

CHANCE

BOMB

Jaque Fragua and Brad Kahlhamer

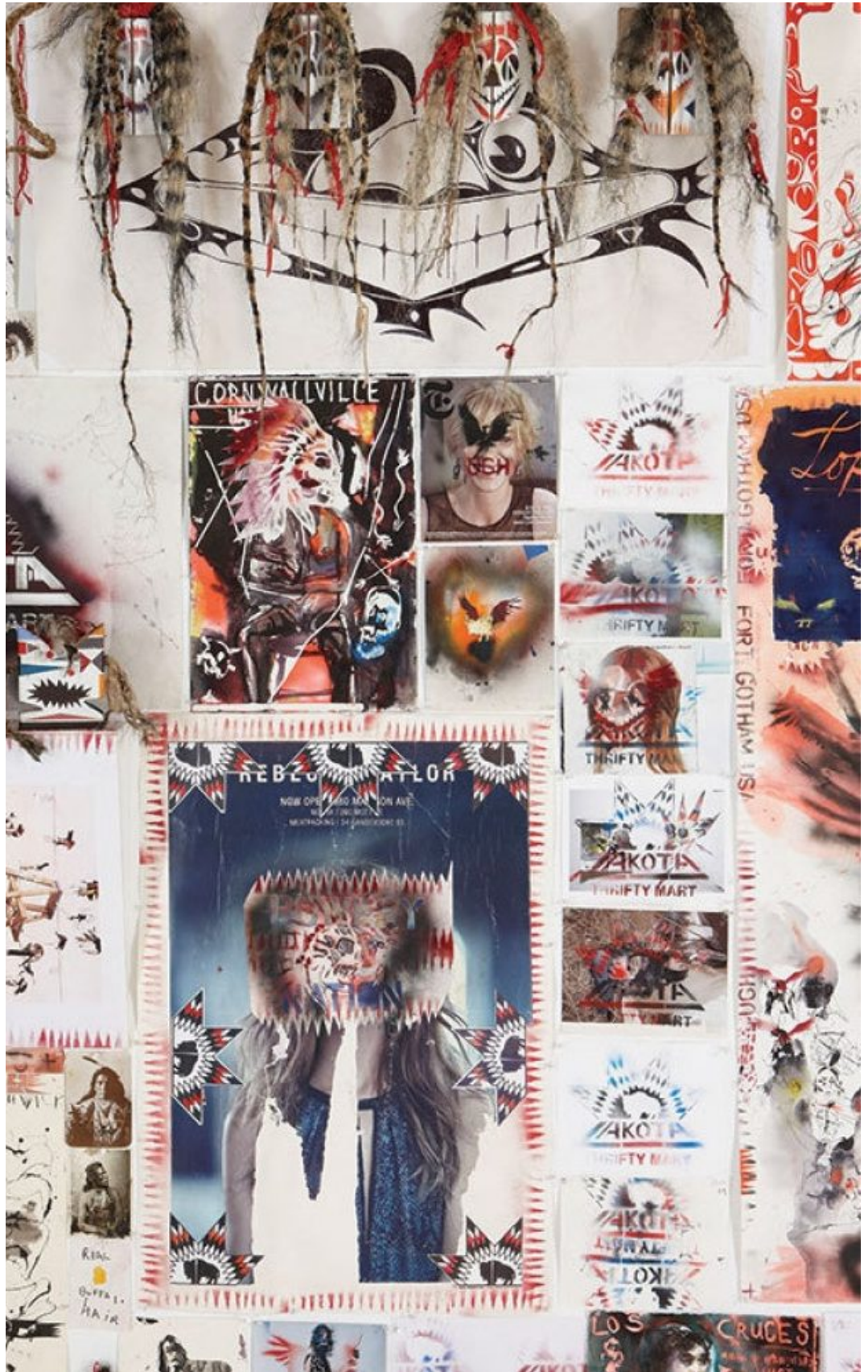
Drawing from punk, graffiti, and traditional Native American aesthetics, talk test art and the notion of the "Post-Smithsonian delinquent."

