

[Intro text]

## **Cannupa Hanska Luger: Speechless**

Working with a wide array of media—video, performance, ceramic, textiles, found materials, social practice, and most recently paper—Cannupa Hanska Luger (b. 1979) activates cultural and social awareness relating to contemporary experience through his sculpture and combinatory large-scale installations. An enrolled member of the Three Affiliated Tribes of Fort Berthold, Luger is of Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara, Lakota, and European descent. He creates vivid aesthetic environments where Indigenous voices are amplified through the formulation of an inventive artistic vocabulary that counters a colonialist or anthropological gaze. With the exhibition *Speechless*, Luger provocatively and astutely aims to “flip the Western gaze back on itself to reflect that in present day North American culture, we are all in a cargo cult.”

The concept of cargo cults underpins the installation—a phenomenon that developed as a result of military campaigns sending cargo to foreign lands inhabited by Indigenous people. This happened in the South Pacific, for instance, when the US military was based there during World War II. Cults formed around the supplies that arrived from the sky, when in fact it was colonizing forces occupying Indigenous lands. Luger wisely interprets and creatively amplifies the problematic colonial history and the contested concept of cargo cults from an Indigenous perspective. A large-scale radio tower made of pine trees and abaca feathers anchors the installation, with a surrounding array of speakers made from ceramic and found components. The radio tower and sound system are emulations of cargo, which for him is analogous to power. Additionally, Luger produced dozens of hand-crafted feathers and Native American powwow bustles made from paper, displayed throughout the Newton and Louise Tarble Gallery.

The title further underscores the fact that, as he says, “communication is at the root of all ritual and technological development.” In the exhibition as a whole, the artist asks significant questions relating to human agency, language, and implements of control: Whose messages are muted? Who has the authority to speak? What meanings remain to be seen? What happens when you tune in to the transmissions of ancestral voices that have been silenced by history? Luger’s installation is an invitation to do just that.

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