

Great Basin artists to show in Sisters

The Great Basin of the American West consists of remote, austere expanses of desert and mountains. A vibrant and dynamic region of terrestrial and aquatic life 12,000 years ago, now, due to scant precipitation and slight temperature increases for subsequent millennia, it appears as a fairly sterile landscape.

This portion of the American West has always encompassed the area that is now the state of Nevada. One thousand years ago, however, this geographic region extended much further than it does today. The arrival of Westerners brought significant alterations to the watersheds and aquifers, reducing the Great Basin ecosystem from over 300,000 square miles to less than 200,000.

Both the lack of precipitation and the subsequent locations of sporadic yet rich aquifers were the overarching factors shaping the awareness, lives and cultures of the First Peoples of these lands.

The Northern and Southern Paiutes, Shoshone, and Utes occupied this area for several thousand years as hunters and gatherers, a nomadic lifestyle guided by the available food supplies. Elevation mattered. Lower areas with lakes were more hospitable in winter; higher elevations offered respite from summer heat. Thus, the people were intimately attuned to the seasons and naturally occurring cycles.

The Peoples existed extensively, rather than intensively as occurs today. Utilizing resources that the land provided, they minimally

harvested and altered raw materials into utilitarian items. Woven baskets of willows or grasses had multiple uses; simply bound branches, sticks, and sometimes grasses created the wickiup shelter.

Few possessions were carried over long distances. People traveled lightly, often caching items of any significant bulk or weight such as metates, tule reed duck decoys and canoes. By today's standards, the daily



PHOTO PROVIDED

Tia Flores.

life of The First Peoples of the Great Basin, their cultures, and the natural world were woven into a seamless fabric of being.

Today, dozens of towns like Eureka — along with the metro areas of Reno, Las Vegas, and Salt Lake City — lay upon the landscape of The Great Basin and are connected by the grey-black lines of asphalt highways, some running east-west and bisecting mountain ranges through high, partially forested passes.

Deep wells, irrigation systems, and dams have allowed for the creation of small green zones, havens for ranches with small herds of domestic livestock. Mining operations at numerous sites pierce into the ground, bring out the entrails of the Earth, and spread it about in heaps of tailings. Oil and gas drilling sites proliferate, adding rusting heavy-duty equipment along beaten dusty roads.

Despite these dramatic alterations, descendants of the First Peoples remain in



PHOTO PROVIDED

Melissa Melero-Moose, Northern Paiute, will show her work.

the region. Some are on small parcels of traditional land with the largest of the twenty-some Homelands being the Pyramid Lake Reservation at 750 square miles. Not surprisingly however, many Great Basin Peoples now live in towns and cities, which provide greater access to supplies, schools, economic opportunities, and healthcare.

Among the current descendants are professional artists. Some use strictly traditional imagery and craftsmanship in their work, others

combine these aspects with contemporary materials and concepts. No matter the approach taken, their artistry carries astute cultural understandings gleaned during simpler times.

Melissa Melero-Moose, Northern Paiute, lives in western Nevada. She holds art degrees from both the prestigious Institute of American Indian Art in Santa Fe and Portland State University. An artist, writer

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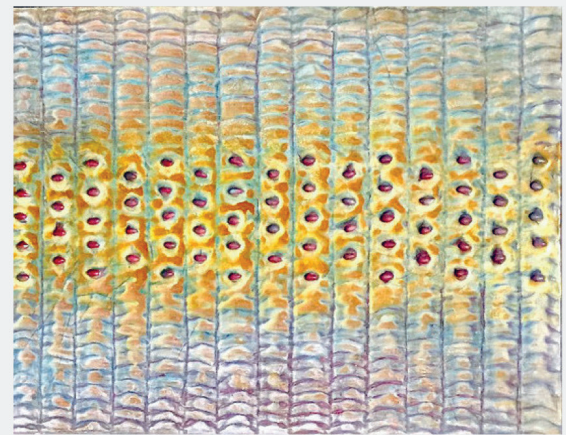
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Brian Black, Antler Artisan

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Native American Artists of the Great Basin



Collecting Pinenuts, Mixed Media
 Melissa Melero-Moose, Northern Paiute



Gourd Pyrography, Tia Flores, Navajo & Aztec



Traditional Paiute Thule Reed Duck Decoys

July 26 - 28
Raven Makes Gallery

This is our final artist show of 2019.