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ation view of *The Four Hairs*, 2014, Andréhn-Schiptjenko, Stockholm.

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mer at Lovely Day, a restaurant near the Bowery, in 2015. We
s, fluid communication between us, as outliers usually do
t about each other. At that time I was living in a building in
ventually bought out and scheduled for demolition. A sense

nce again sent a shiver up my spine, like a wolf in distress, he Southwest. Although it seems like I connect with Brad now his fall I ran into him at the Met for the opening of an *Art of Native America*. There was this polarization in the crowd collectors, and clearly, Brad and I had our own opinions of the ed those out the next day with an impromptu jam session at wick. Since then, we've been texting each other incessantly, notes of ideas we have, sonically. We're almost like pen pals, cans strung together. I'm happy to know Brad is out there on dismantling the Native American Dream. I'll do the same on



2017. Image courtesy of the artist.

a similar position in our work, of being both inside and
 e's a kind of purity in that; we each address the interior in our
 Can you talk about that?

It brought up a stir of emotion. My tribe is Jemez Pueblo. I was raised in New Mexico. And my family historically has had a traditional cultural side of the tribe. Someone in my community, who was a traditional aspects of the culture once said, "You'll never be traditional." It was his reaction to a conversation with my father, a rhetorical argument saying that no matter how culturally involved you are, no matter how much you spend in the community or what dress you have on—no matter how traditional you are, you'll never be Indian enough. It's not about having the power of judgment. That fight is a futile one. The message was essentially: create a life you value and find your own path. It's not about trying to live up to someone else's standard. Growing up in a community that's very traditional and trying to fight progress reaching the middle of the line of contemporary and foundational. That's a challenge that people across the country have to face at some point in their lives.

I started thinking about my own experience being of Native American descent in Tucson, Arizona, to non-Native parents. Over decades, my experience with the private and public issues around identity and tribal recognition is how we define ourselves through the eyes of others. In the context of stop-and-frisk, wandering around New York City, I got stopped by police. Undercover second-generation Asian detectives had stopped a Native man who had just committed a robbery at a dry cleaning store on a street. And I was struck by their character study, you know; in a way that's relative. It doesn't help me on the rez, does it?

I think it helps you in either situation. I usually get identified as a Native American, according to my, you know, record with the law.

Ending this conversation on a low note. *(laughter)* Getting back to your trajectory has been from street art to social protest action, but all the while you've maintained a sharp aesthetic edge. Did that come from your father or is it something you acquired at school?

My father showed me the path not to go down: the academic route. I was academically successful but never thought the Western framework could reach my creative goals. I found myself as creating work outside of that. I only went to the Institute

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n Arts for two years, and then I wasn't welcome back because
 uation. I just couldn't pay the tuition anymore. I thought the
 support myself was to continue making art, and I had to figure
 t with the tools I had. My creative background at that time was
 g toward vandalism—destroying property or intervening in
 spray paint and other media. As a younger person, having a
 ght and even violence through art was essential for me. I grew
 y things are how they are but never getting a clear answer
 icators or my parents. Trying to take that angst in a
 r than destructive direction led me to activism and creating
 work. A lot of protest artwork is used as a form of education,
 with an edge move the message a lot quicker in my
 /ring to channel the angst and grievances we have as Native
 e that has a particular tone, at a frequency people can connect
 t once. Because it's a lot to digest—the stories, policies,
 ome people on the reservation don't speak or read English, so
 and design help communicate what we're about and what
 gh.

ed to the island of Lopud off the coast of Croatia to speak at a
 sza Art Contemporary (TBA21) conference. And on the plane
 th the concept of the post-Smithsonian delinquent and based
 n it.

