Brenda Mallory and Donna Mintz Share a Love of Depth and Texture

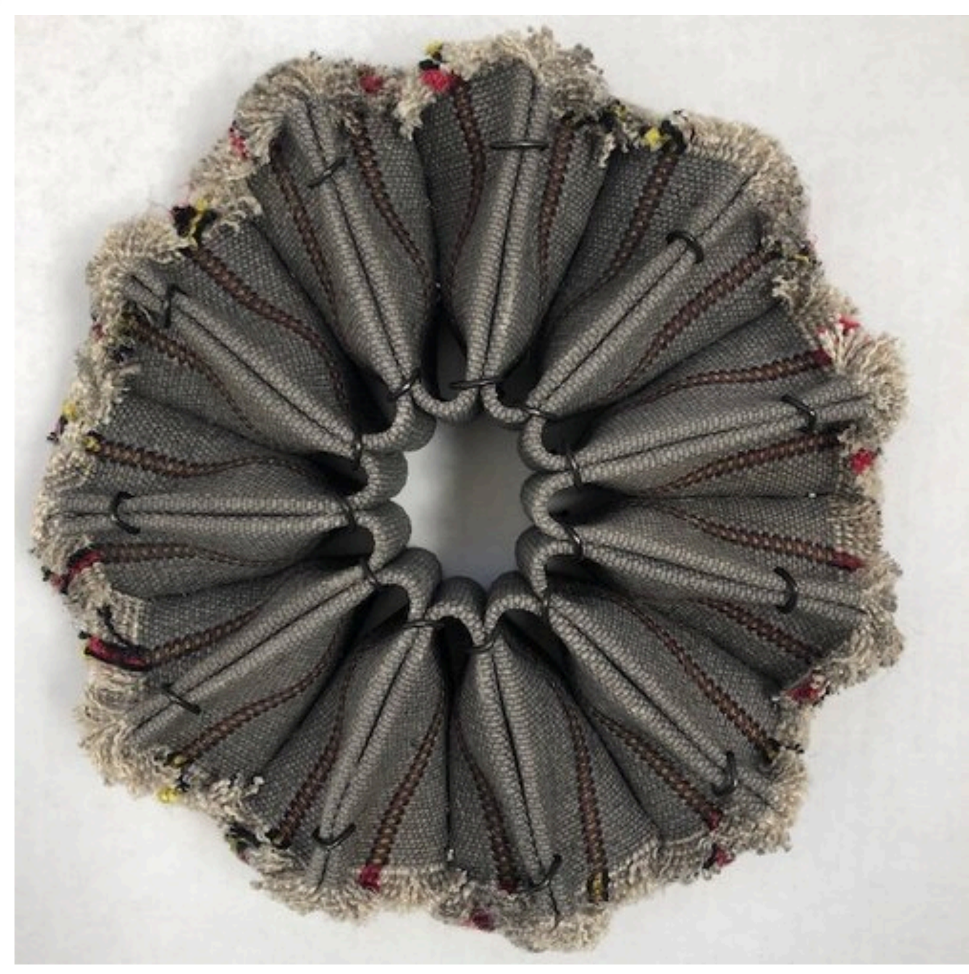
BY GEOFF WICHERT ON JANUARY 2, 2023

Installation view of works by Donna Mintz (left and center) and Brenda Mallory (right) in What Once Was at Julie Nester Gallery, photo by Geoff Wichert

Personal identity is one of the most influential issues of the day, one with its essence to be found in memory. Recalling not only what has happened, but what we felt like then is how we create a durable sense of who we are. In the 21st century we have unprecedented aids to memory, tools like digital photographs that offer convenience Polaroid could only dream of, and computers that promise instant access to what should be our immortal data. Yet trusting such assistants places memory, and with it identity, in entirely new peril. "Cloud complacency" has us cruising towards potential disaster, and anyone who has tried to open a 20 year-old file may testify that, for all their utility, digital memories — illegible numbers stored as magnetic traces — are uniquely fragile, subject to irretrievable loss. In a shared exhibition that opened at Julie Nester Gallery in Park City on the final weekend

of 2022, Brenda Mallory and Donna Mintz contemplate this dilemma and find renewed faith in one of humankind's oldest and most reliable forms of memory: visual art.

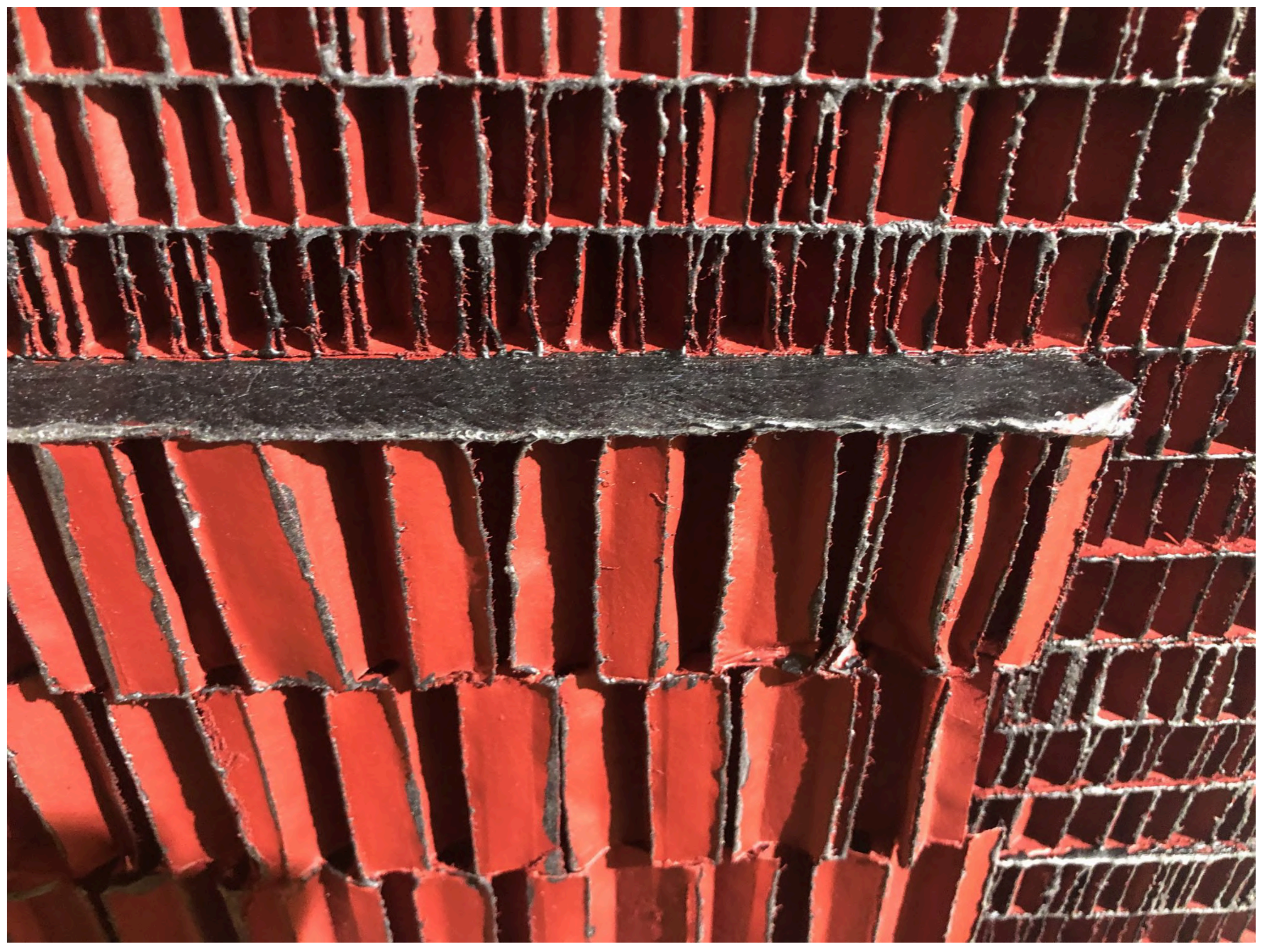
Though she lives in Oregon, Brenda Mallory is a familiar creative force to anyone who frequents this gallery. She generally employs unique samples of found and salvaged materials, often industrial cast-offs but always made from natural materials that she enhances with paint and encaustics. These suggest a rich array of contemporary metaphors of the sort that elevate abstraction beyond ornament while continuing to explore the sophisticated representative suggestions that keep making it relevant. Although she has begun to re-present some of these sculptural forms in fine prints, some of which is seen here, her work most characteristically runs along the boundary between flat images and bas-reliefs. When assembling these history-rich natural materials she prefers to use steel fittings — precision nuts and bolts — that contrast with the fibrous look of fabrics and processed paper. Thus her chronological memories go like this: raw plant matter like jute or wood pulp has, by the time it reaches her, been industrially transformed into durable forms that she further modifies with natural and manufactured waxes, resins, and paints. The metal parts and framing add still more history, invoking the way natural and machine processes flow together like the tributaries of a river. "The forms look like they might have grown out of the earth or have been found on a forest floor," she writes, but "the contrast of crude mechanics and beautiful, natural forms opens the viewer to multiple levels of meaning."



Brenda Mallory, “Firehose Experiment Circle #3,” linen firehose, paint, hog rings, 10 x 10 x 3 in.

Mallory was able to use the down time of the pandemic to make the blending of these processes more subtle, enhancing the ornamental qualities of her work and making her techniques less apparent. An example can be seen in the “Firehose Experiment series,” in which she has cut up worn out canvas fire hoses and arranged them in geometric patterns. The texture of the cloth hose, its woven-in linear marking, and the pattern of fraying on the ends combine with metal staples in pieces that recall a whole range of plant and floral shapes and even invoke such architectural elements as gothic rose windows. A series sharing the title “Reformed Packing” utilize the types of three-dimensional grids that are produced to contain and organize large numbers of manufactured items. Here Mallory’s wax and paint applications make these structures durable while upsetting their rigid, identical nature and making them look like naturally occurring or zoomorphic structures: wasp nests would be one example. Their visual rhythms bring to mind the way calendars organize days, weeks, months, and years, or the pages of journals and diaries

sequence lifetimes, all emphasizing how certain patterns repeat within a life or from one to the next.



Detail of one of Brenda Mallory's "Reformed Packing" works, photo by Geoff Wichert

Shown intermingled with those patterned constructions, Donna Mintz exhibits works that take a very different approach to memories, one that Utah audiences should find more familiar, even though its roots grew in ancient cultures and it came to fruition in the European middle ages. Reliquaries may be thought of as precious boxes, often made of gold and decorated with jewels that make them like jewelry themselves, shaped like the body parts of saints or other admired personages, meant to contain the parts they represent. In those cases, they represent the holy relic, which may thus be kept from mundane visual exposure that might make them seem less otherworldly. Sometimes, to be sure, they include windows that allow the contents to be viewed, and in modern times,

especially in Utah, a later style of reliquary had followed that development, operating more like the way a pedestal holds a sculpture or an ornamental ring does a particular jewel, supporting the relic or relics and presenting them for visual inspection and whatever recollection or imaginary reconstitution they then stimulate.

