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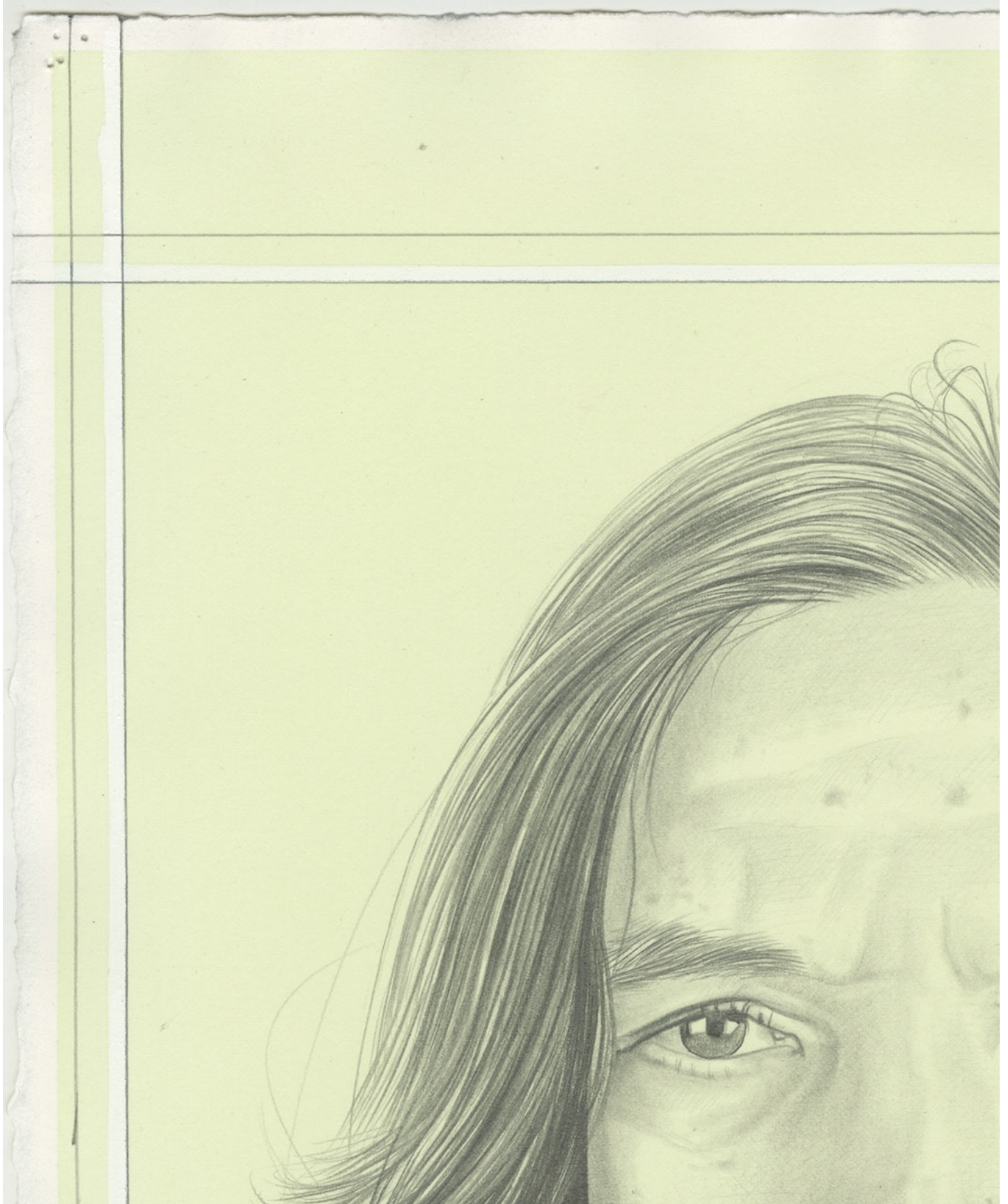
