



Raven Halfmoon Flags of Our Mothers

Raven Halfmoon Flags of Our Mothers

The Aldrich
Contemporary
Art Museum



BEMIS X CENTER



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Foreword

Chris Cook
& Cybele Maylone



Flagbearer, 2022

In 2016, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum mounted the exhibition *David Brooks: Continuous Service Altered Daily*. Featuring every single part of a 1976 John Deere 3300-series combine harvester, the exhibition presented the equipment in various states: from brass-plated gears displayed in museum vitrines to the trademark John Deere green of its unaltered cab. Amy Smith-Stewart, now The Aldrich’s Chief Curator, organized the show and the exhibition also started a meaningful partnership between The Aldrich and Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, where *Continuous Service Altered Daily* traveled in 2017.

Working together on David’s exhibition demonstrated a very important commonality: both institutions were interested in supporting ambitious and challenging new work and were willing to help artists make difficult things possible. When Amy began considering an exhibition of work by Caddo Nation artist Raven Halfmoon, she knew that the show would benefit from a co-organizer who would share ideas and responsibilities, and who could ensure that the exhibition would be seen by a new audience at a different institution. When she learned that Bemis Center Chief Curator and Director of Programs Rachel Adams was also interested in mounting an exhibition of Raven’s work, she found the natural partner—while our locations may be night and day (small-town New England versus a bustling city in the Great Plains), our artist-centric missions and willingness to tackle big things make our collaborations rich.

Big things, quite literally, dominate in *Raven Halfmoon: Flags of Our Mothers*, the exhibition resulting from our most recent collaboration. Debuting significant new sculptures, this exhibition also presents Raven’s largest single piece to date: *Flagbearer*, a soaring twelve-foot-tall female figure. The Aldrich and Bemis are thrilled to present this exhibition, which features new works alongside those made over the last five years, to provide the most significant examination of the artist’s work to date. Creating new work for this exhibition gave Raven

the opportunity to push her practice to new heights, but exhibiting these colossal sculptures in our galleries presented challenges around every turn. How much weight can the floors accommodate? Can a crane fit through that doorway? These questions, and many more, dominated some of the conversations around planning *Flags of Our Mothers*. And yet, while Raven’s works are on a superhuman scale, these pieces also center us with their intimacy. The evidence of the artist’s hand is ever present, from the tags and markings that encircle many of the pieces to the impressions of her finger drags that cover their surfaces.

The great ambitions for this exhibition were met by a community of supporters whose generosity helped to make these presentations happen. At The Aldrich, *Flags of Our Mothers* is made possible by the Jacques and Natasha Gelman Foundation. Generous support is also provided by The Aldrich Council, the Amadeo Family, and Ellen and Andrew Celli. Significant support is provided by Diana Bowes and Jim Torrey; Michel Cohen, Collection Montparnasse; Agnes Gund; Henry Moore Foundation; and Jeanne Greenberg Rohatyn. Additional support is provided by The Cowles Charitable Trust. The catalogue is made possible by the Eric Diefenbach and James-Keith Brown Publications Fund and The Kaleta A. Doolin Foundation, and Kouri + Corrao Gallery, and production support is provided by the Diana Bowes and Jim Torrey Commissions Fund. We are grateful to our wonderful co-publisher Gregory R. Miller & Company for working with us on this book, and to Greg and Alexander for their enthusiasm and guidance along the way. This was a complex exhibition to move, and we are grateful for the continued support of Crozier Fine Arts, the exhibition’s preferred art logistics provider. These supporters were, as always, complemented by the Museum’s unwavering Board of Trustees, whose enthusiasm for The Aldrich at every turn is essential for all of our ambitions.

As the Museum’s Chief Curator, Amy is always pushing The Aldrich to take on bigger and more ambitious projects, moving our exhibitions into exciting new directions. The

Aldrich’s Registrar, Katie Bassett Langin, and Curatorial and Publications Manager Caitlin Monachino kept the show on track and moving forward toward the first stop in Ridgefield. Head of Installation and Facilities Brian Kibler led a smooth and highly choreographed installation. Many materials were developed in tandem with this show, including this catalogue, which was overseen by the Museum’s Director of Marketing and Communications, Emily Devoe, and Design Director Gretchen Kraus.

Along the Missouri River and relatively close (in Midwestern terms) to the Caddo Nation and Raven’s home in Norman, Oklahoma, Bemis Center’s contributions to *Flags of Our Mothers* are substantive and wide-reaching thanks to the hands of many. As a tireless collaborator and thought partner with Raven and Amy, Rachel Adams, was essential to bridging The Aldrich and Bemis once again and to executing an ambitious exhibition for audiences in Omaha. Jared Packard, the Center’s Exhibitions Manager, expertly assisted with the exhibition’s complicated packing and shipping logistics, and worked closely with Raven and the curators to design a breathtaking installation in Bemis’s galleries, whose location at a former warehouse generously accommodates the artist’s sizable ceramic works. Resources essential to buttressing Bemis Center’s role in this important project were secured by Development Director Ellie Novak, and much warranted media attention, both locally and regionally, were lassoed for Bemis by Communications Director Stacie Gumm. As is true with all of Bemis Center’s ambitions, big or small, a roaring applause goes to its fearless Board of Directors and the evergreen support of the Nebraska Arts Council, Nebraska Cultural Endowment, and Omaha Steaks. Additional support for Bemis Center’s presentation of *Flags of Our Mothers*, along with related educational programming, is made possible in part by Michel Cohen, Collection Montparnasse; Douglas County Visitor Improvement Fund; Mid-America Arts Alliance; and the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.



Honoring Matriarchy

Amy Smith-Stewart



Tsu'-Cus Iya 'y? I (Star Sister I), 2022

Raven Halfmoon’s practice primarily spans body-size to over-life-scale glazed stoneware sculpture as well as painting and printmaking. Some of her largest works to date weigh thousands of pounds and stand over twelve feet tall. Her methods memorialize her Caddo origins and manifest her own multigenerational experience as an Indigenous female artist. Her work’s impressive magnitude and visual force oppose existing stereotypes and biases, originating new monuments that honor her ancestry and her community’s traditions, including the female elders who taught her how to work with clay as a teenager.

Halfmoon’s inspirations orbit many centuries and geographies. She specifically cites ancient Indigenous pottery, prehistoric Land art, and the major earth mounds her ancestors constructed for a variety of purposes, including ceremonial, as precedents along with contemporary artists such as Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, T. C. Cannon, Simone Leigh, and Kara Walker. Fusing traditional Caddo ceramic methods and motifs, a history of making mostly done by women, with populist gestures—often tagging her work, a reference to graffiti and Caddo body tattooing—her sculptures venerate feminist lineage and the power of its complexities.

