

Palm Springs Art Museum to Host Exhibition on Native American Comic Book Art

Comic Art Indigène will run from June 17 – September 18, 2011



May 18, 2011 (Palm Springs, CA) – The Palm Springs Art Museum will host the traveling exhibition *Comic Art Indigène* from June 17 through September 18, 2011. This exhibition features 49 works and examines how storytelling, an essential element of Native American culture, has been used in comics and comic-inspired art to express the

contemporary Native American experience. The exhibition is a journey into mystery in which Indian artists articulate identity, politics, and culture using the unique dynamics of comic art.

As an art form, comics are poorly understood, underanalyzed, and under-utilized. Created to be disposable (yet widely read), comics are often dismissed as primitive and juvenile, however a generation of Native artists have embraced this art form as an expressive medium. Today, Native American artists are reclaiming stereotypes used in earlier comic art depicting Indians as savage, war-like primitives or trusty sidekicks.

While comic strips and comic books are maturing as an indigenous American art form and a source for award-winning fiction, highly-budgeted motion pictures, and merchandising opportunities, comic book art remains an enigma, its most popular genre has always been directed towards a young audience hindering its growth and acceptance among artists and critics.



The exhibition will be utilized as a source of inspiration for the museum's Art Camp and TeenStudio Projects. In addition, the exhibition's organizing curator will be on-site for the installation and provide a tour and lecture of the exhibition for the museum's Western Art Council and Docent Council.

About the Exhibition

Like Native American cultures, comic art is amazingly complex and adaptive. As the first widely-accessible mass media, comics were consumed by Indian people as a recognizable form of storytelling; expressing cultural stories through pictures.

Tales of suspense showcasing fantastic heroes and villains interacting with old and new gods have long been a part of Native American culture. *Comic Art Indigène* examines how Native American artists articulate their identity, art, worldview, politics and culture through the kinetic expression of sequential art. Using images and art, *Comic Art Indigène* spans works from the 13th century to contemporary works.

Under the larger definition of narrative art, comic art is more related to Native American art traditions than might be expected. The earliest surviving examples of such narrative art is rock art. The historic examples used in the exhibition, such as photographs of rock art, ledger art, and ceramics are meant to link Native American art traditions with contemporary voices.

The exhibition begins with a photograph of an image from the 13th century featuring a red, white and blue pictograph of the All American Man, a shield carrying warrior from the Pueblo II period (carbon dated to ca. 1290). This photograph is contrasted with a contemporary Jack Kirby drawing of Captain America, the Marvel Comics hero who also sports a red, white and blue shield.

While the exhibition features traditional media such as ceramics, beadwork and painting, the subject matter of these works may surprise those expecting standard romanticized scenes of Native American life. Some of the works depicted in the exhibition originate from long ago, but the majority of the works are from 1990 to the present day.

This exhibition has been organized by the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture/Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM. The Palm Springs Art Museum presentation is made possible by a grant from the James Irvine Foundation and Donna and Cargill MacMillan, Jr.

The Palm Springs Art Museum's main facility is located in downtown Palm Springs in a 150,000 square foot architecturally-significant building and features compelling exhibitions and a robust permanent collection of modern, contemporary, Western and Native American, Mesoamerican and glass art in 28 spacious galleries and in its two outdoor sculpture gardens. The museum offers educational lectures, films and an assortment of programs and art workshops for all ages.

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Image captions: Top: Jolene Nenibah Yazzie (Navajo), *Protector of Innocence*, 2007, digital print, courtesy of the artist

Middle: Ryan Huna Smith (Chemehuevi / Navajo) and Joe Forkan, *Page 6 from Tribal Force #2*, 1996, ink on vellum, courtesy of the artist

NOTE TO MEDIA: High resolution images of the exhibit are available