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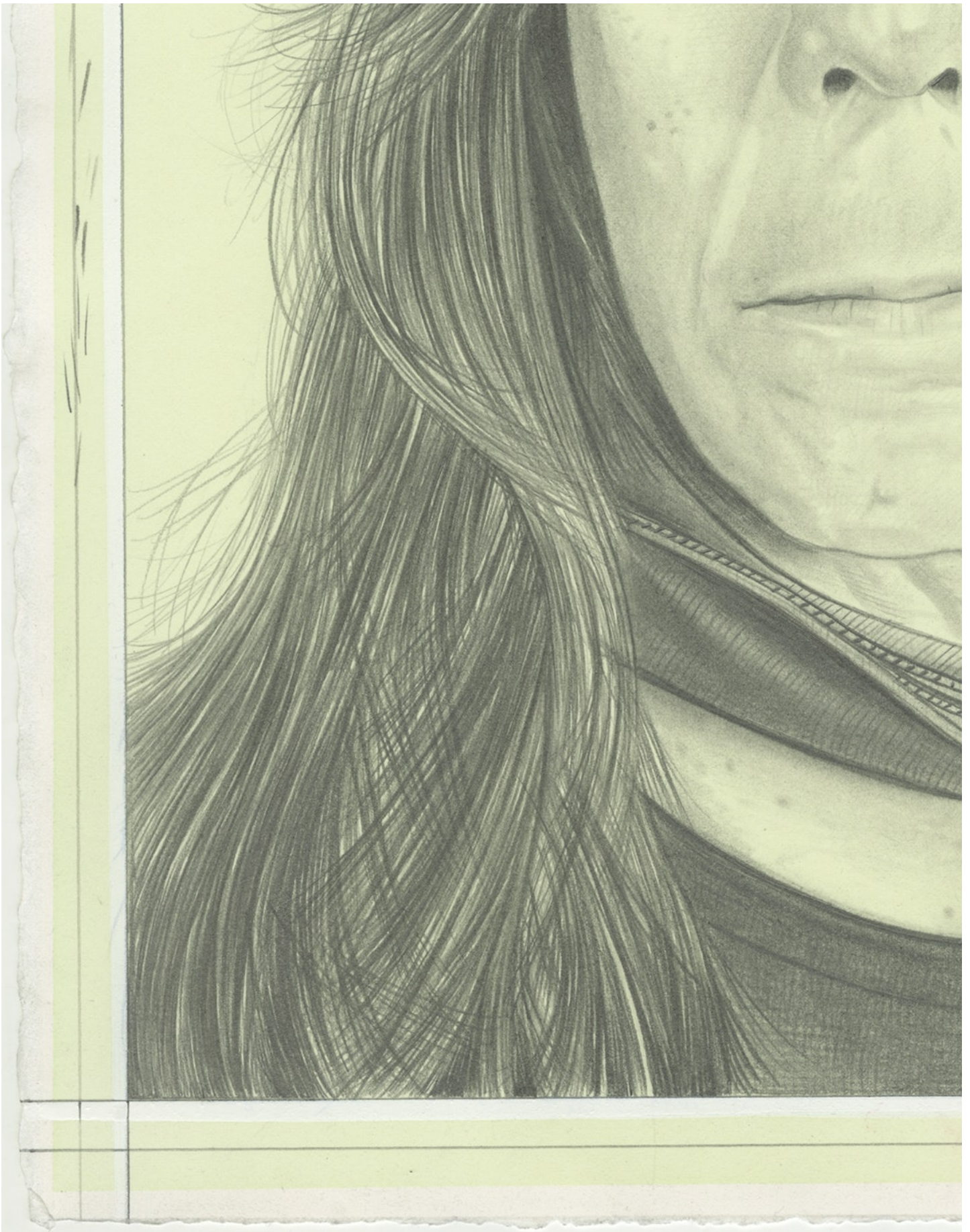
Art In Conversation

