope to honor lived experiences of those who have suffered Post Colonial Stress Disorder.

**What questions do you feel aren't being asked of or by creative people in your community?**

I think that we lack the capacity for healthy critical dialogue. Art is a powerful medium, and because of the economic importance of it for so many, I've found it difficult to critique or have challenging conversations around our creative intentionality.

**How do you engage with and consume culture?**

I don't think culture is for our consumption. I believe culture is for conscious nurturing. As someone who was initially equipped with a cultural identity, it is frustrating to see people use cultures that are not their own (especially Indigenous culture and lifeways) for their own benefit.

**What are you currently working on?**

I am at Anderson Ranch for an arts residency to finish work for a show at Jack Schainman's School at Kinderhook, curated by Helen Molesworth. Because the exhibition is going to be located at an abandoned and re-appropriated schoolhouse, I've been delving into the history of Western Education and Indigenous Boarding Schools as a genocidal tool in the war against indigenous culture. As someone who attended Indian Boarding School myself, this subject is very sensitive and I am very dedicated to this work.

**Who in your community of artists, curators, archivists, organizers, directors, etc. is inspiring you right now?**

I have wonderful conversations with some of my peers, artists that I respect immensely, including Dyani White-Hawk and Razelle Benally. Working with Jessica Silverman has been one of the most inspiring new forces in my life. Helen Molesworth and Susan Dackerman are people that I admire immensely, it is so good to have queer leaders making space in our global conversations. Tony Pandola is writing a book and our conversations seem to radicalize every energetic and philosophical apocalypse. Jamie Okuma, Cannupa Hanska Luger, Vanessa German, Nep Sidhu are some artists I look to for inspiration and energy.

**Where are the centers for creative community in your region?**

I am most connected to two very important creative machines: the Institute of American Indian Arts and the New Mexico School for the Arts. I believe that centers for critical creativity are the lifeblood of a very tenuous environmental and political future.

# ELEPHANT

## Rose B. Simpson Explores the Human Condition Through Her Native American Past

By Ariella Wolens

December 16, 2019

A sense of place and spirituality go hand in hand in Simpson's intriguing ceramic sculptures, as seen in her current exhibition, *Duo*, which is on show at Jessica Silverman Gallery in San Francisco. She speaks to Ariella Wolens about her fascination with automobiles, and reflects on the place she calls home.



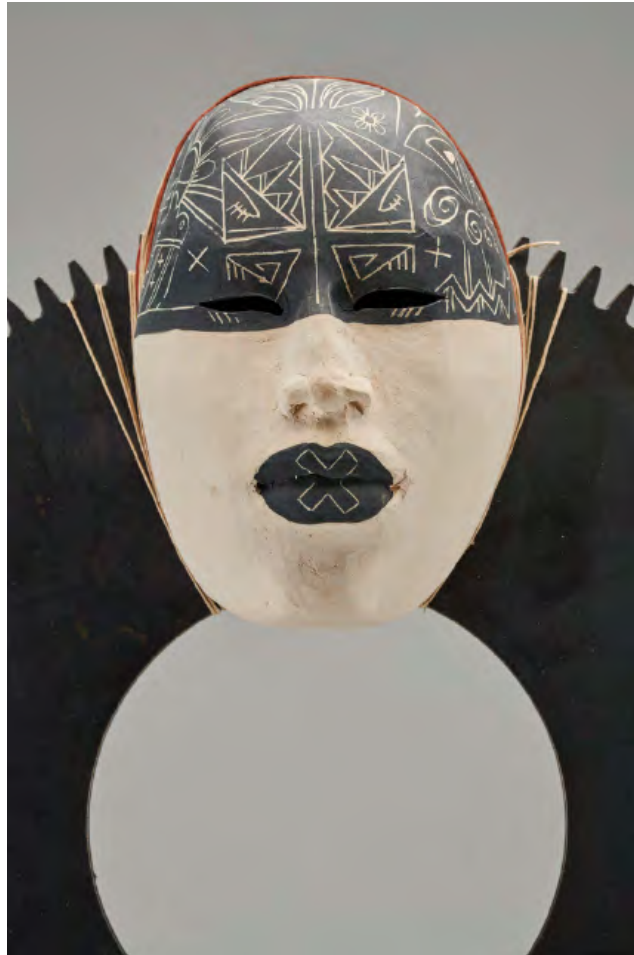
Rose B. Simpson, *Duo* Installation View, 2019. Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman Gallery, San Francisco.  
Photo by John Wilson White.

Rose B. Simpson speaks to me from her immutable home within the sun burnished landscape of her tribe's terra firma, otherwise known as the Santa Clara Pueblo. This historic area of the Pueblo people has existed for thousands of years; sustained by the waters of the Rio Grande and now abutted by the New Mexico capital of Santa Fe on one side, and the notorious city of Española—known as the Lowrider car capital of the world—on the other. As we're talking, Simpson's three-



year-old daughter can be heard playing in the background, adding her own charming narrative to our conversation as we discuss Simpson's recent successes.

One of these notable accomplishments is her current exhibition *Duo*, currently on view at Jessica Silverman Gallery in San Francisco. When I ask Simpson about the impetus behind the show, she describes the importance of site specificity to her work: "I was thinking about audience and space. I wanted to see an arrangement of bodies facing each other in a line, as a way to formally display relationships and activate the space between," she explains.



Rose B. Simpson, Detail of *Root A*, 2019. Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman Gallery, San Francisco.  
Photo by John Wilson White.

*"The sculptural couplets elicit both the tension and fecundity of co-existence; the ability for beings to work together or against one another"*

Eleven sets of genderless corporal sculptures, some evoking totemic forms, others akin to funerary masks, can be seen in the exhibition. The colours and processes hearken back to Simpson's own Pueblo culture and her tribe's venerated practice of creating ceramics and pottery. Simpson, along with her mother, Roxanne Swentzell, is among several Santa Clara sculptors whose work has received global recognition.

While each set of bodies in *Duo* consist of a double, they are not parts of a whole, but rather mutual individuals—equals with a common identity, twins navigating the world simultaneously but alone. The

sculptural couplets elicit both the tension and fecundity of co-existence; the ability for beings to work together or against one another. Simpson informs me that, though she created each work as doubles, they are sent into the world as single pieces.



Rose B. Simpson, Duo Installation View, 2019. Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman Gallery, San Francisco.  
Photo by John Wilson White.

