

Indigiqueer artists examine transcending modern barriers

By Nicole Montesano

Smoke Signals staff writer

A medicine woman leaps onto her horse into a bank of storm clouds, the ribbons on her dress streaming out to become lightning. A wood carving tells the story of “Ikanum,” the Hazel Drumstick Gambler, who found love with both a man and a woman, the three of them forming a family to raise their children. A quilt pays tribute to powerful women, while a night blue cape bestows joy on its maker.

The “Transgressors” exhibit now on display at Chachalu Tribal Museum & Cultural Center in Grand Ronde features an array of mediums by Indigenous queer artists, examining the experience of being two-spirited or otherwise alternately-gendered in the modern world.

The exhibit is on display through April and was curated by Tribal member Anthony Hudson, whose alter ego is Carla Rossi, Portland’s premiere drag clown. Tribal descendant Felix Furby is co-curator.

The exhibit encompasses a variety of art works, a film, a recorded conversation and an invitation for people to draw their own vision of a future including LGBTQ people.

One of the exhibit’s messages is that words such as transform, transition, transport, transcend and tradition, as well as transgress, all take on particular meaning for people who don’t fit into a binary gender system. Yet, historically among the Indigenous Tribes of the Pacific Northwest, people who were trans or two-spirited were taken so much for granted that it appears no word existed for them, according to Hudson and Furby. It was only colonialism, they said, that brought in taboos around crossing binary gender lines.

Hudson and Furby said that while it is deeply validating to rediscover revered historic Tribal members who were able to openly live as transgender, it shouldn’t be required for LGBTQ people to be accepted today.

“We’re not just people stuck in the past ... we are a living culture,” Furby told the crowd that gathered for the exhibit’s opening reception on Friday, Dec. 13. “We deserve



Photos by Michelle Alaimo

Kate Barton, left, and Sydney May look at “Fabanaki Flint Corn” by Geo Neptune (Passamaquoddy) during the opening reception for “Transgressors” at Chachalu Tribal Museum & Cultural Center on Friday, Dec. 13. The exhibit runs through April 26.



Tribal member Anthony Hudson, left, speaks during the opening reception for “Transgressors” at Chachalu Tribal Museum & Cultural Center on Friday, Dec. 13. Hudson and Tribal descendant Felix Furby, right, are curators of the exhibit.



TO SEE MORE PHOTOS AND VIDEO



@SmokeSignalsCTGR @ctgrsmokesignals @SmokeSignalsCTGR

to see ourselves in that future, as much as in the history.”

The exhibit opens with an essay about the name “Transgressors” and the definitions of words such as transform and transition, and words with similar roots. They are followed by stunning mural-sized paintings of two honored ancestors, both trans women in the 1800s and early 1900s, who were medicine women: Shimkhin and White Cindy, painted by Tribal member Steph Littlebird.

White Cindy, a member of the Klamath Tribe who lived from approximately 1830 to 1940,

was known for her white dresses adorned with colorful ribbons, a panel explained, despite the repeated efforts of settlers to force her into men’s attire. She was also known for her horseback riding and her medicine work.

Shimkhin, who lived from approximately 1821 to 1904, was an Atfalati Kalapuya healer on the Grand Ronde reservation and was the subject of a previous exhibit by Hudson and Furby.

The current exhibit is marked by its variety of both subject and art form. In a small, closed booth, listeners can sit on benches arranged

in a circle, listening to a recorded conversation between Hudson and Furby. In the center of the room, only one light shines directly down onto an infant’s cradleboard.

“We don’t want gender to not exist, or people to not have a sense of gender,” one of them muses. “We want it to be free and not be a wound. We want people to think about if they would choose that system if they had a choice.”

Among the other exhibits is a night-blue cape of barkcloth, studded with tiny gold starfish, with a full moon centered on the back. It was created by Lehuauakea, a mähū diasporic native Hawaiian artist. The word mähū implies gender fluidity.

“Creating hand stitched garments like this one allows me to transcend any imposed labels and reclaim the narrative of how I see myself and share that with those around me,” Lehuauakea wrote for the exhibit.

Acclaimed McMinnville arts patron Ronni Lacroute said she was delighted by the exhibit.

“I know the curators and am familiar with several of the artists; I have some of their art in my house,” LaCroute said. “I’m interested in the intersectionality of this and the last exhibit. It’s not often you see not only Indigenous art but Indigenous art by artists (who) are queer. I’m impressed by the diversity and the whole different outlook by all these artists. I’m really enjoying that.”

Katie Kissinger said she had come in part to support Tribal Elder Qahir-bejee Peco, a close friend with whom Kissinger co-authored a children’s book about breaking cultural gender barriers. “Beat the Drum” is told in both English and chinuk wawa, and reflects Peco’s own history.

“I’ve been anticipating this opening,” Kissinger said. “There’s so much about this that’s so important and I’m almost speechless because it’s so beautifully done.”

She said she found it especially meaningful that the Tribe was not only open to it but in funding it as well.

Pecos said they really love the title of the exhibit.

“(I) really love...how that fits how we have to be in the world to be seen, and sometimes it feels like we’re being aggressive, but we’re just trying to be seen,” they said. ■



Youth Education Community Night

Please join the Youth Education Program for an evening of good food, books to take home and lots of great raffle prizes! All are welcome.



January, 14th @ 5:30pm

CTGR Gym

youtheducation@grandronde.org

(503) 879-2101



DUE TO ILLEGAL DUMPING OF TRASH IN THE RECYCLE BINS AND CONTAMINATION, THIS RECYCLING DEPOT IS ON THE VERGE OF CLOSING AND GOING AWAY.

CTGR FACILITIES DEPARTMENT

RECYCLE



Bottles and Tubs 4oz or Larger



Metals



Mixed Paper and Cardboard

