

Gems of the Past, Present and Future

Do you enjoy engaging with diverse cultures and stories of the West and Native America? Well, hang onto your hat, because in this issue of *Proclaim*, our own Rebekah Ryan, collections manager for the Eiteljorg Museum, located in downtown Indianapolis, is giving Northminster readers a sneak peek into the museum's summer plans.

The Eiteljorg first opened in 1989 with a mission to inspire an appreciation and understanding of the art, history, and cultures of the American West and the Indigenous peoples of North America. The Eiteljorg is the only museum of its kind in the Midwest, and one of only two museums east of the Mississippi that explore both Native America and the American West.

Its contemporary Native American art collection has been ranked among the best in the world!

In June, the museum will unveil newly reinstalled Native American Galleries that will offer a venue for Native peoples from across North America to tell their own stories through the themes of relation, continuation, and innovation. "These themes allow us to showcase customary (sometimes called "historic" or "traditional") and contemporary works together – to demonstrate how those works are related to or are distinct from each other," Rebekah explained. "Contemporary Native artists engage with their cultures in different ways. Some will continue traditions that have existed for hundreds or thousands of years, and others are committed to combatting any preconceived notions about what Native art should be. I've been at the museum for



Rebekah with works (from L to R) by Joe Feddersen (Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation), Chholing Taha (Cree First Nations), Lisa Holt (Cochiti Pueblo), Melanie Sainz (Ho-Chunk Nation of Wisconsin), and a star quilt by an unrecorded Lakota artist which will be part of the rotations in the reinstalled Native American Galleries.

almost 10 years, and the diverse creativity in this collection continues to surprise and inspire me."

When completed, the Native American galleries will highlight nearly 300 artworks



Monica Raphael (Anishinaabe / Sicangu Lakota, born 1964) *Nagamo "She Sings"*, 2019
Birch bark with naturally and commercially dyed porcupine quills, vintage Italian glass beads, 24k gold plated Charlotte true cut seed beads on smoked buckskin
2019 Eiteljorg Museum Indian Market and Festival Harrison Eiteljorg Purchase Award

– from clothing to pottery, paintings to installations. About a third of the pieces will rotate in and out of the gallery on a quarterly basis. "Most museums only have the space to exhibit about 10 percent of their collection at a time; that's why we've planned for rotations. There are so many outstanding pieces and stories to share, and we want to make sure that as many people as possible can appreciate them," Rebekah said.

A number of the pieces highlighted in the Galleries have been created by Native artists from Indiana or the larger Great Lakes region. Two true gems, created hundreds of years apart, are a chair made by an unrecorded Mi'kmaq artist and a bracelet made by Monica Raphael, who is Anishinaabe and Sicangu Lakota. They both utilize dyed porcupine quills and birch bark – materials

ubiquitous in the Great Lakes that are extremely time consuming to harvest, dye, and stitch. "The chair was made toward the end of the 1800s, and is impressive because of the number of quills used and the different textures the artist created with them. The bracelet is outstanding because it takes a quill – a straight, hollow tube of keratin – and manages to create curved, realistic figures in fantastic colors. Birch bark is a material that is very sensitive to changes in temperature and humidity and can crack easily. It's a testament to the skills of these artists that they've created works that survive those changes."

Many of the items from Great Lakes Native artists were acquired in 2019 via



Unrecorded Mi'kmaq artist
Chair, 1860-1885 (detail)
Carved and painted wood with woven brown cane seat, fabric, birch bark, and naturally dyed porcupine quills
Gift of Harrison Eiteljorg

a grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. And the coming Galleries experience isn't just designed to be visual. You'll also hear greetings that have been recorded in the languages of the original inhabitants of Indiana – the Miami, Potawatomi, Delaware, Shawnee, Peoria, and Kickapoo, for example. The exhibition will connect with a broader audience via an interactive, multi-sensory, and state-of-the-art space.

"There is so much variety in these galleries," Rebekah continued. "If you like history or current events, local stories or global affairs, there will be works that address these things. Or, if you just want to be wowed by intricate jewelry, show-stopping fashion, or abstract art – we will have pieces in these galleries that will leave you speechless. There are true gems that you won't often see in bigger art museums still primarily focused on interpreting the European canon of oil paintings, decorative arts, and bronzes." That's not to say you won't see paintings and bronzes,

but they won't be the only focus here.

Much like the way Northminster seeks to be a center for our neighborhood and broader community, the Eiteljorg Museum is a true cultural center. "It's a place where community groups, both Native and non-Native, feel welcome to come and celebrate who they are. I can't wait to share it with you," Rebekah said.

You can pre-purchase museum tickets and find out about available discounts online. More information is available at eiteljorg.org.



Project rendering of the Eiteljorg Museum's new Native American Galleries. Image courtesy of Origin Studios.

The Eiteljorg is nearing its goal of raising \$55 million later this year to revamp some of the museum's favorite public spaces. To help support this effort, visit: eiteljorg.org/project2021.

Rebekah holds a carved and painted Mohawk cradleboard (1855-1875) acquired through the museum's Great Lakes initiative.

