

HOCK E AYE VI EDGAR HEAP OF BIRDS



DIARY OF TREES INSTALLATION, 2003, MARKER ON RAG PAPER AND PLYWOOD.

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PHOTO: D. H. HEAP OF BIRDS

HOCK E AYE VI EDGAR HEAP OF BIRDS: DIARY OF TREES—A SITE OF CONVERGENCE

Merging his public artworks with studio maquettes and marker drawings, Hock E Aye Vi (Hachivi) Edgar Heap of Birds (Tsistsistas [Cheyenne]) has re-contextualized *Wheel*, his outdoor sculpture project for the Denver Art Museum, through *Diary of Trees*, an indoor installation for the *Continuum 12 Artists* exhibition. The original *Wheel* tree forms have been modified to manifest the artist's confluence of the official and private for an intimate gallery space. The images and texts synthesize historic events experienced by Native people of the Colorado region with marker drawings containing the artist's diary-like passages. As such, the interior placement of *Diary of Trees* mediates a site of convergence for the social and political discourse of past and present issues concerning Native self-representation in Neo-Colonial urban settings.

The conceptual framework and circular design of the *Wheel* project were inspired by the Bighorn Medicine Wheel, a sacred site constructed as a circle of stones measuring eighty feet in diameter with twenty-eight spokes or radials, located near the crest of the Bighorn Mountains in north central Wyoming. In *Wheel*, Heap of Birds will arrange ten archetypal tree-like forms in a solstice circle to reference this earth renewal site, which is visited by many Native people to obtain strong spiritual medicine.¹ In addition, the particular aesthetic details and sources drawn on the tree forms, in both *Wheel* and *Diary of Trees*, offer a historical dialogue on the constructive and destructive politics of Native daily life. In the *Diary of Trees* installation, Heap of Birds has included four full-size plywood tree maquettes and two clear overlays whose design and themes are the basis for *Wheel*. The maquettes, which are spaced across the center of the gallery floor, are titled *Indian Religious Freedom Act*, *Federal Government Acronyms*, *Indigenous Global Allies*, and *Cheyenne and Arapaho Massacres*. The two clear overlays shown on the north and south gallery walls are titled *Petroglyph And Time Spirals* and *Rez Life Bison to Beef*. Four marker drawings on rag paper are hung on long walls to complete the gallery installation.

This newly imagined space for the *Diary of Trees* conceptually merges public and private domains because the Trees are formally re-positioned indoors to complement the diary-like passages. By juxtaposing seemingly diverse objects, Heap of Birds encourages an analysis of the metaphysics of outside

versus inside, public versus private. The full significance of this process is rooted in the implicit configuration and understanding of the formal oppositions of “outside” and “inside.”² The ensuing dialogue in *Diary of Trees* is a combination of metaphors of the Native American experience in modern society. At the site of convergence, two domains unite in a visual language saturating each Tree with images of alienation and hostility but balanced by a closed script in the diary passages. These metaphors of protest against social and political oppression are the curving and floating symbols in *Indian Religious Freedom Act* or the sutured lines of the railroad penetrating the earth in *Cheyenne and Arapaho Massacres*. In *Indigenous Global Allies*, written words and dates signal massacres, while flags and the lines of bordering countries represent the unification of indigenous peoples worldwide. The forced relocation of Native nations is shown in *Rez Life Bison to Beef* where Heap of Birds acknowledges the pictorial language utilized by other Native artists, such as Kiowa political prisoner Wohaw, whose memory is honored in the installation, and in a bison image—a figure which these artists have drawn throughout their lives.

The four black marker drawings on heavy rag paper included in this exhibition are linguistic and pictorial declarations of the privacy of individuals who volunteer meaning, or spirit, by choice. Although this mode of presentation is visually available in the public domain, the diary-like passages move and curve along the walls as text becomes image, but whole meaning cannot be inferred from the words alone. Heap of Birds’ wall lyrics take form in the immense domain of the imagination, as concrete poetics with endless verses about existence in a gesture of complete self-representation. The marker drawings *Check Stub Chalk* and *Monetish* reflect this highly personalized approach to art as a protest for privacy that finds its source in diary writings while offering a lesson in solitude. The wall drawings deliver a number of invertible dynamisms and spiraling forms to interact and mirror imagery on the Trees: everything becomes circuitous, recurrent, and constantly re-imagined.

In *Diary of Trees*, Heap of Birds allows the viewer to experience an intimacy, an engagement of the imagination that seems to move in all directions before another experience is shaped by the descriptive use of his black marker line. It is evident that the cyclical form of the Medicine Wheel functions to

present and confront the living histories and experiences defined and multiplied in the *Diary of Trees* installation as one nuanced experience. In this way, Heap of Birds inventively creates a space for the aesthetic articulation of a few of the numerous social, political, and personal issues that many Native peoples continue to negotiate today.

— **SHANNA KETCHUM (DINÉ [NAVAJO])**

M.A. student in Art History
University of New Mexico, Albuquerque

¹ However, Heap of Birds has rendered *Wheel* secular rather than a true ceremonial instrument by adjusting the number of trees in its structure.

² Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, translated from the French by Maria Jolas with a new foreword by John R. Stilgoe. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994, p. 212.

