

To be Seen and Heard

Over the past decade, Daniel Heyman has undertaken several remarkable projects that give voice and visage to people whose narratives have been absent from mainstream public discourse. The first was a series of portrait prints and drawings, made between 2006-2008, of former Iraqi detainees who had been abused in an American military prison in Abu Ghraib and were later released without charges. Heyman had the extraordinary opportunity to accompany the American lawyer, Susan Burke, to Turkey and Jordan to witness the former prisoners' testimonies in preparation for class-action lawsuits filed on their behalf. As he listened to the descriptions of their torture, he captured their likenesses and recorded their testimonies on the spot, working in drypoint directly on copper printing plates, or in watercolor (when he ran out of plates). Heyman's impassioned response to their accounts is conveyed through the compelling immediacy of the images he produced. Handwritten texts in rough-hewn capital letters surround or sometimes nearly envelop the figure underscoring the urgency of the sitter's personal narrative, while the carefully rendered portraits individualize these people who were previously known only as anonymous naked or shrouded figures in the shocking photos released by the news media in 2004. Heyman's approach, combining the sitter's words with a dignified portrait— rather than portraying their victimized state—made his subjects more relatable, evoking an empathy in the viewer that points to the universalities of humankind.

Following the Iraqi project, Heyman conducted interviews and created portraits of former prisoners from Philadelphia penitentiaries who were struggling with their roles as remote fathers, and portrayed victims of sexual assault in the military, continuing to explore his dynamic integration of the sitter's words with his or her image. An artist residency in Israel in the summer of 2014 allowed Heyman to research perspectives on national and ethnic loyalties for a future project. The next year, Heyman was invited to collaborate with Lucy Ganje, Professor of Graphic Design, and Kim Fink, Professor of Printmaking and Master Printer for Sun Dog Multiples at the University of North Dakota which resulted in the suite of 24 portrait prints and broadsides, *In Our Own Words: Native Impressions*, 2015-2016, featured in the exhibition *Daniel Heyman: The Dartmouth Collection and Native Impressions* held at Cade Tomkins Projects in Rhode Island in the fall of 2016.

Heyman, Ganje, and Fink began their project by recording the oral histories of men and women from the four tribal nations remaining in North Dakota: The Mandan, Hidatsa, & Arikara

Nation (Three Affiliated Tribes); the Spirit Lake Nation; the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe; and the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians. The artists spoke to a variety of members of these communities, including a tribal leader and historian, two tribal college presidents, a farmer, a poet, and a cook/restaurant owner. There were tragic stories of displacement and cruel attempts of assimilation into Western-European cultural and religious traditions. Especially striking were descriptions of experiences in boarding schools where children used to be sent, where they were forced to adopt Christian beliefs, not allowed to speak their language, often denied contact with their families, and sometimes physically abused. Those of mixed indigenous and European descent were often subjected to prejudice from both sides. Among recurring themes in the interviews, were the importance of education and the sense of identity tied to both place and language and the deep awareness of one's heritage and transference of knowledge between generations. There were also repeated references to the multitude of different languages spoken by the Native populations and the heartbreak over the paucity of current first-language speakers. Deep concern was expressed over how many tongues have been lost already or soon will be, despite recent efforts to reclaim them.

Ganje, who was raised on the Cheyenne River Sioux Nation in South Dakota, and has family ties to tribal nations in North Dakota, developed the idea for the artistic collaboration. Heyman would execute woodcut portraits of six men and six women (three people from each of the four tribal nations) to be paired with matching broadsides that Ganje would create using texts drawn from each sitter's testimony, printed in various letterpress fonts in the same ink palette used for the respective woodcut. Thus, the hand-hewn words carved into the woodblock surrounding the figure in the nearly life-size portrait would be augmented by the cacophony of printed texts that vary in style, size, color, and occasionally language, on the adjacent broadside. In addition to accentuating the magnitude of the role of language in the lives of these people, the broadside component conjures associations with "wanted" posters and public proclamations (often executed in letterpress) that were posted in towns during the western expansion of the United States when many Native populations were displaced. The contrast of hand-lettered and type-based texts may be seen as acknowledging the significance of both spoken and printed language. Moreover, both artists use varying degrees of legibility—some words stand out, while others are barely visible—to allude to the imminent disappearance of Native languages as well as the hidden truths revealed through the sitters'

stories. The ink colors range from earth toned hues of brown, gray and tan, to watery/sky blues and grassy greens, as well as vibrant reds, yellows, orange, and pink that might appear in a glorious sunset on the plains, in keeping with the emphasis on the relationship to land and impact of place on one's sense of self that runs throughout the texts.

There is a poignancy in the array of figure types represented that underscores the duplicity of stereotyping people. The emphasis on the individuality of each sitter runs counter to the long tradition of romanticized portrayals of "noble savages" set forth in the works of artists such as the 19th-century painter George Catlin and the early 20th-century photographer Edward Curtis. Heyman's portraits and their accompanying narratives serve as an important reminder of the amalgam of ethnicities and cultures that have shaped the heritage of all Americans. The immediacy of these images makes plain the human cost that is paid by not embracing the possibilities and respecting of all facets of this legacy, discrediting the preposterous classification of any select group of people in this country as "Real Americans". These concerns are especially resonant now, with the recent development of the Black Lives Matter movement and the ongoing opposition to the oil pipeline project in North Dakota that puts sacred Native American sites at risk of destruction.

Heyman has long acknowledged his belief in the importance of the role of the artist as witness, one who has a responsibility to convey a sense of what life is like today to future generations. Central to his work is a commitment to the democratic medium of printmaking as a means of disseminating the voices and issues that he feels compelled to forefront, following in a distinguished tradition of painter-printmakers such as Francisco Goya, Honoré Daumier, the artists of the populist Mexican printmaking workshop, Taller Gráfica de Popular, among others. *In Our Own Words* offers compelling insights into the complexities of human relationships and the challenges we continue to navigate in contemporary society. The spirit of resilience captured in these prints serves as inspiration in the pursuit of a more compassionate world where differences can be celebrated for broadening our perspectives and fostering a greater understanding of humankind.

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