These can be purchased individually or together, therefore bestowing a weighted decision on the collector: "If someone buys one of them, they're responsible for the splitting of the work. To me, that adds to the conversation," she asserts. The twinness of the works is key; they are birthed together, but through circumstance have to navigate the world as solitary beings.

Simpson's bodily forms are evocatively tactile, with the trace of the artist's touch remaining strikingly visible on the ceramic surface. This is due largely to Simpson's idiosyncratic process of

furiously reworking the clay's density. With a method she calls "slap slab," she repeatedly throws clay onto a diagonal surface until the material is paper thin. From here, she applies an additive process to build up the body of the works in wafer-like strips, which come together to create the solid somatic form.



It could be said that Simpson's work is ultimately about the human condition. Her identity as a Native female may be in danger of becoming fetishized, but for the artist, her work exists within a far less prescriptive state. Simpson is forced to grapple with cultural insensitivity, but ultimately she sees the fight against the racial determination of her work as a privileged engagement: "I've had a lot of access because of these cultural fixations, which I've had to navigate in strange ways because the work that I do within the Native art sphere is considered weird and unheard of. Also, because I'm sensitive not to overshare or capitalize on my identity, I'm able to have a deeper conversation about humanity. Some of the decisions I've made are intentional to deconstructing the stereotypes around culture and gender."

Our discussion of gender inevitably leads to a discussion on Simpson's predilection for automobiles, and her active involvement in car culture. This obsession goes so far that she even formally studied Automotive Science at the Northern New Mexico College (she graduated in 2015), subsequent to receiving her formal art training at the Rhode Island School of Design and the University of New Mexico. With its built-in velocity and utilitarian economy, Simpson treats cars as a vessel in much the same way as she does her ceramic sculptures.



Rose B. Simpson, Moon 1, 2019. Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman Gallery, San Francisco.  
Photo by John Wilson White.

*"Where Simpson comes from, cars are emphatically celebrated as symbols of pride, and as a means of survival"*

Earlier this year Simpson installed Maria, her custom built 1984 Chevrolet El Camino, within the Minneapolis Institute of Art, as her contribution to the group exhibition Hearts of Our People: Native Women Artists. The car's moniker pays homage to Maria Martinez, a Native potter of the San Ildefonso Pueblo, who painted using a distinct black-on-black technique. It is a process that continues to be implemented by Simpson's tribe, whereby alternating matte and polished



treatments are used to create geometric and figurative imagery. Simpson applied this technique to the body of her *El Camino*, painting swift geometric lines of glossy paint across the car's paneling.

For Simpson, this use of automobiles within her art is a way to speak to her identity through means that eschew stereotypical mores. Rose explains how the car culture of Española suffused her upbringing (the artist bought her first car at the age twelve.) Where Simpson comes from, cars are emphatically celebrated as symbols of pride, and as a means of survival.



Rose B. *River Girl 1*, 2019. Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman Gallery, San Francisco.  
Photo by John Wilson White.

When I ask Simpson why she chose to continue to remain on her tribe's reservation while pursuing a career as an artist, she explains the nature of her Native spirituality, deeply rooted in a sense of place: "You can't go somewhere else and practice our indigenous religious belief system. I was raised very strongly in my traditional beliefs at the Pueblo, and because of that, to leave is to make a choice that is too hard." This fidelity speaks to Simpson's uncompromising nature. Simpson communicates her identity with reverence, and with a sanctity for its secrets.

# Art in America

## Native Women Artists

June/July, 2019



Rebecca Belmore, *Fringe*, 2007, Transparency in light box, 96 1/4 x 32 3/4 x 6 1/2 inches

"Hearts of Our People" showcases the artistic achievements of Native American women from the past one thousand years. Organized by Minneapolis Institute of Art associate curator Jill Ahlberg Yohe and Native independent curator Teri Greeves, the exhibition brings together more than 115 artists. The works, ranging from pottery and textiles to photographs and a painted Chevy El Camino, are drawn from the museum's permanent collection and the holdings of over thirty institutions and private individuals. Accompanying pro-grams include a symposium by artists and scholars, screenings of movies by and about Native women, and artist talks. Following its Minneapolis debut, the show will travel to the Frist Art Museum in Nashville, the Renwick Gallery in Washington, D.C., and the Philbrook Museum of Art in Tulsa.

## **A Spectacular Exhibit Of Indigenous Women Artists Counters 500 Years Of Exploitation And Ignorance**

By Jonathon Keats

June 10, 2019



Rose B. Simpson (Santa Clara Pueblo), *Maria*, 2014. 1985 Chevy El Camino. Collection of the Artist. © 2014 Rose B. Simpson. Image: © Kate Russell

At the beginning of the 20th century, a Native American potter named Maria Martinez received an unusual request from an archaeologist excavating a site near her home at the San Ildefonso Pueblo in northern New Mexico. He showed her a potsherd unlike anything made in her village – a remnant of an antiquated style in which patterns were rendered in black on black – and asked if she could replicate it for historical research.

Not only did she recapitulate her ancestors' technique. She also revived it, developing new permutations that were admired by her people and outsiders alike. Her descendants still make it today.

Martinez's distinctive blackware is featured in *Hearts of Our People*, a vital survey of art by Native American women that opened at the Minneapolis Institute of Art last week. Curated with input from a geographically diverse panel of Native artists and Native and non-Native scholars, the exhibition and accompanying catalogue provide an engaging perspective on the artistic practices of Indigenous women representing tribes ranging from Yup'ik to Osage over the past millennium.

Although Martinez was an exceptional artist by any standard, her dynamic balance of tradition and innovation is strikingly pervasive, recurrent throughout the exhibit. Artists past and present have meaningfully addressed their communal heritage through modes of expression uniquely their own. Their

work simultaneously maintains continuity and adds to their culture. In many cases, it also provides a cross-cultural portal for non-Native viewers.

A work by a contemporary Santa Clara Pueblo artist named Rose B. Simpson, created in tribute to Martinez, provides a good basis for appreciating these complex dynamics. Several years ago, while loading crops into the bed of a Chevy El Camino, Simpson realized that the car was a lot like a pot. "In the same way our bodies are vessels, the things we eat out of are vessels—it's a utilitarian object," she explains in the exhibition catalogue. To make the association explicit, she painted the Chevy black on black, using a design evocative of San Ildefonso blackware, and dubbed her artwork *Maria*. The strong visual impact reflects Simpson's motivation to make what she dubs an "empowered vessel". The El Camino becomes a vehicle for affirming her personal strength, and relating it to the power that women hold in her culture as makers of life-sustaining pottery.

