

# WENDY RED STAR

September 6 – December 7, 2014

*Wendy Red Star*



# APPEX







Zoo Softies, Giraffe; Lion; Spotted Mule (Circus Zebra), 2014

## APEX: WENDY RED STAR

Wendy Red Star (Apsáalooke) thinks of herself as a Crow Indian cultural archivist speaking sincerely about the experience of being Native American in contemporary society.<sup>1</sup> Red Star grew up on the Crow Reservation in south-central Montana and draws on her background for inspiration and imagery. A university-trained artist and art professor, she advances discourses such as the politics of museum display, with special regard to the interpretation of Native American history particular to the Crow people and material culture; the commodification of Indian culture; and the art world's tendency to differentiate contemporary Native American art from contemporary art.

In her installation for the *APEX* series, *Peelatchiwaaxpáash/ Medicine Crow (Raven) & the 1880 Crow Peace Delegation*, Red Star uses a variety of strategies to subvert and upend the usual museum depiction of Native Americans and to honor and "humanize" a past tribal leader whose image has been

widely appropriated for commercial use in the twentieth century. Photographs of Chief Medicine Crow (c. 1848-1920) were taken on an 1880 trip to Washington, D.C., where he and five other tribal leaders: Peelatchixaaliash/Old Crow (Raven), Iichilachkash/Long Elk, Alaxchiiaahush/Plenty Coups, Bia Eélisaash/Large Stomach Woman (Pregnant Woman) aka Two Belly, and Déaxitchish/Pretty Eagle were coerced into signing a treaty ceding a portion of tribal lands to the United States Government.<sup>2</sup> In the ensuing decades one of those photographs has been frequently used to represent the stereotypical Indian "brave."

When asked about her inspiration for this installation, which not coincidentally evokes a historical museum display housed within an art museum, Red Star says,

"The single delegation portraits of Medicine Crow are the seed for the entire concept of the exhibition. I first saw the images as an undergrad, when I first started being interested in the



history of my people. Funny to say that, but it wasn't until my first Native Studies class that I wanted to understand why I lived on the reservation? Or why we received commodities and per cap.<sup>3</sup> I remember falling in love with those two images of Medicine Crow. I remember swelling with pride that he was one of my ancestors. Then I started to notice I wasn't the only person captivated by his image. I started seeing it on Honest T at Whole Foods in Los Angeles. And on the cover of *Native Peoples* magazine, not to mention the countless number of artists, non-Native, Native American, Crow, and non-Crow, all making remakes of his portrait. I kept thinking that the majority of the people doing remakes might know he is a Native American chief at the very least, but have no clue as to how those photos came to be. Medicine Crow became their stand-in for whatever agenda they needed – even reduced to stereotypes.

I view this exhibition as my ultimate remake of Medicine Crow – a chance for me to tell the story behind the photographs. I want people to realize that the images of Medicine Crow are more than just a handsome Native man. The images represent a human being, a reservation era chief, the forming of the Crow Indian reservation, the loss of Crow lands, the changing of a people, and the resilience of a culture. In a way the remakes and use of Medicine Crow hold a haunting beauty of continuation and strength of the Crow nation. To Google search "Medicine Crow" and see those 1880 delegation images as the first thing to pop up and to see the remakes is what motivates me to tell the story. This isn't about historical/political forums, it is about humanizing a person and his experience through my artwork."<sup>4</sup>

Red Star juxtaposes manipulated historic photographs, traditional regalia, a tapestry of her creation, *Softie* toys made by an Australian company that turns children's drawings into



Crow Peace Delegation, 1880



Crow Hide Jacket, c. 1865-1899

stuffed toys, and other objects to gain the attention of viewers and connect them with Medicine Crow the human being. She uses Photoshop to superimpose her own face over Medicine Crow's – an eerie reminder of both the strong genetic ties between the two people, separated by only a few generations, and the far-reaching cultural and technological changes that have transformed Native American hunter-gatherer societies in the contemporary world over the last few hundred years. In *Peelatchiwaaxpáash/Medicine Crow (Raven) & the 1880 Crow Peace Delegation*, the insertion of Red Star's face over Medicine Crow's personalizes him, she is a recognizable, named individual – as is he, through Red Star – now named and remembered.

