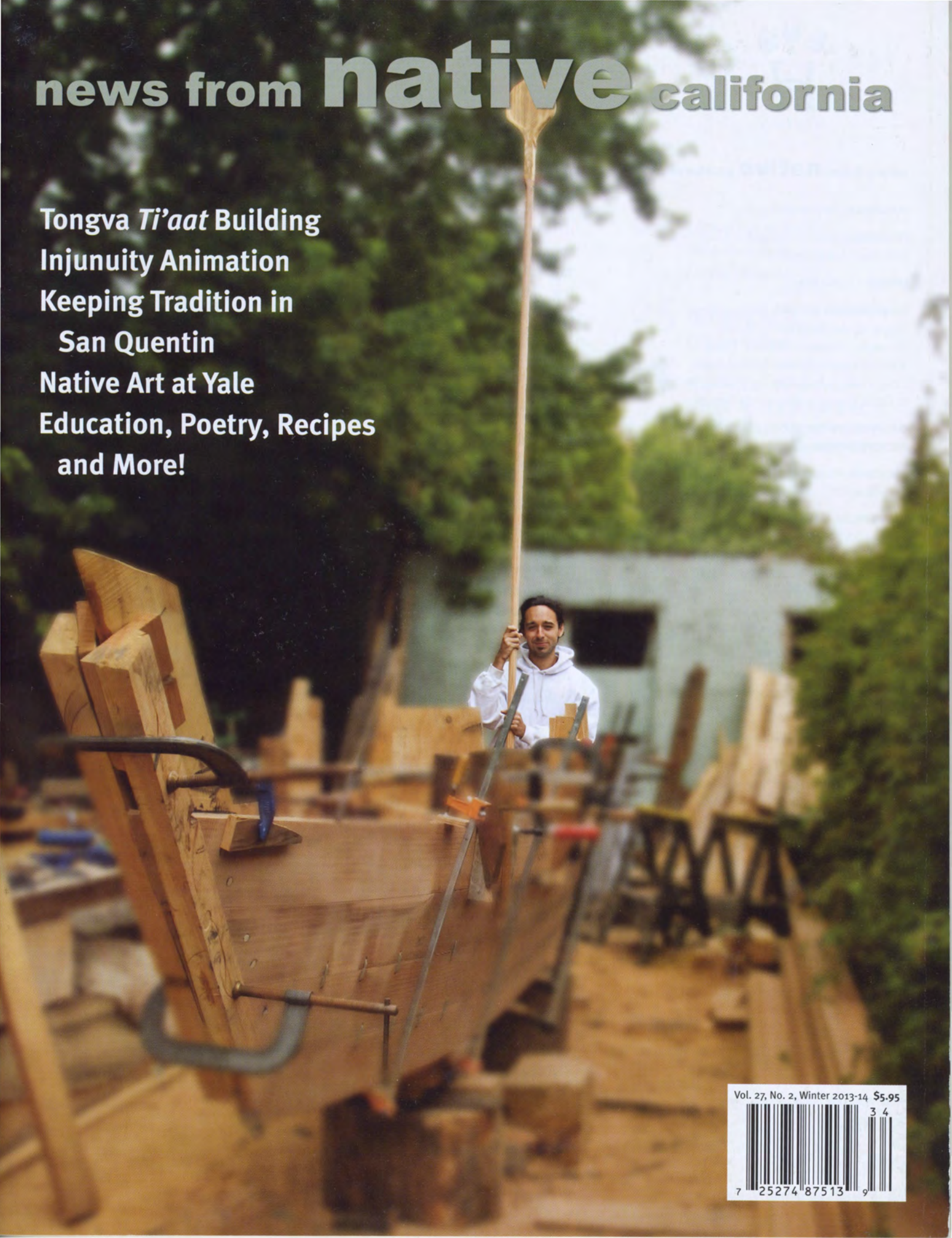


# news from **native** california

**Tongva *Ti'aat* Building  
Injunuity Animation  
Keeping Tradition in  
San Quentin  
Native Art at Yale  
Education, Poetry, Recipes  
and More!**



