



Raven Chacon
A Worm's Eye View from a Bird's Beak
January 25 – April 14, 2024

Swiss Institute (SI) is pleased to present *A Worm's Eye View from a Bird's Beak*, Raven Chacon's first major institutional solo exhibition, organized in partnership with Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum in Tromsø, Norway. A 2023 MacArthur "Genius" Fellow and the first Native American artist to receive the Pulitzer Prize for music in 2022, Chacon works through sound, video, scores, performance and sculpture to address Indigenous sovereignty and environmental justice. The show brings together groundbreaking works from the last 25 years with a newly commissioned sound and video installation, novel iterations of pioneering works, and a major public art mural on SI's building. The exhibition spans diverse geographic contexts: Sápmi (the Sámi homeland traversed by the present-day nation states of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia) and Lenapehoking, or New York, in Turtle Island. Both locations share Indigenous histories and presents that colonialism has attempted to eradicate for centuries. Yet they are also sites where resilience, or, in the words of cultural theorist Gerald Vizenor, survivance, continues to thrive.

Upon entering the exhibition, the score *American Ledger No. 1* (2018) displays a graphic meditation on the founding of the United States in chronological descending order. Made for sustaining and percussive instruments, coins, axe and wood, a police whistle, and a match, the piece narrates moments of contact, enactment of colonial laws, events of violence, the building of cities, appropriation of land and attempts to excise Indigenous worldviews. At the center of SI's first floor gallery is Chacon's sound installation, *Still Life No. 3* (2015). Through a series of speakers installed in a cascading arch, a woman tells the Navajo story of origins, which comprises four worlds below and several others above. But rather than conceiving of the worlds below as the past and the worlds above as the future, in the linear way that Western narratives might suggest, in Navajo cosmogony these multiple worlds still, or already, exist. Parts of the creation myth repeat and overlap, blurring its progression and allowing multiple temporalities to coexist and affect one another. Further inside the gallery, *Report* (2001/2015), a composition and score for an ensemble of firearms, punctuates silence through a cacophony of both power and resistance.

On the second floor, Chacon's new video installation *For Four (Caldera)* (2024) features four women standing on a volcanic hollow in the Jemez Mountains of New Mexico, reading the panorama of their natural surroundings and expressing what they see through song. For a new iteration of *Still Life No. 4*, Chacon sounded a Diné drum from the collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian that had not been played in a long time and recorded the beat, playing it back at listening stations at SI and elsewhere at different tempi ranging from fast to slow the further each station is located from the drum. *Field Recordings* (1999) from the American Southwest magnify sounds of silence to produce noise that reveals the vibrational patterns of these locations. In addition, throughout the building, viewers are invited to take and perform prints of scores. Painted as a large-scale mural on the outside façade of SI facing St Marks Pl, the new score for *Vertical Neighbors* (2024) will be activated during the exhibition with a performance, alongside expansive public programming throughout the duration of the show.

A Worm's Eye View from a Bird's Beak highlights the multidisciplinary depth of Chacon's prolific practice of the past 25 years. Between past, present and future, silence and noise, violence and resilience, Chacon's work proposes new as well as ancient ways of relating through which alternative politics may be glimpsed.

Chacon's first monograph, published by Swiss Institute, Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum and Sternberg Press, will be launched on the occasion of the exhibition. The book includes newly commissioned contributions by Lou Cornum, Aruna D'Souza, Candice Hopkins, Anthony Huberman, Marja Bål Nango and Smávot Ingir, Patrick Nickleson and Dylan Robinson, Eric-Paul Riege, Ánde Somby, and Sigbjørn Skåden, with an introductory text by editors (with Alison Coplan) Katya García-Antón and Stefanie Hessler.

Raven Chacon: A Worm's Eye View from a Bird's Beak is supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts.



Generous support is provided by Becky and David Gochman. Support for *Vertical Neighbors* is provided by the Jacques and Natasha Gelman Foundation. The catalogue is made possible through the support of the Elizabeth Firestone Graham Foundation, with additional support from the Leon Polk Smith Foundation. *Spora* is made possible through Teiger Foundation.

Raven Chacon wishes to thank: Candice Hopkins, Swiss Institute and Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum, and all collaborators on the exhibition and the book.

This exhibition is organized by Stefanie Hessler, Director, and Alison Coplan, Chief Curator.

About Raven Chacon

Raven Chacon was born at Fort Defiance, Navajo Nation in 1977. Since 1999 he has toured the United States with various solo and group projects, composed chamber works, and developed a curriculum for the Native American Composer Apprentice Project, an education initiative to mentor young composers on the Navajo, Hopi and Salt River Pima reservations. From 2009-2018, Chacon was a member of the collective Postcommodity, co-creating twenty-two art installations with the group, including the two-mile-long land art installation *Repellent Fence* (2015). The collective's work was also featured in the 18th Biennale of Sydney (2012); the Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2017); *documenta 14*, Athens and Kassel (2017); and the 57th Carnegie International, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh (2018). As a solo artist, Chacon has exhibited at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2020); the Renaissance Society, Chicago (2020); and the Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2022); amongst many others. He has performed or had works performed at the San Francisco Electronic Music Festival (2013); Borealis Festival, Bergen, Norway (2021); Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, UK (2022); the Perelman Performing Arts Center, New York (2023); Holland Festival, Amsterdam, NL (2023); and Ostrava Festival, Ostrava, CZ (2023); in addition to hundreds of concerts over the past 25 years. In 2022, Chacon received the Pulitzer Prize in Music for his composition *Voiceless Mass*, and in 2023 he was awarded the MacArthur Fellowship.

About Swiss Institute

Founded in 1986, Swiss Institute (SI) is an independent non-profit contemporary art institution dedicated to promoting forward-thinking and experimental art making through innovative exhibitions, education, and programs. Committed to the highest standards of curatorial and educational excellence, SI serves as a platform for emerging artists, catalyzes new perspectives on celebrated work, and fosters appreciation for under-recognized positions. SI is committed to being an organization that is diverse, equitable, accessible, and environmentally conscious in its work, structure, and programming. Open to the public free-of-charge, Swiss Institute seeks to explore how a Swiss context can be the starting point for international conversations in the fields of visual and performing arts, design, and architecture.

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