

HIGH DESERT MUSEUM

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High Desert Museum Presents

Rick Bartow: Things You Know But Cannot Explain

New exhibit explores work of celebrated Indigenous artist

BEND, OR — An exhibition featuring the vivid and engaging drawings, paintings, prints and sculptures of Oregon artist Rick Bartow will open at the High Desert Museum on Saturday, January 26, 2019. *Rick Bartow: Things You Know But Cannot Explain* is an extensive retrospective of nearly four decades of Bartow's work, an exploration of his extraordinary life and complex identity.

Bartow, whose work connects the physical and spiritual worlds and explores the passage between the past and the present, was born between two cultures. Bartow learned from an early age to honor and embrace both his father's ancestry as a member of the Mad River Band of the Wiyot Indians as well as his mother's European heritage, often spending Sunday mornings at church and afternoons at Native American ceremonies.

He was born in Newport, Oregon, where his family's roots run deep, and grew up with close ties to the Siletz community. Though he traveled the world extensively in his lifetime, Bartow always returned to his family's coastal homestead, and it was here that he eventually became one of the Northwest's best-known artists.

Bartow became interested in art at a young age, an interest that expanded to music when he was in high school. After studying art education at what is now Western Oregon University, he was drafted into the Army and deployed to Vietnam, where he worked as a teletype operator and played music in military hospitals for wounded and dying soldiers. He was awarded a Bronze Star for his dedication during his time abroad from 1969-1971.



Creation of Crow. By Rick Bartow

The trauma he witnessed manifested as what we now identify as post-traumatic stress disorder. Bartow struggled with alcoholism through most of the 1970s, all the while drawing ferociously and burning

HIGH DESERT MUSEUM

most of what he drew. Art became his path from the past to the present, a map back to himself and to the new self he would become.

“Bartow found his way out of those dark years by reconnecting with Indigenous tradition, immersing himself in the beauty of nature, and by embracing the therapeutic and redemptive power of art,” explained Museum Curator of Arts and Community Engagement Andries Fourie. “He once described this process by saying, ‘I drew myself straight.’”

A master of gestural marks and bold, dripping color, shadows and negative space, Bartow worked intuitively, drawing from his own experiences and memories. Erasure marks — evidence of reworking — are often present in his works, along with fingerprints and handprints. Visual, literary and musical scores informed his dynamic compositions.

Sculpture is an important part of Bartow’s work. His carving *The Cedar Mill Pole* was displayed in 1997 in the Jacqueline Kennedy Garden at the White House, and his 2012 sculpture *We Were Always Here*, a pair of 20-foot tall carved poles, is on permanent display in front of the National Museum of the American Indian overlooking the National Mall.

“Bartow made art that is vibrant, physical and engaging,” Fourie said, noting that the artist effortlessly combined images of shamans, totems, talismans, masks and creation stories with ideas from Western philosophy. “This diversity illustrates that while he deeply valued tradition, Bartow was also a voracious reader, a deep thinker and an amateur naturalist. He had an all-consuming passion for the physical world in all its messy and contradictory glory.”

In addition to the collection of works drawn from private and public collections, the exhibition will feature a piece from the High Desert Museum’s own collection — *For Roger*, 2009.

The exhibition, organized by the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, University of Oregon, is organized in thematic sections rather than following a chronological survey. Themes such as “Tradition,” “Self” and “Dialogue” allow the viewer to explore the collection as a narrative of Bartow’s life and artistic achievements.

“The opportunity to present Rick Bartow’s powerful body of work is an honor,” said Museum Executive Director Dana Whitelaw, Ph.D. “His art transcends the notions of Native and Western art, and of traditional and contemporary art. The collection pulls viewers into the artist’s world, and the experience, like the subjects depicted in the works, is truly transformative.”

Rick Bartow: Things You Know But Cannot Explain (highdesertmuseum.org/bartow), currently on display at The Autry Museum of the American West in Los Angeles, will be on display at the High Desert Museum through April 7, 2019.

Support for the exhibition is provided by the Ford Family Fund of the Oregon Community Foundation, Arlene Schnitzer, the Coeta and Donald Barker Changing Exhibitions Endowment, The Harold and Arlene Schnitzer CARE Foundation, a grant from the Oregon Arts Commission and the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency, the Ballinger Endowment, Philip and Sandra Piele, and JSMA members. It has been made possible by Zolo Media and with support from Cascade A&E and Smart Shopper.

HIGH DESERT MUSEUM

ABOUT THE MUSEUM:

THE HIGH DESERT MUSEUM opened in 1982 and brings regional wildlife, culture, art and natural resources together to promote an understanding of the natural and cultural heritage of North America's High Desert country. The Museum uses indoor and outdoor exhibits, wildlife in natural habitats, and living history demonstrations to help people discover and appreciate the High Desert environment. The Museum is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization accredited by the American Alliance of Museums and is a Smithsonian Affiliate.

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