As *Hearts of Our People* shows, the interplay of tradition and innovation is not only manifest in ceramics, but can equally be found in long-established media ranging from textiles to beading to carving to painting, as well as newer media such as digital photography and video. Basketry is especially well represented, and serves to illustrate the tensions that Native artists have faced in post-colonial America and how they've confronted existential threats ranging from genocide to assimilation.

Like ceramics, baskets have a long history as utilitarian objects and cultural artifacts, serving day-to-day functions while also holding communities together through practices of gathering and making. Within and beyond tribal boundaries, the most refined examples have been admired as artworks and treated as commodities. In *Hearts of Our People*, early 20th century baskets by Washoe artist Louisa Keyser and Yurok/Hupa/Karuk artist Elizabeth Hickox show the aesthetic splendor of basketry, equal to Maria Martinez's pottery, while their personal stories reveal the ugly circumstances in which they were compelled to work.



Cherish Parrish (Odawa/Pottawatami), Gun Lake Band of Pottawatami, *The Next Generation—Carriers of Culture*, 2018, Black ash and Sweet Grass.



For instance, although Keyser invented a new form of Washoe basket called a *degikup*, the non-Native shop that sold her work instead advertised her 'authenticity', appealing to non-Native buyers' desire for primitivism. She was even given a make-believe name, Dat So La Lee, to tout her exoticism. The marketing paid off in the sense that her large baskets sold for more than \$1,000, a hundred times the price of basketry by nameless female contemporaries. As commodities, these baskets sustained Keyser and her community, much as Maria Martinez and her painter husband Julian helped bring their Pueblo from the brink of starvation to relative affluence. But this imprint of primitivism has remained for nearly a century, at least for non-Native viewers, denigrating the creators by ignoring their inventiveness, imagination and humanity. For that reason, *Hearts of our People* is an essential corrective.

The exhibition is also an important corrective in a second way. At least since the 18th century, when Immanuel Kant wrote his *Critique of Judgment*, the Western elite has viewed utility as antithetical to art. Craft is belittled, with the result that Native art has often not been taken seriously, a problem exacerbated by non-Native ignorance of the multiple valences of utility in Indigenous societies. Although it would be unwise to generalize, given the vast diversity of these cultures, many dimensions of utility are revealed through this exhibit. One of the most significant is the role of craft as a communal activity, weaving collaborations on a daily basis and intergenerationally.

The philosophical implications are profound – as profound as the meaning of any artwork Kant would have appreciated – and they're extremely relevant for all peoples today, as society becomes more fractured and shortsighted amidst xenophobia and environmental destruction. The Native practice of thinking in terms of the next seven generations – and acting accordingly – is one that we all need to adopt, and it can be imbued through encounters with Indigenous art.

No single artwork can possibly contain all of these values, though one contemporary basket comes astonishingly close. The Ottawa/Ojibwe/Pottawatomi artist Cherish Parrish has woven a black ash basket in a shape reminiscent of a pregnant woman, a form she describes as "a universal idea for something beautiful and appreciated, something only women can do". Her vessel, titled *The Next Generation—The Carriers of Culture*, embodies the unity of utility and beauty by relating basket and belly, while simultaneously suggesting that the future of a people is borne through heritage as much as biology.

More than just an illustration of grandiose principles, Parrish's basket is a product of these processes, unifying object and meaning. *The Next Generation* really is a carrier of culture – the living descendant of ancient tribal traditions that may eventually birth meaningful art of its own.



## **The Often-Overlooked Aspect of Native American Art: Women**

By Shyam Patel

June 6, 2019



Christi Belcourt; Métis, born 1966; *The Wisdom of the Universe*, 2014; Acrylic on canvas; Unframed: 171 × 282 cm (67 5/16 × 111 in.); Art Gallery of Ontario; Purchased with funds donated by Greg Latremaille, 2014; 2014/6

Although most outsiders don't realize it, Native American art is largely the product of women's work. "This material culture stems from a Native female understanding of the world, her own identity, who her people are, and how this knowledge can be passed on," says Kiowa beadwork artist Teri Greeves. To illustrate this often-overlooked aspect of Native art, Greeves and the Minneapolis Institute of Art's Jill Ahlberg Yohe organized an exhibition of some-120 works conceived over the span of a millennium by female artists from indigenous nations that, collectively, represent all regions of Native North America.

Titled *Hearts of Our People: Native American Women Artists*, the show, which opened at MIA on June 2, includes contemporary works such as Santa Clara Pueblo artist Rose B. Simpson's *Maria*, a customized 1984 Chevrolet El Camino; Romanesque 19th-century sculpture by Edmonia Lewis; and ancient pottery by the Hohokam and Mimbres tribes. "No one other than the individual who comes from the community that's created these works can speak to it," says Greeves, citing the importance of the Native Exhibition Advisory Board (a panel of 21 Native and non-Native female artists and scholars) in selecting the works on view. The final assemblage was organized into three overarching themes that connect each object: relationships, power, and legacy.

"When you see a dress made for a young woman, you're seeing four deer taken by her uncle, tanned by her aunt, and beaded by her mother," Greeves continues. "She wore it understanding her relationship to the deer sacrificed for her, the trade routes that brought her the beads, and the love of her family." While the show reaches across time, media, and Native communities, it's by no means a definitive study of Native American women's art. "It's the first step toward a conversation around Native art we hope will continue in art institutes," Greeves says. "This is barely the tip of the iceberg."

## **'It's long overdue': the first exhibition for Native American female artists**

By Nadja Sayej

June 13, 2019



Christi Belcourt (Métis) - The Wisdom of the Universe, 2014. Photograph: Art Gallery of Ontario

Walk into most museums and there might be something missing on the wall labels beside Native American artworks – an Apache dress from the 19th century might just read: “Title, year, materials.” What’s missing? The artist’s name. Though many of the artists’ names were not recorded, and will forever be anonymous, many that have been recorded are now being recognized as never before.

