

**Lakota Emergence. 6-9 May 2015, art exhibit. Craig Howe, curator, and Kayla Schubert, assistant curator. Dahl Arts Center, Rapid City, SD.**

*Lakota Emergence* Art Exhibit: [http://www.nativecairns.org/CAIRNS/Lakota\\_Emergence.html](http://www.nativecairns.org/CAIRNS/Lakota_Emergence.html)  
*Lakota Emergence* DVD: <http://www.nativecairns.org/CAIRNS/DVDs.html>

The opening of the *Lakota Emergence*<sup>1</sup> art exhibit was uniquely Lakota, taking place on a Wednesday morning, instead of a Friday evening, and the usual pageantry and highbrow attendees were replaced with busloads of school kids and a concert by Lakota rapper **Frank Waln**. The intention, Craig Howe, *Lakota Emergence* curator, explained, was to “foreground kids, specifically Native kids.” The exhibit perpetuates the Lakota emergence narrative, passing it along to future generations. In Lakota tradition, histories must have purpose and do not truly exist until they have been shared. In this way, *Lakota Emergence*, has become a part of the Lakota *tiyospaye*, “community.”

All aspects of the exhibit were truly Lakota. Each participant in the exhibit was from the Lakota community: all the artists, curator Howe, assistant curator Kayla Schubert, event coordinator Mabel Picotte, most of the tour guides, entertainer, Frank Waln, and special event guest, Sean Sherman, **The Sioux Chef**, are Lakota. The four-day event was hosted in a rental space in the **Dahl Art Center**. In fact, the entire installation took place over eight days, three days of installation, four event days, and a one-day de-installation. While there were no major sponsors, friends, family, and partners from the surrounding area contributed to the project; including, the **Center for American Indian Research and Native Studies** (CAIRNS), of which Howe is Director, Richard and Lois Howe, the **Rapid City Arts Council**, the **Sioux Indian Museum**, the **Rapid City Area School District Office of Indian Education**, and the **Dakota Charitable Foundation, Inc.**

Howe, Oglala Lakota, earned his doctorate at the University of Michigan, served as deputy assistant director for cultural resources at the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, and director of the D’Arcy McNickle Center for American Indian History at the Newberry Library in Chicago, before starting CAIRNS and conceiving *Lakota Emergence*. Howe considers the installation Lakota because “the exhibit was organized around the traditional Lakota emergence narrative about how Lakotas came onto this world. Most exhibits, on the other hand, are organized to showcase a particular artist or group of artists, or some time period, or some tribe, or some idea of a curator. Lakotas were in charge of all aspects of the exhibit.” All of the artworks and museum objects were created by Lakota artists. The labels, design, catalog, and every other aspect of the exhibit was Lakota. In fact, the event itself felt very Lakota, people were greeted and welcomed into the exhibit, there was no charge, no alcohol, and families were invited, especially children. There was lots of visiting and hanging out. More than 1,100 people went through the exhibit in those four days

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in May of 2015, and each guest had the chance to become a part of the Lakota emergence history.<sup>2</sup>

The *Lakota Emergence* art exhibit focuses entirely on the short narrative titled, “[How the Lakota Came Upon the World](#).” The narrative was written down by James Walker “sometime between 1896, when he first arrived at Pine Ridge to serve as the agency’s physician, and 1917 when it was published by the American Museum of Natural History” (“[Background 6](#)”). Researching the original documents was particularly interesting for Schubert, an enrolled citizen of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, who graduated from St. Cloud State University in 2013. After participating in the American Indian Museum Fellowship program through the Minnesota Historical Society, she worked for the Department of the Interior with the Indian Arts and Crafts Board at the Sioux Indian Museum in Rapid City, before meeting Howe and interning at CAIRNS. Eventually she became the assistant curator of the Lakota Emergence project and along with Howe researched the history of James R. Walker, traveling to Denver to visit the History Colorado Center, the custodians of many of James R. Walker’s papers. “We were not interested solely in Walker as the author of the narrative, but in the Lakota men and women that he was educated by during his time as a physician at Pine Ridge,” explained Schubert, “Before the team went to the archive, we had a list of several of these individuals who we could also research through History Colorado’s collection. It was phenomenal to have the opportunity to hold and turn the pages of such important and intriguing documents and records, some written in Lakota by such significant people.”