Halfmoon works exclusively in figuration, hand building her pieces using a coil technique. The surfaces are expressive and show deep finger impressions and dramatic dripping glazes—a physicality that presences her as both maker and matter. Her palette is specific and matches the clay bodies she selects and the glazes she fires with—reds, after the Oklahoma soil and the blood of murdered Indigenous women; blacks, referencing the natural clay native to the Red River; and heavy creams. Sometimes she stacks and repeats imagery, creating totemic forms that represent herself and her maternal heritage while also referencing the multiformity that exists within us all.

Flags of Our Mothers is a tribute to the matriarchs in her life and all the Indigenous women who over many centuries have created and endured, keeping their stories and traditions present, active, and alive.

Voices That Demand to Be Heard

Amy Smith-Stewart in conversation with Raven Halfmoon



Family Names to Last Through Generations, 2019

Amy Smith-Stewart: *When did you know you wanted to be an artist?*

Raven Halfmoon: Ever since I can remember. I was always drawing and painting as a kid. I remember drawing my family and horses, lots of horses. I used whatever I could get my hands on—markers, oil pastels, acrylic paint, charcoal pencils. I was always making something. Both of my parents are very creative and dabbled in the arts. My dad made photographs, beautiful portraits, my mom would paint and draw, and my Grammy too. They all influenced me and encouraged me to be an artist.

Amy Smith-Stewart: *You studied art and anthropology at the University of Arkansas. How did the synchronicity of these two areas inform the shifts and jumps in your vision?*

Raven Halfmoon: I was really finding my voice in college. When I first started at the University of Arkansas, I had three majors: anthropology, studio art, and equine studies. It was one of the few universities with an equine major.

Amy Smith-Stewart: *How did that intersect with your studio art interests?*

Raven Halfmoon: It was all connected, but three majors became too much, so I focused on anthropology and art.

Amy Smith-Stewart: *You spent time growing up close to the Caddo tribal headquarters as well as attending middle and high school in Norman, OK. Your mother, Stacey Halfmoon, worked for the Caddo Nation, is involved with the repatriation of Caddo ancestors and objects, and has written about Caddo cultural history. How did these early experiences impact your creative path?*

Raven Halfmoon: It's always been an integral part of me. My mom always had a connection to the Tribe and so I did too. She worked for the Tribe for more than ten

years. We would attend dances together. My granddad, Hubert Halfmoon, was chairman of the Caddo Nation at one point. For me, it isn't a question of how it has influenced my work. It is just who I am. I feel as artists we talk about our experiences, what we have been through, how we see the world, through our art. This is not only about what I experienced, but what my family, my grandparents, went through too. Hearing stories from my grandmother and my mother about our culture, about what it means to be Caddo, it naturally enters the work and isn't always a conscious decision. As I grow as an artist and a person, it becomes much more conscious.

Amy Smith-Stewart: *There is a strong feminist intentionality in your work as you memorialize Indigenous women, spotlighting specifically the women in your life who have worked to keep Caddo traditions extant. I have read that the ancient Caddo trace descent through the maternal line. Your work honors a history that has not been seen or is mislabeled as anonymous or unknown in many museums. Besides your mother and grandmother, who are the other influential women in your life?*

Raven Halfmoon: Both of my aunts on both sides are very influential. My great grandmother too. Caddos are a matriarchal people. Women are the bosses. That's just how it is. But my dad and my brother have been huge supporters of me too. But I'm a woman and that's why my work centers on women. There are stereotypes of what Native is, what Native means today. There's a romanticized version about Native people and Native art. I counter that by focusing on the strong and influential Native women in my life and in all Indigenous communities. Museums show many seventeenth-century paintings of white men on horseback. The Confederate statues that are now being removed are all of white men. I feel there are no statues, no tributes to all the strong women who carry all of us, so I make work that honors them. These are my offerings to the strong women in my life, and to all

Indigenous women, but they are also what I want to see more of out in the world. I think artists are cultural preservationists. Being an artist can carry a lot of responsibility. You put yourself and your personal narrative out there and then get critiqued for it. But for me, it's important to share my voice and vision with everyone because it isn't only my story—it honors others.

Amy Smith-Stewart: *You talk about being a woman and Caddo, but you also talk about being a millennial and how that shapes your perspective in the work.*

Raven Halfmoon: I'm talking about it all. It's not only about a singular experience, my Tribe, or Caddo legacy, but about how all these experiences intersect. My work resonates with people, particularly people of color and women, because these are stories and histories that haven't always been told or shared. This work is meant to create points of education and conversation. I want people to bring in their feelings too and ask questions. I've been asked, Who are your pieces for? Who's your audience? I feel that there are so many layers to my work. It pulls from ancient Caddo culture and iconography, but I update it for today's world, for my world and how I see things.

Amy Smith-Stewart: *People always look to artists for answers, for meaning. A lot of times we feel discomfort at not knowing everything or not knowing the whole intention or feeling, as though we must understand every move in a work of art. I think the mystery lies also in the not-being-sure, the not-fully-knowing. I feel artists don't have to reveal all those levels of meaning, or maybe some of those layers are just not for everybody. What's important about your work is it acknowledges and pays tribute to lost and silenced histories and how this has affected and been experienced by you.*

Raven Halfmoon: That's what I am trying to do. A lot of people want the full story or want to know about every detail, and I don't think you need it all. When I look at an

artwork, I add my own ideas, so I want my audience to do this too. Once a work of art leaves the studio, artists can't control what people think, how the work affects them. So why would I try to control that in the moment when I'm making the work? Sometimes I get questions, like "Is this about the Battle of the Little Bighorn?" Maybe that's what they see or what it makes them think about. This is why I don't offer too many details. I think too much information can sometimes hurt the work. People might feel as if they don't have a connection to this specific person, that narrative, or even the experience of living in Oklahoma. I like to leave some mystery in there. I do a lot of research, and it is sometimes very heavy material about Native history, what we've been through, even my own family background and removal stories. I need to reserve something for myself. You don't have to have all the information to be moved by a piece. Even when you are physically looking at my work, maybe the arm's not right or the anatomy isn't accurate. I'm not worried about presenting it all. You know what you're looking at. I like the audience to feel some agency in piecing it all together. I hope my pieces spark feelings for anyone, regardless of their history, my history, or the meaning behind my work. That is the magic of art. How does it make YOU feel? What does it remind YOU of? And after that, we can discuss what it means to me or what inspires it.

Amy Smith-Stewart: *Occasionally there might be a self-portrait in there, but they're deliberately novelized and all the works in this show feature an all-women cast. This is consistent throughout your entire practice, right?*

Raven Halfmoon: Yes, it's always been all women. In my mind, they are androgynous, but all women. This is because I want to speak to what I know. Maybe I'll do a man. I'm not saying this is it forever, but up to this point that has been true. I'm not looking at a photo or making works tied to a specific person. They are like none of us and all of us, at the same time. So, everyone can connect to this female figure.

