

Return from Exile: the Mixed Blood Art of Gerry Lang

Gerry Lang is a multi-media artist who traces the tangled journey paths between self, community and identity and the ways we can be embraced, rejected, celebrated, or dismissed based upon perception and perspective. His award-winning art presents a thought-provoking panorama of the artist's own processes of challenge, discovery and resistance to labels of assumption and consumption as a mixed blood messenger.



Sponsored by the Ohio State University Newark Earthworks Center
and made possible by a grant from the Global Arts + Humanities Discovery Theme at the Ohio State University

Land Acknowledgment

To date, The Ohio State University does not have an official land acknowledgement statement. In brief, this means that our university has yet to formally recognize the tremendous amount of territory and other forms of wealth that have been taken from Native Americans over the past several hundred years.

However, there are faculty, staff, and students who are currently working to fill that gap. When this happens – and it is when, not if – Ohio State’s land acknowledgement will have four defining features.

First, we will recognize the Tribes who were forcibly removed from their historic homes in service to the founding of the state of Ohio. Here, we will acknowledge that territories taken from Tribes such as the Delaware, Miami, Ojibwe, Peoria, Potawatomi, Seneca, Shawnee, and Wyandotte were used to build Ohio State’s six campuses.

Second, we will recognize the Tribes whose land was taken – often through brute force or lopsided treaties – and then sold to raise monies that contributed to the founding of The Ohio State University. Here, we will acknowledge that the Morrill Act of 1862 has a dark and bloody history that preceded the development of Ohio State and other land-grant institutions.

Third, we will make certain that the Land Acknowledgment focuses on the past, present, and future; that is, recognizing the past wrongdoings, the present harm that continues to be visited upon American Indians, and the future need for Ohio State to engage in ongoing dialogue and reparative activities associated with these injustices.

Fourth and finally, we will work directly with Tribal Leaders and community representatives to ensure that Ohio State’s Land Acknowledgment accurately reflects the perspectives, values, and traditions of Tribal communities.

ARTIST STATEMENT:



It is my intent to speak of Beauty, Elegance and Silence, which at times defy all appearances. I Am a Human Being, a Witness, a Participant and an Artist. My work is organized around Storytelling and Quantum Memory. It speaks of living in and finding connections to several Cultural Traditions. Here it is presented in chapters, each chronicling the value I have gained while living in different yet equal communities, and each has developed around questions of Identity... how Colonialism, Slavery, Jim Crow and Blood Quantum have impacted every day of my life.

Each piece is a Active Container, alive with content... as sourced from my Dreams, Visions, Family Stories and the Synchronicity of Everyday Life... and is out-pictured as what the West calls "Art."

I was born into a small "American Indian" based "Colored" community in what is now called Winton, North Carolina. My family soon moved to Virginia, (named after the "Virgin Queen") to a Negro based "Colored" community called Portsmouth. I was obliged to become a member of that Black community. Based on the "One drop rule," the Plecker law and "Kill the Indian, save the man" (per Capt. Richard Henry Pratt), my identity was being erased.

My work is steeped in the Reality of The People, deeply connected to Mother Earth, Native Spirituality, Eastern Mysticism, the Collective Unconscious, and the American Dream. It is emerging Organically out of my Daily Life, the Art of Dreaming, Prayer and Meditation. This work is ongoing. - Gerry Lang (Chowanoke, Meherrin, Mixed European and African)

Cracking Wing

Cracking Wing, Sitateish also Cetaghe, arrived at Hampton Institute, now University, Hampton Virginia, on Oct 25, 1881, the son of Elk Feather, a chief of considerable note. They immediately took his clothing and assigned him an army blanket. He was described as a full blood Mandan, age 14, and “an exceptionally bright industrious boy” who knew four Native languages, and quickly learned English as well.” He died of consumption April 21, 1884, at age 17, and was buried in the campus cemetery. It was there that I “met” him circa 1962. His name on his tombstone intrigued me. It was in the early 1990’s that I found this image of him. I felt compelled to re-present him to the world as elegantly as my understanding. would allow. Naturally I selected items from my own wardrobe.



