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TOP STORY

MAM gets \$100K for contemporary indigenous art

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Duane Slick, a faculty member at the Rhode Island School of Design, came to the University of Montana in 2018 to create work with Matrix Press. The prints were part of a group exhibition, "The Shape of Things," at the Missoula Art Museum, paid for with a grant the MAM received from the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.

TOM BAUER, Missoulian file photo

The Missoula Art Museum's exhibitions of Indigenous contemporary art received a significant financial boost recently.

The MAM was awarded a \$100,000 grant from the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts to fund two years' worth of programming in its Lynda Frost Gallery, which is dedicated exclusively to Native artists.

Executive Director Laura Millin said the foundation supports artistic experimentation and institutions "in this cultural, political climate who are really

addressing the challenges and inequities and issues of the day in their programming in ways that are relevant to their community or region."

"It's something that we believe at our heart, it's a core value of MAM," said senior curator Brandon Reintjes. "We're going to keep celebrating Indian artists and indigenous voices and providing opportunities as much as we can."

While programming in the gallery would have continued regardless, the grant allows them to think bigger. The work "exemplifies the foundation's belief that artists, through their voices and visions, have significant contributions to make to social, political and cultural discourse," Jeffrey Walkowiak, the communications manager of the Warhol Foundation, wrote in an email. With the help of the last grant, they created "more ambitious group projects that brought in new voices and new artists," Millin said.

For "The Shape of the Things," in collaboration with Matrix Press at the University of Montana, they invited four Indigenous printmakers from around the country to come to Missoula for weeklong residencies. It culminated in an exhibition that surveyed contemporary Indigenous approaches to abstract art.

One participant was Duane Slick (Meskwaki), a faculty member at the Rhode Island School of Design.

He produced about 110 prints in four different groups of work.

"I found everybody to be generous and supportive and really kind of committed to what they were doing and to the importance of it," he said in a phone call. He built new connections in a new part of the country, and will show some work at the Radius Gallery in the coming year. He said it's rare for art institutions to have a space like the Frost Gallery, and that it's likely in the top 10 in the country in his experience.

Another exhibition, "Our Side," was curated by Wendy Red Star, a Crow/Apsáalooke artist who grew up on the reservation and has established a national career based out of Portland, Oregon. She selected four women artists from around the United States to create new work. They all visited Missoula for a panel discussion and other activities open to the community.

Some other projects included exhibitions with RYAN! Feddersen of Seattle, Chris Pappan of Chicago, and Stephen Hunt of the Mission Valley.

In some cases, the grant helped MAM create an exhibition with artists that they only had the beginnings of a relationship with, or to work with new artists entirely, including ones from outside the region.

The projects led to inquiries from nationally exhibiting artists, and increased demand from viewers.

"People had expectations about what sort of programming was going to happen," he said, and "we kept up with that pace" hoping that funding would assist.

The new grant proposal included exhibitions and more residencies with Matrix.

Among the artists they've invited are:

- Edgar Heap of Birds, a Cheyenne-Arapaho artist based in Oklahoma, who has shown his work in the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. He works in many different types of media, often with

messages of advocacy.

- Marcus Amerman, a Choctaw artist, now based in Santa Fe, who creates contemporary beadwork.
- Neal Ambrose-Smith is department chair of studio arts at the Institute of American Indian Arts, and the son of Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, the artist who donated work that originally seeded the MAM's collection of contemporary Indigenous art.
- Sean Chandler, who is returning to art after focusing on higher education at Aaniih Nakoda College.

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