Amy Smith-Stewart: *You were introduced to Caddo pottery techniques as a teenager by the potter Jereldine Redcorn. How did this introduction happen? How did her teachings inform your own interest in working with clay?*

Raven Halfmoon: Yes, it was with Jeri Redcorn. She is a world-famous traditional Caddo potter, and she has been instrumental in revitalizing and passing on this knowledge to new generations. My mom and I visited her when I was thirteen years old. We did several sessions at her home and learned from her about ancient Caddo pottery methods. That's where I first learned about coil building. All the Caddo pots are coil built. Then in college I learned how to hand build and throw on a wheel. I also went on archaeological surveys with my anthropology courses. I held pots my ancestors made that were hundreds of years old. Caddos are renowned potters, making beautiful pieces with intricate designs, engravings, and etchings. Pots ranged from water bottles to tri-pods and even effigy pots. Caddo people have been working with clay for many thousands of years. All these points come together for me, both in the process of making and the learning about this ancestral history. It's always about an entanglement of past, present, and future in my work.

Amy Smith-Stewart: *You have a very specific palette: both in the clay bodies you select and the glazes you fire in. There are a lot of reds, browns, blacks, and creams, and this too connects back to the land, specifically the red dirt of Oklahoma, which is striking. Geography is another agent in the work.*

Raven Halfmoon: Yes, it has always had a big influence on me. Caddos have always used dark clays, along with other clays from the homelands. When the clay is pit fired, it turns black. It is then polished and engraved with designs that look a lot like tattoos. Caddos engaged in body modification like piercings and tattoos. This

is why I am using stoneware, and dark chocolate and black clay bodies, because to me they resemble the earth. I don't use porcelain because I don't have a tie to it culturally. Also, my work is tough, it needs to be strong, and so do the materials I use. I need something I can push around and be able to build into large pieces that are sturdy. I ask a lot of the clay. My relationship with clay is my first relationship. It's really the love of my life.

Amy Smith-Stewart: *You really do stretch the limits of clay, working in scales that soar and tower. You have acknowledged sites like the Serpent Mound in Ohio and the Caddo Mounds in eastern Texas as pre-contact examples.*

Raven Halfmoon: When I was in school, I was learning about these huge earthworks, the Serpent Mound in Ohio, Moundsville in Alabama, and the Spiro Mounds in eastern Oklahoma. My Caddo ancestors were mound builders. I am drawn to these epic earthworks but also to the Olmec in present-day Mexico and the moai on Rapa Nui (Easter Island). The pieces they produced, often heads, are colossal in size and commanding in stature. How they were made, how they have endured, and how they brought communities together have been inspirational to me. Now that I am making such large sculptures, community has become an important and critical aspect of my building process too.

Amy Smith-Stewart: *Your desire to work bigger has driven you to engage in residencies with supersize kilns from the Archie Bray Foundation in Helena, Montana (where you were a resident for more than five years) to California State University in Long Beach (CSULB). Like the creation of those ancient land art pieces, working within these residencies also involves a community, because you can't make work at this scale alone in the studio. Can you talk about when you started working so big? Why is it so important to make work that is over life-size?*

Raven Halfmoon: I've always worked large, even when I was in school. I have always been struck when a piece can make us feel small or humbled when we stand in front it, and when something is that big, it transports you out of this place. It reminds you how large our world is—like the scale of a mountain range. It makes you think holistically too, which is a Native way to think about how we are all connected energy-wise, it's not just about us; we are all a part of it, and we are all one. Making works on such an immense scale gives them a voice that demands to be heard. Wherever I go, I max out the kilns. When I was in college, the kilns were four feet tall, so I started making heads that were four feet high. Whatever the size of the kiln, that's what I build to. Archie Bray has a five-foot kiln. CSULB has an eight-foot kiln, Missoula too. At CSULB, where I just built my largest works to date, I had five people assisting me.

Amy Smith-Stewart: *Taking up space was a big part of the early feminist art movement in the 1970s. The works you made at CSULB rival architectural scale. When works are human in scale, you can't help but connect them to you. Your works never feel specific—they confront you with an immense presence that feels larger than us.*

Raven Halfmoon: They're taking up space on the scale of a landscape. I think I've always been drawn to places where you feel tied to a higher power. And I'm not talking about God. It can be whatever you want it to be. I'm talking about a place of quiet grandeur. When I moved to Montana, I would go river rafting. I'd be in the middle of the mountains and an eagle would circle above, and it would get very quiet—these moments when you feel connected to everything around you. I've had that same feeling in front of a work of art. I want people to experience that with my work too. So, I think that's part of the reasoning behind the larger scale. I want the work to embody this grandeur.

Amy Smith-Stewart: *When did you first find the kilns, as I know you started as a painter?*

Raven Halfmoon: I did start as a painter. I took my first ceramics class my second semester freshman year, so early on. But all freshman year, I was a painter. I would stretch my own canvases and paint on four- and five-foot sizes. Big paintings, lush, gestural, and physical. For a long time, I felt like there wasn't a tie between my paintings and ceramics. But now you can obviously see that these works are also paintings.

Amy Smith-Stewart: *I know some artists find the glazing technique to be like painting.*

Raven Halfmoon: You can do different things. You can paint. You can spray. A lot of people dip.

Amy Smith-Stewart: *What do you do?*

Raven Halfmoon: I paint with a really big paint brush. The painting is important to me. You can see the connections between the two.

Amy Smith-Stewart: *When you were painting was it figurative too?*

Raven Halfmoon: I have always been interested in the figure. I think of my clay sculptures as paintings in the round. That's why I haven't moved on to spraying or pouring, because I like the glaze to drip.

Amy Smith-Stewart: *I have thought of the drips as tears and blood, evidence of trauma.*

Raven Halfmoon: That's all true. And that's why I choose the colors I use. There is trauma in them. They're supposed to be confrontational. That's the emotion I feel when I'm reading about my own family and Tribe's history and experiences.

Amy Smith-Stewart: *Their sheer physicality also is evidenced in these deep finger impressions that are alive*

in the work. They also acknowledge that there is a lot of your labor in the making. Your fingerprints are all over the surfaces, very much a part of them, a buildup of marks that dramatize the experience of being in front of the works.

Raven Halfmoon: I don't want any of my pieces to look machine-made. You're supposed to see the human experience. That's the main thing I want you to see. You can see my thumbprints and finger drags on them. I show touch and expression. There's a humanity that's active in all of my work.

Amy Smith-Stewart: *They are all coil built too?*

Raven Halfmoon: They are all coil built and hollow. Generally, an entire piece is about three inches thick. But sometimes there are sections that are six inches or more. They're very dome-like, so they fire well.