Cracking Wing, Oil Pental, 18"x24" By: Gerry Lang

I am a member of the Chowanoke Nation of North Carolina, working in ceramics, digital media, sculpture and painting. I feel that my work would be of interest to your students, faculty and University community because it will add to the conversation around the growing scholarly interest in the lives of the Native Peoples of the Southeastern seaboard of the United State of America, and their challenges as a direct impact of Colonialism, slavery and Jim Crow. We were reclassified as “Colored,” thus becoming one of the oldest “mixed Blood” communities in America, in what is now North Carolina.



Gerry Lang, “Quantum Memory” Hand built/Thrown, Porcelain, 24.5 in. x 4 in



Prospectus Art Gallery, Chicago IL



Gerry Lang, *Prayer Bowl*, Terra Cotta, Hand built and Thrown - 19 in X 9 in



First contact began at Roanoke Island in 1585, as John White's watercolors documented their lives, making it possible for me to literally see what my People looked like, aside from the images Hollywood has provided. From them I have gleaned a wealth of information through which i am creating my art. They have given me the intangible gift of familiarity, that was missing from my life. Now I can literally glimpse them, out of the corner of my eye, if just for a second, interacting with the land, the water and in everyday life. I can see them as happy Human Beings before the genocide and calamity.

A Secoto Priest by Gerry Lang

I am a Witness, a Participant, a Dreamer, a prayer chaplain and an Artist, My work is organized around Storytelling and Quantum Memory. In this exhibition it will be presented in chapters, each chronicling the value I have gained while living in several different and equal communities. It is my intent to speak of Beauty, Elegance, and Silence, which at times defy all appearances.

Gerry Lang



Gerry Lang, *Return From Exile*,
Ceramic and Mixed Media, 63 X 24 X 4 in.

Upon moving to Virginia as a child, we were obliged to become a part of a Negro based “Colored” community, I eventually became Gerry Lang, Black Artist, while teaching studio art at the HBCU, Hampton University. It was there that my art was greatly influenced by the University’s extensive African and American Indian Art collections.

I contributed to the Black Art Movement, with “Modular Unite Clay Assemblages,” monumental “Cookie Jars” and “Basket Forms,” which developed out of a deep appreciation for my African American teachers, mentors, colleagues and community members. The cemetery provided unexpected inspiration.

At Hampton I was awarded an Artists Residency at Cite International Des Arts, Paris France. Inspired by a performance by Joan Jonas, to the rejected Equal Rights Amendment for Women, I created a series of seven drawings, entitled “Le Petit Oiseau.”

My great grandmother visited me in a Dream, inviting me to re-remember my American Indian ancestry, thus began my “Return From Exile.”



Gerry Lang, *Counting Coup On The Blue Man*, clay, mixed media. 72 L x 42 W x 85 H/

In my studio gallery, *Hand Heart Mind*, in Geneva IL, I began re-remembering the impact of Colonialism, slavery and Jim Crow, and expressed it in my art. Our tribe re-emerged and I became enrolled. It was then I became involved in the Native communities in Chicagoland, participating in events and curating exhibitions. Eventually I moved to the Mexican community of Pilsen, and began collaborating with muralists, doing projects with the National Museum Of Mexican Art, the DuSable Museum Of African American History, and returned to teaching college students.



GERRY LANG, *EUGENE'S SPIRIT (DETAIL)* 10FT X 41 FT
CERAMIC / BROKEN TILE MOSAIC
EUGENE FIELD PARK, CHICAGO PARKS



Gerry Lang, *Thunderbird Woman*, digital media 18 x 24

All of this has contributed to the richness of my experiences and has offered possible solutions to my question of identity. I would like to share all of this with Ohio State University,

In this way, it is my desire to add to the ongoing conversations of decolonization, blood quantum, treaty rights and to become Seen in the land of my ancestors, and the world.

Contact Info:

Gerry Lang, Chwanoke, Artist

2000 S. Leavitt St.

Chicago IL 60608

1-773-203-2361

langstudios@gmail.com