Hearts of Our People: Native Women Artists is the first ever museum retrospective of Native American and Canadian female artists. It opened at the Minneapolis Institute of Art, and until 18 August, over 115 artists from 50 Native communities are being given the credit they deserve. “This is the first, believe it or not, show devoted to Native women artists,” said Jill Ahlberg Yohe, who co-curated the exhibit with Teri Greeves. “It’s the first to honor Native women from ancient times to the contemporary moment.” Then why did it take so long?

Most 19th-century art collectors were “men with a Victorian sensibility,” Yohe said. For the most part, these men weren’t interested “in identifying women, or individualizing Native people”. She added: “90% of Native art is made by women. Native artists know this. It’s just non-Native people who haven’t recognized that.” Yohe has been working on this exhibition since 2015. “It dawned on me after scouring the collections that all the work is made by women,” she said. Putting together the show meant more than just plucking out items from renowned collections. Rather than repeating the same old narratives, the co-curators wanted to incorporate fresh voices. That led them to working with 21 women, both Native and non-Native scholars and artists, to curate this show as part of their “exhibition advisory board”. “That’s what made it special,” said Yohe. “We have the voices, expertise and knowledge from all these women.”



Rose Simpson's 1985 Chevy pays homage to Maria Martinez. Photograph: Collection of the artist.

Upon entering the exhibition, there's a parked 1985 Chevy El Camino by Rose Simpson, a work which pays homage to the 20th-century potter Maria Martinez, "the first self-identified non-anonymous Native artist," said Yohe. That sets the tone for the entire show, which is divided into three sections: legacy, relationships and power. The exhibition includes the work of 12 Canadian artists to trace tribes and communities that were established long before borders between the two countries. "The borders between the US and Canada weren't created by indigenous people, but by outside influences," said Yohe. "All this work is connected to our history, whether it was made in 1500 or 2019. It's all a part of the American and Canadian story." Métis artist Christi Belcourt shows *The Wisdom of the Universe*, a painting from 2014 that features animals on the endangered species list in Canada, alongside Haida fashion designer Dorothy Grant, who sketches Haida artwork on to clothing, is showing her wool Hummingbird Dress from 1989, the same year she debuted her first collection. Though craft and fashion play a role in this exhibit, it's not where it ends. "It's the gendered aspect of women's work," said Yohe. "These categories don't work; they just don't work in Native communities."



Jamie Okuma's *Adaption II* from 2012.  
Photograph: Charles Walbridge/Minneapolis Institute of Arts



One of the most fun pieces in the exhibit is a pair of heels by the Luiseño/Shoshone-Bannock artist Jamie Okuma, who is showing her Adaption II shoes from 2012. The artist has taken a pair of Christian Louboutin heels and covered them in what Yohe calls "Native couture" – including the likes of glass beads, porcupine quills and buckskin. The work counteracts the stereotype that Native art lives in the past and lacks sophistication. The Creek-Cherokee artist Joan Hill is showing her 1990 painting Women's Voices at the Council, which shows the head of a tribe, a woman she refers to as the "Beloved Woman", meeting with other women as part of the decision-making for their tribe. Haida artist Freda Diesing shows Mask, Old Woman with Labret from 1974, which depicts a woman with a labret, a body modification known as "lip plugs", which were recognized as status symbols for women on the north-west coast. (Diesing was one of the few female carvers of her generation and her Haida name Skil Kew Wat means "magical little woman").

The artworks here are more than just decorative or folk-art masterpieces. They offer an overlooked, often silenced narrative. "Their work tells the story of Native people, the idea of resilience, despite all measures of annihilation of federal policy, settlers and acts of genocide," said Yohe. The Anishinaabe artist Rebecca Belmore shows Fringe, a sculpture from 2007, which draws attention to the violence against First Nations women with a gaping back scar the artist believes will never disappear. But this exhibition is, in part, about healing. For one, it aims to be a counter-narrative. They're calling it "corrective art history" to the dusty old textbooks that ignored them for decades. "It's long overdue," said Yohe. "Native women's art history is American history."

# VOGUE

## In “Hearts of Our People,” Indigenous Women Reclaim Space Through Art

By Christian Allaire

June 3, 2019



Christi Belcourt, *The Wisdom of the Universe*, 2014

Photo: Greg Latremaille / Courtesy of The Art Gallery of Ontario

Art has served as an outlet for indigenous women to carry on their traditional crafts and stories for centuries. They've continued to create even while contending with legacies of unimaginable oppression, like the residential and boarding schools many were forced into throughout the 19th century in the United States, in which colonizers attempted to wipe out their culture and assimilate them into a white, Christian way of life.

Today, their works are heavily referenced in mainstream fashion and design, and often without acknowledgment; indigenous women artists are frequently victims of cultural appropriation. It seems undoubtedly related to this erasure that there has yet to be a major retrospective in a major museum devoted to exploring these women—until now.

Through August 18, the Minneapolis Institute of Art (MIA) is presenting “Hearts of Our People: Native Women Artists,” the first major showcase to provide visibility to the indigenous women, both from Canada and the United States, who have repeatedly been ignored in the mainstream art world. Curated by Teri Greeves and Jill Ahlberg Yohe, it features 117 different objects, all made by native

women, that span more than 1,000 years, including paintings, sculptures, garments, and more. The artists themselves also range in tribe and location.

The project has been a long time coming for curators Yohe and Greeves. The pair have been working on this project for more than four years, and during the acquisition process, the duo worked with an advisory board of 21 different native artists and scholars to ensure that the final selection represented the right mix of region, medium, and tribe. “Neither one of us could speak with authority on all these other nations,” said Greeves, while Yohe added, “To tell a story that’s as rich as this, we can’t tell that story. The board helped us make sure that we were comprehensive in scope.” To accomplish their goal, the curators split the exhibit into three themes: legacy, relationship, and power.

Inside, the works manage to do these big ideas justice. Power, for example, comes roaring at you at high speed: A totally customized El Camino, made by the mixed-media artist Rose B. Simpson, a Santa Clara Pueblo, opens the show. With her work, *Maria*, she presents herself as a petrolhead—something viewed as a very masculine hobby—then gives it a native woman’s twist, outfitting the car with decals inspired by the lines found in Pueblo ceramics, which are often made and mastered by women.

In another room, a large-scale painting, titled *The Wisdom of the Universe*, by Métis artist Christi Belcourt—painted in a dotted style, to give her canvas the appearance of being beaded—explores the relationship between indigenous people and nature. Animals, plants, and water hold a sacred place in indigenous life, and Belcourt specifically refers to 21st-century climate change, only painting species that are on Canada’s endangered list. It’s an extremely beautiful piece with an ugly message at its core.