Mintz was born and lives in Georgia, where she has written extensively about both art and literature while making her own art on subjects and themes related to memory. Over time, she says she accumulated a large quantity of written materials — perhaps drafts of work that changed shape radically while under development or complete works that for some reason never left her possession. All art making tends to involve a good deal of such production: sketches, trial efforts, alternative approaches that were eventually cancelled. While some can be regarded as plain failures, many seem as good, as virtuous, even, as the preferred work that replaced them. What Mintz came up with was the idea that, rather than destroy them, as some creative persons do, or filing them away for possible study by some future academics, she would turn her surplus texts into works of visual art: specifically reliquaries. Like medieval examples, hers would externally resemble what they contained but simultaneously conceal, gild or be made to resemble tarnished and aged versions.

Detail of a work by Donna Mintz, photo by Geoff Wichert

One thing that is probably not apparent in the photographs shown here is how large these are, ranging up to seven-feet tall. Also better seen in person is the range of textures, tile-like pieces, and variations in color even over a large expanse of gold. Occasionally letters or other "leakage" of the linguistic contents appear in ghostly fashion. Mostly, though, it is the overlapping shingles or scale-like bits of covering that become their lively and suggestive covers, like mosaics that are built up of decorative materials covered in gold leaf.

What constitutes the glory of both these artists' works are their surprising three-dimensional qualities: the depth of Mallory's grids as one system overlies another, or Mintz's peeling and yet still building layers. They remind us that events happen twice in our lives: once in real time, and again (and again) as imagined and reconstructed in our

memories. And they do so in ways that we can see not just with eyes, but with the sense our eyes give us of how it feels to caress the passing moment with that most intimate of our five senses: touch.

What Once Was: Brenda Mallory and Donna Mintz, Julie Nester Gallery (http://julienestergallery.com), Park City, through Jan. 17

Geoff Wichert

Geoff Wichert objects to the term critic. He would rather be thought of as a advocate on behalf of those he writes about.

Returns: Cherokee Diaspora and Art (with an introduction by Ashley Holland)

Detail from *Traces and Wounds* (2021) by Luzene Hill, canvas, silk, wire, and wood, 142″ × 84″.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

11 June–4 September 2022, Atlanta Contemporary

INTRODUCTION

For the Cherokee, our creation story is tied to our ancestral lands, which include what is now known as Georgia. Our identity as Native people originates from that location, even if we no longer live there. As with other Indigenous groups of this continent, Cherokee understanding of self and culture has changed over time either by choice or necessity. And with that, so has our relationship to land. Migration has never been a foreign concept to Cherokee, but as settler colonialism continues to impact the lives of Indigenous peoples on this continent, one result has been a large, ongoing Cherokee diaspora. Much like our ancestors who adapted and evolved in order to ensure survival of self and culture, so do twenty-first-century Cherokee. It is in this reality of continuation that many Cherokee artists create their work.

Returns: Cherokee Diaspora and Art, exhibited at Atlanta Contemporary, features the work of three artists: Luzene Hill (Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, born 1946), Brenda Mallory (Cherokee Nation, born 1955), and Kade L. Twist (Cherokee Nation, born 1971). Each artist explores his or her identity—as a contemporary person, a Cherokee citizen, a human being in a global environment—in unique ways. The technical definition of *diaspora* is a "people settled far from their ancestral homelands" or "the place where these people live" and involves movement and migration. While the term was once primarily associated with Jewish communities, it has since been expanded to include African and Native communities, though the latter have been slower to adopt conversations of diaspora into art history. In *Exiles, Diasporas & Strangers* (2008), Kobena Mercer, an art historian of the African diaspora, notes, "[The] language of migration has an intimate connection with the lived experience of modernity because uprooting is intrinsically perspectival: the immigrant who arrives as a stranger or newcomer from the point of view of the receiving society is at the same time an emigrant from the point of view of those who are left behind or who chose not to leave."

Gregory D. Smithers's *The Cherokee Diaspora: An Indigenous History of Migration, Resettlement, and Identity* (2015) explores the impact of migration and creation of diaspora on Cherokee culture. Smithers argues for an understanding of the Cherokee as a migratory people with a deep history in movement, adaptation, and diaspora. For Smithers, the Cherokee are not just tragic figures who persevered through adversity set in play by the appearance and settlement of Europeans, but they are also a culture that has always understood migration and had deeper cultural tools that enable them to navigate and adapt. He notes that travel was not uncommon for Cherokee up through the early nineteenth century, it was just always understood that they would return home.

By the twentieth century, a new Cherokee diaspora began to take shape. Unlike the Cherokee diaspora of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this diaspora was not leaving as a community but as individuals, forced to form new ways of connection with their Native identities. After World War II, Cherokee began to move about the United States at greater rates. A new type of "Trail of Tears" occurred when many experienced the impact of the termination and relocation era of the 1940s to the 1960s, which revoked and destabilized citizenship and community within Native nations. And now in the twenty-first century, Cherokee live all around the United States and even globally. It is through this lens that the exhibition takes its central thesis.

Historian James Clifford, from whose book *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century* (2013) the exhibition borrows its name, examines processes of cultural renewal through the production of art. Clifford seeks to remove the perceived contradictions of an Indigenous and diasporic life. So much of Indigeneity is an inherent perception of an internal connection to the land from which one emerged. But removal from our land does not make us any less Indigenous. Clifford states: "Diasporic ruptures and connections—lost homelands, partial returns, relational identities, and world-spanning networks—are fundamental components of [I]ndigenous experience today."

Returns: Cherokee Diaspora and Art is meant to be viewed as a homecoming, a celebration of resilience but also contemplation of reality. Like many homecomings, it is bittersweet but hopeful. The art featured in *Returns* is no more based in stereotypes than the artists themselves. Instead of confirming an outsider's idea of Indigenous reality, the artists use art as a mechanism to not only celebrate but also interrogate their Indigeneity. It is in these interrogations, demonstrated through a variety of media, that the exhibition asks visitors to reexamine their own place on this land.

As you enter the gallery space, you are confronted first by Twist's powerful installation, ᎠᏥᎸ *(atsilv)*. Kade L. Twist is a California-based artist whose work spans multiple media—video, sound, interactive, text, and installation—and sources inspiration from the place and community in which it is created. A consistent theme within his art production revolves around migration, displacement, and the experience of a contemporary Cherokee in search of ways to create return through art in order to address the imbalance that separation from homeland creates. Twist looks to storytelling and has used the Cherokee language and his own poetry to talk about Indigenous issues of displacement, both from a personal and global standpoint. Through multimedia installations and sculptures, Twist creates work that exemplifies the definition of "contemporaneity" proposed by art historian Terry Smith, who argues beyond a time-based understanding but instead for one shaped by globalization, inequality, and immersion in an image economy. For Smith, contemporary art has the capacity to grasp the relationship between time and being. Twist does this while actively investigating the history and impact of dislocation on Cherokee communities and the resulting diaspora through a central theme of longing for home.

ᎠᏥᎸ is the Cherokee word for fire and it is this manufactured fire that centers the rest of the works of the exhibition. The installation consists of seven individual videos of a house burning. Six of the screens sit piled upon a base of propane tanks, made inert but still visible, and a seventh screen faces east. Seven is a sacred number for the Cherokee: we have seven clans as well as seven directions, and fire is central to our identity. It is the fire that grounds our communities—we moved the fire with us when we were forced from our ancestral lands to our current home in Oklahoma—and it is around the fire that we perform our regenerative stomp dances. The fabricated aspect of Twist's fire and the destructive imagery hint to outside foreign forces, but the very presence of such a symbol also denotes cultural survival.

The hope is that after visitors walk into the space, they traverse counterclockwise around the fire, the same path as our stomp dances. This path leads to Luzene Hill's hauntingly beautiful *Traces and Wounds* installation, suspended from the ceiling. Hill, originally from Atlanta, is a multimedia artist best known for conceptual works addressing issues of violence against women and exploring Indigenous knowledge. She creates installations of resilience and strength as counternarratives to removal and sexual violence, which women are more likely to experience and Native women even more so. Through work informed by pre-contact Indigenous culture, personal experience, and her family history, Hill advocates for Indigenous sovereignty—linguistic, cultural, and personal—as well as a reclamation of female power and sexuality. A warrior against the trauma that has been placed upon her ancestors and herself, Hill responds to moments of imbalance both in her existence and the larger world by bringing awareness through her practice that directly counters a destructive narrative.

The Incan-inspired khipu of *Traces and Wounds*, presented with cochineal dyed silk strings threaded through a thick fabric, appear either as contained knots or chaotic tails and speak to an Indigenous way of communication and recordkeeping. The message is one of warning but also survival. Destruction is a side effect of settler-colonial influence, but so is Indigenous survival.

This work is followed by the large-scale installation *Now That the Gates of Hell Are Closed . . .* , which is meant to evoke a classroom through its central focal object (similar to a blackboard) and two-rowed presentation, but instead of a somber teacher and wooden desks, the space is subtly surrounded by vulvae and bare legs in strong outlines and splashes of red and brown. The message is clear: the patriarchy is no longer welcome in Indigenous life and definitely not within that space of expression. Hill activates the work at various times through the inclusion of female sitters, quietly seated upon chairs in the center. The overall effect is beautiful and contemplative, but there is also a tension that any woman who has been made to feel ashamed of her inherent sexuality and power will recognize.

Hill's work is followed by the balanced and monochromatic display of eight works by Brenda Mallory. Portland, Oregon–based artist Mallory's work ranges from individual wall hangings and sculptures to large-scale installations. Mallory works with mixed media, using natural and found materials to create multiple forms that are joined with crude hardware or mechanical devices to imply tenuous connections and aberration. She is interested in ideas of interference and disruptions in systems of nature and human cultures. Mallory's tactile and geometric work is both installation and sculpture. Often made up of multiple pieces able to exist on their own, the resulting work is multi-surfaced and immersive. Biological forms resembling spores, pods, and plant-like stalks are rendered through the marriage of harsh industrial metal objects and silky soft-looking skins or fibers. The work Mallory creates is much like the environment that we live in, both beautiful and dangerous. It is also like life and history, full of pain and joy. Her work is a representation of her self-realizations and personal history bared to the world. It reflects a diversity of identity by grappling with the hard parts and forging them together with the soft.

At the heart of Mallory's practice is a desire to reclaim her connections to the Cherokee community. While her work may not always read as culturally derived, her continued desire to be recognized as a Cherokee artist is always present in how she discusses her work. And the fact that so much of her work is based in balance—soft and hard, dark and light, natural and manufactured—calls to a Cherokee worldview that should not be overlooked. The two *Reformed Packings* take the aesthetics of packaging, corrugated to protect the object within, deconstructed to something new and beautiful. *Drivebelt Experiment #2* goes even farther and takes discarded drivebelts and reforms them into unrecognizable abstractions that emphasize the texture and unseen beauty of an everyday industrial object. A sense of balance and regeneration is also found in *Soft Focus #4*. The work combines waxed cloth, a process that adds strength and malleability to an otherwise soft material and marries the molded objects together with hog rings. The end result is symbolic in the way that it has been made, unmade, and remade, a physical representation of Mallory's understanding of herself as a Cherokee woman.

