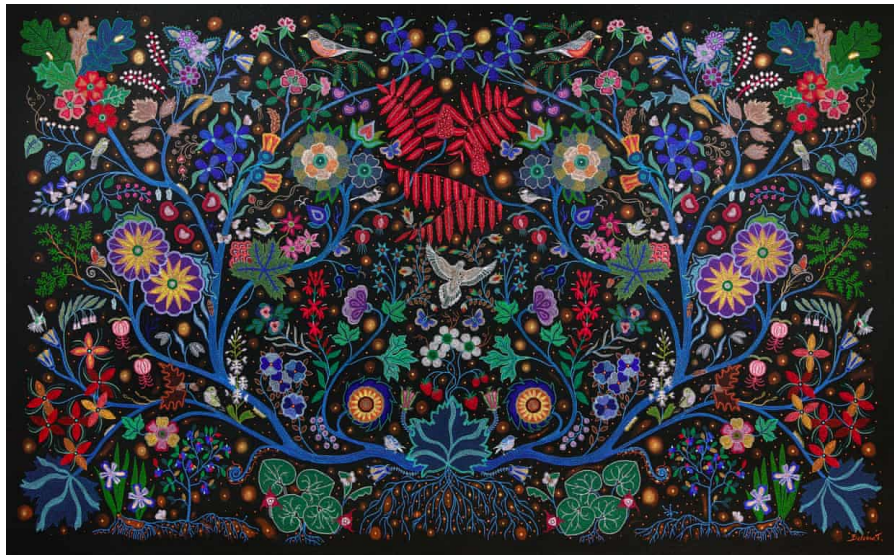




The Often-Overlooked Aspect of Native American Art: Women

By Shyam Patel

June 6, 2019



Christi Belcourt; Métis, born 1966; *The Wisdom of the Universe*, 2014; Acrylic on canvas; Unframed: 171 × 282 cm (67 5/16 × 111 in.); Art Gallery of Ontario; Purchased with funds donated by Greg Latremoille, 2014; 2014/6

Although most outsiders don't realize it, Native American art is largely the product of women's work. "This material culture stems from a Native female understanding of the world, her own identity, who her people are, and how this knowledge can be passed on," says Kiowa beadwork artist Teri Greeves. To illustrate this often-overlooked aspect of Native art, Greeves and the Minneapolis Institute of Art's Jill Ahlberg Yohe organized an exhibition of some-120 works conceived over the span of a millennium by female artists from indigenous nations that, collectively, represent all regions of Native North America.

Titled *Hearts of Our People: Native American Women Artists*, the show, which opened at MIA on June 2, includes contemporary works such as Santa Clara Pueblo artist Rose B. Simpson's *Maria*, a customized 1984 Chevrolet El Camino; Romanesque 19th-century sculpture by Edmonia Lewis; and ancient pottery by the Hohokam and Mimbres tribes. "No one other than the individual who comes from the community that's created these works can speak to it," says Greeves, citing the importance of the Native Exhibition Advisory Board (a panel of 21 Native and non-Native female artists and scholars) in selecting the works on view. The final assemblage was organized into three overarching themes that connect each object: relationships, power, and legacy.

"When you see a dress made for a young woman, you're seeing four deer taken by her uncle, tanned by her aunt, and beaded by her mother," Greeves continues. "She wore it understanding her relationship to the deer sacrificed for her, the trade routes that brought her the beads, and the love of her family." While the show reaches across time, media, and Native communities, it's by no means a definitive study of Native American women's art. "It's the first step toward a conversation around Native art we hope will continue in art institutes," Greeves says. "This is barely the tip of the iceberg."