



Smithsonian
National Museum of the American Indian



Media only: Amy Drapeau (202) 633-6614; drapeaua@si.edu
Eileen Maxwell (202) 633-6985; maxwelle@si.edu

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Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian Sponsors Artist Edgar Heap of Birds for the 52nd International Art Exhibition

The 2007 Venice Biennale has selected conceptual artist Edgar Heap of Birds to participate in the 52nd International Art Exhibition as part of the collateral events. The Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian is sponsoring Heap of Birds at the Biennale as part of its contemporary Native American arts initiative. "Most Serene Republics," a two-part public art installation, will be presented from June 6 to Sept. 30.

"The National Museum of the American Indian is pleased to participate in another Venice Biennale, as part of the museum's ongoing commitment to presenting contemporary Native art to a world audience," said W. Richard West Jr. (Southern Cheyenne), founding director of the museum.

"Most Serene Republics" by Edgar Heap of Birds (Cheyenne/Arapaho) uses the framework of multilingual signage in Italian, English and Cheyenne to engender a dialogue about place, history and the creation of nation-states through acts of aggression, displacement or replacement of populations and cultures. This installation re-examines the past while questioning one's complicity in present-day events.

The first installation will be located in the Giardini Reali (Royal Gardens) near Piazza San Marco and will consist of eight text panels that examine and deconstruct elements of Venetian history, including the Fourth Crusade at the beginning of the 13th century, plunder, and Venetian artistic and nautical achievements. The second installation will be comprised of 16 text panels and will be located between the Giardini Napoleonici and Via Garibaldi, along the Viale Garibaldi. Through the second installation, Heap of Birds pays homage to the Native actors and warriors who traveled to Venice and other European cities as part of Wild West shows in the 1880s (such as Buffalo Bill's Wild West shows)—many of whom suffered and perished through illness, mistreatment or accidental death as a result of these European encounters.

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SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION MRC 935 PO Box 37012 Washington DC 20013-7012 Telephone 202.633.6985 Fax 202.633.6920

To complement the two public art installations that are part of “Most Serene Republics,” Heap of Birds also has created a series of individual text panels that will be posted throughout Venice during the 52nd International Art Exhibition. Heap of Birds’s thought-provoking words will appear on a billboard at Marco Polo International Airport at the customs checkpoint for international arrivals from outside the European Union, as well as on posters throughout the city and notices in the vaporettos (water buses) that travel the canals.

The exhibit will be organized by National Museum of the American Indian curators Truman T. Lowe (Ho-Chunk) and Kathleen Ash-Milby (Navajo).

Heap of Birds’s work frequently draws upon language in form and content, history, and memory and engages audiences in a conversation about forgotten or subversive relationships. His seminal work in the 1980s in the New York art scene helped define the pluralistic and sophisticated direction of Native art that continues to this day.

About the Museum

Established in 1989, through an Act of Congress, the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian is an institution of living cultures dedicated to advancing knowledge and understanding of the life, languages, literature, history and arts of the Native peoples of the Western Hemisphere. The museum includes the National Museum of the American Indian on the National Mall; the George Gustav Heye Center, a permanent museum in lower Manhattan; and the Cultural Resources Center, a research and collections facility in Suitland, Md.

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Note to Editors: For high-resolution images of “Most Serene Republics” and images of artist Edgar Heap of Birds and his past work, visit http://newsdesk.si.edu/photos/nmai_heap_of_birds.htm.