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*The Language of Place*

25 July – 18 October 2025

OPENING RECEPTION

Friday, July 25, 5-7 PM, second floor



HEIDI BRANDOW | *remembering your song*, 2025. Mixed media: painting, wood, plaster, acrylic, graphite, and resin, 24 x 48 x 2 1/2 in (61 x 121.9 x 6.3 cm). Photo courtesy of the artist

(Santa Fe, NM) Indigenous artists and curators Heidi Brandow (Diné & Kānaka Maoli) and Shaarbek Amankul (Indigenous Kyrgyz) present a group exhibition about place, identity, memory, and creative expression within the framework of global Indigenous cultures in time for Santa Fe's annual Indian Market.

(July 2025) *The Language of Place* is a group exhibition featuring mixed media painting by Heidi Brandow; photography and video by Shaarbek Amankul; beadwork and photography by Thomas Jones (Ho-Chunk); Indigenous Kyrgyzstani textiles designed by Amankul and Brandow and made by Kyrgyzstani artisans; and a pair of mocassins handmade by Clementine Bordeaux (Sičáŋǵu Lakótapi [Rosebud Sioux Tribe]). Co-curated by Amankul and Brandow, *The Language of Place* offers a language-to-image synthesis of the grammar and syntax common to Indigenous languages in anticipation of Santa Fe Indian Market, one of the largest Indigenous art markets in the U.S. ***The Language of Place* opens on the second floor of form & concept on July 25 from 5 to 7 PM.**

Experience precedes language. Experience is the foundation we use to develop words and connect words to our physical reality. The inextricable link between language and environment—once apparent and logical—has grown increasingly obfuscated as the modern world evolves. Globalization and the adoption of lingua francas, such as English, means that global communication across geographically and culturally diverse regions is inherently limited by a single language's semantic capacity. "Language shapes the way we think, and determines what we can think about," said 20th-century American linguist Benjamin Lee Whorf. In *The Language of Place*, Amankul and Brandow ask how a return to—and propagation of—key aspects of Indigenous languages, such as connection to the land, respect and reciprocity, and Indigenous conceptions of governance and spirituality could inform or address contemporary poly-crises from climate change to polarization.

"Through diverse perspectives, *The Language of Place* examines how land, history, and cultural knowledge inform and shape the creative processes of four artists whose practices are intricately embedded in their relationships with land and environment. By blending traditional methods with contemporary approaches, the artists reflect the dynamic interplay between heritage and modernity, highlighting the varied ways in which they engage with their cultural identities across continents," writes Brandow.

In this exhibition, Brandow's works recall the native and non-native fauna, such as the Saffron Finch depicted in *remembering your song*, of her home, Hawai'i. Amankul's works capture the fallout of social and political change in the 20th century that language fails to articulate while highlighting the resilience of Indigenous Kyrgyz culture. Jones's photographic *Kyrgyzstan Plant Studies* speak to Amankul's home and touch on Brandow's hypothesis of cross-continental cultural understanding while highlighting the artist's own Ho-Chunk heritage in glass beadwork. And Bordeaux's moccasins remind us that the cultural practices we observe and perform help us traverse the constantly shifting environmental, political, and cultural landscapes that comprise our modern world.

form & concept gallery director, Carina Evangelista, cites linguist Jessie Little Doe Baird (Wôpanâak), who said, "If someone lost their land, they would say *nupunuhshom* (I fall down). To lose the right to one's land is to literally fall off your feet. To have no ground under you. My land is not separate from my body." Evangelista notes the interconnectedness of things and the understanding of how the birds and the plants that are themselves keepers

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of knowledge live off the land that modern societies have largely lost their capacity to listen to. She points out how the 19th-century linguist, Sequoyah (Cherokee), stated, 'White men make what they know fast on paper like catching a wild animal and taming it.' Evangelista adds, "Sequoyah created the Cherokee syllabary but it bears noting the difference between how Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures view wild animals. History has played out to treat tribal languages as the wild animal not to tame but to attempt to kill off altogether. Erasure attempts persist to this day but Joy Harjo (Muscogee [Creek]) writes of the intense pull of both land and language even in the face of centuries of suppression."

And the ground spoke when she was born.  
Her mother heard it. In Navajo she answered  
as she squatted down against the earth  
to give birth.

[...]

She learned to speak for the ground,  
the voice coming through her like roots that  
have long hungered for water.

[...]

And we go on, keep giving birth and watch  
ourselves die, over and over.  
And the ground spinning beneath us  
goes on talking.