Honoring her tribal heritage, Red Star employs traditional objects in her installation, such as a beautifully beaded hide jacket from the Museum's collection, together with contemporary works, such as her photo-based tapestry. The tapestry's superimposed images of Red Star and Medicine Crow are printed on cotton canvas and comprise all the recreations of Medicine Crow found on Google image search. The remakes of Medicine Crow's image are in assorted media including watercolor,

pencil drawings, oil paintings, and graphic illustrations. The hide jacket is nearly identical to one worn in the wall-sized Crow Peace Delegation photograph and makes a compelling connection to the installation's narrative. The mechanically reproduced images of the tapestry are the antithesis of the meticulously hand-made beaded jacket, calling into question the benefit of contemporary life, in which a lack of time and ubiquitous technological advancements seem to have rendered the personal touch obsolete. Red Star's often-biting sense of humor is apparent in her use of the stuffed *Softie* toys, in the tapestry of digitally-reproduced commercialized images of Medicine Crow, and in the scrawled captions superimposed on the reproduced historical photos.

Red Star's installation includes a selection of reproductions of Medicine Crow's ledger drawings documenting the 1880 trip to Washington, D.C. These personal, immediate, and fragile drawings bring viewers closer to the man himself and to the cultural displacement he must have experienced traveling through a rapidly changing country and they assist the transformation of his depiction from icon to individual. Some of the ledger drawings Red Star has selected show surprising and unexpected parts of the experience. As well as depictions of the Crow Peace Delegation's train ride to the East Coast, there are drawings of their trip to a Washington zoo, and one of the White House. Through these drawings we may experience first-hand people, places, and things that were important to Medicine Crow at the time. A white interlocutor, chief clerk to the government agent at the Crow reservation Charles Barstow, wrote captions, presumably based on Medicine Crow's narration, directly on these and other ledger drawings. Red Star believes that Barstow's notes, whether or not

they are accurate, nevertheless indicate that the drawings were intended as an expression of intercultural communication.<sup>5</sup>

As do artists such as Cindy Sherman and Frida Kahlo, Red Star uses self-imagery as a vehicle for political and conceptual statements as seen in the APEX installation. Her work often employs an ironic sense of humor to draw attention to the marginalization of Native Americans. In her photographic *Four Seasons Series*, 2006, Red Star placed herself in elaborately concocted, stereotypical "Indian tableaux." Dressed in traditional garb, she surrounded herself with taxidermy birds, artificial flowers, and even a nearly life-sized inflatable elk. Everything in the scene becomes comically unreal – the beautiful young Indian woman a nostalgically preserved symbol of the Vanishing American. Humanism remains central to the core of Wendy Red Star's work, which pleads for the respect of cultures and cultural traditions, the rejection of stereotypes, and the considering and valuing of each individual and cultural group as uniquely contributing members of a diverse global society.

— Bonnie Laing-Malcolmson

The Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Curator of Northwest Art

<sup>1</sup> Wendy Red Star, short biographical statement, 2006

<sup>2</sup> From a conversation between Red Star and Laing-Malcolmson, July 2014

<sup>3</sup> Per capita payment checks derived from Crow Nation trust income

<sup>4</sup> Email from Red Star to Laing-Malcolmson, July 14, 2014



Zoo Softies, Big Snake with Legs (Crocodile), 2014

## BIOGRAPHY

Wendy Red Star (Apsáalooke, born 1981) resides in Portland, Oregon. She received a BFA from Montana State University, Bozeman, in 2004, and an MFA in sculpture from University of California Los Angeles, in 2006. Her work has been shown at Helen E. Copeland Gallery, Montana State University, Bozeman; The Fondation Cartier L'Art Contemporain, Paris, France; The California State University Long Beach Gallery; Research & Development, Chicago; The Museum Tower at Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; And/Or gallery, Dallas; The University of California Los Angeles, New Wight gallery; The Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery; The Domaine De Kerguehenn, Brittany, France; The Hudson D. Walker Gallery, Provincetown, Massachusetts; The Plush Gallery, Dallas; The Laura Bartlett Gallery, London, England; The Luckman Gallery, Los Angeles; and The Volitant Gallery, Austin, Texas. She has held residencies at Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center, Massachusetts and Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Maine. Red Star's work is in numerous collections including the Missoula Art Museum, Montana; Portland Art Museum, Oregon; National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian, Washington DC; Minneapolis Institute of the Arts; Hallie Ford Museum of Art, Willamette University, Salem, Oregon; and the Eiteljorg Museum of Western and Native American Fine Art, Indianapolis.

