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James Luna: Editions



End of the Frail, 1993

For OVR: Miami Beach, Garth Greenan Gallery is pleased to announce *James Luna: Editions*, a presentation of ten of Luna's iconic, limited-edition sculptures.

Many of the objects included in the presentation featured prominently in Luna's performances. In *Shameman*, for example, Luna, dressed as a shaman, begins with a cleansing ritual. After a short period, he highlights a selection of "sacred" objects that will be available for sale after the show. One such item solicits uproarious laughter: his *Wet Dream Catcher* (1992), consisting of the head of an old wooden tennis racquet with feathers, condoms, and a lucky rabbit's foot affixed to the strings and frame. The artist notes that the piece is "signed and dated," not to mention "limited edition." Suddenly, the authenticity of his ritual, dress, and identity are all called into question, but the grift is Pyrrhic, relying as it does on the fraudulent repackaging of Luna's cultural heritage.

Luna used humor as a tool to simultaneously disarm and confront. “My appeal for humor in my work comes from Indian culture where humor can be a form of knowledge, critical thought, and perhaps used in a way of easing the pain,” he said in an interview. In *Hi Tech Peace Pipe* (2001), the artist joined metal pipe and piping fixtures and commissioned the Luiseño artist, Benita Coultriss, to transform it into a beautiful object with beads. For a moment, the object appears almost traditional, until one notices the telephone base on which it rests. “I played freely with the concept that in traditional tribal cultures Indian people don’t pray to God, they talk to God,” said Luna in an interview. Luna created the object for a performance at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico. In his monologue, the artist laments that the pipestone which, for thousands of years, abundantly met Native American’s ceremonial demands, only became depleted when “Indian people” began to take the stone and “carve trinkets out of it for non-Indians.” Luna’s intended subject was buyers of the pipes, whom Luna described as “spiritually needy.”

Make Amerika Red Again (2016) accompanied the artist during number of spoken word performances. As Luna donned the beaded red cap, he transformed into a familiar figure, albeit one that recently underwent “a change of heart.” With an all-too familiar sequence of sniffing, two-fisted thumbs ups, and grins, Luna begins his speech: “We’re going to build that wall. Actually, we’re going to build a bunch of walls. . . . Were going to build walls around the reservations: big walls, beautiful walls. . . . And you know who’s going to pay for it? You white people.” Despite the occasional outbursts of anger, his speech inverts the rhetoric’s basic sentiment, offering healing and freedom to America’s immigrants. “You can stay and you can speak your languages freely, you can practice your religions without fear, you can wear your tribal dress. You’re free to be cultural, because isn’t that what they took away from us Indians?”

Born February 9, 1950, James Luna was of Luiseño, Puyukitchum, Ipai, and Mexican heritage and lived on the La Jolla Indian reservation in Pauma Valley, California from 1975 until his death on March 4, 2018. Luna has taught studio art at the University of California, Davis; University of California San Diego; and University of California Irvine.

The artist has been the subject of more than 41 solo exhibitions and has participated in over 85 group exhibitions. His works and performances have appeared in the New Museum (1990, New York), Museum of Modern Art (2009, New York), San Francisco Museum of Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa), Museum of Contemporary Native Art (2015, 2018, Santa Fe), Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego (1987, 2019), and Whitney Museum of American Art (1993, 2019, New York). In 2005, he was selected as the first Sponsored Artist of the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian presented at the 51st Venice Biennale (2005).

Luna was the recipient of numerous grants and awards, including the Bessie Award (1991), an Intercultural Film/Video Grant from the Rockefeller Foundation (1992), a Native American Public Broadcasting Consortium video grant (1995), an Andrea Frank Foundation Grant (2000), an Arts International Grant (2000), a Distinguished Artist Award and Eiteljorg Museum Fellowship for Native American Fine Art (2007), a Painters & Sculptors Grant from the Joan Mitchell Foundation (2010), a National Arts Fellowship from the Native Arts and Cultures Foundation (2015), and a Guggenheim Fellowship (2017). In 2012, James Luna was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Humanities from the Institute of American Indian Arts, Santa Fe.

Garth Greenan Gallery is pleased to represent the Estate of James Luna.

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