

Bockley Gallery



Cara Romero

Indigenous Futurisms

Opening Reception, Friday, October 20, 6–8pm

Artist Talk with Juleana Enright, Friday October 20, 5pm

On view October 21–December 16, 2023

Photographer Cara Romero, an enrolled member of the Chemehuevi Indian Tribe, is a visual storyteller. Her images are a precisely woven amalgamation of techniques and traditions that embrace commercial, editorial, and documentary aesthetics. These culminations are rooted in Romero’s impetus to represent personal and intertribal histories, stories, and speculative, unfurling futures. Through this deep knowledge and narrative vision, as well as highly collaborative processes and digital mastery, Romero creates abundantly generative spaces full of potentials and relations previously neglected or actively disavowed by the dominant photography canon. Bringing a dialectical gravity within the medicine of lightheartedness and laughter to vast and complex subjects, Romero is driven by her own identity and positionality, centering and illuminating the experiences and perspectives of Native women in her photography.

Bockley Gallery is pleased to present a solo exhibition of Cara Romero’s growing body of work, *Indigenous Futurisms*. Created in 2022 when Romero began a critical focus on the subject, the five large-scale photographs consider how images of Indigenous futurisms need to refuse colonial narratives of time and ideologies of elimination. In her words, “These works come from a personal place of regenerative thoughts and active resilience. As we Native people continue to heal from past and ongoing traumas, we move from surviving to thriving. We are now in a creative space to imagine our futures while remembering all of our gifts granted by the sacrifices of those that came before us.”

For Romero, the image of the Indigenous future is like its reality: multiple, expansive, and relational—to human and other-than-human kinships, across a breadth of timescapes. Such a task requires holding and honoring the past, and the Original Instructions, which Romero posits as the set of epistemologies and ontologies embedded in communities and their stewardship of the land, in all its iterations. It also involves a deep labor of speculative imagination, of seeing past the horizon—the past being the operative lens for accessing the *future*. Through grappling with these Original Instructions, Native ingenuity and technology are paramount as navigational tools in discerning futurisms. These are technologies spanning agriculture, water, the cosmos, and the production of life.

The photograph *3 Sisters* depicts three women in their respective Native specificity. Romero draws the title and inspiration from what is intertribally known as the three sisters garden—“an example of indigenous science (sometimes called T.E.K. or Traditional Ecological Knowledge) that demonstrates the sophisticated empirical science that has helped tribes live sustainably and in harmony within our environments for thousands of years.” The ethereal aesthetics at work invoke conceptualizations of futurity. Wires strung from their bodies reach up to the cosmos, connecting the women and their wisdoms to the universe they inhabit, and the universes they produce through an ethos of care. Patterns are digitally overlaid onto the women’s bodies, each fastened to a particular cultural vernacular, practice, or production from their respective tribes—their original instructions inscribed onto their skin.

gikendaaso—meaning “she is knowledgeable” or “she knows” in Anishinaabemowin—also similarly foregrounds the power of Native women in the facilitation of Indigenous futures. Featuring Leah Kolakowski (Keweenaw Bay Ojibwe) who is crowned in wires, the image symbolizes the “need to plug into the knowledge of Indigenous culture bearers, our Indigenous women.” Reflected in her sunglasses is an image from a powwow, emblematic of carrying past traditions into the future.

The zenith is the imaginary point directly above or opposite of the gravity point below and is considered the highest point in the celestial sphere. Romero’s photograph *The Zenith* features George Alexander (Mvskoke Creek) playing an astronaut floating in a celestial sphere amongst white corn—a potent facet of Indigenous livelihood and foodways. The image works to upend the ideological myth of the Western frontier in temporal, spatial, and cosmological realms, and positions Native people as intrinsically belonging to and caring for the cosmos and its future. As Romero asserts, “In an Indigenous future, we take our past with us.”

Exhibition text by Carmen Petit.

Cara Romero (Chemehuevi Indian Tribe) was raised between the rural Chemehuevi reservation in California’s Mojave Desert and the urban sprawl of Houston. Based in Sante Fe, she has held solo exhibitions in the US, UK, and Germany. Her current and recent group exhibitions include *In Our Hands: Native Photography, 1890 to Now* at the Minneapolis Institute of Art (2023–24); *Our Selves: Photographs by Women Photographers* at the Museum of Modern Art, and *Water Memories* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (2022). Her public art projects include *#TONGVALAND*, presented in Los Angeles by NDN Collective (2021); *Restoration: Now or Never* with Save Art Space in London (2020), and *Desert X* in the Coachella Valley (2019). Widely collected, Romero’s photographs are in private and public collections including the Denver Art Museum, the Peabody Essex Museum, the Minneapolis Institute of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian, and others.

About Bockley Gallery

Founded in 1984, Bockley Gallery represents artists from across Minnesota and North America, including Andrea Carlson, Pao Houa Her, Postcommodity, Cara Romero, and the Jim Denomie Estate. Its space since 2005, in Minneapolis’s Kenwood neighborhood, offers an intimate experience with art, while its outreach programs to local, national, and international museums and biennials expands the dialogue around what it believes to be the most relevant ideas in art today.

image: Cara Romero, *3 Sisters*, 2022, archival pigment print, edition of 7, 40 x 45 inches