–Joy Harjo, "For Alva Benson, And for Those Who Have Learned to Speak"

**With its array of visual glosses for Indigenous knowledge that may lack a linguistic equivalent in our world's assumed lingua francas, *The Language of Place* offers a case study of the diversity of contemporary Indigenous art that cohere through shared worldviews informed by the cultural knowledge passed down through Indigenous languages, which, like the land, are fighting to stay alive.**

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## About the Artists

**Shaarbek Amankul (Indigenous Kyrgyz)** is an interdisciplinary artist based in Kyrgyzstan, known for his diverse use of media and conceptual research projects that delve into cultural identity, social change, and the intersection of traditional and contemporary art. He holds degrees from Frunze Art College (1980) and Kyrgyz National University (1989) and is a fellow at several international art residencies. His work has been featured in numerous exhibitions, festivals, conferences, and symposiums globally.

Amankul's earlier works reflect the social, political, and economic transitions in Central Asia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. His exploration of these changes—such as the formation of Kyrgyzstan's national identity, political upheavals, and shifts in societal structures—focuses on transforming public spaces and their cultural significance. A central theme in his work is the merging of conceptual frameworks with traditional customs and nomadic practices. Amankul reinterprets these cultural aspects through critical, poetic lenses to address ecological, spiritual, and societal issues. His engagement with nomadic culture goes beyond a way of life, providing a conceptual framework for understanding movement, transformation, adaptability, and resilience.

Amankul was involved with organizations that fostered critical dialogue between Central Asian communities and the global art world such as *Art Contemporary*, a non-profit contemporary art institution founded in Kyrgyzstan in 2006, and Bishkek Art Center, which operated from 2006 to 2011. Since 2011, Amankul's experimental projects have undergone significant evolution, culminating in the creation of the Nomadic Art project, also known as the 'Nomadic Art Camp.' The project draws from the traditional nomadic way of life and Indigenous cultural practices, integrating themes of art, politics, economics, and social processes into contemporary art. By incorporating the spiritual and aesthetic dimensions of nomadic and Indigenous cultures, the Nomadic Art project fosters a deeper understanding of societal, environmental, and cultural connections while encouraging critical reflections on the role of contemporary art.

**Clementine Bordeaux (Sičánǵu Lakótapi [Rosebud Sioux Tribe])** is an Oglála Sičánǵu Lakota scholar. Bordeaux grew up on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. She received a bachelor's degree in Theatre/Communication from Carthage College in Kenosha, Wisconsin, and a master's in communication from The Native Voice Indigenous Documentary Film Program at the University of Washington, Seattle. Bordeaux served as the Academic Coordinator for the American Indian Studies Interdepartmental Program at UCLA for six years and received a PhD in culture and performance from the World Arts and Cultures/Dance program at University of California, Los Angeles. She is currently a University of California President's and Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow and a faculty member in the History of Art and Visual Culture department at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

**Heidi K. Brandow (Diné & Kānaka Maoli)** is a versatile artist whose work prioritizes the inclusion of Indigenous people and perspectives in creating ethical and sustainable forms of creative engagement and artistic expression.

Alongside co-founding the Harvard Indigenous Design Collective, which champions design by and for Indigenous communities as an integral component of the history, theory, and practice in the design field, Brandow currently serves as a Master Artist Mentor for the Master of Fine Arts Studio Arts Program at the Institute of American Indian Arts. She has served as an Artist Liaison and Guest Curator at the Coe Center for Art and as a Tribal Liaison at Local Contexts, assisting Indigenous communities in reclaiming authority over their material culture and archives. Brandow is the Associate Director of Communications at First Peoples Fund, where she continues to uplift and promote the work and stories of Indigenous artists and culture bearers to a national audience. The Mayor and City Council recently appointed Brandow as Arts Commissioner for the City of Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Brandow completed her Bachelor of Fine Arts at the Institute of American Indian Arts, studied industrial design at Istanbul Technical University, and received a Master of Design Studies from Harvard University.

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## About the Artists Cont.

**Thomas Jones (Ho-Chunk)** is an artist, curator, writer, and educator. He graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Painting from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, a Master of Fine Arts in Photography, and a Master of Arts in Museum Studies from Columbia College in Chicago, Illinois. He is a professor of Photography, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Jones's artwork is a commentary on American Indian identity, experience, and perception. He examines how American Indian culture is represented through popular culture and raises questions about depictions of identity by non-Natives and Natives alike. He continues to work on an ongoing photographic essay on the contemporary life of his tribe, the Ho-Chunk Nation of Wisconsin.

Jones co-authored the book *People of the Big Voice, Photographs of Ho-Chunk Families by Charles Van Schaick, 1879-1943*. He is the co-curator for the exhibition and contributing author to the book, *For a Love of His People: The Photography of Horace Poolaw for the National Museum of the American Indian*. His works are in numerous private and public collections, such as Microsoft, The Minneapolis Institute of Art, The Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, The Museum of Contemporary Photography, The National Museum of the American Indian, The Nerman Museum, Polaroid Corporation, and Sprint Corporation.

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