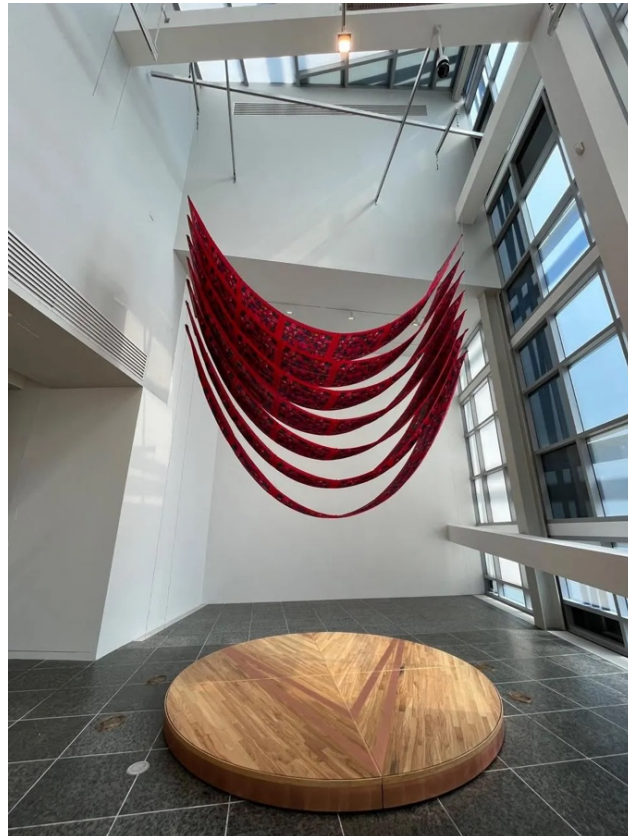


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By Chadd Scott

Tanya Lukin Linklater Reveals And Withholds In Exhibition At Wexner Center For The Arts In Columbus, OH



Installation view of Tanya Lukin Linklater 'Held in the air I never fell (spring lightning ... [+] CHADD SCOTT

Tanya Lukin Linklater's *Held in the air I never fell (spring lightning sweetgrass song)* (2022) soars overhead of visitors at the Wexner Center for the Arts at Ohio State University in Columbus. Bright red Kohkom scarves decorated with vivid floral patterns drape in concentric arcs, commanding its light filled gallery.

"Kohkom" means "grandmother" in Cree and Lukin Linklater happily shares some of the intention behind the piece.

"The scarves are worn by women across what the Anishinabe call Turtle Island," Lukin Linklater (b. 1976; Sugpiak) told Forbes.com. "They're worn by old ladies, by aunts, by powwow dancers. They're also worn by land defenders, by grassroots people, by water protectors."

Kohkom scarves are a material the artist returns to frequently in her work.

"They gesture towards Indigenous knowledge, which is often land based, and also cultural ways of being. They operate as a kind of symbol and evoke older knowledge, or knowledge of the land and the water

and being in those places,” Lukin Linklater explains. “They’re a garment. The way that I use them, they’re a kind of soft sculpture. They’re a textile, but I also think about how this material is a way of honoring practices and communities and lineages of Indigenous peoples, and that those far exceed the idea of who we are, they far exceed these reductive ideas of who Indigenous peoples are.”

These notions begin taking onlookers into understandings the artist is unwilling to share. For example, what is the “spring lightning sweetgrass” song?

“I’m not going to explain the specificity of this particular title because it would mean that I would have to explain components of Indigenous knowledges that just aren’t relevant for this particular article,” Lukin Linklater said. “In my practice at large, I’m concerned with repair of our communities and peoples which so many of our communities and peoples are undertaking on the ground, and my practice often cites that, or gestures towards that reparative work which is required because of these ongoing storms of colonialism that we have endured and continue to endure. I also choose not to fully disclose to a museum viewer or audience completely what’s happening in the work because there’s the kind of work that (viewers) have to do in order to know that, there’s a kind of labor that’s required of them, and that’s all that’s all I’ll say about that.”

All Indigenous knowledge does not belong to all people. Even all Indigenous people. Such information isn’t withheld out of pridefulness, but of protection. These aren’t secrets, they’re sacred.



Installation view of Tanya Lukin Linklater 'Held in the air I never fell (spring lightning ... [+]' CHADD SCOTT

'Structure of Sustenance Three'

“Tanya Lukin Linklater: Inner blades of grass (soft) inner blades of grass (cured) inner blades of grass (bruised by the weather)” brings together visual and performance art in the artist’s first U.S. survey exhibition and the largest presentation of her work to date.

The exhibition’s title derives from an interview with the late Sugpiaq cultural worker Eunice von Scheele Neseth and a poem by Oglala Lakota poet Layli Long Solider. Describing grass in different states—soft,

cured, and bruised by the weather—references the procedures that women of Kodiak Island follow when harvesting and processing plant material used to weave baskets. Lukin Linklater was raised in the Kodiak archipelago of southwestern Alaska.

As was the case with the presentation's opening June 1, during its closing days, August 13 through 17, visitors can experience a multiday series of improvisational open rehearsals with Indigenous dance artists in the galleries. The dancers will center their activities around *Structure of Sustenance Three* (2024), a sculpture in seven triangular parts.

"My initial impulse (for the artwork) was in relation to the architecture and responding to the architecture of those particular galleries," Lukin Linklater explained. "Then I realized this structure was similar to a bentwood hunting hat from my homelands and the Aleutian chain."

The rounded headgear often resembling golf visors are produced by scraping, soaking, steaming, pouring, cracking, sewing, bending, and bracing wood. That process serves as the title for another of the artist's multimedia artworks on view.



"Tanya Lukin Linklater: Inner blades of grass (soft) inner blades of grass (cured) inner blades of ... [+]WEXNER CENTER FOR THE ARTS

Those fortunate enough to see the dancers will not be observing a strictly choreographed performance, but "open rehearsals" in the artist's words. Open rehearsals will take place from 2–5 PM in the galleries.

Lukin Linklater prompts the dancers with notions of what inspired the artwork, they take it from there.

"I think about how these sculptures are listening, how they're hearing our conversations and they're feeling the body of the dance artist in relation to them," Lukin Linklater said. "Sometimes I've given them the instruction to hold the structure or be held by the structure; what does that feel like for the structure and what does that feel like for the dancer?"

Lukin Linklater does not attempt to provide answers as much as she does stimulate questions. Her artmaking is an inquiry. An inquiry of Native traditions across North America. An inquiry that led her to an undergraduate degree at Stanford University on [a Mellon Fellowship](#). To a PhD in cultural studies last year at Queens University in Kingston, ON.

"It is unruly, it's ongoing, it's every day, it's daily life, it's immersive," Lukin Linklater says of the research-intensive process of her art practice that regularly finds her digging through museum archives and talking to culture bearers.

Some of which she shares.

Some of which she doesn't.

All of which goes into her work.