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# All That Remains

## SHARING STORIES OF NATIVE CALIFORNIA IN CONNECTICUT

### An Exhibition at Yale University

Written by **Anya Montiel**

OFTEN A MUSEUM exhibition follows a narrative, listing key themes and messages which are displayed on the walls or printed in a brochure. Little, however, is written about the behind-the-scenes creation and development of an exhibition, although this is also an engrossing story. In October 2013, Yale University featured an exhibition of artwork by three Native California artists at the Yale Institute of Sacred Music in New Haven, Connecticut, an institute known for organ music, choral conducting, and liturgical studies.

Entitled *All That Remains: Material Remembrances in Love and Loss*, the exhibition centered on themes of love, loss, and remembrance through art. Three artists were included—Rick Bartow, Lewis deSoto, and Judith Lowry—with the additional inclusion of a work by Harry Fonseca (1946–2010). Together the artists represented five indigenous nations: Cahuilla, Hammawi Pit River, Maidu, Washoe, and Wiyot. The artworks communicated the artists' explorations

of mourning and intangible loss. Some of the artworks memorialized the artists' beloveds, and others visually depicted their personal emotions, thoughts, and ideas about death. The show included seven artworks ranging over a variety of media.

While I conceived of and curated the exhibition, I spend my time at Yale University not as a curator but as a doctoral student in the American Studies department. Developing an exhibition was not a course assignment, but it is my passion. Before I arrived at Yale, I had another life, working in the museum field for ten years. I worked for seven years at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC, and one year as the curator of collections for my tribe's cultural center and museum in Topawa, Arizona, the Himdag Ki: Hehiku, Hemu, Im B Ha'ap (translated as "The Ways of Life House: Past, Present, and Into the Future," and known to others as the Tohono O'odham Nation Cultural Center and Museum).

While my background seems very non-Californian, I was born and raised in San Francisco. I attended the University of California at Davis and received a bachelor's degree in

Below: The artworks in the *All That Remains* exhibition. Courtesy of the Yale Institute of Sacred Music.

Far right: *Traubild* by Rick Bartow. Courtesy of the Froelick Gallery, Portland, OR.



Native American studies. The Native student community at Davis included young people from Bishop, Hoopa, Lone Pine, Pechanga, Round Valley, and other California rancherias and reservations. We went to big times as much as powwows. We visited museums with collections of Native California material and attended demonstrations of basket-making and acorn preparation. The campus's C.N. Gorman Museum featured the work of Native California artists such as Rick Bartow, Judith Lowry, Jean LaMarr, Brian Tripp, and many others.

When I arrived at Yale in September 2012, I immediately met Professor Sally Promey, who teaches in American Studies and Religion and Visual Culture; she spoke about her research exploring the relationship between religion and sensory experiences. I described an artwork to her by Cahuilla artist Lewis deSoto that masterfully bridges that link. In 1999, deSoto created *Paranirvana* (self-portrait), a twenty-five-foot long sculpture of a reclining figure on its right side, mirroring the twelfth-century stone Buddha at Gal Vihara in Sri Lanka. His version, however, is hollow and constructed from painted polyethylene cloth, which is inflated by an internal fan. From afar the sculpture appears to be made of stone, giving a *trompe l'oeil* effect. The sculpture emits a humming sound that the artist purposely added to give it breath. *Paranirvana* has a life cycle; it is "born" as it is inflated and takes its full shape. When the fan is unplugged; the sculpture takes its "last breath" and deflates slowly into the ground. In keeping with deSoto's Buddhist faith, it is reborn or "becomes again" when the fan is plugged in, and the cycle repeats. DeSoto created it after the death of his father, and it makes loss of a loved one tangible.