Howe and Schubert divided Walker’s 1,251-word narrative into sixteen “passages.” Each number in the exhibit is an important number for the Lakota; in this case, the four sacred directions multiplied again by four to get sixteen, *wakan tanka*, “powerful, knowledgeable.” Each passage was paired with a practical or artistic object from the Sioux Indian Museum (one of the three Indian Arts and Crafts Board museums in the U.S.) or the Heritage Center at Red Cloud Indian School. Howe and Schubert “selected objects that we felt in some way ‘illustrated’ the passage.” Each of the selected objects, more than one for some passages, “span a period of time from before the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty all the way to the early 1970s. All were created by Lakotas and were collected from within the boundaries of the 1868 Treaty, including what is now Pine Ridge, Rosebud, Cheyenne River, and Standing Rock Reservations, as well as the community of Rapid City” (“[Tanyan Yahi](#)”).

In addition to the passages and Museum objects, original artworks by distinguished and emerging contemporary Lakota artists are featured. “After we had objects paired with passages, we invited contemporary Lakota artists to create new artworks that were tied to the passages and objects,” Howe explains; continuing, he and Schubert selected a variety of artists: “Eight women and eight men, from reservations and big cities, emerging and established, working in a wide variety of genres and media. We tried to include works from all six federally recognized Lakota tribes in the US and the one federally recognized Lakota first nation in Canada.” Each artist creatively interprets one passage and museum object(s) from a contemporary Lakota point of view, thereby creating “vignettes.” The sixteen “vignette” [artists](#), a brief description, and links to pictures of their pieces, follow:

Wanci (One): [Renelle White Buffalo](#) (Rosebud Sioux Tribe) – *Bold*

- Nunpa (Two): [Dyani White Hawk](#) (Rosebud Sioux Tribe) – *Anunk Ite and Iktomi Agree*  
 Yamni (Three): [Roger Broer](#) (Oglala Sioux Tribe) – *Bring the Animals*  
 Topa (Four): [Keith BraveHeart](#) (Oglala Sioux Tribe) – *Compassion of the Ugly*  
 Zaptan (Five): [Angela Babby](#) (Oglala Sioux Tribe) – *Bring the People*  
 Sakpe (Six): [JhonDuane Goes In Center](#) (Oglala Sioux Tribe) – *Wolf Track*  
 Sakowin (Seven): [Andrea Lekberg](#) (Oglala Sioux Tribe) – *Man’s Fancy Shirt with Leggings and Woman’s Dress with Chokecherry Patties*  
 Saglogan (Eight): [Michael Two Bulls](#) (Oglala Sioux Tribe) – “...That night, they dreamt of unknown landscapes,” (*comes again*)  
 Napcinyunka (Nine): [Kevin Pourier](#) (Oglala Sioux Tribe) – *Iktomi’s Spoon*  
 Wikcemna (Ten): [Athena LaTocha](#) (Standing Rock Sioux Tribe) – *Wikcemna*  
 Ake wanji (Eleven): [Arthur Amiotte](#) (Oglala Sioux Tribe) – *Vignette I I / Vignette I I*  
 Ake nunpa (Twelve): [Tilda St. Pierre](#) (Oglala Sioux Tribe) – *Ki Co*  
 Ake yamni (Thirteen): [Iris Sully-Sorensen](#) (Rosebud Sioux Tribe) – *Iktomi’s Moment of Delight*  
 Ake topa (Fourteen): [Richard Red Owl](#) (Oglala Sioux Tribe) – *Creation*  
 Ake zaptan (Fifteen): [Ann-erika White Bird](#) (Rosebud Sioux Tribe) – *Woiktani*  
 Ake sakpe (Sixteen): [Dwayne Wilcox](#) (Oglala Sioux Tribe) – *Here We Are*

The curators “wanted to create an event that spanned or rather connected the past and present. It incorporated museum objects and contemporary artworks. In fact, it put the object in front of the artist and asked the artist to deal with it in some way. Its focus was a timeless narrative, but it also dealt with current issues in the region where that narrative took place.” These vignettes “recount the Lakota emergence narrative in written words, museum collections, and contemporary artworks, illustrating that the emergence narrative continues to be a source of creativity, and that the place of emergence” *Wasun Niya*, Wind Cave, in *He Sapa*, “the Black Hills, was and always will remain a landscape of special significance in Lakota cosmology” (“[Tanyan Yahi](#)”).