Rose B. Simpson, *Maria*, 2014. Photo: Kate Russell



Meanwhile, Legacy is a theme that runs through just about every piece in the show. A standout sample is the collaboration jewelry, titled *Adornment: Iconic Perceptions*, by Kiowa jeweler Keri Ataumbi and Shoshone-Bannock and Luiseño artist Jamie Okuma, both profiled for *Vogue* here. On a glimmering cocktail ring and necklace, Okuma beaded portraits of Pocahontas, based on historical illustrations of her in the 17th and 18th century; Ataumbi then set Okuma's beading with precious metal, pearls, and stones. They are fabulous pieces of fashion that reimagine a historical figure who has long been misunderstood and stereotyped.

In general, the fashion pieces show just how much indigenous art has evolved, and they cut through any myth of its homogeneity. An Anishinaabe jingle dress and beaded headband from the 1900s evokes the flapper-style silhouettes that dominated the time period, showing that a traditional garment can even reflect the current trends of the day. Another piece by Okuma, a hand-beaded pair of Christian Louboutin platforms, combines traditional craft with an ultramodern flourish.

One can't help but notice the timing of a show like "Hearts of Our People." Women's rights are increasingly under attack in America; controversial, draconian laws, for example, threaten to overture *Roe v. Wade*. Revisiting traumas specific to indigenous women and connecting to their struggles through solidarity—that's something Greeves believes this show can provide.

"This exhibit was supposed to open in 2016, when Hillary [Clinton] was supposed to be president. Then the election happened," Greeves said. "I realized, everything happens for a reason. This kind of showing of native women's effect on American art, making that declaration now and making a stand on women's power, is actually healing medicine for this moment. This is happening when it's supposed to be happening."



Kay WalkingStick, *Venere Alpina*, 1997  
Photo: Kay WalkingStick / Minneapolis Institute of Art



# DATEBOOK

## **4 Gallery Exhibitions to Share This Holiday Season**

Written by Charles Desmarais

November 20, 2019

There's no shortage of opportunities to enjoy — and perhaps share with visitors — thoughtful art exhibitions at Bay Area museums this holiday season.

They run the gamut from art in the age of Black Power (at the de Young Museum through March 15) to the colorful, unpolished art of Burning Man (Oakland Museum through Feb. 16); from James Tissot's flowery depictions of 19th century high society in England and France (Legion of Honor through Feb. 9) to conceptually formidable contemporary works (two good shows at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art into February and beyond).

Don't let such bounty blind you, however, to the wealth of smart private gallery exhibitions, all without an admission charge.

### **Photography celebrates an anniversary**

Of particular interest to many in this photography-obsessed region will be Fraenkel Gallery's 40th anniversary exhibition, "Long Story Short" (through Jan. 18). Jeffrey Fraenkel and Frish Brandt have built their business into one of the best of its kind worldwide. They did that by focusing first on great images and letting the commerce develop organically.

A case in point is the entertaining current show. It includes works by masters like Diane Arbus, Richard Avedon, Romare Bearden, Sophie Calle and Alfred Stieglitz but pays equal attention to a large number of irresistibly confounding pictures labeled, simply, "photographer unknown."

### **Edifice complex**

The Mexico City artist Damián Ortega is known for an eclectic body of sculptural work. Often, elemental concepts of construction or its crafted opposite — controlled erosion and meticulous disassembly — are at the center of his method. His use of unconventional materials and surprising images calls a different kind of attention to the idea of building. A 1998 work in the collection of New York's Guggenheim Museum, for example, might be a Constructivist sculpture dating to the early 20th century, were it not pieced together of interlocking discs of hardened tortillas.

That sense of whimsy is an Ortega trademark. For his show at Adrian Rosenfeld, "Estridentópolis," in collaboration with the prominent Mexican gallery Kurimanzutto, seven hybrid buildings sprout animal heads and appendages. Each stands about 8 feet high or taller and references an architecturally distinguished high-rise in a major city — the Empire State and Chrysler Buildings in New York, Chicago's Marina Towers, and so forth. All are lovingly formed of discarded paper bags that once held cement. These are put to use as papier-mâché (in Spanish, *papel maché*) and as pasted sheets, carefully matched so that the colorful typography becomes a decorative element.

A cement-bag "Working Class Shirt," overalls and work gloves in the show hint at the unlikely parity of humble human labor and utopian aspiration that formed our modern, Modernist cities.

## Restructuring perception

Miriam Böhm's exhibition "While, Weil," at Ratio 3 through Dec. 20, is a bracing mind game with a refreshing visual payoff. The best word for how one feels after spending 45 minutes carefully unraveling Böhm's photographic puzzles? Restored.

The Berlin artist takes three basic approaches. Least engaging at the surface level, yet challenging on closer inspection, are photographs of what appear to be cut scraps of cardboard and other photos, which are pieced together into abstract designs. Their interest derives from minute clues to their construction, provided by shifts of focus and light across the picture plane, and barely discernible imperfections of cutting and matching.

More baffling are large rectangular scrims, subtly painted to suggest that rectangular apertures have been cut from their centers. Another layer of illusion is added by hanging each scrim in front of photographic wallpaper that depicts, yep, a rectangular aperture.

The best works by far, however, are rephotographed landscape images that have been folded, cut, repositioned, subtly lighted and otherwise altered to disorienting effect. These works pose once again what had seemed a long-solved conundrum, calling on us to enter the psychosocial fray that sets picture against the thing pictured, and then against the world.



"Tusked 1" is a 2019 work by Rose B. Simpson. Photo: John Wilson White, Jessica Silverman Gallery

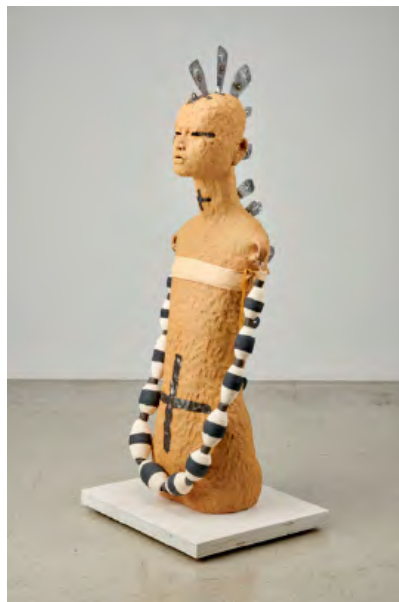
## Native talent

If Rose B. Simpson had her way, viewers of her somber clay figures would know the history of Native American bravery in the face of colonialism and genocide. They would respect the complexities of her Tewa tribal culture of the American Southwest, and the distinction between her own Pueblo of Santa Clara and that of San Ildefonso. But there's a great deal they would never learn, because there is much that is meant to be private, even sacred. To be shared among Tewa alone.