The exhibition concludes with Twist's other installation of two videos, *Of the Smiles We Leave Behind* and *Demand Aggregation*. Combined into a corner, the works create a dissonance through their competing but complementary sound. With *Demand Aggregation*, a rolling script of text taken directly from the #AngloAmericans Twitter page shows a weirdly dystopian PR scheme of sustainable mining. The alarm-like sound warns the viewer that while the words may seem positive, the impact on the environment is not. *Of the Smiles We Leave Behind* features a California condor, perched next to a water source. The lapping waves complete the sound component. Condors for Twist are especially symbolic as he views their current existence much the same way as that of contemporary Indigenous people: bred outside our natural habitats, forced to adapt to the world we have inherited, longing for a home never truly known but recognized in our being. While this parting fact may leave the viewer feeling a sense of weariness, the reality that you must again exit past ᎠᏥᎸ *(atsilv)* reminds Cherokee people that there is always hope as long as we continue to practice our culture, make art, and keep the fire burning.

Ashley Holland
Curator

Ashley Holland currently serves as the associate curator for the Art Bridges Foundation. She is the former assistant curator of Native art at the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art in Indianapolis. Holland earned her doctorate in art history from the University of Oklahoma in 2021 with a focus on Indigenous identity, cultural memory, and issues of diaspora in Cherokee contemporary art. She received her MA in museum studies from Indiana University–Purdue University and BA in art history and religious studies from DePauw University. Holland is a citizen of the Cherokee Nation and currently lives in Rogers, Arkansas.

ARTS ATL

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Mintz, Donna. “Review: Atlanta Contemporary exhibits turn land acknowledgment into action,” Arts Atlanta, July 2022.

Saturday, June 11, saw the return of Atlanta Contemporary's formerly annual and much-celebrated ART PARTY, and with it the premiere of its summer 2022 exhibitions, two thought-provoking and first-of-a-kind related shows that occupy the Contemporary's six spaces: *Returns: Cherokee Diaspora and Art* and *You Are Heleswv (Medicine)*. Both are on view through September 4.

In its formal land acknowledgment statement, Atlanta Contemporary declares that it "occupies the land of the Mvskoke (Muscogee/Creek) Nation. These individuals were forcibly removed against their will and we reap the benefits of their turmoil. Our occupation of this land is an act of privilege. We acknowledge this land and their legacy."

Why first-of-a-kind? While many institutions, both private and public, have made some form of land acknowledgment, the Contemporary wanted to turn its statement into action.

Luzene Hill's "Traces and Wounds"

Considering how best to proceed, director Veronica Kessenich reached out to Miranda Kyle, arts and culture program manager of the Atlanta BeltLine, more than 18 months ago and began discussing ways that the Contemporary could manifest its intention.

Together with John Haworth, director of public programs for the National Museum of the American Indian (Smithsonian Institute), who serves with Kyle here in the role of curatorial consultant, they identified a list of possible curators. Kessenich ultimately selected two Indigenous women — Ashley Holland, curator of *Returns*, who is a citizen of the Cherokee Nation residing in Rogers, Arkansas; and Elisa Harkins, curator of *You Are Heleswv (Medicine)*, a Muscogee/Cherokee artist and composer who lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

First, a brief history: As the Contemporary notes, it stands on land occupied for centuries by the Mvskoke or the Muscogee/Creek. In 1836 and 1837, the United States Army forced the removal of the 20,000 people who

remained on their native land to what was then called Indian Territory in Oklahoma.

The same fate befell the Cherokee several years later. Between May of 1838 and March of 1839, 16,000 Cherokee were rounded up from their lands, much of which was in Georgia just north of present-day Atlanta. They were marched to Oklahoma in what became known as the infamous Trail of Tears.

The exhibition's accompanying, must-read literature informs viewers that the Atlanta we now call home, and its environs, is ancestral land to both Cherokee and Muscogee/Creek. It reminds readers that "you delete an entire society of people . . . by taking away their relationship to the land." For curators Holland and Harkins, place, ancestral home, matters. The exhibition raises necessary questions. What is indigeneity? Who is Indigenous? And what does that even mean if you are *from* here, but have never physically *been* here? What *should* it mean to those of us who live here now?

The artists included in these two exhibits address these questions — or don't — in unique and unexpected ways. One who does so literally is Nathaniel Cummings-Lambert (Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians). His *My heart in thy mountain land still has its home*, included in Harkins' curation, expresses a powerful vision of ancestral home with the land itself. Cummings-Lambert, in the center's aptly named and narrow Sliver Space, encloses soil from his ancestral home of Cherokee, North Carolina, in a clear, human-scaled triangular sculpture upon which is printed text from the Marshall Trilogy, the early 19th century Supreme Court decisions affirming the legal and political standing of the Indian nations. We now know all too well that Supreme Court decisions can be reversed.

“E’nah ti-ti II (Aunt II),” 2022, by Raven Halfmoon (Caddo Nation)

Holland’s *Returns* in the two main galleries features the work of three contemporary artists: Luzene Hill (Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians), Brenda Mallory (Cherokee Nation) and Kade Twist (Cherokee Nation), each of whom purportedly interrogates their indigeneity. “Cherokee understanding of self and culture,” she writes in the wall text and gallery guide, “has changed over time either by choice or . . . necessity. And with that, so has our relationship to land.”

She also writes what could be the curatorial thesis of the show itself: “[R]emoval from our land does not make us any less Indigenous.” But with the artists in *Returns*, there are fewer allusions to the land itself, and more to other contemporary concerns of an Indigenous experience. According to these artists, much of that experience is not pretty.

Hill is represented by work that addresses violence toward women, Indigenous or otherwise. *Now that the gates of Hell are closed . . .* (2019-22) occupies the first gallery. According to her statement, the work "challenges phallogocentrism and celebrates female sexuality and eroticism," but the 11 drawings (in what looks like oil, ink and/or watercolor or gouache on paper) of legs, mostly disembodied, crossed or uncrossed, seemed to emanate more from rightful anger at injustice than from more specific Indigenous concerns. And for good reason; she explains that her college professor began the first day of class by telling the female students on the front row to "please cross your legs," so that he could proceed "now that the gates of Hell are closed."

A site-specific live performance involving women and chairs was staged at the June 11 opening and will be reprised at a later date.

Hill's second installation, *Traces and Wounds*, 2021, in the large gallery, employs knotted crimson silk on suspended white canvas to offer a more abstract, and, to my eye, more satisfying take on a difficult subject — sexual assault on Native American women.

Brenda Mallory, born in Oklahoma but residing in Oregon, creates mixed-media works made from found and natural materials that explore "disruption of systems in nature and human culture" and biological forms that mix "the hard with the soft" through the marriage of the same found materials. Best of these is *Soft Focus #4*, 2018, comprising hog rings and waxed cloth in an aggregate of boat or vulvar forms.

Mallory shares this larger second gallery with Hill's hangings and with Kade Twist. His two short videos, adjacent to one another on a corner wall, are inspired by place and community. His third and more impactful installation, a multichannel video sculpture on the floor of the gallery, shows silent images of fire consuming a building. Instead of a sense of place, though, it delivers an ominous message of climate change or other desecration of community. Propane tanks reinforce the human element in such a demise.

Twist's video installation

Totsu (Redbird), 2020, a 10-minute video in the Lecture Room from Cherokee filmmaker Jeremy Charles, reminds viewers in wall text that "Native American women are more than twice as likely to experience violence than any other demographic." Two women, separated by time, one distant, one contemporary, are prey simply by moving through their own environments. Only Cherokee is spoken in the film, reflecting the director's corrective to the culturally erosive loss of one's language.

Harkins' *Matrilineal Kinship*, in the perfectly situated Chute Space, offers a different perspective. It doesn't offer a literal corrective to violence, but it does offer a balance. Here, women are presented as respected bearers of culture and lineage. Kyle Bell's (Muscogee) video *How-To: Muscogee (Creek) Foods* is a comforting vignette of traditional food preparation and Muscogee language spoken among women who enjoy one another and the tasks at hand. Raven Halfmoon's (Caddo Nation) stoneware sculpture, solitary and powerfully lit in the darkened space, reflects how the strong Native women in her life inspire her.

Speaking of strong women, *I Pray For My Enemies* (Harkins) celebrates traditional plant medicine — the *heleswv* of the title – in the Contemporary's outdoor Secret Garden. Plants cultivated by Patrick Freeland

(Muscogee) are planted in ceramic vessels made by Muscogee elder Cindi Wood. So far they seem to be, if not thriving, at least surviving the punishing Georgia sun. The work emphasizes Harkins' belief in the importance of both place and the native plants that grow there as physical and spiritual medicine.

The voice of Joy Harjo, our 23rd and first Native United States poet laureate, performing her own *Stomp All Night*, 2021, and *This Morning I Pray for My Enemies*, 2021, presides over it all.

As curator, Holland takes her title from historian James Clifford's *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century* (2013). This book explores new and unexpected meanings of the word Indigenous by seeking to remove, as Holland notes in her statement, "inherent contradictions of an Indigenous and diasporic life."

Those inherent contradictions make these two shows necessary viewing and ripe for study and exploration. The real importance of the Contemporary's efforts is not in the questions answered — can any of these issues be easily or quickly answered? — but in the questions raised by this very real first step.

Putting its land acknowledgment statement into action in an even more concrete way, Atlanta Contemporary plans to grant property to Cherokee and Muscogee citizens for their future use. The museum is working with artist Cummings-Lambert to imagine and execute this far-from-yet-realized cultural easement. Stay tuned for more news of this admirable project. It's another possible answer to the questions raised in this important and enlightening exhibit.

(Disclaimer: Donna Mintz, a regular contributor to ArtsATL*, is a studio artist at Atlanta Contemporary.) Mintz is a visual artist who writes about art and literature. Her work is in the permanent collections of the High Museum of Art and MOCA GA. She writes for the* Sewanee Review*,* Sculptur*e magazine,* BurnAway*, and* ArtsATL*. She recently completed a book on the life of writer James Agee and holds an MFA from Sewanee's School of Letters at the University of the South.*

MAHB

“Hope, Risk and Reality: Perspectives from Indigenous Voices on our Relationship with Mother Earth” Interview with Shanny Spang Gion, Art By Brenda Mallory

Cameran Bahnsen | February 9, 2021 |

Brenda Mallory “Reformed order” (detail) Photo Brenda Mallory © 2021

This is the first of four interviews in the series

Series Introduction by Cameran Bahnsen

I am part Assiniboine, a Native American tribe based in Montana under the Fort Peck Reservation. As an Indigenous student and aspiring leader in environmentalism, I hope to aid in the effort of making Indigenous voices heard while taking part in the fight against the climate crisis. It is unquestionable that our culture and history place value on environmental wisdom, responsibility, and reciprocity. Throughout my life, connecting to other Indigenous peoples through powwows, academia, community-based groups, and traditional ceremonies has made me feel honored to be a descendant of the original land and water keepers.

According to the Center for International Forestry Research, "Indigenous Peoples manage or have tenure rights over at least ~38 million km2 in 87 countries or politically distinct areas on all inhabited continents. This represents over a

quarter of the world's land surface, and intersects about 40% of all terrestrial protected areas and ecologically intact landscapes (for example, boreal and tropical primary forests, savannas and marshes)". Today, there is still a large amount of land that tribal members have management over. Protecting these landowners and their voices means protecting the land itself, and I believe civil society can undoubtedly learn from Indigenous Peoples and our relationship with the earth.

