



‘Exploding Native Inevitable’ exhibition features 15 Native artists

Contemporary show emulates Andy Warhol’s 1960s happenings *Updated

SANDRA HALE SCHULMAN • JAN 9, 2024

This work, "Watchful Eye," by Osage painter Norman Akers, is among the art pieces on display in the new exhibition, "Exploding Native Inevitable," that will travel around the United States in 2024 and 2025. The exhibition features 15 Indigenous artists and one collaboration. (Image by Aaron Paden, courtesy of Bates College Museum of Art)

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Sandra Hale Schulman
Special to [ICT](#)

With a clever title that draws from a 1960s multimedia exhibition by pop-art master Andy Warhol, a new touring art exhibition, “Exploding Native Inevitable,” includes 15 Indigenous artists with works in ceramics, painting, video, fiber arts and more.

With a nod to Warhol’s “Exploding Plastic Inevitable” exhibition from 1966, in which he curated multimedia events to go along with his art exhibition, the “Exploding Native” exhibition will include talks with artists, screenings of films and performances.

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After running at Bates College Museum of Art in Lewiston, Maine, through March 4, the show will travel to three other venues in Arizona, Nebraska and Utah. The show is co-curated by top

Indigenous artist Brad Kahlhamer and Bates Museum's Director and Chief Curator Dan Mills, who have been friends for decades.

"It's really going to do what we hoped," Mills told *ICT*, "which is to be in New England, the Southwest, the Midwest, and the Mountain Plains. There are some artists who are in or near all of those regions."

The exhibition was originally set to open Oct. 27 at Bates College, but the mass shooting in Lewiston on Oct. 25 delayed the formal opening. The shooting left 18 people dead and 13 injured, and sent the campus and much of the region into lockdown for two days until the shooter was found dead on Oct. 27.

The exhibit quietly opened a few days later, with a more formal reception planned for Thursday, Jan. 11.

The exhibition also includes a collaborative effort on a music video, "[Wawasint8da](#)," featuring a song written and performed by Mali Obomsawin, an Abenaki First Nation composer and bandleader, and directed by Penobscot interdisciplinary artist Lokotah Sanborn.

'Crazy good artists'

The new "Exploding Natives" exhibition is not confined to white gallery walls, but rather explodes beyond the museum and across the campus into the community with performers, filmmakers, and writers both regional and national.

The works is being exhibited at the same time as another exhibition, "[Brad Kahlhamer: Nomadic Studio, Maine Camp](#)," featuring Kahlhamer's sketchbooks and works from his many travels, which he calls "yondering."

"This show came out of a conversation in Brad's studio in fall of 2019," Mills told *ICT* by phone. "We were looking at his work and talking. We've known each other long enough that I knew him from his emerging years. Brad was in a show that I curated, and we've done some projects together, exhibitions in Chicago and elsewhere. We developed a friendship."

Kahlhamer has exhibited worldwide and is in several international museums, so he has met many Indigenous artists along the way, Mills said.

"I asked him, 'What do you think about joining and doing a project looking at Indigenous artists from across the land who may be crazy good artists, and many who aren't known?'" Mills said.

Kahlhamer told *ICT* by phone from New York City that he drew from his knowledge of Indigenous artists he has met over the years.

"Much like Dan and I go way back, I go as far back with some of these artists," Kahlhamer said, "so I had a range of people to choose from. And while the pandemic was terrible, it was really great for studio practice and deep diving research, and we made the most of that."

"When we reached out to the artists, it was gratifying that many of them didn't know many of the other ones but liked the work," he said. "The goal wasn't to show what everyone's already seen and who's already had a light shown on them so much as pulling together people who hadn't fully emerged yet."

Mills said choosing the artists was "very, very organic."

"We spent a few years just learning widely," he said. "Brad's a much more informed person and for me, the deep dive was to learn about the musicians and filmmakers and artists in order to then make informed decisions that developed into our vision of this show."

Permission to explore

Kahlhamer came up with the title for the exhibition, Mills said.

"From the beginning, the idea was to do multimedia and have different kinds of arts within the shows, and then Brad came up with that Warhol riff name," Mills said.

Kahlhamer said the title liberated them from just looking at painters to designing an art show that included film, dance, and video.

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"The Warhol 'Exploding Plastic Inevitable' ... centered around building the underground arts," Kahlhamer said. "Back then it was a multimedia, multi-discipline platform, way before those words became common currency. We just took our cues from the title, which then gave us permission to go out and combine our talents. I came around with the title which brought a center to it.