Amy Smith-Stewart: *You've been on a residency circuit for many years now. You've been working in an environment where there's not a lot of personal space, because everyone can see what you're doing. Now that you've set up your studio in Norman, what has that been like, being back home?*

Raven Halfmoon: This is my first private studio space. It was important for me to be in Norman. My family is here. My Tribe is here in Oklahoma as well. But there are definitely pros and cons. In a residency, all the equipment is there, and there are also spontaneous conversations that happen. We are all sharing the same experience, trying to connect through the work and bouncing ideas off each other. I do miss that. I am thinking about creating a mini-residency here in my own studio, where I can invite friends who want to visit Oklahoma. They can share the space with me, fire in the kiln, and be here for two or three weeks. But I'm excited to have the space to myself too. Although I am still attending three residencies this year!

Amy Smith-Stewart: *Where are you going?*

Raven Halfmoon: I’m going to Michigan State in Kalamazoo. They have awesome facilities. Big kilns. I’m teaching a workshop there but will also be able to work freely in their studio. I’m also going back to the Archie Bray in July. I’m doing a project with Cannupa Hanska Luger. We’re going to be making work that is all pit fired and also working with the Archie Bray to design a community building for Indigenous arts. And then I’m going to the Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts in Little Rock in the fall. They have a new museum building that’s about to open. I’ll be their first artist-in-residence in October. I’ll be there for six weeks. Now I am starting to wonder when I am going to make work at home!

Amy Smith-Stewart: *For some of the larger works you make, you do have to go back to glaze since they need many months to dry.*

Raven Halfmoon: Yes. My residency at CSULB has turned into a two-year run. Christopher Miles (Professor, School of Art; Program Head, Ceramic Arts, Director; and Co-founder, Center for Contemporary Ceramics) and Tony Marsh (Professor Emeritus, School of Art; Co-founder, Center for Contemporary Ceramics) have done so much for me and my career. They really let me, and so many artists, work freely and they have supported our efforts and the processes. There are very few places like that.

Amy Smith-Stewart: *Which brings me to one of the centerpieces made for this show, Flagbearer. It is your largest to date, standing over twelve feet tall, and depicts a singular Native female power figure. She is composed out of three stacked elements and is held together by a steel armature. You use figuration as an instrument of social justice. Whom does she memorialize? And do you think about making work out in the public realm under the open sky?*

Raven Halfmoon: Yes. That’s what I imagined when I made all this new work. It was made to be in a public space, an institution. That’s where I envision them and that’s where I want them to be. I obviously love clay and will continue to work with it, but there could be a bigger project in bronze or stone. I have worked in bronze but not on such a large scale. Clay is important, but I’m not a ceramicist. I’m not tied to any medium.

Amy Smith-Stewart: *What kind of stone are you thinking about?*

Raven Halfmoon: I’m thinking about quartz. It was important to the Caddo too. Caddo people worked with quartz and traded it as well as copper and turquoise. There is also a lot of shell that was used in the Caddo area. So I’m considering these and other materials that continue to pay homage to ancestral homelands, people, and my heritage.

Amy Smith-Stewart: *Can you talk about some of the recurring devices in the work? I am thinking about the intertwining scrolls and spirals specifically, as well as the facial and body tattooing. Which are appropriated and which are purely imagined? Stars have made a recent appearance in your newest works. Several works in this show are adorned with them, and the exhibition’s title—Flags of Our Mothers—also references this new subject.*

Raven Halfmoon: The stars are new. I use many symbols in my work, including the cross, which to some Native cultures and to me represents the four cardinal points, and the spiral, which I have tattooed on my body. Stars are age-old symbols and have been used by many Native Tribes and within Caddo culture too. I incorporate powerful ancient Caddo symbols that represent me, my family, and my lineage. The spiral represents the Red River. The Caddos lived along the great bend in the Red River going back at least five thousand years. I added the stars because they are so iconic and are associated

with the United States. But I am flipping the script. The star’s symbolism is much older than its appearance on the American flag. The stars were notable symbols for many different Native Tribes. There are other histories that are not the version we were taught and had to learn about in school. The glazes, the reds, blacks, and creams, are also very graphic. The works in this show, *Flags of Our Mothers*, represent new flags, a new nation. But not new histories, just histories that we haven’t heard or seen.

Amy Smith-Stewart: *You also “tag” your pieces or sometimes inscribe them with phrases, marks, and dates. You often title works in Caddo—venerating a language that has been silenced and excised—by activating it. Why is “naming” such an important gesture in your work?*

Raven Halfmoon: I follow a lot of graffiti artists on Instagram. The signing started when I was a senior in college. All the painters would sign their names on the front of their works. But with sculpture, it would always be on the bottom, where no one could see it. So I decided to claim it and write my name big and graphic right on the surfaces of my ceramic works. The artist Ruby Neri does it too. You know, whenever you put your name on something, people ask, who is that? I am sharing my name and spotlighting where I come from. It’s a form of power and acknowledgment. I am asserting my ancestry too.

Amy Smith-Stewart: *One of the works in the show, Family Names to Last Through Generations, 2019, has the name McCarty tagged on one side and Halfmoon on the other. Who’s McCarty?*

Raven Halfmoon: So that’s my name as well. I have both sides of my family represented: Halfmoon and McCarty. Halfmoon is my mom and McCarty is my dad. I wanted to recognize them both. There is also no front or backside to my work. They are meant to be read in the round.

Amy Smith-Stewart: *What do the Xs symbolize?*

Raven Halfmoon: A few different things. They are crosshatches that originate from drawing, like the planes of the face. It can mean “X marks the spot,” like a target. It’s also referencing a body tattoo. I also include circles, which can mean many different things, but when I put it on a face, it is a form of adornment like blush.

Amy Smith-Stewart: *There’s a lot to get excited about with this new show: new imagery, your biggest scale to date. It also brings together five years of work. Can you reveal where you’re headed next?*

Raven Halfmoon: I want to bring in some flora and fauna from Oklahoma. Maybe more colors too. I might even get more painterly, perhaps rendering images directly onto the surfaces of my sculptures. For me, this show is like a mini-retrospective. I haven’t been able to see all of this work together in one place before.



The Future of Legacy

Rachel Adams



Weeping Willow Women, 2022

As an artist, a citizen of the Caddo Nation, and a Native American woman, born and raised in Oklahoma, Raven Halfmoon is ultimately a forward-thinking cultural preservationist.¹ She builds upon the ancestral histories and artistic techniques passed down to her, creating work that speaks to the contemporary moment. By relaying histories left out of mainstream conversations and expanding upon them, Halfmoon culls inspiration from her personal heritage—the ancient pottery of the Caddo and the major earth mounds constructed by her ancestors—and her present-day interest in popular culture to highlight her feminist lineage and the strength found in its complexities.