Before the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 was passed, my own grandfather experienced an era of the suppression of Indigenous voices as a young adult. Even though these voices have become lost over time, I am hopeful that the world is slowly beginning to realize that Indigenous perspectives provide invaluable information on how to positively navigate relationships with the earth. Greta Thunberg addressed this when she spoke out against the Keystone XL Pipeline in 2019: "Indigenous peoples have been leading this fight for centuries [...] They have taken care of the planet and they have lived in balance with nature and we need to make sure that their voices are being heard. We need to listen to them because they have knowledge that is valuable right now (rapidcityjournal.com)." Even the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has "highlighted the key role traditional landholders" play and the importance of governments recognizing "the land rights of those groups over the territory they inhabit and manage." Historically, suppression and forced assimilation have tried, and partially succeeded in reducing the presence of Indigenous people, which may be why we are not traditionally seen as key political actors today.

In regards to climate activism, this perspective needs to change.

The following interview pieces highlight the voices and experiences of four Indigenous people of various ages, occupations, and backgrounds. Integrated within each interview is the work of four Indigenous artists, who capture the traditions of our people and Mother Earth through their artistic vision and abilities. In this four-part series, one interviewee and one artist will be featured with each publication. I hope to share the stories and traditions of my people and illustrate how Indigenous people navigate the climate crisis. I believe our unique mindset and interconnectedness with nature has important information and solutions to our current climate issues. By exploring the connection between traditional Indigenous environmental knowledge and the global environmental solutions we are currently seeking, I hope to place value on the importance of diverse voices around the world.

Disclaimer: I do not support the tokenization and extraction of Indigenous knowledges and people. Upholding ways that respect and honor Indigenous knowledges and people is of the utmost importance. Every Indigenous interviewee and artist has given me their consent to share their words for this piece.

Spoken Interview with Shanny Spang Gion

Cameran Bahnsen: What do you believe are the defining aspects of how Indigenous people view the Earth?

Shanny Spang Gion: I would venture to say that there are a few defining aspects of how Indigenous people view the Earth and our greater universe. One is that our belief systems, knowledge, cosmologies and values are cyclic. We tend not to think in a one-directional manner, such as a linear sense of time as Western culture does. I also think relationship and relational accountability are fundamental to how we view the Earth and our place in it. We have to take great care to tend to and foster our relationships with both human and more-than-human relatives. I also think our knowledge and view and experience on this Earth are very diverse, making our knowledge quite diverse across individuals, families, and nations.

CB: What traditions or stories have shaped how you view and treat the Earth?

SSG: There are a few stories I can think of. One is within the context of my tribe's colonial experience. We hold a shared experience with other tribes in that we were forced on to lands not familiar to us in present-day Oklahoma. It was at great risk and sacrifice, but part of our people made the choice to leave and attempted to return to our homelands in present-day Montana. It is their sacrifice, the sacrifices of our ancestors, that I have the honor to call this place home, that I think of every day and it has shaped how I walk in this Earth space. I'm filled with gratitude.

Brenda Mallory

Slipping Into Order: A Glitch in the Phylum

Organic sculptures co-mingle with found objects, both natural and manmade, blurring and confusing the distinction between technology and nature in a theatrical construction that invites sorting, counting, naming, and viewing through a microscope. Strewn botanical drawings, schematics, and buckets of specimens create a classifier's workshop.

CB: What do you think Western cultures can learn from Indigenous people when considering global environmentalism?

SSG: I think one of the most important lessons to be learned is that all things are alive, and have a spirit and energy within them. To respect each part of this Earth as having a spirit and to honor our relationship with these relatives can serve to decentralize human-use based conservation philosophy and practices.

CB: How can Indigenous ways of understanding the environment allow us (humans) to change our relationship with the Earth?

SSG: Relationships are so crucial to how we navigate this physical and nonphysical space. That relational accountability is important. You can say you have a relationship with someone, but maybe you're not tending to that relationship, you don't foster it, you don't make time. In human to human relationships, for instance, you can say you know someone, but you don't really talk to them that often, so it is not really a deep and meaningful relationship where you take the time to say "Hey how are you? How's your family?" or go see them, or stay in touch- that's one example of a relationship. But I would say, the biggest thing we can do is de-center ourselves and not think of ourselves as separate from our environment and natural systems. Some tribes even think that humans, if there were a hierarchy, would be kind of on the lower end of that hierarchy. I think just that one practice of saying, "I'm only a human being, I'm only a part of the Earth that we all share" and trying to look at the relationship you have with different parts of our Earth is so important. For instance, sometimes when I go out and go for walks I talk to the plants about how my day was and touch them because maybe I had a bad day. They really help heal me, and I come back feeling better, feeling more centered, and able to move on that day and take care of my family. So my relationship with our plant relatives is really important to me. It takes a sense of openness and humility to look at the Earth in a spiritual way, and not just in a western, STEM, science way, and knowing that your relationships with all the different parts of our Earth are spiritual too. When you are standing directly next to a water body, it's not just physical, it takes a lot more to understand and respect the different spirits that can reside in different areas. For me, I like to give examples and share things through stories. I want to share a

quick story that shows how our way of understanding can change our relationship with the Earth. It really just has to do with water. In Northern Cheyenne world-view, we see springs as a site that is very sacred and spiritual, and it is considered to be a spiritual corridor where spirits gather and can reside. For us, that means some of these spirits, particularly, called “mynth” in Cheyenne (serpent spirit), reside there. They may not always show themselves, or one may come and not the others, but there is one spirit that I was always told that only seeks to do you harm. So to avoid that spirit, we have protocols around springs- avoid the spring sites around certain times of the day and during storm events, and to not visit a spring by yourself. It is a practice we uphold to respect those spirits and give them their space for when they are more likely to appear, and also to protect ourselves from harm. Because it’s an active spiritual corridor for us and we want to physically keep it clean, we also take care of the site and not allow it to be damaged in any way. That’s one way, I think, we are able to decenter ourselves, with our relationship to water, springs, and the spirits that reside there. We don’t say “this spring is just here for my use and for me to get drinking water” or whatever it may be, we honor and uphold first that it is a very spiritual place.

Photo Brenda Mallory © 2021

Brenda Mallory

Proximate Parcels

Proximate Parcels is comprised of spools of industrial sewing thread that have been sliced apart to expose the individual strands. The act of cutting something apart down to its core, effectively destroying its original function, but then reforming it into a beautiful lush object reflects my interest in how things that are broken or disrupted are often still viable and lively. The varying shades of red reference the complicated issues around blood quantum that even to this day inform certain Native American tribal enrolments. The title Proximate Parcels refers to allotment policies that destroyed the communal landholdings of many Oklahoma tribes, including that of my tribe,

Cherokee Nation. Sometimes families were lucky enough to have their parcels near each other, other times the allotments were far distances, contributing to isolation.

CB: Is it important that the global citizenry activate Indigenous ways of knowing?

SSG: It is important for our own ways of knowing to be shared, as long as it is done in the appropriate way. There have been instances when there is a ceremony that someone might want to learn about and they get into a community [...] and they take that knowledge and they misuse it. They go out and try to start holding their own ceremony for profit, and people will sometimes abuse that knowledge. That goes back to the idea of relationships.

In terms of traditional knowledge, and how it might intertwine with different initiatives, I think of all of the awesome work that's out there by Indigenous scholars and scientists that finds that balance between doing research in a responsible and appropriate way, while also upholding their own knowledge systems from their own tribe- as long as those ways of knowing are honored and respected, and there are guidelines set up for their use in any specific manner. So, in terms of climate change even, a resource I came across a few years ago, in light of climate change, is called "Guidelines for Considering Traditional Knowledges in Climate Change Initiatives" by several different Native scholars (linked here: https://climatetkw.wordpress.com). This kind of goes through and touches on goals and guidelines that could be applied anywhere, even outside of a climate change context. I think there are ways, especially what Indigenous scholars and people are thinking, that provide protections for our

knowledge systems and ways of knowing. I guess the long and short is, I think it's important, but I also think it's even more important for the broader community of humans to do it in the right way and make sure they're doing things in a good way with the tribal individual, community, and nation.

CB: Is it possible/appropriate to bridge the gap between traditional Indigenous environmental approaches and scientific knowledge to contribute to a more sustainable future?

SSG: Absolutely, but I would qualify that by saying it is very dependent upon and specific to each tribal/Indigenous nation, and relationships formed/maintained/fostered amongst tribal nations, tribal members, universities, etc. is paramount. There is an ever-growing number of Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics who are already navigating and finding appropriate pathways within academia do just that. I am honored to count myself among those who are seeking to find ways to balance knowledges and how that informs the ways we choose to think and form projects/research, practice science and most importantly, finding a path to walk that honors and upholds Indigenous knowledges of our nations and ancestors as an equally relevant way of viewing and being in relation to our non-human/more-than-human relatives. In my own graduate research experience, I aimed to find ways in which Traditional Knowledge and Western Science can, together, inform how water is valued, viewed and managed at a local scale, on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation (present-day Montana). My research utilized both Western Science and Indigenous Research methods to explore how these two ways knowing can co-exist. I chose a watershed that drains a good

part of my reservation at Northern Cheyenne, Rosebud Creek, and focused on identifying groundwater-surface water interaction of water resources in this watershed while simultaneously gathering Traditional Knowledge surrounding water use, tribal values, and knowledges from the Northern Cheyenne worldview. Stable isotopes of oxygen and hydrogen were used to identify source waters of Rosebud Creek. Additionally, I recognized that traditional knowledge and ways of knowing only come from living in, relating to, and experiencing this world. Thus, I chose to uphold my tribe's way of communicating knowledge through utilizing Indigenous Research Methods to converse with knowledge holders about water. The research and findings were intended for consideration by my tribal community and tribal government towards changing and informing water resources policy and management for the Northern Cheyenne Tribe.

Photo Brenda Mallory © 2021

Brenda Mallory

Recurring Chapters in the Book of Inevitable Outcomes

Recurring Chapters in the Book of Inevitable Outcomes was inspired by Cherokee history. Like many peoples that have suffered colonization and repression, the Cherokee culture has endured through hardships and travails to remain a vital presence. Lively spore-like clusters dance around somber leaning forms that resemble charred timbers, evoking both loss and hope to represent a resilient people.

CB: What are some community approaches to addressing the fact that Indigenous communities are often disproportionately affected by climate change?

SSG: For this question, I think about not only if you're living close to water and how changes in our climate can affect how/where you live near water, but also I think about our winter months, even our late summer months, where we may

not have enough water for our own living, let alone trying to use it for agriculture or other purposes, the biggest thing I think we can do as a community, which has probably been seen across many different platforms and organizations, is to really look at how we can make ourselves and how we live more sustainable. That can happen through embracing renewable energy sources, and also in our day-to-day as individuals and families, choosing how we want to live. In Cheyenne history, we were at one time in present-day North Dakota area, and we were farmers living in Earth lodges before we came onto the plains. I would even say we should revisit how we choose to live in our homes. If that means we try to live in Earth lodges to help make ourselves more sustainable and have it be more of a natural heat/cooling source of the Earth, or if we do still use modern ways of making homes but making it way more energy-efficient. That's been a real struggle in my area, as I'm sure it is in other communities.

CB: What do you see as the largest barriers to enacting the change we need to see in order to live more sustainable lives and protect the Earth's resources?

