

## San Antonio Museum of Art taps into local art scene with newest acquisitions

by [James Courtney](#) July 6, 2021

With the acquisition of eight artworks by seven San Antonio artists, the San Antonio Museum of Art looks to renew its recent commitment to support living, local artists via its Initiative to Acquire Art by Contemporary San Antonio Artists.

The artists in this round of acquisitions — Jennifer Ling Datchuk, Jenelle Esparza, Joe Harjo, Jon Lee, Ethel Shipton, Chris Sauter, and Liz Ward — were selected by a specially convened advisory committee that included local collectors, professors, artists, and arts leaders.

Seeing local artists experience hardship brought on by the pandemic added a real sense of urgency to the team's efforts, said Lana Meador, SAMA's assistant curator of modern and contemporary art.

The selection process, started by SAMA's former curator of modern and contemporary art Susanne Weaver and seen through by Meador, took less than a year.

Meador stressed the importance of local acquisitions to the museum's relationship with the community, saying that it is key "for people to be able to see themselves in the museum."

"There's a responsibility to engage our community and to reflect our community," she said, noting the vibrancy and diversity of the art scene in San Antonio.

Esparza, a local multidisciplinary artist whose work *Continent* was among those purchased, said that there's a dual significance to seeing her piece enter SAMA's collection. For one, it is the first piece of hers ever acquired by a museum. A bonus, Esparza said, is that the artwork will be housed at a location that her family can easily visit.

"My grandma taught me how to sew when I was eight and her influence is ever-present in my work, especially in this piece," she said. "I like knowing that it will be well taken care of by the staff at SAMA and that it will possibly outlive me."

*Continent* is a 72-by-100-inch quilted work that takes on the semblance of the United States flag but "replaces the stars of the union with quilt blocks that represent gender identity and how our bodies are infinite yet controlled at the same time."

Esparza described the message, inseparable from the medium, as "an attempt at representing a multi-generational collection of women's experiences in this country."

Harjo's work, *The Only Certain Way: Faith*, was also among the new acquisitions. And, like *Continent*, it speaks to pressing, topical issues that surround the crucial relationship between past and present.

The work, an imposing cross made from 24 custom memorial flag cases fitted with 24 Pendleton beach towels, "speaks to the forced assimilation of Indigenous peoples to Christianity," Harjo said.

The striking artwork seeks to interrogate "the undermining of Native belief systems by way of mistrust and deceit veiled in sympathy and salvation."

Harjo, a multidisciplinary artist from the Muscogee Creek Nation of Oklahoma, addressed the significance of SAMA acquiring his piece in an email.

"Being included in SAMA's collection functions as a way of Us telling Our stories, where traditionally We haven't had that voice. Much of the time, Our stories have been made up and told in place of Our true lived experiences, by either scholars or those interested in Native culture. It is a rare opportunity to tell Our narratives in such a public space with a wide audience."

The museum expects to begin showing some or all of the new artworks by this fall.