

# apexart

2020-21 NYC Proposal

submitted October 2019

## *Native Feminisms*

submitted by: Elizabeth S. Hawley

As the United States prepares to celebrate the centennial of the 1920 passage of the 19th amendment, which guaranteed that the right to vote would not be denied on account of sex, this exhibition reminds viewers that federal legislation ensuring the voting rights of indigenous peoples was not passed until 1924.

The proximity of these decrees' dates, the colonial geopolitical boundaries to which they point, and the web of interconnections between feminism and Native sovereignty that has been woven by Native women artists in the years since provides the premise of this exhibition. Both second-wave U.S. feminism and the American Indian Movement date to the late 1960s, and Native feminists quickly drew connections between the two movements.

In her 1986 article, "Who Is Your Mother?: Red Roots of White Feminism," Laguna Pueblo activist and scholar Paul Gunn Allen asserted: "If American society judiciously modeled the traditions of the various Native Nations, the place of women in society would become central, the distribution of goods and power would be egalitarian, the elderly would be respected, honored, and protected as a primary social and cultural resource, the ideals of physical beauty would be considerably enlarged." She further noted that "the destruction of the biota, the life sphere, and the natural resources of the planet would be curtailed" and "war would cease to be a major method of human problem solving." In other words, if mainstream U.S. society adopted the indigenous worldviews and matrilineal practices that characterized indigenous communities prior to European invasion, it would alleviate many of the sociopolitical concerns of the contemporary era.

While Allen's work has been accused of essentialism, collapsing the boundaries between specific indigenous peoples into a generalized description of Nativeness, it is nonetheless foundational for conceptions of Native feminisms. Indeed, her rhetoric might be read as a form of strategic essentialism, in that Allen was herself a member of the Native community about which she wrote, and that her essentialist construct was aimed at a feminist as well as decolonizing agenda.

This exhibition presents the works of contemporary American Indian artists who identify as feminists and whose practices address intersectional issues connected to notions of Native feminisms. These issues include matrilineal traditions, indigenous futurisms, ecocriticism, land and water rights, survivance, and the fight for Native sovereignty — ongoing topics of concern, as evinced by Allen's early texts. These artists, moreover, hail from a variety of indigenous communities, and identify as Diné/Navajo, Apsáalooke, Ojibwe, and Spokane. Some of the works included manifest a strategically pan-Indian visual rhetoric, while others deal with specific issues unique to the community of the particular artist. Displaying both approaches, this show reveals the aesthetic richness and political power of Native feminist art practices today.

291 Church Street  
New York, NY 10013  
212.431.5270  
info@apexart.org; www.apexart.org