SSG: One of the things, more and more, that I see is the United States accepted practices of living relies heavily on plastics. We are all a part of that, it is not any one person, community, or sector of our society. We are all very heavily dependent on plastic, from our shoes, to plastic bags, to food packaging. And I think that is a large barrier. Our society is set up to have that convenience, and I do it too. I like having vegetables that are out of season, and they usually come in plastic. I think the

culture of convenience in the U.S is a large barrier. It's so big, sometimes I get overwhelmed by it, and try to improve my lifestyle choices day-to-day.

On the food side, that sovereignty is being able to provide food for ourselves. On the broader scale, I like the culture that's shifting on trying to find more local food. Buying local food as much as we can and really thinking about our food sources. That's the kind of change we need to see, examining our own cultures we've adopted in the broader consumerist sense.

In regards to the Indigenous mindset of relationships we've discussed… In my home community, we have adopted the mindset of consumer culture, I think because of part of our history and the historical trauma we've experienced, there can be a community level mentality that you have to have certain things that express the level of success or amount of care you can give to your children. Sometimes that is expressed through consumer goods. There are families that will buy top-of-the-line everything because it's an expression of how much they care for that child. It's kind of an adaptation, where traditionally it might have been making them a dress or traditional doll, where before we were colonized. If we can get back to those values of care but practice it differently, then I think we can enact that change to live more sustainable lives.

Photo Brenda Mallory © 2021

Brenda Mallory

Firehose Experiment

Firehose Experiment #8 (Bioform) is made from linen firehoses I found at the dump during my GLEAN Residence in Portland. It is an artist residency where five artists get to spend five months with access to the Waste Transfer Station (aka The Dump). I loved that residency and it made me happy to access all the great treasures, but sad to see the way our culture throws away resources. I felt like a whole sociological study could be done there. American consumers have access to cheap goods because of the cheap labor of disadvantaged workers in other countries. Over consumption, single use plastics, and built-in obsolescence – it's a broken system that's bad for people and the planet.

CB: What support do you and/or your community need to better address some of the challenges and problems we've discussed today?

SSG: I can see multiple ways and levels in which we as a tribe can effectively engage in issues such as water protection and climate change that uphold our value systems. Support may be in the form of community education around many things, including how to care for ourselves in the midst of our colonial experiences and historical traumas. I strongly believe in learning together, with each other, so community education may also be a great opportunity to learn about the innovative and forward-thinking approaches to caring for the Earth that other countries and Indigenous nations have employed. One such example that I only briefly got to examine in graduate school is that of progressive legal policy for water governance. In short, there are nations that are providing legal personhood to river systems as a form of protection that recognizes the river's right to exist as its own person without being harmed. The legal personhood granted to the Whanganui River in New Zealand is an especially powerful example. To think beyond the environmental governance frameworks currently in place in the United States is a huge action that we can all do right now. Then, we can begin our own journey of implementing ways of protection of our more-than-human relatives and the Earth as a whole.

I want to thank both Shanny and Brenda for their kindness, strength, and vulnerability. I met Shanny through my uncle, and I am deeply inspired by her work as she navigates combining western science and traditional Indigenous knowledges. Her

caring and positive spirit instantly made me feel like family. I connected with Brenda online via Instagram, and I was incredibly touched by her creativity and passion. Her humble attitude and welcoming arms are qualities that I deeply admire about her. I am so honored to have worked with both of these amazing women.

Cameran Bahnsen

Disclaimer: The words and art of the featured interviewee and artist are independent of each other and only reflect their own viewpoints and opinions. They are not reflected through each other in any way.

Photo Brenda Mallory © 2021

Brenda Mallory

Reformed Order

Reformed Order is a reclaimed material of sorts – reclaimed from myself! In 2011, I did a large site-specific installation at Portland International Airport entitled Mechanics of Hither & Yon, about the way air travel affects the would so quickly (whether germs, ideas, cultural shifts). The installation included some 25 feet tall vertical wall pieces. At

the end of the installation, rather than throw them away, I sliced them up and turned them into Reformed Order.

Shanny Spang-Gion

Shanara "Shanny" Spang-Gion is Northern Cheyenne and Crow, with German heritage, and is enrolled in the Northern Cheyenne tribe located in present-day Montana. She is the Executive Director of Southeast Montana Area Revitalization Team, a non-profit organization in Fallon County, and the Secretary of the Tongue River Water Users Association in Montana. She earned her Masters degree in Interdisciplinary Studies – Hydrogeology and Technical Communication, from Montana Tech of the University of Montana, where her research utilized both Western Science and Indigenous Research methods to explore how these two ways of knowing can co-exist and inform how water is valued, viewed and managed at a local scale, on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation (present-day Montana). She earned her bachelor's degree in Environmental Science at Montana State University and she currently also currently serves as a consultant at Montana Tech, where she assists in sustaining and institutionalizing the Indigenous

Mentoring Program. She served on the Bureau of Land Management Eastern Montana Resource Advisory Council from 2008-2011 and the MT Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Yellowstone River Basin Advisory Council from 2013-2014. Under her direction, the Cheyenne Wetlands Program Plan (2014-2019), Northern Cheyenne Aquatic Lands Protection Ordinance (2017), and Northern Cheyenne Culturally Significant Riparian and Wetlands Plants List (2015) were completed with a majority of authorship as a collaborative effort of multiple stakeholders on behalf of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe's Department of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources. She is a mother to two Northern Cheyenne/Crow/German children.

Brenda Mallory

Brenda Mallory's work ranges from individual wall-hangings and sculptures to large-scale installations. She works with mixed media and organic materials, creating multiple forms, often joined with crude hardware or mechanical devices in ways that imply tenuous connections and aberrations. Texture and repeated

rhythmic forms are instrumental to Mallory's abstract compositions that deal with concepts of disruptions and repairs. She is interested in ideas of interference and disruption of long-established systems in nature and human cultures.

A resident of Portland, Oregon for many years, Mallory grew up in Oklahoma and is a citizen of the Cherokee Nation. She received a BA in Linguistics & English from UCLA and a BFA from Pacific Northwest College of Art. Mallory has received multiple grants including from the Oregon Arts Commission, Ford Family Foundation, Regional Arts & Culture Council. She has received the Eiteljorg Museum Contemporary Native Art Fellowship and the Native Arts and Culture Foundation Fellowship in Visual Arts. Residencies include Anderson Ranch, GLEAN, Crow's Shadow Institute of the Arts, C3: Papermaking Residency, Jordan Schnitzer Printmaking Residency at Sitka Center, Signal Fire, Bullseye Glass, and Ucross where she received the Fellowship for Native American Visual Artists.

Brenda Mallory's website.

Cameran Bahnsen

Cameran Bahnsen was raised in Ventura County, located in Southern CA. She is part Assiniboine (Fort Peck Reservation, Montana) and currently attends the University of California, Santa Barbara. She is pursuing a B.S in Environmental Studies with a minor in American Indian and Indigenous Studies. At a young age, she grew up beach camping with her family, which

inspired an early love for the outdoors. Her love of nature, coupled with her cultural connection, continue to drive her aspirations of working within resource management, environmental education, interpretation, tribal relations, and conservation. She enjoys hiking, camping, backpacking, cooking, listening to music, and spending time with friends and family.

ableism = systemic and systematic discrimination against alter-abled or "disabled" people. adultism = systemic and systematic prejudice and discrimination against young people and children. ageism = systemic and systematic discrimination against persons of an older age group. antisemitism = systemic and systematic prejudice and discrimination towards Jewish people. alloism = systemic and systematic prejudice and discrimination against people who are asexual. classism = systemic and systematic prejudice and discrimination based on social or economic class. cisgenderism/transphobia = systemic and systematic discrimination against transgender people. colorism/shadeism = a form of systemic and systematic prejudice or discrimination in which people are treated differently based on the social meanings attached to favoring lighter skin color (distinct from racism, but derived from white supremacy)colonialism = in the U.S. context, this is a form of systemic and systematic prejudice and discrimination against Indigenous people or Native Americans (like other forms of oppression, it intersects with racism and other -isms).ethnocentrism = systemic and systematic prejudice or discrimination against people who do not speak English as a first language. heterosexism = systemic and systematic prejudiced attitude or discriminatory practices against homosexuals and Queer-identified people. jingoism = an extreme form of patriotism that often calls for violence toward people who were not born in the U.S. lookism = systemic and systematic discrimination or prejudice based on a person's physical appearance, often based on the media's presentation and definition of beauty. saneism = a form of systemic and systematic discrimination and oppression based on a diagnosis or the perception of someone having been diagnosed with a psychiatric condition. nativism = the policy and attitude of protecting the interests of native-born or established inhabitants against those of immigrants.

racism = systemic and systematic discrimination/prejudice based on race; the idea that whiteness is superior and therefore has the right to dominate another race/races.

religious imperialism = systemic and systematic prejudice or discrimination against people who practice religions other than Christianity. sexism = systemic and systematic prejudice, stereotyping, or discrimination against women on the basis of gender. sizeism = systemic and systematic prejudice or discrimination based on a person's size.

Breathe

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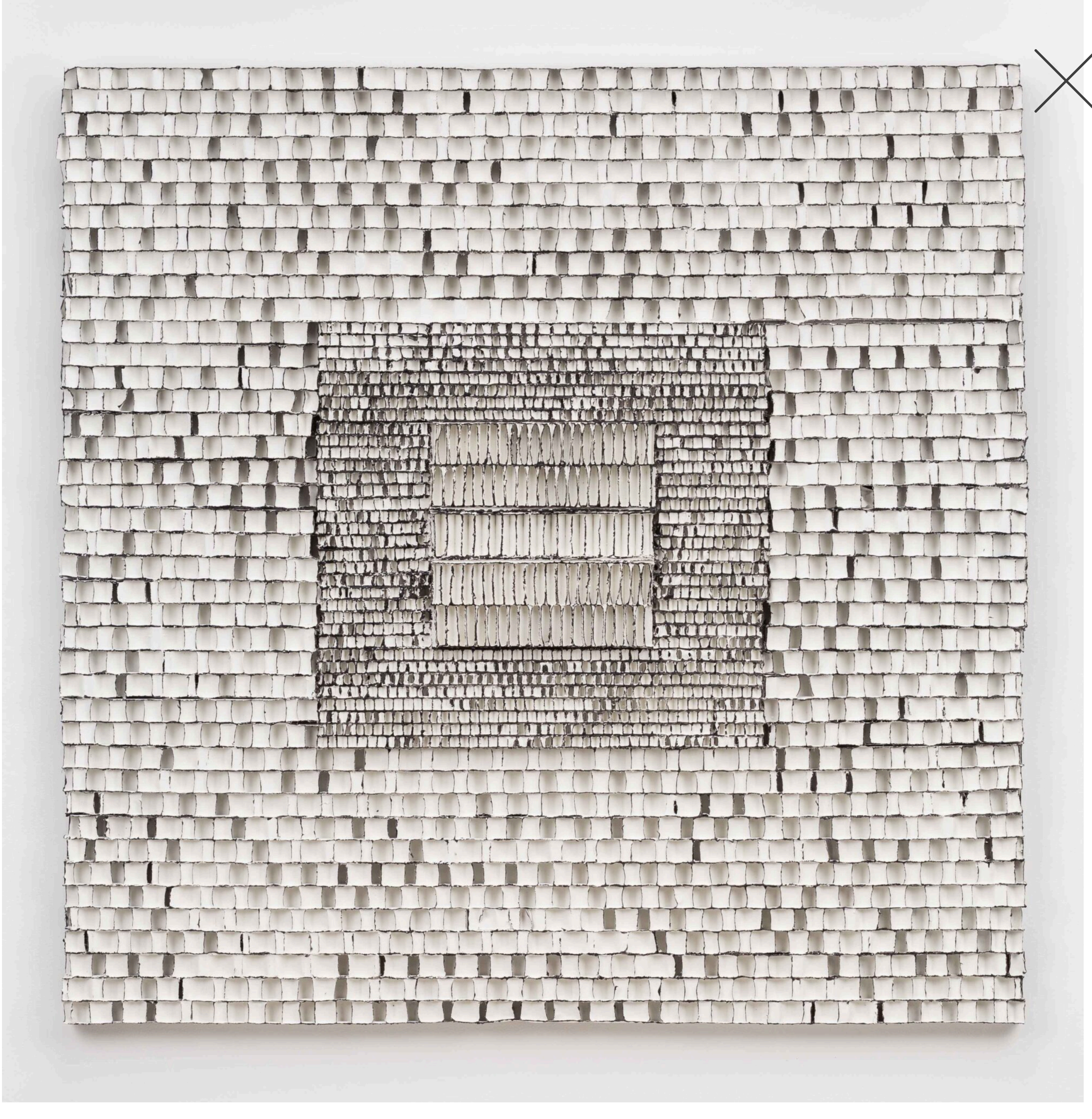
By Noelani Kirschner

April 8, 2019

Kirschner, Noelani. “Brenda Mallory,” The American Scholar, April 2019.