BRAD KAHLHAMER with Susan Harris

“I wanted to create a space I could live in ... like a universe—a sky universe.”

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Portrait of Brad Kahlhamer, pencil on paper by Phong H. Bui.

I've known and loved Brad Kahlhamer's drawings since the '90s but preparing for this conversation has given me the opportunity to look at the whole body of his work that includes painting, sculpture, music, writing, photography, and installation—which I now see as stories about his life journey. In the wake of the Dakota Access Pipeline protests and the Black Lives Matter movement which have raised awareness about the structural environmental and racial violence towards Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, and in the contexts of the imprisonment of Indigenous People at the southern border, and of the coronavirus pandemic's disproportionate effect on Indigenous populations and communities of color, I think the stories that Kahlhamer tells speak to the complexities of considering what it means to be American.

Brad Kahlhamer was born in 1956 of Native American ancestry in Tucson, Arizona, where he grew up with his German American adoptive parents, and moved with them to Wisconsin where he attended college in Oshkosh in the late '70s, early '80s. He spent five years as a traveling musician before he moved to New York City in 1982 and got a job with Topps Chewing Gum where he came into contact with Artie Spiegelman, and other underground cartoonists. He left this job after 10 years and became a full-time artist in 1993. Reflecting on his Native American heritage, his formative Midwestern upbringing, and his downtown community in New York City, Kahlhamer has evolved a very personal, vibrant, and expressionist version of an American experience that is a mix of styles, codes, and cultural references that are equal parts autobiography and imagination.

Susan Harris (Rail): So, Brad, let's start when you came to New York, and you landed a job at Topps Chewing Gum. Can you talk about the experience of landing in New York City and what it was like for you?

Brad Kahlhamer: So that was 1982. I was pretty much a full-time musician at that time and raised about 1,000 dollars in cash, loaded up my little pickup truck and started driving. I broke down in Vermont I think or—I can't even remember—but I took a train down to New York City and quickly ran out of money. I answered an ad—I think it was in the *Village Voice*—to go to Topps Chewing Gum. And sure enough, I got hired almost right away. Fast forward to Artie Spiegelman picking me out of this little paste-up bullpen and asking me if I would work with him and his group of underground cartoonists, New Product Development. He was just birthing *Maus*, he would come in and bring this loose leaf folder of *Maus* within these plastic sheets and show it to us. And I remember he gifted me a very early *RAW* cover that was misprinted, although misprinting in those days was really a desired goal, because we were all looking at early German Expressionist prints and things like that and trying to bring that spirit into the graphics world. It was an incredible time, you know, and overall I was just really struck by those underground comics' sense of mission and purpose. I think that stuck with me as a kind of guidepost. They sort of all despised the art world that existed at that time and were interested in other forms of communication, obviously, comics as an alternative and music as well.

Rail: Did their visual language—narrative content, reappearing characters, thought clouds, the sense of time and space, etc.—influence your own drawing? Were these elements something that over time seeped into your consciousness, or did you deliberately adopt—and adapt—them into your drawing?

Kahlhamer: You know, at that time, I have to say I was very naïve, and pretty much an open sponge; I was running around New York City going to the clubs, which were incredible. I think with the comics crowd there was that sense of characterization and building a narrative and telling a story, which I later connected to the super incredible 1996 ledger drawing show at the Drawing Center. It was really formulating characters and telling a story and being very forthright—all these guys could draw ... if there was a connective tissue between all of us, we're all very interested in drawing as an experience.

Rail: So, in 1993, you left Topps to become a full-time artist. It was the early '90s and it was just after the big market crash so a lot of galleries in New York City had gone out of business. Alternative spaces picked up the slack and you were included in some pretty seminal shows at Exit Art, Thread Waxing Space, White Columns, and Socrates Sculpture Park. I think we met at Exit Art where I was a board member and you were in some really cool shows including *It's How You Play the Game* and *The Garden of Sculptural Delights* in 1994.



Brad Kahlhamer, *Old Tucson*, 1994. Wood, wire, wire. Dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist.

Kahlhamer: Yeah, for *The Garden of Sculptural Delights* I had this kind of doomsday bomb shelter idea with inner tubes. Of course, it's completely absurd, but it had to be big and you had to feel somewhat secure in it. And this is a rather large piece which I then replicated even twice as large at Socrates Sculpture Park.

Rail: I also remember your *Project Room* at Thread Waxing Space with these gritty, urban assemblages.

Kahlhamer: I had this idea where I wanted to create a kind of alternative village—based on where I grew up in and around Tucson, Arizona. And I think I had seen *Road Warrior* at that time which, you know, was hugely influential, and somehow I connected that survivalist improvisation with growing up in Tucson. But of course I wanted to create a space I could live in and so I thought I would build a model village ... like a universe—a sky universe.

Rail: Ah, so this is where you wanted to live?

Kahlhamer: Yeah, I just love building these tiny little structures. And you can see here's a rock concert thing—it's a bit Burning Man before Burning Man. Only in miniature.

Rail: You had your first one person show with Bronwyn Keenan in 1996?



Brad Kahlhamer, *Super Speaker*, 1996. Ripped speaker cones, glue, wire, dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist.