The *Lakota Emergence* art exhibit was originally conceived as a short four-day installation. Howe describes it as “a very special thing, the type of event you *have* to change your calendar to attend.” Additionally, there were two conceived spin-offs: “An innovative exhibit of high quality that could be hosted by any major museum; the other, a traveling version to be hosted at community spaces in neighborhoods and reservations. The former would consist of the original artworks, but they could be paired with objects from museum collections or private collections.” I visited the South Dakota Art Museum in Brookings which paired the original artwork and the passages from Walker’s work with a private collector’s extensive collection. Howe, who also works in Native architectural design, created a conceptual installation that can fit almost any museum, drawing from and showcasing the museum’s collections in relation to the narrative. The traveling community version consists of re-designed panels and focuses on the link between the artworks and the passages. The museum objects are left out and the artworks are all reproduced, so the exhibit can be hosted where security is low, environmental quality is variable, and risk of damage is high. For the month of October 2016, the travelling exhibit was installed in the lobby of the [Prairie Center](#), a space on the Avera Hospital campus in Sioux Falls, SD. Howe explains, “We are working to take this version to reservation spaces, such as schools, chambers of commerce, hospitals, clinics, government buildings.” The *Lakota Emergence* traveling art

exhibit will always be free of charge. The point of the instillation is to pass along Lakota history to new generations. Each time someone interacts with the art exhibit, they become a part of the emergence narrative.

Though not as compelling as viewing *Lakota Emergence* at one of the installations, an on-line version of the art exhibit is available on the CAIRNS [website](#). I have included links to the on-line exhibit throughout this review, so readers can take part in the Lakota emergence history. The on-line *Lakota Emergence* exhibit begins like any of the museum or travelling installations, with *Tanyan Yahi*, “welcome, I am glad you have arrived safely,” which briefly explains the creation of the exhibit and its various parts. The introduction is followed by a seven-part [Background Section](#). “Seven” representing the Seven Nations of the Lakota is a sacred number within the Lakota community. Background [One](#), [Two](#), [Three](#), [Four](#), and [Five](#) introduce the main characters and the setting for Walker’s “How the Lakota Came Upon the World.” Background [Six](#) and [Seven](#) give a brief history of how Walker came to record the Lakota emergence narrative.

The background section is followed by ake sakpe, “[sixteen](#),” [vignettes](#). Each vignette includes an audio pronunciation of the corresponding number, a link to the vignette, the matching artwork, museum piece(s), explanations of each, and the corresponding section of Walker’s “How the Lakota Came Upon the World.” For example Wanci, [Vignette One](#), includes links to the first part of [Iktomi’s Troubles](#), Renelle White Buffalo’s painting [Bold](#), a [brief statement](#) about the artist and the artwork, and a [description of the museum pieces](#) associated with the first vignette, in this case two miniature tipis. Links to each of the ake sakpe vignettes can be found [here](#).

The final section of the on-line experience is the four-part [Foreground Section](#). Again, the number “four” is greatly significant for the Lakota tiyospaye. Foreground [One](#) discusses the formation of the *Oceti Sakowin*, Seven Council Fires. Foreground [Two](#) discusses the formation of the seven Lakota Oyates. Foreground [Three](#) gives a brief history of the White Buffalo Calf Woman bringing the Lakota the Sacred Pipe and the seven sacred ceremonies associated with the Pipe. Foreground [Four](#) lists the current reservations where each Lakota Oyate now reside. Each foreground section also includes a map which shows the gradual land reduction of the Lakota Oyate between emergence and forced relocation to the reservation system.

There is also a [Lakota Emergence DVD](#) available for purchase on the CAIRNS website. The film was screened for over eighty people at the [Northern Great Plains History Conference](#) in St. Cloud, Minnesota. The 28-minute film highlights the sixteen vignettes created for the *Lakota Emergence* exhibit. Director Christopher A. Ives films Howe introducing the exhibit and explaining the artwork of each vignette. Schubert recites each of the sixteen parts of Walker’s “How the Lakota Came Upon the World.” For Schubert, “It was a very introspective experience to read aloud the written narrative of our relatives’ emergence through the cave, onto a harsh but beautiful landscape, to become the Lakota Nation of our generation’s past, present, and future.” The *Lakota Emergence* film begins and ends at Wasun Niya with Howe explaining the importance of the project:

The purpose of this exhibit was to raise awareness of the Lakota emergence narrative, to pass it on to the next generations, educating them about its importance in Lakota identity and culture, linking those generations back to the original seven families that emerged at

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Wasun Niya. A place of genesis for the Lakota Nation, it is the center, it is the heart, it is the birthplace...it is, in every sense of the word, sacred land.

One purpose for the film was to “document the exhibit, to serve as a record of what was,” explains Howe. Another purpose was to serve as a promotional piece for potential museum hosts. A third purpose was to provide content for CAIRNS “Lakota Lands and Identities” traveling seminars. The final and most important purpose was to reach new audiences, especially classrooms.

