

# form & concept

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Armond Lara**

## **FLYING BLUE BUFFALO INSTALLATION**

August 17 - November 17, 2018

**Preview with guest speaker Estevan Rael-Gálvez:**

Thursday, August 16, 5:30-6:30 pm

**Opening Reception:** Friday, August 17, 5-7 pm

**Educational Event:** Saturday, August 18, 2-3 pm

**Closing Reception:** Saturday, November 17, 5-7 pm

**What/Who:** Armond Lara collaborates with form & concept on a monumental art installation that tells the centuries-long story of enslaved Native American children. The Santa Fe artist will send 75 hand-painted, cast resin *Flying Blue Buffalo* sculptures soaring through the gallery's atrium. Inspired by his own family history, Lara dreamed up the winged buffalo as a new symbol of Native survival and resilience.

**When:** The *Flying Blue Buffalo* installation debuts at a reception on Friday, August 17, 5-7 pm, on the weekend of Santa Fe Indian Market. Dr. Estevan Rael-Gálvez of Santa Fe, who is writing a book on the topic of Native American slavery, will speak at a preview on Thursday, August 16, 5:30-6:30 pm. An educational event about the project, hosted by Armond Lara and his collaborator Joseph Riggs, is on Saturday, August 18, 2-3 pm. Lara and Riggs will also appear at a closing reception on Saturday, November 17, 5-7 pm.

**Where:** form & concept, 435 S. Guadalupe St. Santa Fe, NM 87501

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### **SUSPENDED INSTALLATION OF WINGED BUFFALO REPRESENTS PAINFUL HISTORY—AND ENDURING HOPE**

Santa Fe, NM—This August, when Armond Lara sends 75 winged buffalo sculptures into the stratosphere of form & concept's atrium, he'll fulfill a long-held dream. Lara has been depicting buffalo in his artwork for years, but more recently they've turned blue and sprouted wings. The *Flying Blue Buffalo* series is a reference to the Santa Fe artist's family history: his grandmother,

who was Navajo, was kidnapped as a small child and forced into servitude by a Mexican family. Across three centuries of Spanish, Mexican and American rule, thousands of Native children were similarly enslaved as household servants or fieldhands. The Pueblo people called these abducted youths “Lost Bluebirds,” a symbol that Lara combined with the buffalo to create a new icon of Indigenous resilience. He dreamed up a massive installation of 75 winged buffalo sculptures, which came to fruition through a Kickstarter campaign and 3D printing technology. The *Flying Blue Buffalo* installation debuts at a special reception on Friday, August 17 from 5 to 7 pm. Dr. Estevan Rael-Gálvez of Santa Fe, who is writing a book on the subject of Native American slavery, will speak at a preview of the installation on Thursday, August 16 from 5:30-6:30 pm.

“My grandmother didn’t talk much, but if she did talk, you listened,” says Lara. He’s known the story of his grandmother’s abduction for as long as he can remember, but it wasn’t until recently that he learned how common the practice was. “My sister was doing genealogy research on the family, and she found a list of all the Native American kids who had been ‘adopted’ by Mexican families in the Four Corners area,” says Lara. “It dawned on me, whoa, this is really widespread. That’s when I started asking other people about it.” He learned about the kidnapping and enslavement of an enormous number of Native American children over several centuries—from the 1600’s when the Spanish arrived, through the period of Mexican Independence, until the late 1800’s under the government of the United States. A number of Lara’s close friends revealed that they too had ancestors who were taken.

For Lara, this growing web of stories reminded him of his grandmother’s resilience, which has been an enduring source of inspiration. “I looked to my grandparents for guidance. The strongest voice was my grandmother’s voice,” Lara says. “She didn’t talk about it, she just did it. If she needed something, she’d make it. If she needed a robe, she’d weave one. I really admired that quality.” He dreamed up an art installation and storytelling project that might communicate this ethos, and inspire people to learn more about their heritage. A series of five winged blue buffalo marionettes that Lara carved from wood over a number of years became central conceptual elements.

With the help of his frequent collaborator Joseph Riggs, an artist and retired attorney who lives in Santa Fe, Lara pitched the idea to form & concept. The gallery commissioned a digital model and several mock-ups of the buffalo from Albuquerque technology firm 3D Proven Systems, while Lara and Riggs started gathering stories for the project. “We’ve represented Armond’s work for years, and were so excited to help bring his vision into reality,” says Sandy Zane, Owner of Zane Bennett Contemporary Art and form & concept. “For a project at this scale, we turned to 3D printing technology to capture the original carvings in high fidelity.” The gallery mounted a Kickstarter campaign to fund a round of 3D-printed sculptures, which were used to create molds for a final series of 75 cast resin sculptures.

Riggs says the scale of the installation is vital to the project, because it communicates the staggering number of children, families and communities affected by the issue. “I’ve lived in the

Southwest my whole life, and I was unfamiliar with the story,” says Riggs. “You can’t find it in history books in New Mexico, but as I learned, there were slave markets all across this region. It became a deep part of the culture of the Southwest.” Each of the 75 buffalo sculptures will represent the story of one “Lost Bluebird,” with oral and written accounts of their fight for survival. “People in New Mexico have been searching for a way to explore this part of their family history,” Riggs says. “They can take pride in the fact that they’re Hispanic, and they’re Native American, and they’re American. There’s so much division in our country. We need to find ways to show our unity, to show how much we’re alike rather than how we’re different. And I think we can do it through this story.”

### **Estevan Rael-Galvez**

With ancestral connections to both Hispanic and indigenous communities, Dr. Rael-Gálvez was raised working on a farm and ranch stewarded by his family for generations in Costilla, New Mexico. He holds a B.A. from the University of California at Berkeley and an M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, where he completed an award-winning dissertation, “Identifying Captivity and Capturing Identity: Narratives of American Indian Slavery.” He is currently working on the manuscript, *The Silence of Slavery*. Formerly the State Historian of New Mexico, Executive Director of the National Hispanic Cultural Center and Senior Vice President at the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Dr. Rael-Gálvez currently is a writer and the founding principal of *Creative Strategies 360°*, a consulting firm which supports transformative work within communities and organizations, including his present project, an initiative on “Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation.”