Kahlhamer: Correct. So this is an installation shot. This is *Super Speaker* (1996), which expressed my ongoing music practice at the time. I was playing guitar with David First who is a microtonal master, and we were playing all the downtown galleries. He's gone on to gain quite some notoriety, now he's cited by Sonic Youth as an early influence. We were playing very loud raucous music but I remember David took me to see a Glenn Branca performance which was ear shattering, I mean, literally your ears were bleeding, and you felt like vomiting. 33 guitars turned up at full volume. I associated that with a wild western mountain ecosystem and spiritual weather—I felt that in Branca's performance. So how to express that ... I went up to 48th street—I knew all the music stores were up there—and I asked for all their old speaker cones and tore them up. I wanted this giant universe of sound. You can see I have attached miniature speakers inside which carried on the model practice to create this dramatic scale shift, which I was into very early on.

Rail: Around that time you were one of 10 artists of Native heritage who were invited by the Swiss Institute to make works in response to Swiss artist, Peter Rindisbacher, an early 19th century artist who made these naïve renderings of First Nation tribes in Canada and the US. You made a diorama called *Old Tucson*.

Kahlhamer: *Old Tucson* is a very famous, notorious movie set where a lot of genre westerns were filmed, I think in the '50s. But this piece specifically responds to Rindisbacher's drawing of a fort in the West, but in my fort, there are these little figurines, with bits of my hair, all frozen in either stages of death or ecstasy. James Luna, also in the exhibit and at the opening, told me that I was the character in Sherman Alexie's *Indian Killer* (1996).



Brad Kahlhamer, *Old Tucson II*, 1996. Birch Bark, wood, cloth, hair. Dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist.

Rail: And in that year, in 1996, was the Plains Indian ledger drawing show at the Drawing Center that you mentioned before. It was a monumental, extraordinary show, which essentially introduced the contemporary art world to this amazing body of work. Plains Indian ledger drawings illuminate an essential chapter in American art and history. They were drawings made under assault between 1865–1910—years during the most brutal and extensive period of US government violence against Native Americans. They were drawn by imprisoned indigenous people in notebooks and ledgers that were given to them by white settlers and military men. Faced with their own extinction, these ledger artists documented and kept alive personal narratives and myths of tribal experience. Combining acts of drawing and telling, the drawings preserved Native Indigenous culture and are resounding testaments to the fierce resilience and resistance of the Native American people. Can you talk about your reaction to seeing them at the Drawing Center and then about their influence on your drawing practice?

Kahlhamer: You know, I had made numerous trips out west so I'd seen a number of ledger drawings, mostly in South Dakota during my Sun Dance journeys. When I saw them again—going back to my Topps experience—I was thinking that these were really America's first graphic novels. This was the first foundational material that I wanted to really dig down into and analyze, and I was immediately struck by the entire cosmology, this complete universe, all contained on a rather small page. In particular, it was the

connective glyphs that were tethered to two visual ideas: one of warrior exploits and one of spiritual encounters. The graphic lines that connected them do show up in my work later on—in really significant bodies of work, I think from 2000 and then in the dreamcatchers later on.

I mean, this show was nearly biblical for me. I think I went down there almost daily, just to look for these things and I got the book and then later on, I took a residency at the Bemis Art Center, just to be close to the Joslyn Museum, which has a ridiculous collection of these.

Rail: It's ironic that the artists were making drawings on these small pieces of paper at the very time that their vast worlds were shrinking and they were being forced and confined onto reservations.

Kahlhamer: I see them as battle maps. I would imagine the artist flying up above the prison camp and looking down, and then coming back down to physically draw on the ledgers. So it's not just the page moving. It's also the body of the artist moving around the piece of work.

Rail: Wow, I love that—and there's this simultaneity of different actions on the page.



Brad Kahlhamer, *Nomadic Studio*, 1990–20. Paper, mixed media, 8 1/4 x 10 inches. Courtesy the artist.

And as we look at your drawings it will become evident how the visual language influenced you and yet you made it your own. Okay, *Friendly Frontier* was your first show with Jeffrey Deitch Gallery. Jeffrey was a pretty big downtown dealer. It's kind of like you made the big time. What did that feel like?

