

Tribally Ambiguous Artist Who Has Been Sketching Since He Was 3 to Discuss His Work at Plains Art Museum Thursday

BY NATASHA RAUSCH



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FARGO — Native American artist Brad Kahlhamer exists in what he calls the third place: the intersection of two opposing histories, one in the Native world and one in the non-Native world.

Kahlhamer, who lives in Brooklyn, New York, and Mesa, Arizona, explores the third place in his artwork, which ranges from drawings and paintings to sculpture and multimedia. On Thursday, Nov. 14, the artist will discuss his concept at the Plains Art Museum at 6 p.m. for the “Creative Voices Talk.” His work, including 58 pieces, is on exhibition at the museum until Jan. 25.

Kahlhamer, who was born to Native American parents and adopted by a German-American family, considers himself “tribally ambiguous,” as he’s not an enrolled member of any specific tribe. He said the “first place” is the reality he lives; the “second place” is the life he imagines if he hadn’t been adopted, and the “third place” is the combination of those.

“It sort of parallels that experience that I think a lot of Natives currently live, on reservation and off reservation,” he said.

In a press release, the Plains Museum said: “Kahlhamer’s art explores notions of cultural hybridity and the experience of navigating multiple communities, as well as the representation and appropriation of Native culture.”

One of the centerpieces of the show is a painted bed sheet titled “Please Pay Me So I Can Pay Them.”

“The bed sheet is a standout for me,” he said. “It’s a place where I would pause in the show, and all the concepts we’d just been talking about are expressed through that work.”

Kahlhamer, now 63, said he’s been sketching since he was 3 years old. He always knew he would be an artist. “There was no plan B,” he said.

Following the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe’s 2016 protest against the Dakota Access Pipeline, which garnered national and international attention, Kahlhamer said Native American art started to come into the spotlight.

“It’s becoming a known quantity,” he said. “People are starting to care about it.”

The show is the bookend of the event series held in honor of Native American Heritage Month in November. Sculptor Aaron Spangler will also discuss his work Thursday night at the museum.

“Native America is a foundational culture,” Kahlhamer said. “It shouldn’t just be a month; it should be always.”