

The Art of Ben Aleck

This exhibition honors the career of Ben Aleck, a lifelong artist, educator, and enrolled member of the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe (*Kooyooe Tukadu/cui-ui* fish eaters). Born in Reno in 1949 and raised on the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony (RSIC), Aleck's paintings, illustrations, and prints give visual form to Indigenous stories about the stars, plants, animals, lands, and waters of the Great Basin.

One of nine children born to Vira Aleck Quartz, Aleck attended Orvis Ring Elementary School and Vaughn Middle School, both in Reno, where his artistic talents were recognized at an early age. As a successful student-athlete at Wooster High School, he was selected to participate in the Upward Bound Program, administered by the University of Nevada, Reno, which provided support for college-bound students. After graduating from Wooster High School in 1968, Aleck attended the California College of Arts and Crafts (now California College of the Arts) in Oakland. During his time in the San Francisco Bay Area, he witnessed the politics and protests of the Civil Rights and Vietnam War era. He became involved with the American Indian Movement (AIM) and participated in the American Indian Occupation of Alcatraz. Aleck graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Painting from CCA in 1972. He was the first Upward Bound student from Nevada to graduate from a four-year college.

In 1972, Aleck returned to Northern Nevada and received his first solo exhibition, at the age of twenty-three, at the Nevada Museum of Art (then known as the Sierra Nevada Art Gallery). During the 1970s and 80s, he worked in the education department at the RSIC and was later elected to the RSIC Tribal Council. From 2000 to 2014, he could be found daily at the Pyramid Lake Paiute Museum and Visitors' Center, where he worked as Collections Manager and greeted thousands of visitors to Pyramid Lake, sharing the history, culture, and contemporary perspectives of the Northern Paiute people.

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