Kahlhamer: I actually thought he was an English art dealer. Maybe I was confusing him with someone else. I really didn't know him, but a friend of mine did and said, "Oh, no, no, no. You have to let him over." I was quite naïve about these upper orbits of the art world. But when he came in the door, I immediately liked him. He offered me a show right away. I mean, within 10 seconds. I think Jeffrey was trying to assemble a strong painting gallery, and there were four of us more traditional oil painters. I think he saw in me an opportunity to offer a vision or a voice that was sorely lacking in the art world at that time. I think he saw that I was bringing a whole universe in—coming from the west, developing in the east, and pushing it back out. And he was able to facilitate that push to the public in a rather big way. That first opening was amazing.

Rail: Did you both come to a decision to present your work in a Native context? I mean, it hadn't seemed like a factor previously. Jeffrey speaks of your Native American heritage in the first line of the catalog. He writes about how you think of your paintings as being located "in a third place"—a meeting place between your Native American heritage and your more conventional American upbringing with your German-American family. Can you talk about exactly what and where is this "third place" in your thinking as well as in your drawings and paintings?

Kahlhamer: I remember clearly that he called me up, it was a Sunday evening. And he asked me a few key questions and I mentioned that concept, the first place being life as I had lived, the second place being had I been born and raised on a reservation in Arizona or South Dakota, and then the third place is that combination of the two realities, which I was expressing through almost every facet of my work, including the lyrics of my music at the time. I just remember that he was quietly tapping that out and I think the next day, he sent that to me. I read it and I was like, "Wow." We were very interested in presenting a complete universe. So it was a combination of a lot of things. And perhaps I was ready for it, I was painting strong and freely, I felt. And he recognized that.

Rail: It seems to me your work really operates in this third space; it wasn't just a construct for the show. It occurs to me, too, that the space of a ledger book corresponds to your third space. The Native artists drew their worlds, their world visions, in the space of a ledger, that is, over the white settler space with its lines, lists, and calculations. In so doing, their drawings transformed the ledger book, and the drawings were transformed by the context of the ledger book, and the two cultures and spaces intersect to create a third space in between writing and drawing and telling.

Kahlhamer: Exactly. Making that connection to the kind of historic heavy lifting and innovation that those drawings had even at that time. So it was a real revelation for me.

Rail: What about the title, *Friendly Frontier*?

Kahlhamer: Well the frontier was anything but friendly. I was coming out of the New York punk Bowery scene, CBGB, which was, you know, always ironic, 24/7 irony. And then also with Artie and the underground cartoonists, there was always that snot and spit

kind of attitude that we had towards society. And you would then lace it with a kind of confection, which was that kiddy kind of frontier, you know, some Disney-esque thing.

Rail: Right.

Kahlhamer: I was pleased to get a supportive Native contingent to the opening of *Friendly Frontier*. I also hired two of the principal singers from Silvercloud, to play Pow Wow. I think at that time in the New York art world there was absolutely no Native representation and most people probably just thought it was a joke or something. I was sort of playing in between the real and the fake and whatnot.

Rail: There is an interview in the *Friendly Frontier* catalogue between you and Margaret Archuleta, curator of the Heard Museum, in which she said that as a Native person adopted out at birth, you represent a part of the modern Indian experience that isn't fully recognized or even acknowledged as valid in the Native world. She followed that by saying that you cause us to reevaluate our understanding of what it means to be Indian today. Can you speak to this?

Kahlhamer: Well, she was absolutely right. I think it was way back to the 1996 Swiss Institute show that I felt that some people looked at me as almost illegitimate or even inauthentic. But I always saw the adopted experiences as an integral part—the full spectrum of Native identity. I highly recommend anyone going to Phoenix to see the *Away from Home: American Indian Boarding School Stories* at the Heard Museum, their permanent boarding school exhibition which details the experience; this kind of evolution of colonialism from the '20s on, into the adoption policies of the '50s and '60s.

Rail: Do you consider these questions of your own personal identity within the larger discourse of Native American art?

Kahlhamer: During my formative years in New York, I felt very much outside of it but that's changed over the last couple of years. In a way, I think it was more due to the evolutions of non-Native curators and directors of institutions. Before then, there just wasn't the cultural bandwidth to recognize the full spectrum of Native Americans. I remember clearly when Richard Klein of the Aldrich Museum contacted me and said, "I can give you X amount of money to travel." And he said to me, "If you exist, that means more of you exist," and I said, "No, I don't think so. I have like maybe four names in mind and they're scattered around the west. That's not enough for a group show." He saw it as enough, but at the time I felt it wasn't. There just wasn't enough groundswell to put a contemporary exhibit together.