Studying anthropology at the University of Arkansas allowed Halfmoon to personally expand her knowledge of Caddo culture as well as the cultures of others. She is greatly inspired by the *moai* statues on the island of Rapa Nui (Easter Island) and the monumental stone work of the Olmec civilization (fig. 1), and one can see all these influences in her sculptures that blend traditional techniques with contemporary aesthetics.² In a conversation with Christian Ayne Crouch, she stated, “That’s where a lot of my artwork is informed: really trying to physically manifest in my work these intricate concepts of identity that I was grappling to better understand all through school. Taking the imagery and iconography from the Caddo pottery ... that I was seeing and holding and studying, and reinterpreting that [in ways] that makes sense into my work and on a contemporary platform.”³ She uniquely rekindles in her style the tradition of clay work handed down from her ancestors, the Caddo people. Known for creating vessels, pots, effigies, and more, the Caddo people dug clay from the Red River and its tributaries in what is known today as Louisiana, eastern Texas, Arkansas, and Oklahoma.⁴ The works were often functional, yet elaborately decorated with several types of motifs, including the appearance of basketry weaves, zigzag patterns, encircling bands of horizontal

lines, double-back meanders, chevrons in symmetrical units, even stars and other flourishes.⁵ The designs were often symbolic, carrying cultural and spiritual significance. The pottery was coil built, engraved, pit fired, and finally burnished. In her teen years, Halfmoon learned from Caddo tribe member Jereldine Redcorn (fig. 2)—a self-taught Caddo potter who has brought the traditions of Caddo pottery, including incising (cutting linear designs) and punctuating (pressing a pointed implement to indent or puncture), to contemporary times by studying pottery in museum collections. These techniques are noticeable on many of Halfmoon’s works, including the cross-hatching on many of the faces and the fingernail marks that are embedded in the clay body, adding her signature texture to each work. Like Redcorn and her ancestral Caddo potters (figs. 3 & 4), Halfmoon hand coils the clay and then punctuates it—a Caddo technique that involves layering rounded thumbprint-like forms on the surface. While encouraging viewers to reconsider social and historical narratives through reframing perspectives surrounding identity, culture, and



(Fig. 1) Olmec colossal head, 8th century BCE, La Venta Park archaeological site, Villahermosa, Mexico

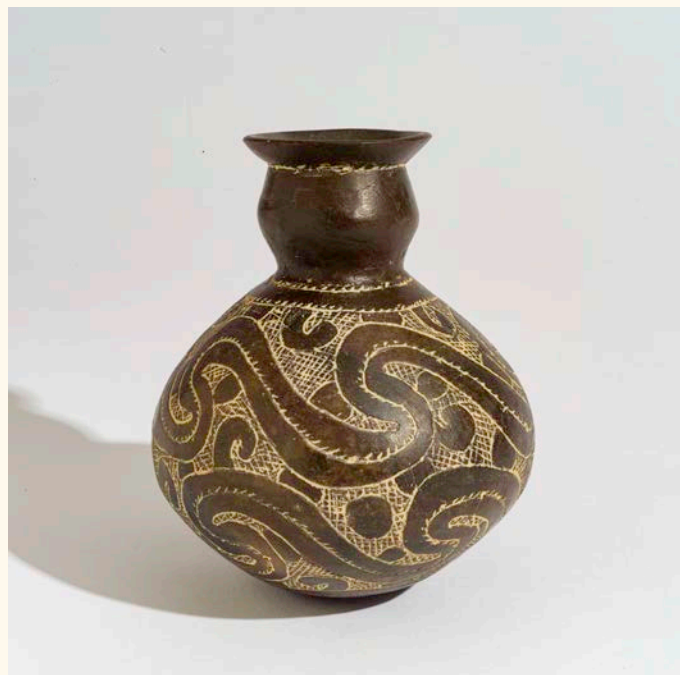
ethnicity, Halfmoon skillfully births body-size to over-life-size works that monumentalize the legacies of her tribal heritage.

Flagbearer, 2022, Halfmoon’s most ambitious work to date, was built in three sections and then stacked. The ceramic figure, standing at over twelve feet, towers over the viewer. It represents a full body, with head, torso, and legs—an expansion from Halfmoon’s previous figures that are usually only a head and/or a bust. Glazed in Halfmoon’s traditional color palette of red and cream, the figure’s face is marked by a circle painted under one eye. With a largesse that pays homage to colossal works found in Mesoamerican civilizations, *Flagbearer* encompasses how Halfmoon aims to present her work: as larger than life, in conversation with natural elements found in the landscape, and at the same time pushing the boundaries of clay. With an ode to the figurative works of artists Viola Frey and Simone Leigh, this sculpture represents every woman and no woman. It helps to imagine and move us toward a new future while simultaneously representing past lives that Halfmoon aims to unearth and honor.



(Fig. 2) Vessels made by Jereldine (Jeri) Redcorn, Norman, Oklahoma

When looking closely at Raven Halfmoon’s ceramic sculptures, it’s not only the size that stands out, but also the details. Using her hands as tools, the weight from her body pushes into the clay, leaving the latter embedded with her prints. Her clay bodies are strong, like the women she portrays—often dark brown or black, similar in color to the clays her ancestors used.⁶ Glazed with a viscous energy that allows the paint to drip and pool, she often restricts her glazing palette to creams, reds, dark browns, and blacks, painting the glaze with a thick brush. The works are “tattooed” with symbolic markings from her Caddo heritage: the horizontal, double-back meandering symbol for the Red River, crosses that represent the four cardinal directions, and five-sided celestial stars.⁷ Her signature, scrawled in a graffiti-like style, is always a focal point, branding the work with her name and the lineage of women that came before her. Representing the Native body through large-scale heads, busts, heads totemed together, and sometimes a body astride a horse, Halfmoon sculpts those she knows—herself, her maternal family members—and gives voice to her ancestors. *Flags of Our Mothers* includes



(Fig. 3) Engraved jar, Hodges Engraved type, Caddoan, Arkansas, 1400–1700 CE

recent works that touch upon the breadth of Halfmoon’s practice. Included are several of Halfmoon’s largest works to date, as well as a range of small-to-large sculptures of heads, busts, horses, and a screenprint—a nod to her earliest medium of paint. Regardless of medium, the works demand viewers to delve into the historic marginalization and continued invisibility of Native people, especially women. The work is unapologetic, in concept, in scale, and in presence. Her work demands that the invisible or overlooked finally be seen.

