

medium of clay. The artist says that the pots in this show were inspired, in part, by Mississippian head pots—a series of portrait effigy jars from Arkansas and Missouri of tattooed, deceased males. The polychrome dripping colors and loose, gestural forms harken back to his earlier nonobjective abstract paintings in which impasto applications of paint assumed sculptural dimensions.

Gibson has moved on to three-dimensional installations by draping his mixed-media cloaks, growing ever larger, over frames of driftwood and crowning them with his ceramic jars, evoking human or equine forms. Perfectly static sculptures in a silent gallery space don't seem representative of dancing, singing, and music, but through carefully orchestrated repetition, Gibson invokes motion and sound.

Some of the components in his sculptures are personal keepsakes; others are almost over-the-top stereotypically “Native”—quartz crystals, flint arrowheads. These seem like metaphorical bones tossed to a non-Native audience craving Indian-ness, so that Gibson can get be free to get on with the business at hand: creating, working with color, texture, and all the formal elements that hold his artistic interest. Regarding the loaded designation of being a “Native American artist,” he told *Forbes* art critic Adam Lehrer, “I used to worry about the label being limiting. But then you realize that the label isn't going anywhere and if we are going to describe each other in this way; you're whatever and I'm Native American; then I'd rather proactively use it strategically.”<sup>1</sup>

Gibson's career is hitting its stride. He has a robust exhibition schedule and is represented by Marc Straus in New York. He hints at the intriguing possibility of venturing into performance, which might be revealed in the traveling, mid-career survey currently being planned by the Denver Art Museum for 2018.

—America Meredith



Luzene Hill (*Eastern Band Cherokee*), *Enate*, 2017, photograph from videotaped performance. Image courtesy of the artist.

## PORTLAND, OREGON

### *Connecting Lines*

#### Portland Art Museum

**O**N VIEW at the Portland Art Museum's Center for Contemporary Native Art through October 29, 2017, *Connecting Lines* features the art of Luzene Hill (Eastern Band Cherokee) and Brenda Mallory (Cherokee Nation). The artists met in 2015 when they both received Contemporary Art Fellowships from the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art in Indianapolis. The artists' bond formed during this period led to the development of this exhibition.

Hill's performance and installation, *Enate*, focuses on issues of violence against Native women, female empowerment, and Native sovereignty, as she specifically calls attention to the sexual abuse of Indigenous women. Mallory's installation, *Recurring Chapters in the Book of Inevitable Outcomes*, consists of tall shapes resembling chard timbers or skeletal plant stalks surrounded

by colorful, lively, spore-like forms. Her work is inspired by a rereading of Cherokee history and addresses ideas of disruption, repair, and renewal.<sup>1</sup>

Entering the gallery, text panels introduce the visitor to the thematic elements of the exhibition. Statements by curator and scholar Ashley Holland (Cherokee Nation), as well as by Mallory and Hill, aid the visitor in providing a context for which to view these works of art. As Holland notes, *Connecting Lines* documents the struggles, fears, hopes, and successes of these two Cherokee artists and each work presents concepts of survival, culture, and self-representation, resulting in an exhibition that explores issues of contemporary Cherokee identity and continued connections to the past.<sup>2</sup>

Hill's *Enate* is a complex installation that includes a performance recorded in the gallery space. During the performance, projected on a continuously looping video within the gallery, Hill cloaked herself in a red mantle constructed of 6,956 silk taffeta silhouettes resembling ancient depictions of women. The number is not arbitrary; it represents the average

1. Adam Lehrer, “Artist Jeffrey Gibson Explores Complexities in Human Movement in New Show at Marc Straus Gallery,” *Forbes*, October 29, 2015, web.

1. “CCNA: *Connecting Lines: Brenda Mallory and Luzene Hill*,” Portland Art Museum, accessed April 25, 2017, web.  
2. Ibid., Ashley Holland, introductory text panel, pdf.



**Brenda Mallory (Cherokee Nation), *Recurring Chapters in the Book of Inevitable Outcomes*,** waxed fabric, nuts, bolts, welded steel, 2015. Image courtesy of the Portland Art Museum.

number of Native American women in the United States who report sexual abuse each year. The silhouettes of the female figures have been dyed a vibrant red using cochineal to demonstrate the importance of this natural dye prior to colonization. The color is meant to imbue the cloak with feminine power.

The work makes a powerful statement. Hill is hidden by the mantle as she writhes beneath the weight of the taffeta. She eventually emerges from constraints of the cloak wearing a delicate, silk robe. Like the mantle, it too has been dyed in the same dark, rich red of the cochineal. As the performance piece plays again and again, the mantle hangs from the ceiling, hovering over the viewer who is compelled to look above and engage with the piece. The silk robe hangs nearby on the wall. Its thin, lightweight material stands in stark contrast to the heft of the taffeta mantle. Just as Hill intends the use of cochineal to represent a reclamation of power, her emergence from the mantle is a metaphor for reclaiming power for the Indigenous women who have endured sexual abuse.

The soft, tactile quality in Hill's work stands in contrast to the tangible sculptures in Mallory's installation.

Mallory's work is a combination of rigid geometric and organic forms made from waxed cloth, nuts, bolts, and welded steel. Each individual piece that forms the installation could stand on its own as a work of art. Together the work becomes multi-surfaced and immersive.<sup>3</sup> *Recurring Chapters in the Book of Inevitable Outcomes* creates a landscape that is both foreign and inviting. There is a sense of the sublime in which the artist's work can be interpreted as beautiful and dangerous. The sculptures draw the visitor into the space, but at the same time the black, tower-like forms repel the viewer from fully engaging with the less ominous, organic, spore-like forms. According to Holland, Mallory's work is a representation of her own self-realizations. Despite this openness, there is a sense that something is being kept from the viewer, protected within the imposing structures and complex spheres.<sup>4</sup>

The Center for Contemporary Native Art is a small but important space housed within the galleries at the Portland Art Museum. It is dedicated to presenting the works and perspectives of

today's Indigenous artists, who are fully engaged in the curatorial process, interpretation, and programs associated with each exhibition. This approach challenges museum visitors to think about Native American art and culture as dynamic and changing rather than being stuck in a romanticized, ethnographic past. *Connecting Lines* is a complex exhibition that requires the viewer to engage with art, performance, and text. If visitors take the time to immerse themselves in this powerful exhibition, they will be rewarded by a deep and meaningful experience that connects past with present. This show demonstrates the ongoing struggles and successes of these artists within the context of their Native American heritage and contemporary experiences.

—Denise Neil-Binion

## SANTA FE

### *Athena LaTocha: Inside the Forces of Nature*

#### IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts

**U**PON MY FIRST STEPS toward the South Gallery at the IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, I was surprised to find a seemingly modest representation of works by Athena LaTocha (Hunkpapa Lakota-Ojibwe). On display in the gallery's hallway from January 20 through May 13, 2017, a vinyl text introduction and a video monitor playing a Q&A between the artist and curator Manuela Well-Off-Man and documenting the artist sketching in a wooded landscape were placed as welcoming guides into the space. What happened next was my sighted glance of a complete, wall-filled drawing, which made my heart skip a beat. Four small studies were installed in the wall parallel to the mural. These densely layered artworks were exploding with information,

3. Ashley Holland, "Connecting Lines," brochure, 2017. Her essay, copies of which are available to museum visitors, provides a closer look at the art and artists and helps to gain a deeper understanding of the displayed works. The essay is available online at [portlandartmuseum.org/exhibitions/ccna-connecting-lines](http://portlandartmuseum.org/exhibitions/ccna-connecting-lines).

4. Ibid.