



## A Visual-Arts Bright Spot in COVID Summer

Chehalem Cultural Center showcases work by the late Michael Gibbons, Kerri Evonuk, and Sara Siestreem.

**JULY 28, 2020** |

**DAVID BATES**

COAST, OREGON / NW, YAMHILL

Out in the Grand Lobby and Mezzanine is an exhibit one can only wish was as expansive (in terms of the number of pieces) as the artist's thoughtful, accompanying notes. *CACHE NINE: the hope material (how to feel not scared in a pandemic)* is by Sara Siestreem (Hanis Coos), a Portland artist who teaches at Portland State University and is represented by Augen Gallery in Portland. The baskets, hangings, and paintings on display are few, but Siestreem's notes are arguably the most important aspect in terms of educating the public about Indigenous art — not so much about the technique behind it as the mindfulness behind its creation and the political content. She teaches weaving to the Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw Indians, and writes of that program:

*To share this awakening with the mainstream I exhibit each year's cache of natural materials in public spaces. This is an occupation of public land, an overt political act. To gather and possess these plants is an exercise of sovereign rights, a legal provision for Indigenous people of this land mass to continue to practice our cultural and spiritual birthright. Each plant represents a different relationship I initiate and maintain with Federal, State, and private landowners.*

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*More importantly, every very single section of this cache represents lifelong relationships I have with the places I gather and the plants themselves. From an Indigenous world view, plants, animals, and elements are equals, we are relatives. It is forbidden to take anything without permission, compensation, follow-through on promises made, and within the boundaries of sustainability. That means I must establish and gain permission from the land and plant itself. I cannot do that in one day, it takes years. I must visit these places and plants again and again before I can gather them.*

At the top of the notes, the artist acknowledges the occupational nature of the center itself.



*“Taxai lo?lo? t’see mə<sup>h</sup>kmə<sup>h</sup>k kwansəm” (huckleberry pie forever),*

*Coos ceremonial cooking basket, by Sara Siestreem (Hanis Coos)*

*Newberg, Oregon, lies within the traditional homelands of the Tualatin Kalapuya Peoples who were relocated to the Grand Ronde Reservation under the Kalapuya etc., 1855, ratified treaty (also known as the Willamette Valley Treaty, 1855). Today, these Tribes are a part of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. The Grand Ronde people continue to maintain a connection to their ancestral homelands and maintain their traditional cultural practices.*

Siestreem is a master artist from the Umpqua River Valley on the South Coast. She comes from a family of professional artists and educators. She graduated Phi Kappa Phi with a BS from Portland State University in 2005 and earned her MFA with distinction from Pratt Institute in 2007. She describes her studio work as multi-disciplinary, and

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while her primary language is painting, she also works in photography, printmaking, drawing, sculpture, video, and (obviously) traditional Indigenous weaving.

*CACHE NINE* will be on display through Sept. 1