Women are the protagonists of Halfmoon’s work. While inserting Indigenous culture into art historical systems of representation,⁸ she emphasizes the complexities of the Caddo social structure. As members of a matriarchal society, women held important roles and positions of authority within the community. Family lineage was traced through the female line, reinforcing the central role of women in Caddo society. They were responsible for farming, tending crops such as corn, beans, and squash, and managing the food supply. Their expertise in agriculture was highly regarded, and



(Fig. 4) Engraved cylindrical bottle, Hodges Engraved type, Caddoan, Arkansas, 1400–1700 CE

this knowledge was passed down through generations. Women also engaged in various economic activities, such as pottery making and weaving. Sometimes they were village leaders and custodians of sacred knowledge, responsible for maintaining rituals and preserving the Tribe’s spiritual traditions.⁹

Weeping Willow Women, 2022, showcases three women pressed together next to each other and mirrored front and back. One side of the work is glazed in a cream color, the other in red. The sculpture is thick (approximately 56 inches wide) and it is stitched at the seams with three stars on each end. While the figures create one large plane on both sides, they are simultaneously distinct and similar. Their hair falls down their bodies in two flowing waves, and they stare forward, unwavering yet serene. Halfmoon’s symbol for the Red River winds across their bodies, connecting them to each other, to the clay that the Caddos used, to their ancestral homeland. Opposite in scale to *Weeping Willow Women* and without its repetition, *Sah-CooH II*, 2022, is a small head, only nine inches tall. Meaning “Sun” in the Caddo language, *Sah-CooH II* is a work that is inescapably linked to the violence and anguish that Native people have endured for centuries. With a section of the head ringed in bright red glaze, covering the mouth, the work not only speaks to this history of past oppression but to the present. Violence against Native people, and in particular Native women, is significantly higher than that experienced by other races, and the crisis in missing and murdered Indigenous people has resulted in approximately 4,200 unsolved cases in the United States alone.¹⁰ *Sah-CooH II* solemnly points to this ongoing epidemic, which continues to be sidelined in terms of importance.

Halfmoon’s work is an ongoing exploration of her personal experiences as a Native woman, as well as those of her mother, her grandmother, and up through the ancestral line. These experiences are retained in

the passing down of knowledge and illustrated in her works through their strength and size, the structural and decorative techniques, and the stoicism that these figures portray. At times, the figures are ambiguous and androgynous, yet they aim to highlight the complexities of being Native and female, being powerful women in physicality, engaging the often unheard histories of “the other” and critiquing existing stereotypes. She imbues her work with spirit and stories quietly demanding to be seen and heard. Incorporating contemporary imagery and symbolism, Halfmoon honors her Caddo and Native heritage while integrating present-day elements. Her works fuse the traditional with the contemporary—reflecting an innovative approach to artmaking and Halfmoon’s commitment to both preserving Caddo ceramic traditions and extending the boundaries of what defines contemporary Indigenous art.

1. The Caddo Nation was a confederacy of several southeastern Native American Tribes who were forced to a reservation in Texas, and in 1859 removed from there to Indian Territory, where their Tribal Headquarters now reside, in Binger, Oklahoma.
2. Rapa Nui is the native name for Easter Island, a territory of modern-day Chile. It is famed for archaeological sites, including nearly nine hundred monumental statues called *moai*—carved human figures with oversize heads, often resting on massive stone pedestals called *ahus*—created by inhabitants during the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries. The Olmec people are believed to have occupied a large part of modern-day southern Mexico. The Olmec civilization is referred to as an archaeological culture, meaning that what is known about it is based on artifacts rather than texts. Archaeologists think that artifacts found primarily on the northern half of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Mesoamerica from 1200–500 CE represent the Olmec society. The name *Olmec* was actually invented by scholars, derived from the Nahuatl (Aztec) word *Olmecatli*, which means “inhabitant of the rubber country” and is a reference to rubber production in the area where many of the artifacts have been found.
3. Raven Halfmoon in conversation with Christian Ayne Crouch, February 18, 2021, in *Raven Halfmoon: Oklahoma to Manahatta*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Ross + Kramer, 2022).
4. The original homelands of the Caddos consist of the Red River Valley from southeastern Oklahoma to Natchitoches, Louisiana. Beyond Natchitoches to the Mississippi River confluence, Tribes that claimed allegiance, kinship, or relationships to the Natchez and Choctaws (whose principal settlements were east of the Mississippi River) occupied the lands.

5. Richard F. Townsend and Chester P. Walker, “The Ancient Art of Caddo Ceramics” in *Hero, Hawk and Open Hand: American Indian Art of the Ancient Midwest and South*, ed. Townsend, Robert V. Sharp, and Garrick Alan Bailey (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 236.
6. Halfmoon has created work outside of her home state for several years, but she is deeply embedded in Oklahoma and its ties to her Tribe. While growing up in Norman, her mother worked for the Caddo Tribe, helping to rematriate cultural objects back to the Caddo people in the 1990s, and her grandfather was chairman of the Tribe from 1987 to roughly 1989. Halfmoon attended events on the reservation, including dances and gatherings. She culls from the landscape to inform the colors in her work. In a place where the redness of the dirt seeps up through the ground, and the black and dark brown clays pulled from the Red River are reflected in the historical pottery of the Caddo, the Oklahoma land physically imprints itself into the mind’s eye of the artist.
7. Caddo women traditionally had tattooed circles on their breasts and lines on their faces.
8. See, for example, the essay about her work *Caddo Dancing in Binger, Oklahoma*, 2019, included in Craft Contemporary’s clay biennial *The Body, The Object, The Other*, by Suzanne Isken, Holly Jerger, Caroline Ellen Liou, and Andres Payan Estrada, in *The Body, The Object, The Other* (Los Angeles: Craft Contemporary, 2020), 44–45.
9. Cecile Elkins Carter, *Caddo Indians: Where We Come From* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995).
10. Indian Affairs, US Department of the Interior, “Missing and Murdered Indigenous People Crisis: Violence Against Native Americans and Alaska Natives Far Exceed [sic] National Averages,” accessed June 23, 2023, <https://www.bia.gov/service/mmu/missing-and-murdered-indigenous-people-crisis>.



Flagbearer, 2022
Stoneware, glaze
154 x 59 x 48 in.





HASINAI (Caddo): Our People, 2021
Stoneware, glaze
2 parts; 105 x 42 x 38 in.









Weeping Willow Women, 2022
Stoneware, glaze
72 x 70 x 46 in.





Caddo Woman Warrior, 2021
Stoneware, glaze
64 x 32 x 62 in.





Tsu'-Cus Iya'y? I (Star Sister I), 2022
Stoneware, glaze
42 x 30 x 62 in.







Donoode'tumah (Stallion), 2022
Stoneware, glaze
64 x 46 x 33 in.



Family Names to Last Through Generations, 2019
Stoneware, glaze
36 x 22 x 22 in.









Morning Blush I, 2023
Stoneware, glaze
11 x 5 x 6 in.





Morning Blush II, 2023
Stoneware, glaze
11½ x 8 x 7 in.







*Praise song
for hands*

Kinsale Drake

Praise my mother, praise her hands.
I feel I write about hands too much,
but sometimes they are all I remember
at first: palms smoothing together,
dissolving the edge
of memory. Navajos are hairless, and she laughs,
the sound rolling like ancient waves over
what remains of prehistoric oceans: the fish-
bones and kelp dust that must now fertilize
the great saguaro. The piñons, the prickly pear.
The reeds that bend into baskets, the ever-
birthing swirl. And clay, somehow everywhere
and holding stories to our knees,
tucking gifts between our fingers,
coating words I offer in return to my mother.
We emerge from every remembering
the color of a sunset. Even
When we are smoky—pine trees blunt
Against the sky, her jewelry
Blurred like tears, there is the red earth
Where we sat. Our arms,
Like two roads linked
and blanketed in clay.
In the deep blue,
I follow them back.