Rail: Hmm. Well, Holland Cotter wrote about your show. He speculated that your works stemmed from a tension of addressing the subject of Native America while rejecting a traditionalist vocabulary. I'm quoting him:

How, he seems to ask, can one talk through art about having an identity without using the coded visual language and symbols that the culture at large associates with, has even assigned to, that identity? It is a question facing many young American artists—Black, Latino, Asian, American Indian. At present—as the say-it-loud identity politics of the 1990s settles in for the long, introspective and in some ways more difficult haul.

I mean, that was 1999 and he was looking at the language of your work as transcending the activism of late-20th-century identity politics.

Kahlhamer: When was the identity biennial? I think that was '96 or '97. So there was a very human quality to that which I loved. I loved the work because it ushered in—or that particular event ushered in—consciousness towards the Other. But I had always maintained that I wanted my work to stick on the wall and hold your attention regardless without a text. I want it to be fairly convincing, you know, like a great song. Even a good song could have three chords, but if you have the textures right there's a complexity to it. And so I've always wanted that. And now we're in a very literal age, so it's very much about curatorial preferences. I love drawing and painting, I like the complexity and the messaging simultaneously.

Rail: You had a major painting show in 2001 called *Almost American*. Does the title express how you feel? Did you feel "almost" American?

Kahlhamer: Yeah, that's what I was going for with the title. I just felt like you buy into some of the national narrative but then you look at the history of Native America, which was completely ignored at that time and then there's this "almost," or "maybe." And this was a major project; I was doing very large scale paintings because I wanted to address the idea of the American landscape—"Landscape USA" (2000).

Rail: You once said, "I'm making landscapes that I can live in through an ongoing definition of contemporary life and art. Not about America, but from America."

Kahlhamer: Yeah, um, I think I stole that from a friend of mine ... Aaron Spangler, are you listening? [*Laughs*] You know, artists talk. But I love that idea. So you're not just conceptualizing these notions of America, race, and identity, you're really coming out of a real space and where I live now, in Mesa, Arizona, is a real contentious space, and I seem to really like making work in places like Alaska, Arizona, which have a very extreme polarized population for the most part. It takes the sand to make the pearl, right? I like operating in these kinds of tense spaces.



Brad Kahlhamer, *Next Level Figure*, 2012-18. Wood, rope, paint, wire, 14 x 10 x 2 inches. Courtesy the artist.

Rail: In the catalog for The Aldrich Museum show, *Bowery Nation*, in 2012–13, Richard Klein wrote about you, "firmly grounded in modern existential angst, Kahlhamer's homesickness is as much American as American Indian reflecting the restlessness and rootlessness that characterizes much of American identity." It is a notion of the American landscape—there is the external landscape, and then there's the American psyche, the inner landscape.

Kahlhamer: Right. And this was—again, going back to this sort of ironic kind of celebration—it was meant to be an alternative Pow Wow vehicle. Years prior, I had seen a Crow Nation parade where vehicles were outfitted in a kind of regalia of blankets, taxidermy buffalo heads, and things like that. I wanted to make this kind of spaceship traveling to space. So there's over 100 dolls, which I had been making since 1985 and collected together in this kind of spaceship float idea. And then I think there's 22 birds on the ladder. I really like that Richard compared it to Calder's circus in a way even though this has, I think, a bit more edge to it.

Rail: Are your dolls related to Katsina dolls?



Brad Kahlhamer, *Next Level Figure*, 2012-18. Wood nails, cloth wire paint, 14 x 2 x 2 inches. Courtesy the artist.

Kahlhamer: Yeah. At the Heard Museum there's the Barry Goldwater collection, which I think has 463 Katsina dolls that he bequeathed. I was just totally awestruck by the enormous power of the collection of all these figures and spirits. I probably was riffing on that—this idea of the collective power—but really each figure has an almost cartoon characterization, which would go all the way back to Topps and then come all the way up to the Heard, but then was ultimately made in my studio.

Rail: Music is an important constant in your life and your art. And it's related to storytelling, which is at the heart of your visual art and music. How do you go from one to the other—not that there are clear boundaries between media? How do these practices cross-pollinate?

