

Living Native Culture (from page 1)

“His vision was to show the whole thing, not just a chunk of our culture,” Spang said. “It is the hallmark of a living culture to express what is happening in the moment, not just recreating the past. The whole spectrum is native art, looking at what work has been done in the past and what is being done today.”

Spang’s work, “War Shirt No. 1,” is made of stitched-together photographs, many of them taken of the Northern Cheyenne Reservation and of his family. The fringe is made of film negatives.

“The first place that I thought to start with was family photographs, thinking about the structure of the war shirt as a protective device for a warrior. These are the people who protect my community. Then I started to ask, ‘When I take control of the photographs, what do they become? What happens when I



“Four Seasons Series (Summer)” by Wendy Red Star (From the Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Overland Park, KS)

use them to define us?”

Red Star, the niece of the well-known painter Kevin Red Star, created her piece, “Four Seasons,” based on an experience she had when she was a graduate student in 2006 at UCLA. It was the first time she lived so far away from the Crow Reservation. Her undergraduate studies were

completed at MSU in Bozeman, much closer to the Crow Reservation.

“The piece was born out of missing home,” said Red Star, who now lives in Portland, Ore. “I knew in a kind of messed up way that I could find a little bit of home at the Natural History Museum. I knew I could see some Crow artwork.”

In the same area where the Crow mocassins were displayed, there was a dinosaur exhibit. The idea of having visitors walk

through the museum, seeing the artwork of her tribe shown as something from the past that no longer exists, hit her hard.

“Knowing that people were walking around looking at these Crow objects right next to the dinosaur exhibit when a few miles away I had my whole outfit in my apartment, I just started to think about this idea of the diorama,” Red Star said.

In her photo series, “Four Seasons,” Red Star posed a cutout of herself on AstroTurf for the summer photo with fake flowers and a fake deer, wearing a native outfit. She got the last laugh on the series, which many of her peers in graduate school did not understand or particularly like. After hearing their negative commentary on the series back in 2006, Red Star ran outside where she broke down in tears and called her father Wallace, who comforted her by making her laugh.

That same piece is now on exhibit at the Met.

“It’s been very, very amazing to see how well these pieces have been received,” Red Star said.

The exhibit won’t be coming to Montana, but Spang and Quick-to-See Smith have exhibited at the YAM and Red Star’s work is certainly worthy of being exhibited there as well so we can all celebrate this living native culture.



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Storm chaser

Young Plains Indian artist makes it all the way to the Met

By Erika Fredrickson

Missoula Independent, March 12

Late last spring, Shania Hall, then 17, stood on top of a hill near Chateau and waited for a storm to hit. Sheets of rain hurtled across Glacier National Park and dark clouds bloomed above the plains. Hall and Big Sky High School’s Flagship program coordinator at the time, Scott Mathews, duct-taped a Fujifilm instant camera to a tripod. As the wind whipped the rain and clouds across the sky, Hall squinted through the viewfinder and began to shoot.

“As I’m taking the pictures,” Hall recalls, “the photos are popping out in front of me and flying over my head, and Scott’s behind me catching them.”

Mathews and Hall, along with Big Sky Spanish teacher Jay Bostrom and his wife, Kim, had driven 250 miles from Missoula to the hill up Molly Nipple’s Road. It was an unusual school-sanctioned adventure, but it marked the chance of a lifetime. Several months earlier, an email from New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art had



Artists Shania Hall and Bently Spang pose at the Met during the opening of “The Plains Indians: Artists of Earth and Sky.”

(Photo by Scott Mathews)

circulated in schools nationwide asking for a high school student of Plains Indian descent to submit photographs for inclusion in “The Plains Indians: Artists of Earth and Sky” – one of the largest Native American exhibits in the world. Hall, with the encouragement of

Mathews, had her eye on that prize.

Out of the storm and in the calm light of the hotel room where they were staying, the group studied the photographs as they dried. Mathews, flustered from the chaos, recalls not being sure if what they had was going to hit the mark, but looking at the swirling imagery in front of him, he was hopeful. He numbered the prints and threw them into an envelope to be delivered to the museum. When he mailed them a few weeks later, Mathews was stressed about letting go of the originals.