Bah'hatteno Ina (Red River Mother), 2022
Stoneware, glaze
56 × 42 × 23 in.





Hey'-en, Ina, Ika, 2020
 Stoneware, glaze
 58 x 48½ x 19 in.



America's Sweetheart, 2022
Stoneware, glaze
102 x 32 x 24 in.





She's Something Else, 2020
Stoneware, glaze
Approx. 45 x 50 x 64 in.



ONE'-TEH, 2020
Stoneware, glaze
53 x 38 x 25 in.





Natural Hands, Natural Rider, 2020
 Stoneware, glaze
 45 x 22 x 43½ in.



Bird of Prayer, 2020
 Stoneware, glaze
 53 x 17¾ x 17 in.

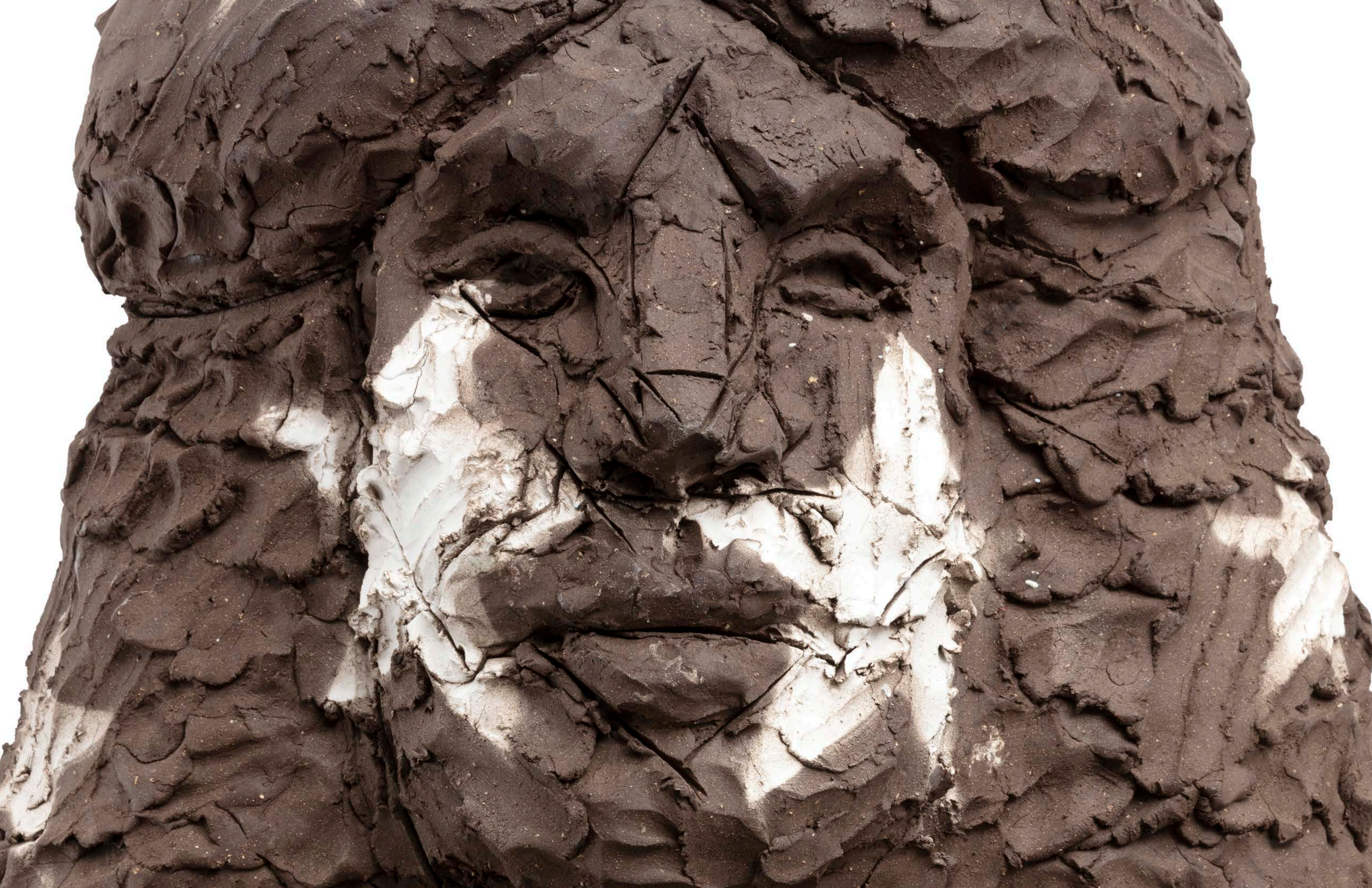


E-a'-ti-ti (Sisters), 2021
Stoneware, glaze
38 × 25 × 63 in.











All dimensions height x width x depth in inches unless otherwise noted

*Works on view in *Raven Halfmoon: Flags of Our Mothers*

PP. 14, 51–53
Flagbearer, 2022*
Stoneware, glaze
154 x 59 x 48
Courtesy of the artist and Ross + Kramer Gallery, New York

PP. 20, 69–71
Tsu’-Cus Iya’y? I (Star Sister I), 2022*
Stoneware, glaze
42 x 30 x 62
Collection of Mark McDonald and Dwayne Resnick
Courtesy of Ross + Kramer Gallery, New York

PP. 22, 75–77
Family Names to Last Through Generations, 2019*
Stoneware, glaze
36 x 22 x 22
Weissman Family Collection

PP. 38, 60–61
Weeping Willow Women, 2022*
Stoneware, glaze
72 x 70 x 46
Courtesy of the artist and Kouri + Corrao Gallery, Santa Fe, NM

PP. 55–57
HASINAI (Caddo): Our People, 2021*
Stoneware, glaze
2 parts; 105 x 42 x 38
Courtesy of the artist and Ross + Kramer Gallery, New York

PP. 65–67
Caddo Woman Warrior, 2021*
Stoneware, glaze
64 x 32 x 62
Courtesy of the artist and Ross + Kramer Gallery, New York

PP. 72–73
Donoode’tumah (Stallion), 2022*
Stoneware, glaze
64 x 46 x 33
Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York

P. 79
Glazed and Fired, 2023*
HD color video, sound
5 minutes
Courtesy of the artist

PP. 80–81
Morning Blush I, 2023*
Stoneware, glaze
11 x 5 x 6
Courtesy of the artist and Ross + Kramer Gallery, New York

PP. 82–83
Morning Blush II, 2023*
Stoneware, glaze
11½ x 8 x 7
Courtesy of the artist and Ross + Kramer Gallery, New York