Rose B. Simpson's 4½-foot-tall "Frère 1" is on view at Jessica Silverman Gallery through Dec.21.Photo: John Wilson White, Jessica Silverman Gallery

I found this out over the course of a delightful conversation I had with Simpson at a small party in her honor. I was pleased, not least because it justified the approach I always take to unfamiliar art. I don't generally talk to artists or curators before I write a review. I assume I can never know all the references and life experiences that may be relevant to the work. That frees me to take it in on equal human terms. Of course, as in any social interaction, the more we learn about an artist's language and approach, the deeper our appreciation. But that comes best after engagement with the art, not before.



Rose B. Simpson's "River Girl A" is among the works in the Jessica Silverman Gallery show.Photo: John Wilson White, Jessica Silverman Gallery

There is, in any case, a regal solemnity about the figures in Simpson's exhibition "Duo," at Jessica Silverman Gallery through Dec. 21, that seems outside of culture. Or, more precisely, that supersedes any single society.

The title of the exhibition is reflected by the works throughout. Siblings, lovers and alter egos; pairing, coupling and mirroring. A pair of Janus-like figures look to the past and to the future, symbolizing at once both beginning and end.

**"Long Story Short":** 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Tuesday-Friday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday. Through Jan. 18. Free. Fraenkel Gallery, 49 Geary St., S.F. 415-981-2661. <https://fraenkelgallery.com>

**Damián Ortega: "Estridentópolis":** 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Tuesday-Friday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday. Through Jan. 25. Free. Adrian Rosenfeld, 1150 25th St., S.F. 415-285-2841. [adrianrosenfeld.com](http://adrianrosenfeld.com)

**Miriam Böhm: "While, Weil":** 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday. Through Dec. 20. Free. Ratio 3, 2831-A Mission St., S.F. 415-821-3371. <https://ratio3.org>

**Rose B. Simpson: "Duo":** 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday. Through Dec. 21. Free. Jessica Silverman Gallery, 488 Ellis St., S.F. 415-255-9508. <https://jessicasilvermangallery.com>



# KQED Arts

## A groundbreaking exhibition finally tells the stories of Native women artists

Written by Jeffrey Brown and Kira Wakeam

October 18, 2019

"Hearts of Our People" is the country's first ever exhibition devoted solely to the works of Native American women. The Minneapolis Institute of Arts assembled the retrospective, which is currently at Nashville's Frist Art Museum and will visit Tulsa and Washington, D.C. in 2020. Jeffrey Brown reports on how the show brings attention to a realm previously "not at all addressed in the art world."

### Read the Full Transcript

- **Judy Woodruff:**

And now a look at an art show that is both making history and teaching it. Hearts of Our People: Native Women Artists is the country's first ever exhibition devoted solely to the works of Native American women. Jeffrey Brown traveled to Minnesota and New Mexico to meet with some of the team behind the retrospective. It's part of our ongoing arts and culture series, Canvas.

- **Jeffrey Brown:**

How many artists have a master's in fine arts and studied auto mechanics? Meet Rose Simpson, whose day of making art includes hours coiling clay in her studio, soldering metal pieces for sculptures in her garage, and spending time under the hood of a 64 Buick Riviera she's fixing up. Simpson lives and works on the Santa Clara Pueblo just outside Espanola, New Mexico. Her mother, Roxanne Swentzell, is a ceramicist, as was her mother, a tradition through time.

- **Rose Simpson:**

I come from a long, long line of artists and creative people. And long line, I mean, like, as far as you can go back.

- **Jeffrey Brown:**

You're not talking about 10 or 20 years. You're talking about hundreds.

- **Rose Simpson:**

Yes, I'm talking about hundreds, possibly thousands.

- **Jeffrey Brown:**

Continuity and seeing art as part of daily life.

Simpson's work is a contemporary take on the traditions of her Santa Clara Tewa ancestors. And now she's part of a groundbreaking exhibition, the first of its kind dedicated to more than 1,000 years of artistic achievements by Native American women.

Put together by the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, where we saw it, the exhibition is called Hearts of Our People.

- **Jill Ahlberg Yohe:**

Seeing these works of art together.

- **Jeffrey Brown:**  
Co-curator Jill Ahlberg Yohe:

- **Jill Ahlberg Yohe:**

This exhibition was really necessary in a non-Native context, because it had never been explored before. And that was stunning, because something that is so clear in Native communities wasn't at all addressed in the art world.

- **Jeffrey Brown:**

On display, some 117 works of art from more than 50 Native American communities across the U.S. and Canada. There are traditional pieces, like this Anishinaabe jingle dress created in 1900 and worn for dancing at powwows, and a Hohokam bowl dating back to 1,000 A.D. There's also contemporary photography, video and installation pieces, like *Fringe*, a 2007 piece by Rebecca Belmore tackling the issue of violence against Native people, particularly women. Whenever possible, the creators of these works are named. Rather than generic craftspeople, the exhibition wants us to see creative individuals making art.

- **Jill Ahlberg Yohe:**

I think that the way — that the development of collecting Native American art and the stories that had previously been told are ones that position Native women as non-artists.

- **Jeffrey Brown:**

Contemporary artists are shown alongside those of their ancestors, highlighting the way Native women's art has adapted, while remaining connected to generations past. One example? This towering stack of blankets by Seneca artist Marie Watt entitled *Blanket Stories*, displayed next to a traditional Navajo chief's blanket from the 1880s. And then there's Rose Simpson's piece, a restored 1985 Chevrolet El Camino she named *Maria*. Sitting at the show's entrance, it's paired with a large vase by the car's namesake, Maria Martinez, the celebrated pioneer of the black-on-black Pueblo pottery style emulated in the car's paint job. But a car as art? Rose Simpson made *Maria* herself, to use, to drive. Plus, she realized it holds things, just like some of her other creations.