“I remember checking my phone watching them travel through to Manhattan,” he says. “The time stamp for when the package was received at the museum to the time we received the email congratulating Shania was, like, an hour.”

Hall had made it in: the only high school student to be included in the prestigious Met exhibit. But for Hall, the months leading up to the opening of the exhibit were anything but a smooth ride.

Read the rest of “Storm Chaser” at missoulanews.bigskypress.com.

What makes a community healthy?

As time marches on, what will present challenges to the delicate weave that preserves the fabric of a community? And what role can the arts play, in partnership with other sectors, in keeping our communities vibrant, healthy, and equitable over the next decade and beyond?

Launching in 2015 with support from the National Endowment for the Arts and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation – and in partnership with 30 local, state, and national arts organizations, arts agencies, and foundations – the New Community Visions Initiative is an ambitious two-year effort to explore the future of local arts in America and the role of community-based arts enabling organizations, funders, cultural institutions, and artists in shaping that future.

Incorporating 12 regional and national convenings, 10 commissioned essays, and the release of a library of resources and digital engagement anchored by three books, this project aims to put forth a forward-looking blueprint for 21st century local arts development that will in turn drive 10 years of local-level capacity building, transformation, and change.

Visit americansforthearts.org.

Three Montana towns make Arts Vibrancy Index

The National Center for Arts Research (NCAR) recently released its first annual Arts Vibrancy Index, which lists three Montana towns among the top 20 among medium and small markets. The index ranks more than 900 communities across the country.

Here’s what the report says about Montana communities:

No. 6: Bozeman – The community is filled with artists, professors and ranchers whose diverse styles are reflected in all aspects of life. It ranks sixth in the country on independent artists and tenth on arts organizations per capita, driving it to the ninth spot overall on Arts Providers.

It has numerous galleries that line the city streets as well as four museums ... Montana State University’s diverse arts department provides a variety of offerings and there are landmark local organizations such as the Bozeman Symphony, Big Sky Association for the Arts, InterMountain Opera Company, The Verge Theatre, Montana Ballet Company, Dance Alliance Company, and the Emerson Center for the Arts and Culture, a complex that offers the region’s artists a place to work and sell their work as well as performance space for local performing arts groups, several classrooms, shops, and cafes.

State arts support is strong in Bozeman and the city receives a higher number of federal arts grants per capita than 97% of cities.

No. 8: Missoula – Missoula has an engaged and active populace, who are just as likely to participate in outdoor recreation as they are to go to the symphony or attend a theatre production. It ranks 15th on Arts Providers and in the top 4% of cities on every Arts Provider measure. Throughout the year there are numerous festivals – film, literary, cultural, theatre, dance, music – and monthly gallery walks.

Missoula is also home to The University of Montana, and there is a strong partnership between the university and the downtown. More than 60 nonprofit arts and cultural organizations operate in Missoula and range from a handful of nationally known organizations to many small groups, with few employees.

Missoula is strong in most disciplines and attracts many writers, visual artists and musicians. The Missoula Children’s Theatre and Montana Repertory Theatre are behind Missoula’s Arts Dollars ranking of no. 6 in the theatre sector. Missoula is 12th in the country on Government Support, with very strong federal support and a high number of state arts grants.

No. 12: Helena – The Helena statistical area comprises both Lewis and Clark and Jefferson counties. The area is home to the Myrna Loy Center for the Performing Arts, the Holter Museum of Art, Broadwater Productions, the Iron Theatre, Live at the Civic, the Helena Symphony, and the Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts. Dance flourishes through the Montana Dance Arts Association, Ballet Montana, Queen City Ballet, and the Premiere Dance Company.

Helena is low-key, down to earth, and home to many professional and amateur artists. There are numerous community-based organizations such as the Last Chance Community Pow Wow, Drumlunnon Institute, and Clay Arts Guild of Helena.

Helena is in the top 6% of cities on three of the four Arts Provider measures, with an overall Arts Provider rank of no. 32. Government Support in Helena is no. 3 in the country, with both state and federal support ranked in the single digits on every measure.

Read the full report at mcs.smu.edu/artsresearch/.