NUANCE OF SKY: EDGAR HEAP OF BIRDS INVITES SPIRIT OBJECTS TO JOIN HIS ART PRACTICE
Presented by the
POMONA COLLEGE MUSEUM OF ART

“Nuance of Sky: Edgar Heap of Birds Invites Spirit Objects To Join His Art Practice” will be on view from January 22 through April 14, 2013 at the Pomona College Museum of Art, in Claremont. An opening reception honoring the artist will be held at the Museum on Saturday, January 26, 2013 from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. Heap of Birds will present a lecture, “Heads Above Grass: Indigenous Voices of Survival Through Public Art and Studio Expressions,” on Wednesday, January 23 from 12 p.m. to 1 p.m. in The Hampton Room, Malott Commons, Scripps College, as part of the Scripps College Humanities Institute Spring 2013 Lecture Series "Music, Dance, Ritual, and Belief: Transforming Societies." The lecture is co-sponsored by the Pomona College Museum of Art. Additional events will occur during the exhibition, please visit www.pomona.edu/museum for more information.

“Nuance of Sky” unites the work of Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds with historic Native American art objects from the collection of the Pomona College Museum of Art in an exhibition curated by Heap of Birds. “Nuance of Sky” explores the spiritual significance of blue and asserts the enduring presence of Native culture in contemporary life and art. The exhibition is accompanied by an illustrated catalog.

Edgar Heap of Birds is an artist, writer, educator, curator and tribal leader. Recognized for some of the earliest, and most powerfully political, art by a Native American artist, he pursues a multi-disciplinary practice combining the textual and the visual in installations, paintings, prints, drawings and monumental sculpture. Using art as a cultural tool and weapon, Heap of Birds reclaims elements of the past to communicate a narrative in which Native culture carries on, like the passage of sky overhead and flowing water below.

The exhibition, as conceptualized by Heap of Birds, places paintings, monoprints, and sculptures by the artist in dialogue with objects from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including Plains beadwork, Navajo turquoise and Pomo feather basketry. The Native American artworks, or spirit objects, come from the permanent collection of the Pomona College Museum of Art and vary widely in terms of tribal heritage, function, date and materials used. For the exhibition, the artist created four new monoprint suites commenting on the role of the artist and the impact of collections and archives.
The color blue unifies the exhibit, connecting old and new objects from a multiplicity of tribal views. Blue—seen in the sheen of feathers, in intricate beadwork and in semiprecious stones—reflects the natural elements that indigenous people hold sacred, such as the blue sky, fresh waters, and the sea. While the traditional spirit objects evoke deeply significant natural phenomenon, work by Heap of Birds—monoprints, glass sculptures, abstract paintings and public interventions honoring 20 historic Tongva villages—addresses both historical issues and current concerns, such as water rights. Blue-toned forms wrapping around glass vases honor Native warriors and families who perished during travels to Europe as part of the late 19th-century Wild West shows, while similar forms in paintings hint at clouds and fish, venerating the protective and sustaining nature of the sky and water. As the spirit objects of the past visually speak to a way of being in the world, Heap of Birds declares the persistence of Native American spiritual and artistic practices that seek to participate within the same all-encompassing, life-giving continuum today.

Born in 1954 in Wichita, Kansas, Heap of Birds (Cheyenne/Arapaho) earned his Bachelor of Fine Arts from The University of Kansas, pursued graduate studies at The Royal College of Art in London, and received his Master of Fine Arts from the Tyler School of Art at Temple University. A professor at the University of Oklahoma since 1988, Heap of Birds teaches Native American studies. His extensive national and international exhibition history include The Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, New York, and a major public art project and blown glass pieces entitled “Most Serene Republics” at the 52nd International Art Exhibition at the 2007 Venice Biennale.

The Pomona College Museum of Art is located at 330 N. College Avenue, Claremont, and is open to the public free of charge Tuesday through Friday, from 12-5 p.m., Thursday evenings from 5-11 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday from 1-5 p.m. For more information, call (909) 621-8283 or visit www.pomona.edu/museum.

The Pomona College Museum of Art houses a substantial permanent collection as well as serving as a gallery for the display of temporary exhibitions. Important holdings include the Kress Collection of 15th- and 16th-century Italian panel paintings; more than 5,000 examples of Pre-Columbian to 20th-century American Indian art and artifacts; and a large collection of American and European prints, drawings and photographs.

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