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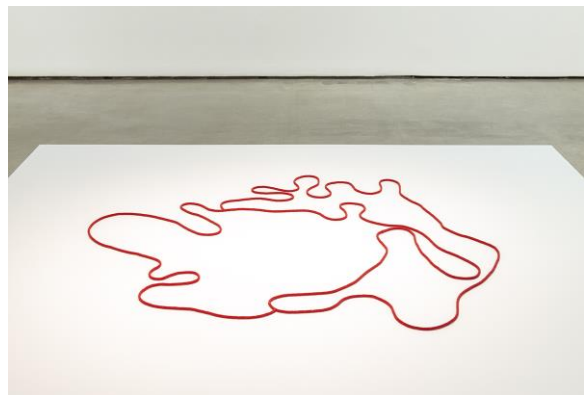
Pulitzer Sheds Light on the Singular Vision of Faye HeavyShield

Faye HeavyShield: Confluences Opens March 10, 2023 / Pulitzer Arts Foundation only venue

Artist Talk: March 11, 2023, 11am CST

ST. LOUIS, MO, JANUARY 17, 2023—This spring the Pulitzer Arts Foundation presents *Faye HeavyShield: Confluences*, a career-spanning exhibition of works by Faye HeavyShield (b. 1953), a First Nations artist who fuses rigorous minimalism with a feminist and Indigenous perspective drawn from her Kainai (Blood) heritage, the environment of her homeland, and her personal memories. The exhibition features a selection of the artist's drawings and sculptures from the 1980s to the present, alongside two commissions responding to landscapes and histories in the greater St. Louis area.

On view from **March 10 through August 6, 2023**, the focused survey has been organized by Tamara Schenkenberg, Curator, Pulitzer Arts Foundation.



Faye HeavyShield, *the red line* (installation view), 2021

“We are pleased to showcase a body of work grounded in ideas about land, community and culture,” says Pulitzer Executive Director Cara Starke. She continues, “Faye has long resided on the Blood Reserve in the foothills of Southern Alberta, Canada. Thus, she has not only worked outside the geography of the mainstream art world, but also outside its roving eye, which has been slow to recognize the relevance of her achievements or that of other Indigenous contemporary artists. That’s changing, however, and this exhibition is part of a welcome shift to broader recognition that will further shed light on Faye’s extraordinary work.”

Says Tamara Schenkenberg, the curator of *Faye HeavyShield: Confluences*, “Faye has forged a singular practice that is minimalist in color and form, poetic in expression, and profound in meaning. Powerfully rooted in the spare beauty of her homeland as well as histories and traditions of the Kainai people, Faye’s work points to the reciprocity and exchange between individuals and their community; between people and their environment; and between the past and the present—each one makes the other.”

“I see this exhibition as a journey across time in two ways. It illuminates how Faye’s work blends the past with the present even as it also demonstrates how her practice has evolved over 30 years,” concludes Schenkenberg.

Exhibition Overview

Faye Heavyshield: Confluences unfolds in a roughly chronological fashion and opens in the Entrance Gallery with a trio of wall sculptures fashioned from wire wrapped in cloth. Titled *Trap in Yellow Ochre*



Faye HeavyShield, *Trap in Yellow Ochre* 2, 1989

1, 2, and 3, each is a variation of an irregular round form studded with spiny protrusions. While these works present as contemporary abstractions, they invite multiple interpretations, including that of dried prairie grasses and bleached animal bones held together by sinew. By the time HeavyShield made this series of works in 1989, she was seeking to translate her personal experiences and the traditional ways of life of her ancestors into abstract, minimal, and evocative form.

At the far end of the Entrance Gallery are two earthen-colored sculptures created in 1992. One is a mound-like floor work entitled *Fort Belly*, which evokes an abdomen of a person or an animal lying on their back as well as a sloping hillside. This domed form is perforated by wooden stakes that allude to the architecture of settler forts and other invasions of a landscape and its inhabitants. Here HeavyShield lays bare the violent legacy of settler colonialism while also challenging the notion of land and the body—via the stakes that have been placed apart and pried open—as sites that can be “settled.” At the same time, these wooden posts represent architectural building blocks of Blackfoot lodges, which have been sites of Sundance gatherings for centuries, offering spaces of ceremony, fellowship, and renewal to the community.

Nearby *Fort Belly* is an untitled cone-shaped vertical sculpture standing on three spindly wooden legs. Made of wood, cement, and wire, *Untitled* (1992) can be read as skeletal armature, teepee, or a hybrid form that is precariously balanced.

These two sculptures are being shown for the first time in the U.S. since debuting 23 years ago at the National Gallery of Canada in the *Land, Spirit, Power: First Nations* exhibition. The first major museum presentation to focus on contemporary Indigenous art, *Land, Spirit, Power* is recognized today as a landmark exhibition.

Reflecting on these early works from the 1980s and 1990s that are featured in this gallery, HeavyShield has said:

One of my earliest and strongest memories is that of my father skinning a deer... the beauty of the animal's eyes, serene in death, the smell of blood, the crackle of fat as the hide was peeled away, and the great taste of the meal my mother cooked. This image and others I saw later in statues of Jesus on the cross, in the architecture of the old homes—teepee poles before the skin/canvas [covered them] and structures left over from the Sundance, in the bodies of the old. When I began my formal art training, these influences surfaced in the form of biomorphic images, skeletal armatures with vestiges of 'flesh,' using architectural and figurative language.

Main Gallery

The Missouri River and the Mississippi River meet in St. Louis, a confluence that has connected humans for millennia. For HeavyShield this historic location served as a starting place for her latest site-specific work, commissioned by the Pulitzer Arts Foundation.

