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500 WORDS

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Edgar Heap of Birds discusses *Genocide and Democracy*

Joe Goode on his life and work in Los Angeles

Arca talks about his latest album

Vinyl Terror & Horror discuss their work at the Horsens Kunstmuseum

Vanessa Place on her work with rape jokes

Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker speaks about *Work/Travail/Arbeid* at MoMA

Edgar Heap of Birds

04.25.17



Edgar Heap of Birds, *Genocide and Democracy*, 2016, ink on paper, 15 x 22" each.

For over forty years, Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds has produced works that antagonize indigenous oppression and foreground his Cheyenne heritage. In recent monoprints, Heap of Birds merges political songs and anthems with his own writings—*RED SKIN BOUNTY TIS OF THEE*, reads one print in *Genocide and Democracy*, 2016, a piece he discusses below. That work is featured in "Reconstitution" at LAXART in Los Angeles, an exhibition that looks at the enduring legacy of identity politics and is curated by Catherine Taft and Hamza Walker. The show is on view through May 27, 2017.

I'VE BEEN MAKING MONOPRINTS like these for about fifteen years or so. I started printing them in Santa Fe with Michael McCabe, a master Navajo printer. He showed me a process where you paint backward on clear glass with a clear liquid. The result feels a little elusive, but I like it, because it's different than my public art, which is more in your face with bold text. With these new monoprints, I never know what's going to happen because of the liquid. Recently with *Genocide and Democracy* I started using solvents too, dissolving the letters even more.

It has been found that perhaps one hundred million indigenous lives were lost, throughout the Americas, due to so-called "contact" with Euro colonizers. Today countless tribal communities struggle to recover from genocide caused by war, violence, disease, loss of food sources, and encroachment of urban society upon the sacred Native medicine and natural world.

I began making these prints during the election. They illuminate the profound lack of electoral standing indigenous communities hold in democratic systems because of depleted population numbers and broadly dispersed demographics that span across many states and provinces, often from forced removal.

In some ways the prints in *Genocide and Democracy* look like they're coming out of some bloody, violent event—blood is pooling on them, and there's a violence implied by the words. I write texts but I also edit other documents, like the Declaration of Independence, which, if you just cut it down in a particular way, gives you the truth of a nation. It's a racist document, with its talk of the savage Indians and so forth. I also found lines in songs like "God Bless America" and "The Star-Spangled Banner" that show the hypocrisy of justice, health care, sovereignty, and education in America and just put them together.

I like NBA basketball; I'm an Oklahoma City Thunder fan. So everyone sings "The Star-Spangled Banner" before each game and they put a hand on their heart. There's a unified moral celebration, and prayers are offered. When you take that rubric and then pair it with the genocide and violence, I think that's where you might have a flashpoint of recognition.

I had to speak at a funeral on the reservation where I live just the other day. Death there is constant. Some of it is self-inflicted, but a lot of it is just based on problems on the reservation. And it's not getting any better. There's so much disenchantment there now—ill health from bad food provided by the government. It's all sugar, salt, and processed—foods that will kill you. They give it away for free and then you get a horrible disease like diabetes from it.

My wife is Navajo, so we're between the Cheyenne and Navajo Nations, traveling back and forth all the time. And her nation is really suffering too; they tested bombs in Nevada and the fallout came within the range of their reservation and dropped like rain—all these black particles gave everybody cancer. All the uranium mines there too. There's just all of this tragedy and it's not even like America has a blind eye to it, because

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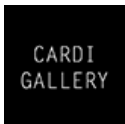
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Excerpt from Edgar Heap of Birds' interview for 500 Words.

Native people just aren't visible in the US.

I was proud of how the tribes came together for the Dakota Access Pipeline protest, but I didn't get too involved because I don't with the buzzword things. We have a joke: "We're Indian every day." So that's how I look at it, from the tribal standpoint. We did this activism before, we do it now, and we'll do it later. People can get political when there's a cause, sometimes a celebrity cause. But I wish they had kept going—there was a wonderful momentum. And I hope it channels into more activism and engages more non-Native communities. Because it was inclusive and that's the way Native people are; we appreciate help. So it was wonderful in many ways, but the violent way it ended and how pushy it became was simply awful. Though I saw it coming when Obama left office.

— As told to *Lauren O'Neill-Butler*

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