

Pasatiempo

ARTS & CULTURE

A 60-year survey of Native art and activism fills the galleries at SITE Santa Fe, Museum of Contemporary Native Art

Ania Hull Jul 3, 2026



New Red Order is the name of the collaborative “public secret society” that created it. The installation reflects the artists’ mission to explore and amplify the Indigenous experience.

Brad Trone

Enter SITE Santa Fe this summer, make your way past the reception desk, and cross the open space. There, to your left, you’ll see a human-sized figure lying down on a platform, where you’ll enter the first enclosed gallery.

Here’s where you’ll come face-to-face with your first clue that this exhibit is probably unlike anything you’ve ever seen. Hanging from the ceiling are oversized black-and-white earrings, part of an evolving series created by Eric-Paul Riege (Diné). The title in Diné — jaatloh4Ye’iitsoh — roughly translates to “earrings for the big god.”



In this installation view of the Indian Theater: Native Performance, Art, and Self-Determination since 1969 exhibition at SITE Santa Fe, Eric-Paul Riege's "earrings for the big god" (forefront) command attention. Through his art, the Diné fiber artist pays homage to his lineage of Indigenous weavers. Also on view in the space are works by performance and visual artist Kite.

Brad Trone

To the right of the earrings is a flat TV screen, sitting on the floor and propped against the wall. The words and sentences that flash across it represent a subtle work of resistance, a relatively small work just beside the exhibition's largest.

What you're seeing is a single-channel video, or video mono canal, by installation artist, sculptor, and curator Tanya Lukin Linklater (Alutiiq/Sugpiaq). On the screen in a three-minute loop are words that appear and disappear almost as quickly as you can read them:

This feeling.

Many of us have left the land of our ancestors

perhaps because the grief becomes unbearable

Suk. A human being.

Afognak dialect: the S is pronounced SH. It sounds like shook but with a shorter o.

Perhaps we shake. Or past tense, we shook. When are we shaken?

An information panel on the adjacent wall to *Event Scores for Afognak Alutiit 1–3 (abridged, 2016-2020)* by Linklater stipulates that you should read the words in the video aloud. The words "should be felt by and through the body of those who witness it."

Read them again, this time aloud, and as you do, look back at the massive earrings and take it all in. You are, as the title of the exhibition says, in a space created and curated by Indigenous people whose works are designed to teach you a lesson or two.

The exhibition *Indian Theater: Native Performance, Art, and Self-Determination since 1969* is divided between two museums, the bulk of it at SITE Santa Fe and smaller works across three gallery rooms on the second floor of the Museum of Contemporary Native Art.

To put it simply — although there is nothing simple about this exhibition — the goal is to chart the evolution over the last six decades of Indigenous art, including performances and political events of resistance, since the beginning of the Self Determination Era in 1969. The movement influenced the work and expression of Native American, Alaska Native, Métis, First Nations, and Inuit artists, writers, and curators.

Indian Theater was originally presented at the Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College in upstate New York. It then traveled to the MacKenzie Art Gallery in Saskatchewan, Canada, before landing at SITE and MoCNA in an iteration that features several additional artworks.



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The show includes more than 100 works by Indigenous artists and art collectives from the U.S. and Canada, including Jeffrey Gibson (Mississippi Band of Choctaw and Cherokee), Kite (Oglala Sioux Tribe), Cannupa Hanska Luger (Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara, Lakota), James Luna (Payómkawichum, Ipai, and Mexican), Kent Monkman (member of Fisher River Cree Nation in Treaty 5 Territory [Manitoba]), Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (Salish member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Nation), and Spiderwoman Theater (Lisa Mayo, Gloria Miguel, and Muriel Miguel [all Rappahannock and Kuna]).

The exhibition's focus on 1969 relates to the era that marked the beginning of the self-determination movement for Indigenous people in the U.S. and Canada.

For one, it signified a time during which Indigenous people were not always free to express themselves artistically and politically without having to be “translated,” or defined, through the oppressors.

It's also known, says Candice Hopkins (Carcross/Tagish First Nation), the show's curator and the executive director and chief curator of the Indigenous-led nonprofit [Forge Project](#), for the Occupation of Alcatraz Island in the California Bay Area that began in November and lasted 19 months. In addition to artworks, the exhibition includes archival works and a listening station that provides oral histories from that period and the occupation.

It's also known, perhaps lesser-so but no less crucial, as the era of the newly formed Institute of American Indian Arts. In 1969, Lloyd Kiva New (Cherokee), Rolland R. Meinholtz, and several IAIA students wrote a document titled “Indian Theatre: An Artistic Experiment in Progress” that defined and contextualized performative arts for Indigenous people across Turtle Island, the term for Indigenous peoples of the Americas.

“There was no Native contemporary theater movement at the time, there were no Native theater troupes at the time, and the document was basically a kind of idea proposition that they were putting up to the world,” Hopkins says.

The exhibition takes visitors through a multitude of realities of artists who stood up to what had before defined Indigenous art — from the point of view of the white gaze — and said, “Enough.” The influence of their work, like that of James Luna or Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, can be seen and felt in the freedom of expression captured in each piece in the exhibition and paints a picture of an era critical to those expressions.