Future plans for the original *Lakota Emergence* art exhibit are to find new museum hosts “across the country and beyond.” CAIRNS owns all but one of the artworks which are permanently housed at [Wingsprings](#) (home to CAIRNS). Plans are underway to build a community meeting space within which the exhibit is displayed. Other exhibit projects include the [Great Race](#) exhibit, hosted in the spring of 2016, and the upcoming *Star Knowledge* exhibit opening in the spring of 2017.

I have been lucky enough to view the *Lakota Emergence* installation at the South Dakota Art History Museum, visit the traveling exhibit at the Prairie Center in Sioux Falls, SD, and bring a group of American Indian Studies students to the first screening of the film at the Northern Great Plains History Conference. Each time, I gain a greater appreciation of the depth of the exhibit, and when my students viewed the film they spent hours clicking through the on-line exhibit on the CAIRNS website. As an instructor of Native Literature and Lakota Studies, the educational aspects of the *Lakota Emergence* art exhibit are, for me, the most appealing; though, each time I visit the exhibit, I too learn something new and exciting. For these reasons, I believe vignette [Topa](#), [Keith BraveHeart's](#), *Compassion of the Ugly* is my favorite. I feel the vignette encapsulates the entire *Lakota Emergence* project.

Vignette Topa begins with the passage from Walker’s “How the Lakota Came Upon the World,” which describes Anunke Ite, the double faced woman, preparing for the arrival of her relatives, the Pte people: “She dried the flesh and tanned the skins, and gathered much meat and many robes and soft tanned skins. She made clothes for a man and for a woman and decked them with colors. Then she made a pack of the clothes and choice bits of the meat.” The museum piece chosen for this vignette was a cradle cover made by Fearful Woman for her granddaughter Nellie Eagle Staff. While the design is beautiful, the piece is also extremely functional like the clothes Anunke Ite made for her Pte relatives. Each colored strip of quillwork on the cradle cover is associated with the four “Superior Gods of Lakota cosmology: yellow with Inyan, green with Maka, blue (or in this case, purple) with Skan, and red with Wi.” Well-constructed, beautiful, and functional, the cradle cover museum piece also tells a story, serving the same purpose as the *Lakota Emergence* exhibit.

BraveHeart describes his rendering of Anunke Ite in *Compassion of the Ugly*, “I do not think she was uncaring, or ugly in the way we normally would think about it. I think she loved her relatives, and was very compassionate. I did not want to paint her as an ugly woman.” Braveheart’s painting is not of a “horrendously ugly” second face, instead her second face is “supernaturally strange,” perhaps “uncomfortably alluring.” BraveHeart describes himself as a contemporary artist who wants to “interpret these traditional stories in modern terms. I want to

use humor, and irony in my paintings.” BraveHeart’s depiction of Anunke Ite fits with his contemporary interpretation of the section of Walker’s work to which it corresponds. In modern Lakota society, clothes are not made, they are purchased at retail stores, like Target, JCPenny, and Old Navy, labels BraveHeart embeds in the painting. In the background of BraveHeart’s *Compassion of the Ugly* James Walker relaxes in a chair reading a newspaper while wearing a pair of red moccasins, torn between his “western education and his interest in Lakota culture.”

Each person who interacts with BraveHeart’s work, whether or not she/he is young or old, Lakota or non-Native, becomes a part of *Compassion of the Ugly* and of the ongoing emergence narrative through reflections in the small mirrors placed low on the canvas, so children, in particular, become a part of the instillation. Each viewer passes along the emergence history of the Lakota tiyospaye to future generations. Walker’s story, the museum pieces, BraveHeart’s *Compassion of the Ugly*, and the *Lakota Emergence* art instillation are reflected back upon the viewer, making the audience a part of the narrative. In traditional Lakota oral narratives, the audience must interact with the story in order for the tale to take on significance. The history of the Lakota emergence, the “genesis” of the Lakota Oyate, may well be the most important story to be passed along through generations. Every iteration of *Lakota Emergence* takes its place in the narratives of the Lakota Oyate, and in our “reflections” on the narration, we too take part in Lakota history.

*Brian J Twenter, University of Minnesota, Morris*

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> ED: Please note, there are numerous links in this document. These are all active in the html version of the review, so please view that version rather than the pdf if you wish to explore further. As these are all third-party websites, we cannot guarantee that all links will remain “live.”

<sup>2</sup> For the full poster, please see:

[http://www.nativecairns.org/CAIRNS/Lakota\\_Emergence\\_files/Lakota%20Emergence%20Flier%20%20update.pdf](http://www.nativecairns.org/CAIRNS/Lakota_Emergence_files/Lakota%20Emergence%20Flier%20%20update.pdf)

### Works Cited

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