Promey asked if *Paranirvana* was available to be exhibited at the Institute of Sacred Music, where she acts as deputy director. I informed her that deSoto has created three versions of the sculpture, and the third one was in his studio.

She then asked me if I would be able to curate an exhibition around *Paranirvana*. The theme would be my choice, and I would present an exhibition proposal to the Institute staff members. As a museum person, the opportunity to create and curate an exhibition was wondrous. My mind began formulating an exhibition.

Immediately, I knew that the exhibition would consist of Native artworks only. As I walked through the Yale museums, I noticed that Native art was not represented except at the Peabody Museum, with its ethnographic cases arranged according to anthropological culture areas. The same museum that displays dinosaur bones and Neanderthal skeletons exhibits Native American art. Therefore, it was important to display works by Native artists as art.

Next I considered the venue. While it is located at the Divinity School, the Institute's mission is broad—"the interdisciplinary study of sacred music, worship, and the related arts." Past exhibits include the artwork of Islamic women artists, Judaica, and images of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The Institute would be a fitting place for an exhibition about Native spiritual traditions, yet the rampant appropriation of Native ceremonies and traditions by non-Native people thwarted my thoughts about exhibiting such work. Instead I thought about what *Paranirvana* represented—the loss and remembrance of a parent and dealing with death and grief. Therefore the exhibition would revolve around the themes of love, loss, and remembrance.

My list of possible artworks became extensive. While surveying the items, I noticed that Rick Bartow and Judith Lowry had multiple works on the list. Their artworks are emotive and have memorialized deceased loved ones or revealed personal traumas. Likewise, they create art in varied media, such as acrylic paintings, prints and drawings, wooden sculptures, installation work, and multimedia pieces. And by exhibiting them together with deSoto, the show



would become Native Californian, which is poorly represented on the East Coast.

I contacted the artists and discussed my ideas. All of them agreed to be in the exhibition. For Rick Bartow, a Wiyot artist living along the Oregon coast, I selected three works. *Personal Myth* (2001), a work on paper drawn in pastel, charcoal, and graphite, addresses the death of his wife, Julie, to breast cancer and reveals the continued love a couple shares despite parting in the earthly world. In the drawing, a female figure faces left with a skull pervading and harming her breasts, and Bartow drew his face facing right, hand outstretched, joining his body into hers and embracing her tightly. *Traumbild* (2001), also created after Julie's death, depicts the spirit world and communion with it. The third work, *Give Me Back My Father* (2009), expresses the everlasting love for ancestors and the pleas for the repatriation of indigenous human remains. In the painting, Bartow has shown the ancestor's return, his body cradled by a youth, with the female figure representing one of the netherworld Furies who avenge wrongdoings.

Judith Lowry, a Pit River and Mountain Maidu artist whose home and studio are in the foothills of northern California, depicts the people of Native California and their history, cultures, joys, and sorrows in her works. I selected *Sacrifice* (1997), an acrylic painting of woman seated on a platform next to a little girl, with clouds below their feet and falling leaves in the background. The girl, Lowry's relative Patricia, died at an Indian Health Service hospital after being over-anesthetized by an inebriated white physician. Patricia's mother holds her daughter with one hand while a black-billed magpie—a bird known for aggressively defending its nest—perches on her other hand.

Lowry also agreed to lend a new painting, *And He Glittered When He Walked* (2012), a portrait of artist Harry Fonseca

(Nisenan Maidu/Hawaiian/Portuguese), who passed away from brain cancer at the age of sixty. Lowry renders Fonseca smiling and carefree. He is a heavenly figure, complete with halo, walking on water; dressed in a black overcoat with a collared shirt and tie, his trousers rolled to his knees, his bare feet touching the water, creating concentric circles on the surface. The landscape is stark, with faint stars in the distance, yet Fonseca's halo provides enough light on this moonless night. I wanted to include a third painting by Lowry, but she proposed a better idea, that I borrow an artwork by Fonseca from her personal collection and hang it next to her portrait of him. She sent one of his *Stone Poems* paintings of overlapping figures and shapes which speak about the ageless beauty and messages infused in indigenous petroglyphs. It was the perfect addition to round out the collection.