## APEX

An ongoing series of exhibitions featuring emerging and established artists living in the Northwest. Presenting contemporary art in the context of the Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Center for Northwest Art, this program continues the Museum's 120-year commitment to exhibiting, collecting, and celebrating the art of the region. APEX is supported in part by The Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Endowments for Northwest Art, The Paul G. Allen Family Foundation, and the Exhibition Series Sponsors.

COVER: Peelatchiwaaxpáash/Medicine Crow (Raven)

INSIDE FLAP: Artist altered Peelatchiwaaxpáash/Medicine Crow (Raven)

## WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Dimensions: Height precedes width precedes depth  
All works courtesy of the artist and the Portland Art Museum.

### Peelatchiwaaxpáash/Medicine Crow (Raven) & the 1880 Crow Peace Delegation, 2014

Installation, mixed media  
Dimensions variable

Digitally reproduced ledger drawings by Medicine Crow, American, Crow, c. 1848 – 1920, 1880

From the Charles H. Barstow Collection, Montana State University Billings Library

United States Capitol Building, Washington, D.C. Pencil and ink on paper 1930.17

Steam Boat on the Potomac River, Pencil on paper, 1930.18

Two Monitors and a Small Fishing Boar, Pencil on paper, 1930.19

Three Different Trains, Pencil on paper, 1930.20

Zebra, Pencil on paper, 1930.21

Birds, Pencil and ink on paper, 1930.22

Reptiles, Pencil and dry pigment on paper, 1930.23

Red Cat Fish, Pencil and dry pigment on paper, 1930.24

Monkey and a Fish, Pencil and dry pigment on paper, 1930.25

Lion, Seal, and Rhinoceros, Pencil, ink, and dry pigment on paper, 1930.26

Giraffe, Elephant, and Camel, Pencil and dry pigment on paper, 1930.27

Antelope and Camel, Pencil and dry pigment on paper, 1930.28

### Zoo Softies, 2014

Plush stuffed toys from the zoo drawings of Medicine Crow

Dog and Man (Monkey); Elk with Big Back on Him (Camel);

Big Snake with Legs (Crocodile); Giraffe; Lion; Spotted Mule (Circus Zebra);

12 x 12 x 4 inches, each

Artist and the artist's daughter Beatrice Red Star Fletcher (born, 2007) manipulated digitally reproduced photographs by C.M. (Charles Milton) Bell, 1880 National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian, Washington, D.C.

Peelatchiwaaxpáash/Medicine Crow (Raven)

Peelatchixaaliash/Old Crow (Raven)

Bia Eélisaash/Large Stomach Woman (Pregnant Woman) aka Two Belly

Iichíilachkash/Long Elk; Déaxitchish/Pretty Eagle

Alaxchiiaahush/Many War Achievements or Plenty Coups, aka

Chíilaphuchissaaleesh/Buffalo Bull Facing The Wind

Crow Peace Delegation, (group portrait)

### Peelatchiwaaxpáash/Medicine Crow (Raven): Aappiwaaxaaxiish/Shining Shell, 2014

Digitally printed cotton tapestry

180 ½ x 36 inches

### Unknown Crow Artist

Hide Jacket, c. 1865-1899

Beads and abalone shell on hide

27 ½ x 57 ½ inches

Portland Art Museum, The Elizabeth Cole Butler Collection

### Unknown Crow Artist

Man's Pants, c. 1920

Beads on hide

39 x 16 inches

Portland Art Museum, The Elizabeth Cole Butler Collection



PORTLAND ART MUSEUM