



BMA to Open Dana Claxton Solo Exhibition, Including a Newly Commissioned Work

Dana Claxton: Spark is part of *Preoccupied: Indigenizing the Museum*, a major initiative focused on enhancing the presence of Native voices throughout the BMA

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BALTIMORE, MD (July 24, 2024)— On August 4, the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) will open *Dana Claxton: Spark*, a solo exhibition that focuses on the artist's large-scale, backlit, color transparency photographs. Claxton (Wood Mountain Lakota First Nation) refers to her photographs as “fireboxes,” playing on the commonly used term “lightbox” to capture the elemental energy that she finds embedded in the form and to root her work in Indigenous sensibility and perspectives. In addition to Claxton's photographic works, *Spark* includes objects from the artist's imagery as well as historical works from the BMA's Indigenous art collection. By including the physical works, the exhibition provides audiences with an opportunity to draw connections between the beauty and value of the objects and the experience of the photographs. *Dana Claxton: Spark* will remain on view through January 5, 2025, as part of the BMA's wide-ranging initiative, *Preoccupied: Indigenizing the Museum*.

“Dana Claxton believes beauty is medicine,” said co-curators Dare Turner (Yurok Tribe) and Leila Grothe. “Her vibrant vision and the finely tuned skill of her works demonstrate the powerful bond within Indigenous communities, from person to person and generation to generation.”

Claxton's practice explores Indigenous beauty, the body, and socio-political expressions and happenings. For her *Headdress* series, she portrays Indigenous women as cultural carriers. Their figures are covered in elaborate beading that incorporates objects and symbols preserved within their families for generations as well as contemporary items reflective of their communities today. The exhibition includes several prior works from the series along with a new firebox commissioned by the BMA, titled *Headdress—Shadae and Her Girlz* (2023). Here, Claxton celebrates generations of Indigenous women in both inherited and newly made regalia. The standing figures—a mother and her two daughters—wear ribbon skirts that communicate Indigenous pride and honor the resilience of Indigenous ancestors. The mother also holds a newborn, lovingly swaddled in its cradleboard, with ceremonial feather fans protecting her face. The image spotlights some of the many ways that Indigenous women—particularly mothers—maintain traditions and cultural knowledge through time.

The exhibition also includes examples from Claxton's *NDN Ponies* series, including *Easy Rider NDN* (2022). In these works, Claxton positions her figures in an open space that evokes the vastness of the Great Plains and references the Plains warrior societies. The protagonists are outfitted in ways that capture the aesthetics of male-centric identities and converge the symbols of warrior, cowboy, hip hop, and lowriding culture. By engaging contemporary and historical imagery, Claxton examines the ways in which violent conflicts, past and present, continue to shape North American Indigenous experiences. Among the other works by Claxton in the show are *The Uplifting* (2016), a single-channel video that reflects on the struggle and ultimate triumph of Indigenous existence, and the firebox *Cultural Belonging* (2016), which is inspired by her sense of Indigenous womanhood and sovereignty.

The historical works in the exhibition drawn from the BMA's holdings include two pairs of moccasins by unidentified Lakota (Sioux) artists from the late 19th century; a beaded pouch by an unidentified Lakota (Sioux) artist from the late 19th century; a woman's dress by an unidentified Cheyenne artist from the 19th century; and a cradleboard from c. 1880-1900 by an unidentified Cheyenne artist—an important object across Indigenous cultures that was created to represent the warm embrace of loved ones and is typically adorned with designs reflective of Indigenous identity. The historical works in the exhibition were selected by Claxton to amplify themes and ideas within her practice.

The exhibition is part of the BMA's ***Preoccupied: Indigenizing the Museum*** initiative that significantly increases the presence of Native voices, experiences, and works across the museum. Unfolding over the course of 10 months, *Preoccupied* includes nine solo and thematic exhibitions, interpretative interventions across the museum's collection galleries, the development of a publication guided by Indigenous methodologies, and public programs. It represents an exceptionally expansive museum presentation of Native artists and thinkers, with nearly 100 individuals contributing to and represented across the initiative. The project was led by Dare Turner (Yurok Tribe), Curator of Indigenous Art at the Brooklyn Museum and former BMA Assistant Curator of Indigenous Art of the Americas; Leila Grothe, BMA Associate Curator of Contemporary Art; and Elise Boulanger (Citizen of the Osage Nation), BMA Curatorial Research Assistant, in consultation with a 10-member Community Advisory Panel that includes artists, scholars, designers, and community leaders.

This exhibition is sponsored by the Estate of Carolyn Lee Smith.

Preoccupied: Indigenizing the Museum is generously supported by the Ford Foundation, the Terra Foundation for American Art, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the Eileen Harris Norton Foundation, The Dorman/Mazaroff Art Exhibition Fund, the Hardiman Family Endowment Fund, the Sigmund M. and Mary B. Hyman Fund for American Art, The Clair Zamoiski Segal and Thomas H. Segal Contemporary Art Endowment Fund, and the Robert Lehman Foundation.

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About Dana Claxton

Dana Claxton (Wood Mountain Lakota First Nation; b. Yorkton, Canada 1959) is a critically acclaimed artist, who works in film, video, photography, single/multi-channel video installation, and performance. Her work has been shown at the Museum of Modern Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Walker Art Center, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, and the Minneapolis Institute of Art, among other institutions, as well as at the Sundance Film Festival. She has received numerous awards, including the Audain Prize for the Visual Arts (2023), Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts (2020), the Scotiabank Photography Award (2020), and YWCA Women of Distinction Award (2019). Claxton's work is held in public, private, and corporate collections, including the National Gallery of Canada, Winnipeg Art Gallery, Vancouver Art Gallery, Eiteljorg Museum, Seattle Art Museum, Minneapolis Institute of Art, University of Toronto, and the Moose Jaw Museum and Art Gallery. She is Professor and Head of the Department of Art History, Visual Art and Theory with the University of British Columbia.

Baltimore Museum of Art

Founded in 1914, the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) inspires people of all ages and backgrounds through exhibitions, programs, and collections that tell an expansive story of art—challenging long-held narratives and embracing new voices. Our outstanding collection of more than 97,000 objects spans many eras and cultures and includes the world's largest public holding of works by Henri Matisse; one of the nation's finest collections of prints, drawings, and photographs; and a rapidly growing number of works by contemporary artists of diverse backgrounds. The museum is also distinguished by a neoclassical building designed by American architect John Russell Pope and two beautifully landscaped gardens featuring an array of modern and contemporary sculpture. The BMA is located three miles north of the Inner Harbor, adjacent to the main campus of Johns Hopkins University, and has a community branch at Lexington Market. General admission is free so that everyone can enjoy the power of art.

Visitor Information

General admission to the BMA is free. The BMA is open Wednesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., with extended hours on Thursdays until 9 p.m. The Sculpture Gardens are open Wednesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to dusk. The museum and gardens are closed New Year's Day, Juneteenth, July 4, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day. The BMA is located at 10 Art Museum Drive, three miles north of Baltimore's Inner Harbor. For general museum information, call 443-573-1700 or visit artbma.org.

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