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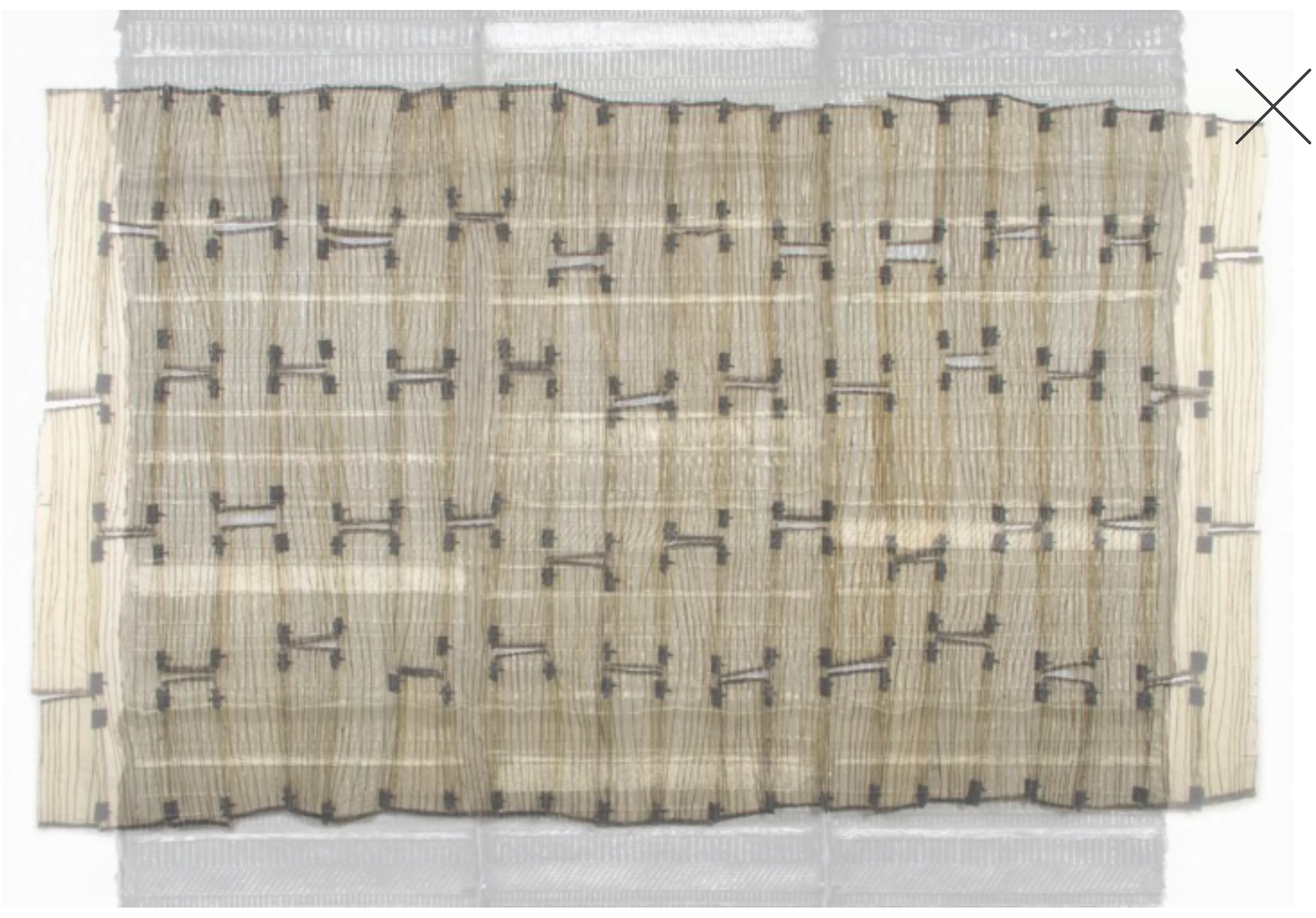
Multidisciplinary artist Brenda Mallory (https://www.brendamallory.com/) *grew up as a member of the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma and has lived in Portland, Oregon, for more than 20 years. In 2015, she was awarded a residency at GLEAN, a Portland-based art program that encourages artists to create works that draw attention to consumption and waste. Here, she discusses her* Reclaimed and Reformed *series.*

"I've always worked with mixed media. I like working with things that are found, rather than buying new things and cutting them up. That's how I got my start—for an assignment in art school, I started using cloth mixed with wax. I had access to piles and piles of scrap fabric that was basically in the same shape. It's malleable like clay but not fragile.

When I was a GLEAN resident, I had five months to work at the local dump. Almost all of the works in the *Reclaimed and Reformed* series were made from objects I found there. For *Reformed Packings #12*, I used honeycomb packing material as a substrate. It comes in 4' x 8' sheets and is very strong. I reform it so that it becomes fragile, and then I paint it. *Drive Belt #1 (Red)* is made from drive belts—the ones that are in our car engines.

You would not believe the number of new or perfectly usable things that get tossed into the trash. The fact that we throw this stuff away indicates to me how we devalue labor. All of these consumer goods are somewhere else where labor is cheap—so cheap that we can throw away hundreds of dollars of material goods, only to buy more. The sociology of consumption is built into my series.



I grew up poor. My grannies used to save everything. I still have some potholders that my granny made out of old clothes. Who would do that anymore? Maybe someone doing it in a DIY or crafty way—it's niche. We don't need this art that I'm making to put on the wall. But my granny needed those potholders, and cloth was valuable at the time. We didn't waste anything.

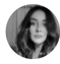
The monochrome palate is because I'm not a painter and fear color. I have been working for a long while with this idea of the 'broken.' The broken line or the broken form that gets reshaped and put back together. In my mind, it becomes more interesting because of that—where you can see the repair or the seam along which things were reassembled. For instance, I cut apart firehoses and put them back together. In the pieces, you can see the frayed edge. To me, it's about disruption. In school, I learned about the disruption of our

ecosystems. But as time went on, I kept thinking about disruption on a larger scale—how our cultures are disrupted. Historically, my culture was disrupted by the Trail of Tears when the Cherokee were forcibly moved to Oklahoma. The fact that a whole culture could be uprooted, moved to a new place, and then keep going—it's incredible."

HYPERALLERGIC

Artists Explore Indigenity Through Printmaking

Map(ing) is part art show, part residency: indigenous North American artists collaborate with Arizona State University graduate students to make prints



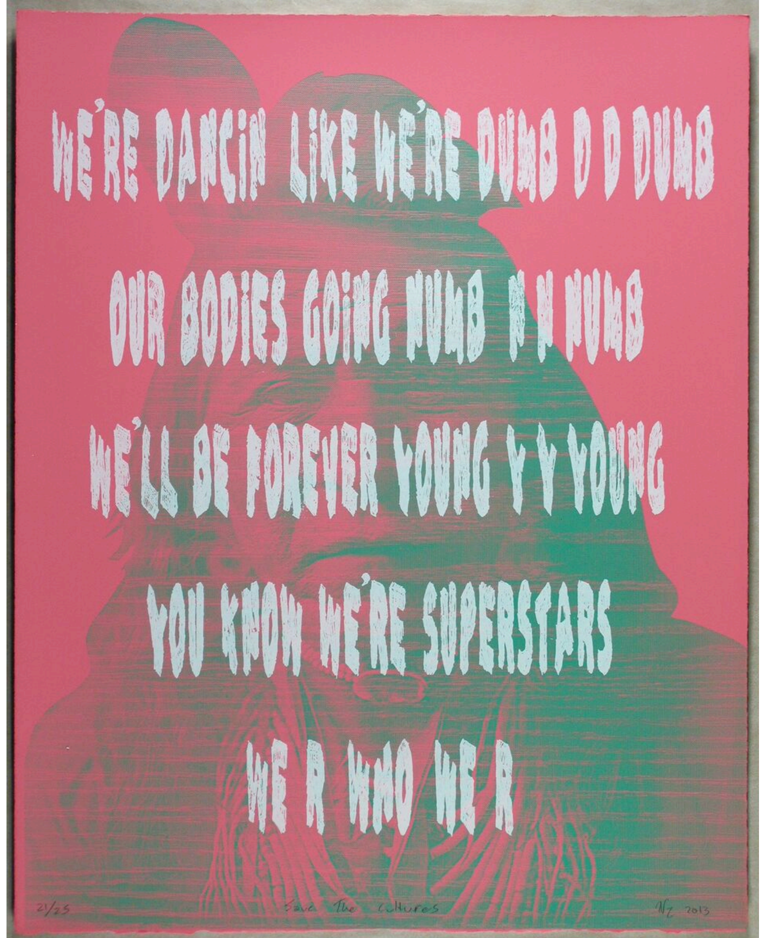
Erin Joyce April 17, 2017

Sarah Sense (Chitimacha), "Does Water Have Memory?" (2017), dust grain photogravure, CMY photo-lithograph, woven, 15 x 19 in (gift of the Map(ing) project director from the ASU School of Art to ASU Art Museum)

TEMPE, Ariz. — This year marks the 10th anniversary of Arizona State University Art Museum's biennale exhibition, *Map(ing) (Multiple Artists Printing Indigenous and Native Geographies).* The exhibition is part art show, part residency: Each year, the exhibition director invites indigenous North American artists to participate in a collaborative residency with graduate printmaking students from the university. Featuring 28 works, the show illustrates the range of the printmaking medium and the variations that can be explored visually through the process. The nuance of the media echoes the nuance of the subject matter: indigeneity in North America. As

the art and cultures of indigenous tribes often get siloed via a stereotypical lens, this exhibition helps illuminate the wide variety of cultural differences as well as the similarities between the 562 federally recognized indigenous tribes in the US, and the First Nations tribes in Canada.

