



URBAN SHAMAN GALLERY

CONTEMPORARY ABORIGINAL ART



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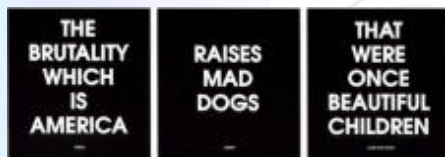
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Feature: Remembering in America: Toward a Critical Dialogue

by Shanna Ketchum

Contemporary artist **HOCK E AYE VI Edgar Heap of Birds** (Cheyenne/Arapaho) provides a critical context for analyzing both the individual and collective conscience of Native peoples living in the Americas. With art that structures time, place, and meaning into text-based messages, Heap of Birds succeeds in reclaiming the political status of art by simultaneously engaging and challenging the history of the United State's relationship to its indigenous populations and the natural environment.



Image 1 | Image 2 | Image 3

Most notably, the artist has displayed a quote from the American Declaration of Independence on an outdoor billboard (on the corner of Ellice Avenue and Smith Street) that captures the social conscience of an era in American history when state power maintained an incendiary position toward Native inhabitants by declaring them "merciless Indian savages." While the rest of the original document proclaims all men to be created equal with certain unalienable rights, Heap of Birds's billboard deftly reveals the hypocrisy inherent in the text while actively implicating the constitution of the work of art into public space.

As with many public art pieces whose realization depends upon audience participation, Heap of Birds embraces a collective model in deference toward revealing the full social humanity of the experiences of Native people living in the Americas. This integration of Native consciousness into the billboard text successfully necessitates a reordering of structures of power since meaning is often subject to multiple interpretations in the public realm. Indeed, as one scholar put it, "hostile or harmonious, the world resonates with the human presence, intrudes upon it, and will not be denied."^[1]

In tandem with his billboard project, the artist strikes a balance at Urban Shaman Gallery with an exhibition of his prints, drawings, and metal Native Host signs that bespeak a private vision focused upon expressing the complexities often scarcely revealed concerning the conditions of modern Indian existence in the US. The challenge that Heap of Birds sought to address in these works are historically and ideologically connected to the image of the Indian as savage (as in the Declaration of Independence), whose humanity and freedom are continuously denied to him/her even in the present era.



Video 1 | Image 1 | Image 2 | Image 3

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