Kahlhamer: So around the '90s I started writing lyrics and songs and I would pick out lyrics and start scrawling them onto the paintings—titling both paintings and songs. It was a whole attempt to bring the worlds together. I've always had guitars in the studios to play and invite people over. Music is such a super exciting expression; it moves so much quicker and it's so much more immediate; the art world can be quite plodding by comparison. I just feel super grateful to be able to balance both worlds.

When I came to New York, I promised myself I wasn't going to get involved in a band because they are so horribly distracting. But the lead singer Lanyah, who is in the center, had this idea. She was actually a waitress at Veselka, where a lot of us went for a cheap meal. It was this idea where Patti Page meets dubstep, which was crazy. So we had a Jamaican Toaster and Michael, who sold Rasta themed t-shirts on the street, playing bass. And we were very close to the Rasta world. In fact, we split a rehearsal space on Ludlow, which then became Alleged Gallery, which prior to that was a music studio that we shared with Bad Brains and Modern Clixs. And I remember Gary from Bad Brains, Dr. Know the guitar player, really liked my style because I was playing country licks, you know, in a reggae groove. Which later would inform my hybrid studio work.



Courtesy the artist.

Rail: Wow, what a compliment! Can you talk about National Braid?

Kahlhamer: Yeah, so that was with Laura Ortman. We did one CD that was more of a countrified ethereal unplugged notion which came out of developing a soundtrack for *Redskin*, a silent movie from 1929.

Rail: Yeah, I read that you were commissioned by the National Museum of the American Indian to write a score for *Redskin*, which was about a child taken from his tribe and sent to boarding school. It was this classic screenplay that was critical of government policies towards Indians.

Kahlhamer: Yeah, we debuted it at the Tribeca Film Festival and then toured Europe.

Rail: Stepping back, to your visual art ... In 2004–2005, you had a solo show, *Let's Walk West*, at the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art. I might add that you're having a solo show there next year called *Swap Meet*. But *Let's Walk West* was notable for the fact of your borrowing 12 Plains Indian ledger drawings from the Heard Museum to show alongside your work.

Kahlhamer: Right. That was a super important show. I had this idea that I wanted to collaborate with an institution across town, which was the Heard Museum, and I was invited to go down the basement where they laid out a selection of ledger drawings, which were absolutely phenomenal. I couldn't believe at the time that I could do this. But the institutions, both Scottsdale and the Heard loved the idea and the Heard in particular, because they knew they were sitting on this very important foundational material that needed and demanded a wider audience. I remember that a lot of people thought that the drawings were actually my work. Shows you how little awareness there was.

Rail: Ha! Well, it does seem groundbreaking—both for you and the Heard lending historical ledger drawings to be shown next to work by a contemporary Native artist. It seems like the beginning of what we are seeing more of now. For example, in 2014 you were included in a couple significant exhibitions that featured or included contemporary Native American artists. The first was *Contemporary American Indian Art, the Nerman Museum Collection*, in Overland Park, Kansas for which they bought and showed *Eagle Fest USA* (2005), and the other was *The Plains Indians Artists of the Earth and Sky* at the Metropolitan Museum. The latter was largely a historical show with a section of contemporary artists and you were represented by *Around the Camp* (2001). The catalog entry says that you "represent the trajectory farthest away from the traditional Plains Indian art, while simultaneously referring to it." It seems that this was the moment when museums began looking more seriously at and recontextualizing Native Art rather than shoving it into an ethnographic corner.

Kahlhamer: I'd met with Gaylord Torrence [curator for Artists of Earth and Sky] three to five years prior and he recognized then that there had to be a contemporary inclusion. So I thought it ended well and that but the show itself was amazing with historic material. And I did a talk, compressing 2,000 years of history for the Met. You know, a lot of these more innovative shows start in the west, and sadly often don't travel to the East Coast—I think that's still a problem. One thing I really like about making work in the west is the conversation is more north to south—it's between the Americas, while in New York, it's still oriented towards Europe—an east to west kind of conversation. The west has a fresher take, particularly now with all the cultural shifts; I think it will probably lead the way. What it lacks is, of course are the major institutions and their resources.

Rail: You have been drawing in notebooks wherever you are and travel for a very long time. You showed them together as *Nomadic Studio* that you presented for the first time at Reed College in Portland, Oregon in 2016–17. Can you talk about your notebook practice?