"It has given us permission to just kick over even more rocks."

In his decades of exhibiting, this is the first major show Kahlhamer has curated.

"I've done a little bit behind the scenes," he said, "mentioning specific artists to professional curators, but I've never really picked up the shovel like this."

There will be a publication post-exhibition that will document the show and the performances and programs. Each artist will have several pages for their work as part of the creative endeavor.

After closing at Bates, the exhibition will travel to the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art in Scottsdale, Arizona, from Aug. 10, 2024 to Jan. 5, 2025; to the Sheldon Museum of Art, University of Nebraska in Lincoln, from Feb. 7, 2025 to July 12, 2025; and at the Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art at Utah State University in Logan, Utah, from Aug. 29, 2025 to Dec. 12, 2025.

The features artists include:

***Norman Akers**, an Osage Nation painter from Lawrence, Kansas. Akers uses images and symbols drawn from his cultural heritage, life experiences, and contemporary culture to address identity, Osage mythos, removal, disturbance, and the struggle to claim cultural context.

***Nizhonniya Austin**, a Diné/Tlingit Artist and musician who lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Austin works abstractly, making expressionistic paintings guided by process and expression, and often painting in an earthy palette reminiscent of Tlingit art.

***Alison Bremner**, a Tlingit artist and language advocate who lives in Seattle, Washington. Bremner addresses cultural appropriation with subversive humor, reimagining traditional Tlingit themes in contemporary materials.

***Jaque Fragua**, Jemez Pueblo, who lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Fragua draws from punk, graffiti, protest art, and traditional Native aesthetics to create paintings and murals of visual resistance and public interventions.

***Raven Halfmoon**, a Caddo Nation sculptor who lives in Norman, Oklahoma. Halfmoon makes large, expressive ceramic sculptures primarily of Caddo female heads and figures, with glazes of symbolic colors rooted in Caddo traditions.

***Elisa Harkins**, a Muscogee/Creek Nation artist and composer, who lives on the Muscogee Reservation in Oklahoma. Harkins makes innovative, interdisciplinary, and multimedia work in performance, electronic music, and sculpture.

***Sky Hopinka**, Ho-Chunk Nation of Wisconsin/Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians, who lives in New York City. Hopinka layers documentary-style and abstract imagery with sound and language in short and feature films and videos that represent Indigenous histories and contemporary experiences.

***Terran Last Gun**, a Piikani/Blackfeet artist who lives in Santa Fe. Last Gun continues the tradition of Blackfeet ledger drawings by making vivid abstract work on antique settler ledger paper that explores subjects from animals and cultural forms to nature, sky, and the cosmos.

***Fox Maxy**, a Mesa Grande Band of Mission Indians/Payómkawichum artist and filmmaker who lives in San Diego. Maxy makes films combining footage of friends and family, cultural and current events, and invented digital imagery, edited into abstract stream-of-consciousness experimental films.

***New Red Order**, a group that described itself as a “public secret society” that collaborates to create video and performances questioning the desire for Indigeneity. Core members include Adam Khalil, Ojibway; Zack Khalil, Ojibway; and Jackson Polys, Tlingit.

***Mali Obomsawin**, an Abenaki First Nation bassist, singer and composer who lives in Portland, Maine. Obomsawin tells Indigenous stories through melding chorale-like spirituals, Wabanaki and folk melodies, and free jazz/improvised music. She is the bandleader of a sextet and quartet, and she acts, sings and directs in the video, “Wawasint8da.”

***Sarah Rowe**, a Lakota/Ponca painter, sculptor and performer from Omaha. Rowe combines traditional Indigenous iconography, personal forms and popular culture, and draws on the energy of Heyoka, the sacred clown of the Lakota, to reimagine Native animals and mythic creatures.

***Lokotah Sanborn**, an interdisciplinary Penobscot artist who uses film, music, photography and graphic and 2-D design to celebrate the perseverance and power of Wabanaki people. He served as director of “Wawasint8da.”

***Duane Slick**, a painter from the Meskwaki/Sauk and Fox Tribe of the Mississippi, combines the concerns of Modernist abstraction and beliefs and traditions of Native people with multilayered coyote images and reductive paintings.

***Tyrrell Tapaha**, Diné, is a weaver, fiber artist and sixth-generation sheepherder. Tapaha’s textiles, made with raw, natural fibers predominantly grown and hand-dyed with local flora, are interwoven with feelings, memories, and experiences.

Update: This article has been updated to include artist Lokotah Sanborn, who collaborated with Mali Obomsawin on the music video, “Wawasint8da.”

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