Map(ing), installation view (image courtesy of Lauren Bailey)



Nicholas Galanin (Tlingit/ Aleut), “Save the Cultures” (2013), laser-engraved relief and screenprint, 19 x 15 in (gift of the Map(ing) project director from the ASU School of Art to ASU Art Museum)

During an accompanying panel discussion — with the exhibition director and founder Mary Hood, as well as artists Brenda Mallory (Cherokee), Cannupa Hanksa Luger (Mandan/Hidatsa/Arikara/Lakota), Hannah Claus (Tyendinaga First Nation/Mohawk), Rory Wakemup (Chippewa), and Sarah Sense (Chitimacha) — the audience was walked through the processes these artists employed. One of the unique aspects of the residency is the fact that the artists invited to participate are not printmakers: They all work with other materials and media in their practice, which made navigating the foreign landscape of printmaking an interesting journey.

Brenda Mallory (Cherokee), “Focus Break” (2017), Collograph, chine collie on handmade paper by Mary Hood, 15 x 19 in (gift of the Map(ing) project director from the ASU School of Art to ASU Art Museum)

Dana Claxton (Hunkpapa Lakota Sioux/ Wood Mountain), “He Who Transforms” (2009), inkjet print, relief, 13.5 x 13.5 in (gift of the Map(ing) project director from the ASU School of Art to ASU Art Museum)

Some of the pieces include abstract forms in varying palettes and tonalities, such as Brenda Mallory's "Focus Break" (2017), a beautiful collagraph with a paradoxical aesthetic. On one hand, it is light and has amazing movement; on the other, it is heavy, displaying a broken quality, a discord of fluidity that creates a wonderful tension. Other pieces in the exhibition are more figural in their formality, even though that representational quality is synthesized with an abstractness. Dana Claxton's "He Who Transforms" (2009) straddles the line between representational figuralism and abstraction; using the human form as an anchor in a nondescript backdrop, she is able to create a world where the sitter is floating in space.

The resulting pieces are striking, loaded with an ethos of memory and contemporary issues; political, ideological, geographic, and personal identities and topics are investigated and redressed. Each artist's work references his or her cultural past while exploring relevant issues facing Native America in the 21st century.

Cannupa Hanska Luger (Mandan/Hidatsa/Arikara/Lakota), "Irontype" (2017), Cyanotype, screenprint, mirror paper chine collie, 15 x 19 in (gift of the Map(ing) project director from the ASU School of Art to ASU Art Museum)

Map(ing), installation view (image courtesy of Lauren Bailey)

Map(ing), installation view (image courtesy of Lauren Bailey)

Map(ing), installation view (image courtesy of Lauren Bailey)

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Editorial : Features

"GLEAN"

Disjecta, Portland, Oregon
Review by Richard Speer

Brenda Mallory, "Chill," 2015, styrofoam boxes, paint and found objects, dimensions variable.

Continuing through September 6, 2015

The trope of trash-to-treasure — turning found objects or detritus into artwork — is long since a veritable warhorse for art and craft exhibitions, especially in grade schools and country fairs. While such endeavors can work well as teaching tools, it's unavoidable that most "artwork" that comes out of a trash can looks like it came out of a trash can, and moreover, probably should have stayed there. "GLEAN" is a welcome exception, however, with work by five artists who share a gift for finessing materials in unexpectedly sophisticated ways. Curated by Amy Wilson, the show is jointly mounted by the Recology, Metro and Crackpots organizations. To glean media for their projects, the artists foraged through Portland's Metro Central Transfer Station, aka "the dump," over a five-month period.

Notably, Brenda Mallory's immaculate minimalist works look anything but trashy. In her installation, "Chill," she has arranged white-painted boxes, black on the inside, in a Cartesian grid. There's something clinical, almost sinister, about these empty boxes, which suggest televisions with blank screens, curio boxes devoid of curios, or, more broadly, a mind with no content or a soul without a moral compass. Creating artwork from recycled materials is second nature to Mallory, whose well-known textile-based sculptures are made from fabric scraps left over from the manufacture of reusable sanitary pads.

Adjacent to Mallory's works are Brian Hutsebout's sculptures, which make inventive use of metal, paper, wood, and rope. His wall-mounted "Hammered" is an étude of gently bending lines and shadow-play, while the free-standing "Balanced," with its graceful curves, suggests a ballet dancer or a patch of seaweed undulating in ocean currents. Fashion designer-cum-artist Rio Wrenn contributes a suite of textile-based works centering around geometric patterns on sheets of diaphanous silk. Wrenn creates these patterns by placing rusting objects on the fabric until the objects leave an imprint upon each piece. In the vein of last year's traveling David Bowie exhibition and this year's notorious Björk show at MoMA, Wrenn also includes fanciful costumes and props in her portion of the show, all of which were used in a ritual-like performance that she choreographed for the exhibition's opening night. Finally, Beckey Kaye's sculptures, "Thorny Oyster" and "Osprey," turn nails and plastic into intricate circular fantasias, while Schel Harris' scrap-metal sculptures play off of a Steampunk aesthetic. While pieces such as "Mechanical Monkey" have a winning whimsy, the works are more than a little bit Burning-Man and seem incongruous alongside the other artists' cooler, more abstract contributions.

Overall the show lives up to the formidable challenge of minimizing emphasis on the lowly origins of the works' media. Unless you were told, you wouldn't guess the components were culled from a landfill. That's a tribute to the artists' ingenuity but also a reminder that in a post-Beuys, post-Oldenburg, post-Kienholz world, to use found, distressed, or just plain ugly materials is no longer déclassé. With its motif of re-purposing, the exhibition also capitalizes on the reputation of Portland itself as a mecca for recycling and green living. In a city where every stitch and trifle has its proper bin, slot or compost pile, it's only natural that something as ignoble as a dump would wind up transmuted into an El Dorado for artists on the hunt for novel materials.

Exhibition Reviews | Visual Arts

Brenda Mallory at Julie Nester

BY GEOFF WICHERT ON JULY 9, 2014

Wichert, Geoff. “Brenda Mallory at Julie Nester,” 15 Bytes, July 2019.

Driving back from Park City, where Brenda Mallory's second exhibition at Julie Nester opened July 5th the familiar but still disturbing sight of an elk lying dead on the median strip of I-80 brought into sharp focus the universal significance of the artworks just seen. Once broken, nothing in this world can ever be made whole again: never be put back together exactly as was. Cracked, bent, torn-and-repaired, objects whether naturally occurring or man-made, even our ideas and opinions, and especially includin ourselves, gradually give way to experience, until the patina of use and abuse marks the departure into old age and dissolution. On the other hand, everything that exists has been reassembled from previously-used fragments arranged and—in the jargon of our age—repurposed from shards. What Brenda Mallory's quiet-spoken, eloquently accumulated constructs demonstrate, as they explore the narrow zone between two-dimensional designs and three-dimensional structures, are the only way ecome new again.

Translate »

Mallory's preferred materials are handmade papers, cloth, wax, fiber, strings, and ink, with which she produces lines and surfaces for them to articulate. Her most characteristic objects are clusters of vessels that aggregate ambiguously on a wall—part natural populations, part fabricated clusters. In much of her earlier work, these often evoked winged creatures or pollen-producing plants. Even in the presence of metal screws and rods holding them together, these flocks and bouquets, with their vivid veins and segmentations, overwhelmingly suggest organic matter, structure, and process: tubes, leaves membranes, and what might be constructed with them.

A few works in the current show continue this approach. In "Interrupted Forms" we see an array of tubes from the outside, and their progress across the wall can be read several ways, such as by surrendering to the pictorial illusion that those longer forms in the center are closer, animating the ensemble and, as the word suggests, lending the whole a lifelike energy. In "Variable Order," on the other hand, we see the insides of tubes that have been split in half lengthwise, their black edges and machine screws the only contrast to their glutinous white membranes.

Some of these fabrications remain on the gallery's website (https://web.archive.org/web/20180814124442/http://www.julienestergallery.com/artists_catalog.php?artistsID=6), while one still hangs in an adjacent room. They combine highly specific suggestions with archetypes both mechanical and organic, in ways that argue for continuity across what are commonly taken to be exclusive domains. Viewers familiar with the oddly appealing affect of Steampunk might feel a similar charge here in the pleasure of her inventions, as much aesthetic as practical.

Recently, though, Mallory's thinking and expression have broadened, taking on more of the metaphorical and even allegorical implications of the working methods that draw her on. At first sight, the resulting works resemble prints or drawings, and indeed some of the raw materials came from those sources, which produced the patterns of lines that were then cut apart and put back together in inventive creations. The materials are the same as were employed in the constructions, with the primary difference lying in the new works more shallow relief. The wittily-titled "Warm Lines 1, 2, & 3" were stitched in chenille: French for 'furry caterpillar' and familiar to Americans primarily through ornamental bedspreads. Mallory's lines, however, are stitched into stiff paper instead of pliant cloth, and vary in width and weight as they cross and recross over each other and cascade from one panel to the next. "Drawn Lines 1, 2, & 3" transform this visual look into straight pen-and-ink: the same process of reconstruction translated from material to thought . . . and back again.

This recent aesthetic direction reaches its fulfillment in three works: "Grid Drawing #1, Rifts (horizontal)," and the magisterial "Rifts," each of which began as a drawing or print made in ink and wax that was cut apart and mechanically reassembled, using yet more ink and wax, becoming transformed in the process. "Grid Drawing" shows the most obvious reformation: a series of parallel lines having acquired the appearance of a basket weave. In her statement, Mallory explains her interest in line:

> I have been working with thread and line as a metaphor for life and life's interruptions. Often the damaged and repaired line is more beautiful than the pristine line.

Essential to how we should think about this is the presumption that the woven pattern is more pleasing—aesthetically superior—to the simple lines that were cut and reassembled in order to make it possible Nor should Mallory's foregrounding of metaphor be interpreted to take away from the pleasure in the visual massage that results. As she concludes:

> The necessity of repair, the evidence of the struggle, the healing act of pulling order from chaos: these are the acts and images I want to see.

For anyone weary of a damaged and wounded reality, there is good news in the realization that it can be made not only new, but in the process, better.

Brenda Mallory is exhibiting in a two-person show with Tor Archer at Park City's Julie Nester Gallery (http://www.julienestergallery.com/)through July 22.

Geoff Wichert

Geoff Wichert objects to the term critic. He would rather be thought of as a advocate on behalf of those he writes about.

Reiterations and Rifts
Brenda Mallory

by Richard Speer

The backstory of Brenda Mallory's mixed-media sculptures lies at the confluence of environmental awareness, feminism, and entrepreneurship. In the mid-1990s, the Portland, Oregon-based artist founded GladRags, a company that produces re-washable, reusable menstrual pads made out of cotton flannel. There were often stray strips of cotton lying around her home office and the workshop where the products were assembled, and it proved difficult to find a source that could reliably recycle them. While studying at the Pacific Northwest College of Art in 2000, Mallory decided to incorporate pieces of the extraneous fabric into one of her class assignments. Dipping the fabric in hot wax and using it as a sculptural material, she was fascinated by how it behaved: the strips curled up; they could be shaped; they lent themselves to being used in multiples. In the past, she had worked in ceramics, whose properties she now found similar to the wax-dipped cotton. "There's something about this waxed cloth," she observes, "that has the malleability of clay but not the fragility. It also has a mysterious quality; people look at it and don't know what it is."