Kahlhamer: Yeah, the sketchbooks are a long-standing practice and adjacent to something like *Bowery Nation* where I'm making one object at a time, and then joining it to a larger collective or assembly. And *Skull Project* (2004), that was, I don't know, 246 drawings of skulls. Now I'm approaching 100 Moleskine sketchbooks. I mean, it's really taking that ledger drawing experience out of the studio and on the road. I rarely look back at them, but when I do, it's a reminder of events I have experienced—maybe felt. It's really a catalog of feelings as opposed to the sort of literal reading of a naturalistic space or something. It's more the Parisian concept of the flâneur, you know, but walking around the west.

Rail: Regarding this nomadic, artistic practice, I'd like to bring up some ideas Christopher Greene wrote about in a thought-provoking essay for the show, *Larger Than Memory: Contemporary Art from Indigenous North America* that you're currently in at the Heard Museum. He discusses two terms coined by Anishinaabe cultural theorist Gerald Vizenor: The first is survivance, to mean the "assertion of innovative, persistent and active Indigenous survival and presence" that he says is becoming ubiquitous in the examination of Indigenous American art today. Greene writes that if survivance is an ongoing presence, then trans-motion—the second term—is a related assertion of sovereignty—"a visionary resistance to cultural dominance" by means of freedom of motion through physical space and in the imagination. He explains trans-motion as a way to interpret art through "traces of motion" that reflect those otherwise found in sacred objects, stories, and literature. What do you think about this?

Kahlhamer: I love picking up on the trans-motion part as it relates to *Nomadic Studio* or even my own adopted body pushing itself through space as a kind of trans-moment. And positioning it as a kind of a psychological free range is what I'm doing. You know, I was unencumbered from any particular tribal identity, so there's this freedom and I've always thought that was a positive.



Brad Kahlhamer, *Billy Jack Jr.*, 2006. Graphite, ink, gouache, watercolor on paper, 62 x 82 inches. Courtesy the artist.

Rail: Let's look at *Makeshift*, the show you were in at the Kohler Art Museum in which you invited your father to show his plane alongside your dream catchers.

Kahlhamer: Right. The dream catchers are now a rather large body of work. I think the first one debuted in 2014 at Jack Shainman Gallery in the exhibit *Fort Gotham Girls and Boys Club*; it was a giant 12-foot dreamcatcher. And then I made another significant one ... here it is. That center dream catcher is about 10 feet in diameter and consists of Pow Wow bells and jingles and rather fine wire woven over a cosmology of woven wire dream catchers. So there's almost an uncountable number of dream catchers in there. When Michelle Grabner, the curator of *Makeshift*, approached me, it was this idea of how one expresses—in my case, expressing dreams through objects. And the dream catchers were always taking and reaching back, taking that cartoon sensibility, the ledger drawing lines of urgency, and then adding my particular character glyphs in a somewhat transparent structure that I would call a dreamcatcher. I got the idea to invite my now 92-year old father who was obsessed with building this plane for decades. I saw it as an embodiment of how two people adjacent to each other can realize their dreams.

Rail: That's beautiful—and they look beautiful together. The dream catchers look like drawings in space! Can we talk about *Larger Than Memory: Contemporary Art from Indigenous North America*—the big show at the Heard Museum you are in now? I know the

Heard is very proud of this show. They are long known for its historical collection of American Indian art, and with this show they say they are signaling their intention to expand their role in deepening the understanding of Indigenous Peoples and presenting the works of living artists.

Kahlhamer: The Heard has really never done something like this. I almost think of it as a biennial of sorts. It's just such an honor to show under the same roof as the incredible material that that museum offers and has collected. This drawing is a riff on the kokopelli back in Mesa—it's a scrambled, abstracted version of this Western, tribal icon.

Rail: Are you actively making art in your studio out west?

Kahlhamer: Yeah, here are my zombie botanicals—protectors of decayed cactus parts. My working out west has come full circle, as I was a kid running around the desert in Tucson and now I live only a couple hours away in Mesa, basically doing the same thing. It's amazing how my life has stayed so steady.

Rail: From when you were a child? That's a beautiful thing.

Contributor

Susan Harris

Susan Harris is on the Executive Boards of Printed Matter and the International Association of Art Critics, United States section (AICA-USA). She is an independent scholar and curator. Her most recent book project is Managing Editor, *Unfinished Memories: 30 Years of Exit Art, Steidl, 2016*.