

Art & Sole

Olivia Barney (Diné), Collections Coordinator and Exhibition Curator

This May, *Art & Sole* opened at the Heard Museum. The exhibition features shoes that have been painted, drawn on, beaded and styled by Native artists. Each pair of shoes is partnered with an artwork by the same artist — many of them potters, painters and bead workers — showing the style within which they commonly create. In this way, the exhibition is meant to demonstrate how an artist's visual language translates across different mediums and forms, highlighting their innovation when practicing a new or different method. There are a total of 15 pairings, representing 30 artworks and 17 artists.

Art & Sole takes place in two gallery spaces: Kitchell Gallery, which visitors enter directly after Admissions, and the Alcove Gallery. Guests are immediately greeted with works by Harlan Reano (Santo Domingo/Kewa Pueblo), Lisa Holt (Cochiti Pueblo), Susan Folwell (Santa Clara Pueblo) and Phillip L.P. Vigil (Jemez Pueblo, Jicarilla Apache). Right beside these works is a wall covered with vinyl to make it appear as a brick wall with large paint splatters on it; the exhibition title is displayed in stylized and organic text forms, setting the tone of the space before leading into more of the artists' works. Throughout the exhibition, many of the shoes are positioned as if they are walking and taking a step, which was an early decision made during the curation process to reinforce the life and movement of the footwear, as well as the energy the artists put into creating them.

Many of the shoes were donated to the museum as a generous gift by Charles King, owner of King Galleries in Scottsdale and Santa Fe. King began asking artists if they would decorate shoes for him in 1998, starting with Susan Folwell. This first pair of shoes actually began as an artwork exchange between the two. Folwell would design shoes for King, and he would do the same for her. Since then, King's collection of commissioned shoes has grown to include a variety of artists and styles.

Discussions and ideas for what would become *Art & Sole* began a couple years ago, before the exhibition had a title, an opening date, or even a set direction beyond a desire to show the artist-adorned shoes at the museum. An addition to the exhibition's concept was pairing the shoes with other artworks by the same artists. The artwork pairings were also a way to present further works from the museum's collection that either hadn't been shown in many years or had not been on view at all. For those artists whose work wasn't already in the museum's collection, we contacted the artists themselves or collectors of their work to determine a pairing.

For the labels that accompany the artwork, the artists were presented with information the

museum had in its records. They were asked if they wanted to make any additions or changes to the label text. In that way, the artists had the option to determine how their names, tribal affiliations, materials and artwork titles were presented. The title for the exhibition itself also came from another collaborative aspect in which multiple departments at the Heard Museum were asked for suggestions once a concept was settled on. Adam Scott, a senior graphic designer, was the staff member who proposed the final name: *Art & Sole*.

On the first Friday of May, the exhibition's opening celebration involved local talent from Arizona: an all B-Girl group's breaking showcase (also known as breakdancing), DJ Nina G from Phoenix and artist Chris Murphy from Jupiter Customs of the Gila River Indian Community, who demonstrated his shoe-painting techniques.

By utilizing shoes as a common thread, *Art & Sole* shows the interconnectedness of creations by Native people with their cultures, broader society and the artistic world. About his donation of artist-decorated sneakers, King shared, "At the Heard, they are where they should be, a daily conversation starter about great Native art, leading us into the future step by step." The exhibition will be on view through January 5, 2025.