PP. 84–85
Sah-Cooh II, 2022*
Stoneware, glaze
9 x 7 x 6
Gochman Family Collection

PP. 86–87
Silkscreen (Hot Red), 2021*
Ink on quilted fabric
Edition 1 of 2
25 x 20 (artwork)
30 x 24 x 2 (framed)
Forge Project Collection, traditional lands of the Muh-he-con-ne-ok

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Bah’hatteno Ina (Red River Mother), 2022
Stoneware, glaze
56 × 42 × 23
Courtesy of the artist and Kouri + Corrao Gallery, Santa Fe, NM
Installation view: *Raven Halfmoon: Ancestors*, Art Omi, 2022
Image courtesy of Art Omi

PP. 92–93
Hey’-en, Ina, Ika, 2020
Stoneware, glaze
58 x 48½ x 19
Courtesy of the artist and Ross + Kramer Gallery, New York

P. 95
America’s Sweetheart, 2022
Stoneware, glaze
102 x 32 x 24
Courtesy of the artist and Steve Turner Gallery, Los Angeles

P. 97
She’s Something Else, 2020
Stoneware, glaze
45 x 50 x 64
Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 2020.35
Gift of Richard and Gloria Anderson, Lake Quivira, Kansas

PP. 98–99
ONE’-TEH, 2020
Stoneware, glaze
53 x 38 x 25
Courtesy of the artist and Ross + Kramer Gallery, New York

PP. 100–101
Natural Hands, Natural Rider, 2020
Stoneware, glaze
45 x 22 x 43½
Courtesy of the artist and Ross + Kramer Gallery, New York

PP. 102–103
Bird of Prayer, 2020
Stoneware, glaze
53 x 17¾ x 17
Courtesy of the artist and Ross + Kramer Gallery, New York

P. 105
E-a’-ti-ti (Sisters), 2021
Stoneware, glaze
38 × 25 × 63
Forge Project Collection, traditional lands of the Muh-he-con-ne-ok
Installation view: *Raven Halfmoon: Ancestors*, Art Omi, 2022
Image courtesy of Art Omi

Cover:
Weeping Willow Women (detail), 2022
Photo: Jason Mandella
PP. 18–19, 36–37, 48–49, 58–59, 62–63, 78–79:
Raven Halfmoon: Flags of Our Mothers (installation view, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, June 25, 2023 to January 7, 2024).

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John Berens: PP. 92–93, 98–103
Alon Koppel: PP. 91, 105

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Olmec colossal head, 8th century BC, La Venta Park archaeological site, Villahermosa, Mexico. Photo by DeAgostini/Getty Images. DEA / M. SEEMULLER

P. 41
Vessels made by Jereldine (Jeri) Redcorn, Norman, Oklahoma. Catalog numbers E432918, E432919, and E432917, Department of Anthropology, Smithsonian Institution. Photo by James Di Loreto.

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Engraved jar, Hodges Engraved type, Caddoan, Arkansas, 1400–1700 CE. Ceramic, h. 14 cm, James and Elaine Kinker Collection, Midwest.
Photo: John Taylor

P. 43
Engraved cylindrical bottle, Hodges Engraved type, Caddoan, Arkansas, 1400–1700 CE. Ceramic, h. 25.4 cm; James and Elaine Kinker Collection, Midwest.
Photo: John Taylor

Curators’ Acknowledgments

We feel honored to have had the opportunity to work with Raven Halfmoon over the last several years. When we first spoke about curating this exhibition together (after learning we were both interested in mounting individual exhibitions), it made complete sense to cull our resources towards a traveling exhibition that included commissioning new work and a comprehensive catalogue. *Flags of Our Mothers* includes works Halfmoon made over five years, offering visitors the opportunity to trace connections across her practice, and the debut of her largest sculptures to date. The viewer enters Halfmoon’s world and is confronted by her vast and powerful vision.

We extend our gratitude to the lenders and supporters to this exhibition. Thank you to Todd Kramer and Cielle Hart of Ross + Kramer Gallery and Justin Kouri and Michael Corrao of Kouri + Corrao Gallery. We also want to thank Emma Fernberger, former director at Ross + Kramer, who brought us together to curate this show.

Our hope is that this publication offers the reader background on Halfmoon’s practice, specifically images of not only the works in *Flags of Our Mothers*, but previous and new work she has created. In addition to our contributions,

we want to thank Kinsale Drake for her beautiful poem *Praise song for hands*. We are thrilled to have her voice included in this book.

We are eternally grateful to all our colleagues at The Aldrich and Bemis Center but especially Executive Directors Cybele Maylone and Chris Cook and the museums’ Trustees for believing in us, Caitlin Monachino and Jared Packard for their expert handling of the exhibition’s project management, Katie Bassett Langin for her Herculean effort in shepherding the artworks safely to our respective museums, Brian Kibler and Jared Packard for supreme installation logistics, Eduardo Alfonso for creating digital installation renderings at The Aldrich, Emily Devoe for carefully overseeing marketing and communications, and Namulen Bayarsaihan for organizing compelling educational programs. We also want to thank Tony Marsh and Chris Miles for making *Flagbearer* possible, and Jason Mandella for his expert documentation of this important exhibition.

Gretchen Kraus, thank you for your beautiful design of this publication, which captures the spirit of the artist’s work. Thank you to Gregory R. Miller for working with us to co-publish this book; we are thrilled to have this wonderful opportunity to collaborate with you.

Thank you especially to Stacey Halfmoon for her skillful edits to our texts while also sharing with us her deep knowledge of Caddo history. Your work is so appreciated.

But our biggest thanks, of course, to Raven for entrusting us with her powerful work, which has forever expanded our minds and hearts.

—Rachel Adams & Amy Smith-Stewart

Artist Bios

Raven Halfmoon was born in 1991 in Norman, Oklahoma, where she presently lives and works. She is a member of the Caddo Nation, a federally recognized Tribal Nation headquartered in Binger, Oklahoma with a rich history of many thousands of years in the Southeastern region of the United States. She is also a descendant of the Choctaw Nation and the Delaware Nation. Halfmoon received her BFA from the University of Arkansas, where she double majored in ceramics and cultural anthropology.

Kinsale Drake (Diné) is a poet, playwright, and performer based out of the Southwest. Her work has appeared in *Poetry Magazine*, *Poets.org*, *Best New Poets*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Nylon*, *MTV*, *Teen Vogue*, *Time*, and elsewhere. She recently graduated from Yale University, where she received the J. Edgar Meeker Prize, the Academy of American Poets College Prize, the Young Native Playwrights Award, and the 2022 Joy Harjo Poetry Prize. She was named by Time Magazine as an artist representing her decade “changing how we see the world,” and is the founder of NDN Girls Book Club.

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Raven Halfmoon: Flags of Our Mothers is curated by Amy Smith-Stewart, Chief Curator at The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, and Rachel Adams, Chief Curator and Director of Programs at Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts.

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