- **Rose Simpson:**

It hit me like, pew, it's a pot. It is a super contemporary vessel. This is why there is no disconnect between life and art.

- **Jeffrey Brown:**

No disconnect?

- **Rose Simpson:**

No. And this is — what does art have to do with cars? I'm like, what does art have to do with life? What does life have to do with art? The point is that we have ripped art away from our lives. And so the more I could apply the creative process to every part of my life, then the stronger I felt as a person.

- **Jeffrey Brown:**

Given the show's size and scope, Jill Ahlberg Yohe and co-curator Teri Greeves knew they could not put it together alone. They assembled an advisory board of scholars, historians and artists, 21 women in total, Native and non-Native.

- **Dyani White Hawk:**

The work is indigenous, truly indigenous art form.

- **Jeffrey Brown:**  
Among the advisers, Dyani White Hawk of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, a painter and mixed media artist based in Minneapolis.
- **Dyani White Hawk:**  
This exhibit covers 1,000 years.
- **Jeffrey Brown:**  
Yes.
- **Dyani White Hawk:**  
Still, it was so hard to pick the pieces that were going to go in the show, because there's so many that could be.
- **Jeffrey Brown:**  
White Hawk's work mixes modern techniques with traditional Lakota artforms like bead and quill work. She says the recognition of Native women artists is long overdue.
- **Dyani White Hawk:**  
The vast majority of Native arts has been supported by women over generations, but it's an aside. It's a side note in the way that we understand and look at American art history. And it's not a truthful and honest way to understand the history and artistic history of this land.
- **Jeffrey Brown:**  
Rose Simpson also served on the museum's advisory board. For her, being in the show is an opportunity to open doors for other Native American artists.
- **Rose Simpson:**  
It's absolutely about changing a mind-set. The first step is to infiltrate and then get respect, and then pull it back the other way. I was handed this — the baton, right? And I have to go further and really respect it and be responsible with it.
- **Jeffrey Brown:**  
And she's choosing to remain in her rural home, where she's passing on an ancient artistic tradition to her own daughter. For the "PBS NewsHour," I'm Jeffrey Brown on the Santa Clara Pueblo in New Mexico.

# HYPERALLERGIC

## The Undersung Art of Native American Women, Front and Center

Written by Erica Cardwell

August 15, 2019



Christi Belcourt, "The Wisdom of the Universe," 2014, acrylic on canvas 71 x 114 x ½ x 3 ¾ inches (courtesy Art Gallery of Ontario)

MINNEAPOLIS — Upon first arrival to *Hearts of Our People: Native Women Artists*, the feature exhibition at Minneapolis Institute of Art, visitors are greeted by a 1985 Chevy El Camino parked in the center of the gallery. "Maria" (2014), was conceptualized by Rose B. Simpson, alongside the exhibition advisory board. Simpson describes "Maria" as an "empowered vessel," similar to a pot or basket, with its rounded corners and "black on black" interior and exterior. While bold, the decision to place "Maria" at center stage, was both a measured pronouncement of the exhibition terms and an impracticality. However, Jill Ahlberg Yohe, the institute's Associate Curator of Native American Art, insists that it was easy to get the car into the building. On my first visit, I circled the car with Ahlberg Yohe, pausing from time to time to eavesdrop on people, particularly men, who were admiring its interior and new engine. On my second visit to the exhibition, I found myself subconsciously disinterested, being that I am not much of a car person, skipping the installation altogether, in order to move onto the "art."





Rose B. Simpson, Santa Clara Pueblo "Maria" (2014) 1985 Chevy El Camino 117 x 74 x 56] (courtesy Collection of Rose Simpson)

The car, as an object, is initially framed in distracting codes of machismo messaging and a ploy for engagement. According to Simpson, the car as art object represents the legacy of agency and power endowed by the Santa Clara Pueblo female experience. As a challenge to Western perception, "Maria" introduces a new dimension to the role of Native women's art in the cultural and institutional landscape. The car, and its charged position, is both a tool for unlearning and expanding interpretations.

In a 2013 conversation between Ahlberg Yohe and independent curator and beadmaker, Teri Greeves of the Kiowa Nation, the pair considered, why hadn't there been an exhibition dedicated to Native women artists? *Hearts of Our People: Native Women Artists* sought to answer this question. To make it happen, Ahlberg Yohe, Greeves, and research assistant Dakota Hoska collaborated with an advisory board comprised of 21 Native women artists, as well as scholars, curators, and historians on Native North America. As the board convened, one central and more specific question was posed, "Why do Native women artists create?"



Kiowa artist, "Cradleboard" (1890) Wood, leather, venetian glass beadwork 43 ½ x 11 ½ x 10 ½ inches (courtesy Denver Museum of Nature and Science)

After three years of extensive meetings, phone calls, and emails with the advisory board, Greeves and Ahlberg Yohe narrowed down the exhibition into three themes, including several sub-themes: Legacy, or the continuum of resilience as it relates to children and ancestors; Relationship, or further, the Indigenous concept of interconnectivity and relationships called Kincentricity as well as Collaboration; and Power, which encompasses Honor/Diplomacy (certainly as it relates to land sovereignty) along with Dignity, Grace, and Balance. These themes uphold the confluence of spirituality and practice within Indigenous organizing structures, producing an exhibition that includes 115 diverse works spanning 1,000 years, with an impressive 70% of the ancestral art identified by name. This model is a crucial guide for dismantling more general ideas around diversity and inclusion in traditional curatorial

practice. Both curators were dedicated to presenting the show through an immersive collaboration process that centered Indigenous values, rather than the translation of these values into palatable white supremacist standards.



Ancient Pueblo artist, "Pot (Olla)" (c. 1000–1300) Clay, pigments (courtesy Minneapolis Institute of Art, The Putnam Dana McMillan Fund)

The predominance of Native art is attributed to pottery, beadwork, and textiles. Ahlberg Yohe has observed that Native women contribute roughly 90% of the art found within Native and Indigenous collections. Much of this work is craft, an artistic practice that is ingrained from birth. Given that these practices are usually intended for domestic use, Native art is typically perceived as "primitive novelties" or souvenirs. These creative methods, however, need not be relegated to oversimplified defining concepts such as "creative outlets" and "functional craft," especially as they relate to the history of colonization and subsequent Western trade and market production. As Ahlberg Yohe puts it, "it is important for experience and artistry to be on equal terms."

