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THIS IS NOT A SILENT MOVIE: FOUR CONTEMPORARY ALASKA NATIVE ARTISTS

May 26 – September 8, 2013

Four contemporary Alaska Native Artists investigates race, Native stereotypes, and individual identity at CAFAM.



Things are Looking Native, Native's Looking Whiter, Nicholas Galanin, digital photograph, 2012. Courtesy of the artist



Get Comfortable, Nicholas Galanin, digital photograph, 2012. Courtesy of the artist

LOS ANGELES — The Craft & Folk Art Museum (CAFAM) in collaboration with the Anchorage Museum presents *This Is Not A Silent Movie: Four Contemporary Alaska Native Artists*, an exhibition centered around four acclaimed Alaska Native artists whose groundbreaking contemporary works question institutional methods of identifying Native heritage, examine their own mixed-race identities, and challenge perceptions and stereotypes about indigenous peoples. It will be on view from Sunday, May 26 through Sunday, September 8, 2013.

Through the language of contemporary visual art, Sonya Kelliher-Combs, Susie Silook, Da-ka-ween Mehner, and Nicholas Galanin seek new and distinct ways to speak of tradition and mediate the serious and sometimes ironic conditions of art, identity, and history in the late 20th and early 21st century. Though each artist's work is rooted in a lifelong immersion in their respective Alaska Native craft traditions, their multi-media contemporary installations dissolve the boundaries between contemporary and traditional arts.

Sonya Kelliher-Combs (Iñupiaq/Athabaskan) utilizes media such as polyurethane, Beluga intestine, and walrus stomach into her paintings, sculptures, and labor-intensive installations. These works often simulate skin, which is a point of investigation into her struggle for self-definition and identity. In 2007, Kelliher-Combs was awarded the prestigious Eiteljorg Fellowship for Native American Fine Art.

Nicholas Galanin's (Tlingit/Aleut) video and photography installations object to the cultural appropriation and categorization of indigenous peoples by popular culture. In *Things are Looking Native, Native's Looking Whiter*, Galanin creates a split image that is a composite of one of photographer Edward Curtis' Native American models with actress Carrie Fisher as Princess Leia in *Star Wars*. The image references the cross-pollination of the traditional butterfly whorl hairstyle that was worn by unmarried Hopi girls and the popular culture image. In 2013, Galanin received a major award from United States Artists and a fellowship from the Eiteljorg Museum.

Carver Susie Silook (Yupik/Iñupiaq) is a writer, carver, and sculptor. The ancestral ivory dolls of Saint Lawrence, traditionally carved by men, are the basis of her work. Silook also departs from tradition by depicting women in her carvings rather than the animals most commonly rendered by men. Her walrus tusk carvings add a distinctly feminist perspective to an otherwise male-dominated art form as they address the widespread incidence of sexual abuse and violence perpetrated against Native women. Silook received a United States Artists Fellowship in 2007.

Da-ka-ween Mehner's installation *Finding My Song* (Tlingit/N'ishga) draws upon his family's stories to take a personal look at the retention and reclamation of language. The installation is inspired partially by his grandmother, whose mouth was washed out with soap whenever she spoke her Tlingit language in school in order to "encourage" her to speak English. Born in Fairbanks to a Tlingit/N'ishga mother and a Caucasian father, Mehner's work examines his own multicultural heritage—and the social expectations and definitions that accompany each aspect of it.



Finding My Song, Da-ka-xeen Mehner, projections on rawhide, 2012. Courtesy of the Anchorage Museum.

The title *This is Not A Silent Movie* comes from a quote by Native American writer and filmmaker Sherman Alexie, who works to move audiences away from narrow and stereotypical views of Native people—a view that Native people had very little influence in shaping. The exhibition was curated by Julie Decker, Ph.D., Chief Curator at the Anchorage Museum.

An artist panel will take place on Saturday, May 25 from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. at CAFAM. The opening reception will follow from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. Both events are open to members and the public.

Press contact:

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Catalogue and public programs:

An illustrated catalogue is being produced to accompany the exhibition and will be available in the CAFAM Shop.

CAFAM will offer exhibition-related workshops and events in conjunction with the exhibition, including CraftLab family workshops on the second Sunday of each month from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m.

May 25 | 6:00 – 7:00 p.m.

Artist panel followed by opening reception from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.

July 13 | 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.

Brendan Constantine other guest poets will read new and original works written in response to the exhibition *This Is Not A Silent Movie*. This program is supported by The Antonia and Vladimir Cultural Heritage Fund.

Situated on historic Museum Row since 1973, the Craft & Folk Art Museum (CAFAM) is an invaluable contributor to Los Angeles culture, exhibiting current artists with intriguing perspectives and distinctive practices. Exploring the leading edge of craft, art, and design, CAFAM gives audience to diverse makers and artists whose work is often not represented in larger art institutions. The museum is a place to see art and make art — all under one roof. CAFAM coordinates a robust roster of hands-on workshops led by professional artists and makers. The intimate, atypical museum space and independent spirit at CAFAM combine to create an atmosphere of excitement and innovation, where people in Los Angeles deepen their relationships to art, creativity and one another. For more information, visit www.cafam.org

Location: 5814 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90036

Admission: FREE every Sunday

Regularly: \$7 for adults; \$5 for students, teachers, seniors, and veterans; free for CAFAM members

Hours: Tuesday-Friday, 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.; Saturday & Sunday, 12:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.; closed

Mondays. Every first Thursday of the month, extended hours 6:30 - 9:30 p.m.