Installed in the Main Gallery, this monumental wall-based installation will be made up of 3,600 small-scale digital images stacked in a grid formation, row after row, like roof shingles. All images come from HeavyShield's vast archive of North American rivers she's been photographing and amassing for over a decade. They also include recent shots of the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi.

The images will be printed on four different materials that absorb and reflect light to different degrees and will be attached at the top edges only to generate gently fluttering, shifting movement. Altogether, the variegated surface of the installation will embody a subtle sense of ebb and flow, not unlike that of a river. The final installation will be so large and its photographic parts so small that the final effect will be one of fragmentation and fragility but also power.

HeavyShield focuses here on the grandeur and poetry of rivers, leaving the viewer to experience the impact of all that could be lost to climate change and development. This is how she describes her own deep-rooted connection to the land and the environment, a subject which runs through a lot of her work:

The environment is an extension of myself because it's always been there. It was one of the first things that I saw and smelled. I consider it a part of me. The landscape is an extension of the body because we're dependent on it, and to flip that, the landscape is dependent on us. We're sharing a space.

Cube Gallery

The second of the two site-specific commissioned works is on view in the Cube Gallery. While the previous installation attests to HeavyShield's ongoing commitment to seeing and recording the changing reality of the landscape and rivers of Canada and the U.S., this installation (still in development) is a response to the mound building practices of Mississippian people, including the site of Cahokia Mounds, located just across the Mississippi river and only ten minutes from downtown St. Louis. Here, HeavyShield will pay tribute to people who built such earthworks for close to two millennia

along the Mississippi River. At its peak, around 1250 A.D., the Cahokia complex was the largest city north of Mexico and more populous than the city of London.

Lower South Gallery

Two of the exhibition highlights are encountered in the Lower South Gallery. The first is *the red line* (2022), a long continuous cord of bright red-beading that will run along the floor in sinuous and undulating loops. HeavyShield beaded *the red line* inch by inch over many months and she continues to extend the sculpture over time. *red line* exemplifies HeavyShield’s use of repetition and simple means—which are hallmarks of her practice—to convey an intricate web of meanings: a meditation on line as a formal element in art; a metaphor for rivers and other natural forms; and a visual symbol of her lineage as a member of Kainai (Blood) Nation.

the red line is paired in this gallery with *I’ll know you when I see you*, a grouping of some 50 unframed line drawings of the artist’s mother that are based on one childhood photograph. None include her mother’s facial features but they trace and retrace—in an intentionally “unstudied” manner—the outline of her body, as if humbly and tenderly searching to reconnect with a loved one who’s no longer in this world.



Faye HeavyShield, *I’ll know you when I see you* (installation view), 2021

Faye HeavyShield

Faye HeavyShield was born into the Kainai (Blood) Nation, a member of the Blackfoot Confederacy, in 1953. She was raised on the Blood Reserve in the foothills of Southern Alberta, where she grew up speaking the Blackfoot language. A residential school survivor, HeavyShield trained as an artist at the Alberta College of Art and Design and, later, the University of Calgary.

HeavyShield’s work has been exhibited in solo and group exhibitions across North America, including at landmark shows *Land, Spirit, Power* at the National Gallery of Canada and *Nations in Urban Landscape* at the Contemporary Art Gallery in Vancouver. Her work can be found in the collections of the National Gallery of Canada, the McMichael Museum, Alberta Foundation of Art, the Glenbow Museum, Heard Museum, the Kelowna Art Gallery, and the MacKenzie Art Gallery.

In 2022, HeavyShield received one of Canada’s top art prizes, an award from the Gershon Iskowitz Foundation and the Art Gallery of Ontario. The artist’s first solo exhibition, *The Art of Faye HeavyShield*, is currently on view through February 19, 2023, at the MacKenzie Art Gallery in Regina, after which it will travel to Winnipeg.

This spring, concurrent with the exhibition at the Pulitzer, the Saint Louis Art Museum will present a new commissioned installation by HeavyShield in response to its collection of historic Plains art as a part of its Native Artist Collaboration series.

About the Pulitzer Arts Foundation

Located in the heart of St. Louis, the Pulitzer Arts Foundation presents art from around the world in its celebrated building by Tadao Ando and in its surrounding neighborhood. Exhibitions include both contemporary and historic art and are complemented by a wide range of free public programs, including music, literary arts, dance, wellness, and cultural discussions. Founded in 2001, the Pulitzer is a place where ideas are freely explored, new art is exhibited, and historic work reimagined.

In addition to the museum building, the Pulitzer has several outdoor spaces: Park-Like—a native plant rain garden; the Spring Church—a roofless pavilion and beloved landmark; and the Tree Grove—a quiet, shady picnic spot. The museum is open Thursday through Sunday, 10am–5pm, with evening hours until 8pm on Friday. The outdoor campus is open daily, sunrise to sunset. Admission is free. For more information, visit pulitzerarts.org or on social media @pulitzerarts.

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Image Captions

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Faye HeavyShield, *the red line* (installation view), 2021

Photo: SITE Photography

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Faye HeavyShield, *Trap in Yellow Ochre 2*, 1989

Wall mounted sculpture, three dimensional, mixed media, paint, wire and cloth, 16 9/16 × 11 13/16 × 4 3/4 inches (42 × 30 × 12 cm)

Collection of the Kelowna Art Gallery, Purchased with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance program, 2001. Photo: Yuri Akuney, Digital Perfections

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Faye HeavyShield, *I'll know you when I see you* (installation view), 2021

Photo: SITE Photography