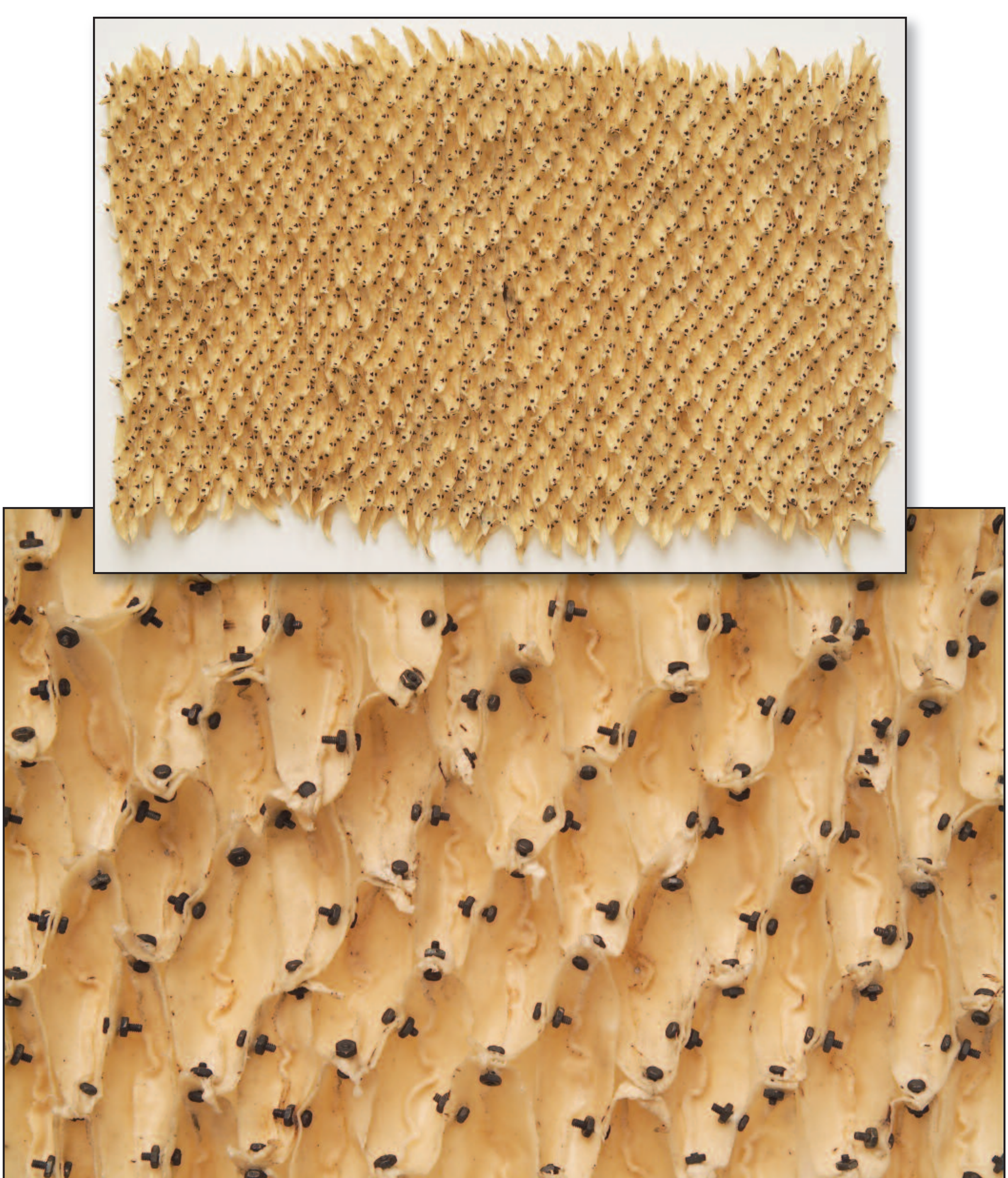
Intrigued by the medium's possibilities and the ways in which it dovetailed both with her social consciousness and aesthetic needs, Mallory continued working with it over the following decade, including after she sold GladRags in 2011. Her working method, she explains, "is really just like an encaustic painter's. The only difference is that I'm using it in a 3D way rather than painting. I use beeswax mixed with dammar resin, and every time I apply another layer, I burn it in with a torch."

In many compositions, Mallory fastens the dipped fabric with nuts and bolts, a process she likens to sewing, and holds the compositions together in frameworks of milled steel. These connective elements have a rough-hewn craftsmanship, which the artist traces to her childhood in northeastern Oklahoma. "A lot of my work—especially slapdash aesthetics of the hard connections of the nuts and bolts—is informed by growing up on a farm with a dad who threw everything together with baling wire. He had a make-do-with-what-you-have attitude. My nephew once pointed out that every gate on our farm had a homemade latch, no two of which were the same, and none of which was pretty." The Oklahoma landscape—windswept, gold with wheat, brown and desolate in wintertime—has also seeped into Mallory's work. Pieces such as *Colonization* and *Undulations* evoke endless earth-toned plains and the patchwork of grasses and farmlands. Growing up in agriculture also instilled in her a cautionary attitude toward ethical quandaries surrounding agri-business. In *Demeter Does the Math*, she incorporates an unconventional material, bullet casings, into a polemical aesthetic response to the specter of genetically modified seeds propagated by the agri-business Monsanto Company.

The treacherous intersection of science and business is of particular interest to Mallory, as one who holds an abiding respect for the empiricism of the scientific method. She hungers to comprehend the origins of things, the way things work, and the methods by which we systematize knowledge. The systems that anchor linguistics, medicine, neuroscience, and biology fascinate her and infiltrate the architectonic structure of her sculptures. The book *Biology* (Neil A. Campbell, Benjamin-Cummings: 1996), given to her by a friend, has been a rich source of visual and thematic reference points. Like a scientist, Mallory is also dually interested in theory and field work; even in highly conceptual series, the presence of the hand never recedes into the background. There is an obsessiveness in what she calls the "manual-labor" element of her work, which she carries from her years of making utilitarian objects in ceramics.

In 2013, Mallory's interests in biology and technology came together in a striking installation at the Portland International Airport. A multi-piece meditation on international air travel, entitled *Mechanics of Hither and Yon,* it pointed to disturbing links between jet transportation and the dangers of pandemics transmitted through airborne disease. With their radiating spokes of fabric and metal, the installation's components simultaneously resembled flowers

Speer, Richard. "Reiterations and Rifts," Surface Design Journal, Winter 2014.

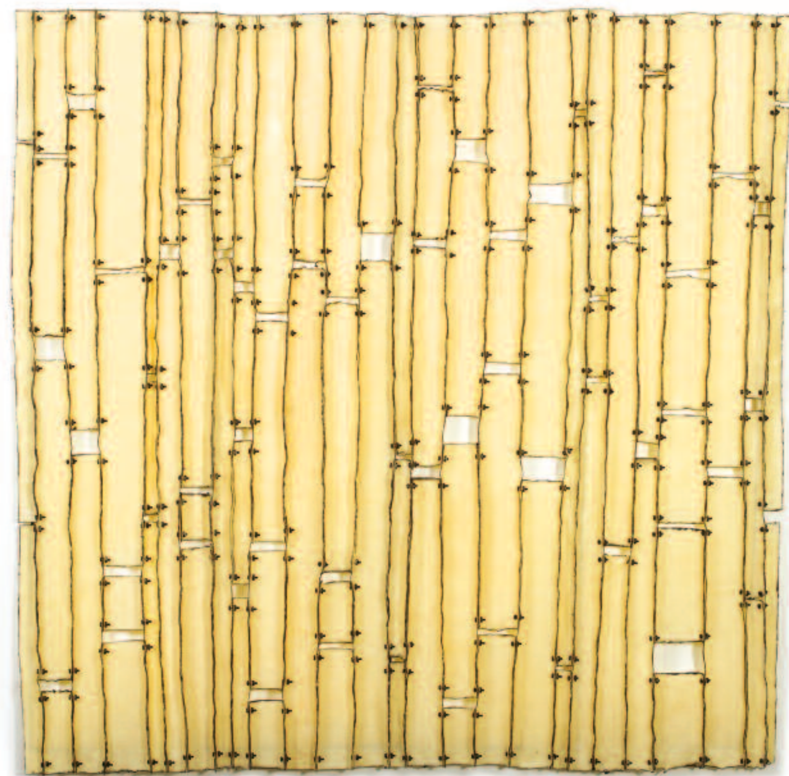


TOP: **Brenda Mallory** ***Colonization*** Waxed cloth, nuts, bolts, steel, 43" x 67" x 2.5", 2003.
Detail *BOTTOM*. Photos: Bill Bachhuber.

Speer, Richard. "Reiterations and Rifts," Surface Design Journal, Winter 2014.

TOP: **Brenda Mallory *Mechanics of Hither and Yon*** Waxed cloth, nuts, bolts, steel, 23' x 40' x 3', 2011-2012. Installation at Portland International Airport, Oregon, 2013. Detail *BOTTOM*. Photos: Christie Hazan.

Speer, Richard. "Reiterations and Rifts," Surface Design Journal, Winter 2014.



Brenda Mallory ***Variable Order*** Waxed cloth, nuts, bolts, steel, 42" x 42" x 2", 2013. Photo: Crystal Van Wyk.

and viruses. By conflating the fetching and the fierce, the artist not only distilled the amorality of nature, she also betrayed a healthy ambivalence about her chosen medium. "Things can get too beautiful with this material. It can quickly become so luscious that it looks too decorative, too pretty and trophy-like. I want it to be a little deadly, too."

Becoming a prisoner to her medium—or even to overarching themes such as sustainability—is something Mallory works to avoid. Increasingly, she subverts medium and process to concept, leading to some surprising developments. For example, when she darkens the nuts, bolts, and steel that hold her compositions together, she does so with gun blue (black oxide), a caustic chemical normally used to darken handguns. It's an aesthetic choice that would seem to fly in the face of her ecological concerns. Further, in recent work she is departing from the organicism of ovular forms in favor of more rectilinear shapes and a formalist approach. In works such as *Variable Order* and *Articulated Verticals*, she uses long, segmented lines to evoke the rigorous geometries of Agnes Martin and UPC bar codes.

Prior to a ten-week artist residency at Anderson Ranch Arts Center in Snowmass Village, Colorado, in the autumn of 2013, Mallory made the radical decision to not take any wax or flannel strips with her, but rather to limit her media and thereby challenge herself to expand her material vocabulary in new directions. The decision mirrored the exciting, if intimidating, place where Mallory, like many mid-career artists, finds herself. She stands balanced on the fulcrum of success in a given style and the imperative to push creative boundaries—between materiality and concept, object and installation. Like the broad plains of her native Oklahoma, the artist's future stretches out with an expansiveness limited only by the long, hazy line of the horizon.

Brenda Mallory's website is www.brendamallory.com. Her work will be included in *Salon* at Butters Gallery in Portland, OR (through February 1, 2014), www.buttergallery.com; and at Julie Nester Gallery in Park City, UT (June 27 – July 29, 2014), www.julienestergallery.com.

—*Richard Speer is a contributing critic for* ARTnews, Art Ltd, *and* Visual Art Source. *He is visual arts critic at* Willamette Week *(Portland, Oregon's Pulitzer Prize-winning alternative newspaper) and author of* Matt Lamb: The Art of Success *(Wiley, 2005, revised edition 2013). www.richardspeer.com*

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