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CANNUPA HANSKA LUGER'S *SPEECHLESS* EXPLORES CARGO CULTS

Reno, NV (October 7, 2023) –Multi-disciplinary artist Cannupa Hanska Luger—who is of Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara, Lakota, and European descent—takes his inspiration for the forthcoming exhibition *Speechless* from the historical phenomenon known as cargo cults—a unique occurrence that developed as a result of military campaigns occupying and delivering supplies to areas already inhabited by Indigenous populations. For example, this happened in the South Pacific when the US military was based there during World War II. Cults formed around the introduction of foreign food and necessities that seemed to magically drop from the sky, when in fact it was occupying forces bringing shiploads and planeloads of cargo as they colonized Indigenous lands.

The exhibition, on view at the Nevada Museum of Art from October 7, 2023 to June 2, 2024, offers a glimpse into Luger's futuristic, aesthetic realm that is rooted in the formation of new narratives that speak to the complexity and syncretic nature of contemporary life. "As a Native contemporary artist and craftsman of North America, I am motivated to reclaim and reframe a more accurate version of 21st Century Indigenous culture and its powerful global relevance," Luger has stated. In *Speechless*, Luger importantly asks the critical questions relating to language, human agency, and implements of control. Who gets to speak? Who has to bite their tongue? Luger further asserts, "Communication is the root of all ritual and technological development. How to amplify, translate, respond and receive? Whether in relation to our environment, each other, the ancestors, spirit, or the universe itself, desire and the function of speech is the same—to make contact and connect. The exhibition flips the Western gaze back on itself to reflect that in present day North American culture, we are all in a cargo cult. Devoting our lives to the 'unnamed gods' of consumption, wealth and fame, we emulate those who have what we want in the manner of an arcane ritual—prayerful action without practical understanding of who we are performing for, or of what we are petitioning."

Speechless will feature a monumental new installation of a large-scale radio tower made of lodgepole and white pine poles that echo cargo cult structures. The installation will also include Native American bustles made with intricate handmade paper feathers that were completed during Luger's recent residency at Dieu Donn e in New York. Additionally, ceramic and mixed media speakers will surround the tower. Painted in Luger's bright, colorful palette, speaker cones display teeth that bite down on tongues. In Luger's installation there is no sound, and yet the objects, colors, and forms assembled in the space of the museum speak volumes and produce a visual symphony of signs and symbols. As Luger states, "Within the cargo cult of contemporary art, proximity to power is often subliminally (and sometimes explicitly) reliant on saying only what power wants one to say."

Future Ancestral Technologies

The installation and exhibition are part of Luger’s ongoing project, *Future Ancestral Technologies (FAT)*, that explores Indigenous futures presented through a lens of speculative fiction. In the project, he explores how to share the nomadic technologies of his ancestors as we move into a time where sustainability becomes an increasingly important, even desperate, concern. Luger describes FAT as “a methodology, a practice, and a way of future dreaming that harnesses the power of science fiction to shape collective thinking and reimagine the future on a global scale.” Senior curator of contemporary art, Apsara DiQuinzio, states that “cumulatively, Luger’s work encourages us to think about the earth, not as a possession that humans dominate, but rather as something all-powerful with which humans must restore their bonds and sense of belonging.”

The exhibition’s opening at the Nevada Museum of Art is timely: with the launch of a Sustainability Plan and ongoing Green initiatives in 2023, this marks a seminal year of environmental and social stewardship—concerns that *Speechless* addresses. “Luger’s work has gained attention due to his unique perspective and acute attention to the connection humanity holds to the land—and to the responsibility we share in protecting the past while we steward those legacies into the future. *Speechless* speaks to issues impacting our climate and culture in a way that is impactful and timely,” said Nevada Museum of Art CEO David B. Walker.

Biography

Luger was born on the Standing Rock Reservation in North Dakota in 1979, and lives and works in Glorieta, New Mexico. An enrolled member the Three Affiliated Tribes of Fort Berthold (Arikara, Mandan, and Hidatsa), Luger works with a wide array of media—video, performance, ceramic, textiles, found materials, and most recently paper—to activate cultural and social awareness around urgent issues relating to 21st century Indigeneity through his combinatory, large-scale installations.

Through his work, he creates performances, video, and aesthetic environments that focus on Indigenous histories and lived experiences that are not rooted in a colonialist or anthropological gaze. He has received numerous awards such as the Native Arts and Cultures Foundation National Artist Fellowship Award (2016); the Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters and Sculptors Grant (2019); and a Guggenheim Fellowship (2022). Luger’s work has been featured in museums across the country and beyond, at Princeton University Art Museum; the Denver Art Museum; and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, among others. He is represented by the Garth Greenan Gallery, New York.

Exhibition Catalogue

A catalogue will be produced in conjunction with the exhibition and will be co-published by the Nevada Museum of Art and Dieu Donn . The exhibition’s curator, Apsara DiQuinzio, senior curator of contemporary art, will contribute an essay on Luger’s work.

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The Nevada Museum of Art is the only art museum in Nevada accredited by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM). A private, nonprofit organization founded in 1931, the statewide institution is supported by its membership as well as sponsorships, gifts and grants. Through its permanent collections, original exhibitions and programming, and E.L. Cord Museum School, the Nevada Museum of Art provides meaningful opportunities for people to engage with a range of art and education experiences. The Museum’s **Center for Art + Environment** is an internationally recognized research center dedicated to supporting the practice, study, and awareness of creative interactions between people and their environments. The Center houses unique archive materials from more than 1,000 artists working on all seven continents, including Cape Farewell, Michael Heizer, Walter de Maria, Lita Albuquerque, Burning Man, the Center for Land Use Interpretation, Great Basin Native Artists Archive, Ugo Rondinone’s *Seven Magic Mountains*, and Trevor Paglen’s *Orbital Reflector*. Learn more at nevadaart.org.

Land Acknowledgement

The Nevada Museum of Art acknowledges the traditional homelands of the *Wa She Shu* (Washoe), *Numu* (Northern Paiute), *Newe* (Western Shoshone), and *Nuwu* (Southern Paiute) people of the Great Basin. This includes the 28 tribal nations that exist as sovereign nations and continue as stewards of this land. We appreciate the opportunity to live and learn on these Indigenous homelands.