Given this duality, along with the breadth of the exhibition, *Hearts of Our People* will probably require a second look for most visitors. It is a massive undertaking with a substantial collection of art from Native North America. Containing sculpture, textiles, paintings, photographs, collage, video, audio, and music, the depth of the exhibition gives the viewer the sense of a retrospective survey, breathing new life into these works of art.



Louisa Keyser ("Dat so la lee"), Washoe, "Beacon Lights basket" (July 1, 1904–September 6, 1905) Willow, dyed bracken fern root, western redbud (courtesy Fenimore Art Museum, Cooperstown, New York, Gift of Eugene Victor Thaw Art Foundation, Thaw Collection of American Indian Art)

The impressive 343-page exhibition catalogue further contextualizes the exhibition. It includes scholarly articles and personal essays from members of their advisory board and artists with work in the exhibition. In their essay, "Encircles Everything: A Transformative History of Native Women Arts," Janet Catherine Berlo, Professor of Art History at the University of Rochester and Ruth B. Phillips, Professor of Art History at Carleton University in Ottawa, recall Abe and Amy Cohn as major players in the colonization of Washoe baskets. Their intent was to collaborate, but instead the Cohns exploited the basket weaving artist Louisa Keyser by giving her the name "Dat-so-la Lee", making her fame a distraction from the broader community of basket weavers. Keyser's "Beacon Lights Basket" (1904) is representative of the artist's signature *degikup* style – the rounded curve of the baskets is formed through a meticulous style of taut weaving, resembling rows of corn. Washoe baskets were known for their shape and the ability to hold water. According to Berlo and Phillips, "[the Cohns'] propagandistic misinformation has until recently obscured the



artists' greatest achievements in providing a critical economic and artistic resource for their communities at a time of cultural upheaval so great that it threatened their very survival."

Lea S. McChesney, curator of ethnology at the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology and director of the Alfonso Ortiz Center for Intercultural Studies at the University of New Mexico, uses the term "soft power," in her essay "Carrying On: Gender and Innovation in Historic Pueblo Pottery, to further elaborate on the significance of women's pottery and makers. McChesney believes that through aesthetics, women's pottery can influence and transform space and relationships.



Arroh-a-och, Laguna Pueblo, "Storage Jar" (1870-1880) Clay, natural pigments, 12.5 x 15 inches (image courtesy the School for Advanced Research, photograph by Addison Doty, © School for Advanced Research)

While clay and pottery have unquestionable links to women within Indigenous cultural practice, the expansiveness of gender is more clearly recognized within these communities. The Native concept of gender is configured much differently than biologically focused structures found in the West. Often, in the framing of artistic production of pre- and post-colonial work that is not rooted in the West, artists with gender identities that do not fit within a binary or linear framework are either lumped into the category of "woman" without distinction, or disregarded.

The artist Arroh-a-och is described as *k'u kweemu*, or "like a woman and sister/brother" by Laguna community member Max Early and utilized she/her/hers pronouns and Laguna female gender words. Though little is known about the artist, Arroh-a-och, her "Storage Jar" is widely recognized as a signature piece of Pueblo pottery.

The debut of *Hearts of Our People* occurs at a particular watershed moment in the art world, when several shows centered around women artists have opened or are forthcoming, thus producing a further examination of the concept of endangerment. Many of these shows had been in the works for years prior to the lead up to the 2016 election, a fact highlighted by the foolhardy name of a recent *New York Times* article, "[Female Artists Are \(Finally\) Getting Their Turn.](#)" This recent surge of art shows dedicated to women artists offers the retrospective sense of preservation, at a time when our physical bodies are at stake, a critical shift in power at an uneasy juncture in history.



Cherish Parrish, Grand Traverse Bay Anishinaabe, "The Next Generation – Carriers of Culture" (2018) Black ash and sweet grass 23 x 12 x 14" (courtesy Gun Lake band of Pottawatomi)

Edmonia Lewis, the neoclassical sculptor, is another example of an under-recognized woman artist in this show. Lewis was of Haitian, Mississauga and African American heritage and trained

and lived in Rome, Italy. One of her most famous sculptures, "The Old Arrow Maker," is on view in the exhibition; it depicts Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem, "The Song of Hiawatha." Widely known for her sculpture "Forever Free," which represents two freed slaves, Lewis was known for creating narratives of Black and Indigenous people as a dogged means of inclusion. However, in spite of her efforts and mastery of Western sculpture, Lewis is rarely included in contemporary discussions of neoclassical art, even when these discussions are centered on women artists.



Edmonia Lewis, Mississauga and African American, "The Old Arrow Maker" (modeled 1866, carved c. 1872) Marble, 20 x 14 x 14 inches, (courtesy Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art Bentonville, Arkansas; photo: Sotheby's)

*Hearts of our People* addresses this categorical denial in a signature painting from the exhibition, "The Wisdom of the Universe" (2014), by Christi Belcourt of the Michif tribe. The painting displays an ornate midnight covered in coiling, rooted vines. Birds, flowers, and golden stars are nestled into the foreground, and upon an even closer look, round-faced clover, berries, hanging spiders and fresh herbs can be seen. The pastoral impression of the work seems familiar on first look; it is in the presence of such vibrance and lushness that one could experience both possibility and

prosperity, somewhat disguising the sinister absence coursing its way throughout the piece. Unless you read the wall text, it would be hard to discern that every element of animal or plant life in the painting is either nearing extinction or endangered. The viewer, now privy to Belcourt's knowledge, can more adequately perceive the intuition of the painting, and experience the connection between life and art, with measurable injustice in between. The future, while ominous, is also ongoing within this context.

From the advisory council who gathered for long-term curatorial visioning, to the engagement with ancestral artistic inheritance, *Hearts of Our People* has developed new traditions within the institutional complexity of the fine art world. *Hearts*, a prescient title, is an appropriate front-facing sentiment as both a mode and a context for looking.

*Hearts of Our People: Native Women Artists* *is now on view at the Minneapolis Institute of Art through August 18. The exhibition was curated by Jill Ahlberg Yohe and Teri Greeves, with the Native Exhibition Advisory Board, a panel of 21 Native artists and Native and non-Native scholars from across North America, [fully credited here](#). The exhibition will travel to the Frist Museum in Nashville September 27, 2019–January 12, 2020, to the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C. February 21, 2020–May 17, 2020, and to Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa June 28, 2020–September 20, 2020.*