In March 2013, I wrote an exhibition proposal for *All That Remains* explaining the themes I wished to address and how the artworks fit into those themes. I submitted a budget estimate for packing and shipping the seven artworks from California and Oregon. I proposed potential educational programs and tours, and demonstrated how the Yale students and faculty and the people of New Haven would benefit from such an exhibition. The Institute accepted the proposal and scheduled the opening of *All That Remains* for October 1, 2013, with a six-week run.

When planning an exhibition, one must be prepared for the unexpected. The greatest concern was shipping the artworks to the East Coast, because they were in five different locations on the West Coast. As we made the packing and shipping arrangements, the unexpected occurred: the version of *Paranirvana* in deSoto's studio was no longer available. The staff and I scrambled to contact the Museum of



Contemporary Art in San Diego and the Columbus Museum of Art in Ohio, which owned the other two. Luckily, neither institution was displaying the sculpture. Ultimately, we borrowed the original version from San Diego and finalized the loan agreement. At the same time, I found out that the gallery would close at the end of October, reducing the show from six weeks to three weeks. Nevertheless, I moved forward with the final arrangements. With the final list of artworks in place, I wrote the museum wall panels and the brochure essay, which were finalized at the beginning of September.

With a month until the opening, the exhibition designer and I studied the gallery layout and discussed the placement of each work. Of course, another issue appeared when we discovered that the gallery would not be available for installation until four days before the opening. Consequently, the art installers and I had to work quickly during those days to unpack the artworks from their crates, inspect each work for damage and take photographs of their condition, hang the two-dimensional works, install the inflatable Buddha and test the fan, climb ladders to adjust the gallery lights and install the blackout curtains, mount the wall text panels, and move the empty crates into storage.

The third surprise came with the art shipment. Four of the seven artworks arrived on time, with the last three stuck two hours away in Hartford. Since it was a Friday, the shipping company decided to wait until Monday—one day before the opening—to deliver them. We pushed forward and marked the wall with blue tape where the final three paintings would hang. On Monday, the shipment arrived at noon, and the exhibition was completed five hours later. Fortunately, everything came together and *All That Remains* opened on October 1.

Although the exhibition only ran for twenty-four days, it had a lasting impact. The local New Haven newspaper covered it, and two different student reporters from the university newspaper wrote about it. The Institute scheduled public viewings of *Paranirvana's* deflation every week. The artworks also inspired other students; one wrote a poem about love and loss and another composed a song. A third student created a modern dance piece about her brother's death and performed it in the gallery. A chaplain from a hospice center for terminally ill patients and their families in Dallas, Texas, viewed the exhibition and asked to reprint the brochure essay with photographs in its monthly newsletter. During my gallery tours, I had visitors share stories of their beloveds who had passed away and how the art touched their soul. Additionally, the Institute of Sacred Music purchased Bartow's *Traumbild*, marking the first acquisition of contemporary Native art by Yale since a Fritz Scholder (Luiseño) lithograph in 1975. While that fact is shocking and disheartening, I am confident that it will not take another four decades for Native art to find its place in Yale University. ▼

*Anya Montiel (Tohono O'odham/Mexican) grew up in San Francisco and is a doctoral student at Yale University. She is a curator, educator, and writer for the Smithsonian's American Indian magazine.*

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Left: *Paranirvana (self-portrait)* by Lewis deSoto. Courtesy of the Yale Institute of Sacred Music.

Below: Artist Rick Bartow (black shirt) with Yale students and faculty members at the reception for the *All That Remains* exhibition. Courtesy of the Yale Institute of Sacred Music.