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Authenticity and representation within the discourse of Native art are complicated by the concept of originality or of the established by many Native Americans today. In my case, I'm a person of delinquency in these fields of discourse, possibly making a name for myself by emphasizing and exploring my tribal ambiguity. This is both a challenge and an opportunity that provides the potential for innovation, for a re-examination of identity, cultural representation, and self-reflection. Early on, my tribal ambiguity was actually a freedom. I didn't have the constraints of a tribal card to direct me into a particular market. So what people would think of as a disadvantage into an advantage, when moving to New York City, which doesn't really care. The New York art world based more on innovation and, for better or for worse, not so much on tradition. In big cities, you're surrounded by these institutions, and the art world, which controls a lot of the conversation around the art historical canon, is very conservative. It wasn't clear where I would fit, so I had to break out of my traditional native position, that of the post-Smithsonian delinquent. You

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...n. (*laughter*) I feel that institutions, museums, schools take a lot of their inspiration from the Smithsonian and other anthropological or historical collections, whereas the contemporary art world is more about what's happening now. So with this idea of post-tradition, we're not relying on past references or fabricated traditions; we're coming through our own Native experience and the present moment, looking toward the future, and seeing how we relate to our artwork. One reason I like your work is because you're not copying Andy Warhol or other blue-chip triumphant artists of the past; you're coming from a source that's hard to define other than it's your own. Your work is a lighthouse in the space of creativity that usually is dominated by the traditional artist—you're not using identity as a crutch; you're letting the

elf. And that's what I hope to do, through whatever I touch or

to where you and I meet more directly, around music and the
 nd direct action. There's an immediacy you get from the
 v you relate to your tribe and your people. You and I have
 t forming a band. But I also feel like I already have a band with
 /visual dialogue.

was making graffiti or "street art" — people want to call it art;
 nt of that term as a generalization—I felt I was painting music
 he immediacy of creating an impact with this improvisational,
 ience. I was doing line work and petroglyphic-style stuff, more
 ttering. I took the idea of a one-liner—pressing the can and
 a single continuous line—and wrapped whole buildings,
 ars. It was therapeutic; there was a frequency, pattern, rhythm,
 a happening while I was painting. And that all came from the
 s. I can't wait to get back playing. When I was in New York last
 uitar, that was a rare moment for me. But I still got it. It's like
 ghter)

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ss rare. I'm eager to strap on a guitar to your tunes. This
 the years I spent in the city looking at punk rock posters and
 hey offer. I did a CD called *KTNN*, which was the Navajo
 on I grew up listening to. And I remember seeing Glenn
 w York with a guitar army and this kind of jagged, East-meets-
 west sound. Do you take any of this urban grit from the East
 ou to New Mexico? Or are you looking at LA and other places

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on from New York, the blight and also the positive side of
 the huge deviation between rural reservation life and New
 people in those two spheres are separated by class, by
 the things that happen on the reservations power the big
 vajo Generating Station, which powers parts of Phoenix, Las
 parts of the Southwest. There's this interconnectedness
 isumption of resources at the expense of Indigenous people
 dustrialization comes into rural areas through oppressive

ending Rock: grassroots groups camped out there, and when scalate, the military came in, and a lot of technology was ntlines. Both by media—cameras, wireless technology, drones on the Energy Transfer Partners side, who had rubber bullets, nd cannons, even weaponry. People think rural areas don't ; to technology, but then, in the event of a calamity, it appears ight there on the reservation.

always been here. New Mexico is occupied by a number of l government laboratories: Los Alamos National Laboratory, Base, Sandia National Laboratories, White Sands Missile i. And it's funny, people talk about Area 51 and conspiracy ;ret government bases, but really they're in plain sight. Driving /, you see nuclear waste being moved from one huge ext, out in the open like things are fine. Industry, percapitalism: they're everywhere.

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Level Figure, 2012, mixed media.

adic Studio sketchbook, 2018.

id I share a similar background. I grew up in and around
 .Monthan Air Force Base. Part of the complexity of the
 you have this notion of spirituality and purity, yet also these
 s overhead. Which brings me to the idea of being a wartime
 /s seems to be a Native position. On one hand there's the
 holesomeness, of the Indian art market. And then there's this
 n of Native activism that's come to life. At the time of the
 :cupation, I was seventeen, and I only read about it through
an, an underground newspaper out of Milwaukee. And I
 ncing my first real political awakening. Now of course we
 o these actions are suddenly amplified. I was wondering what
 t that in relation to social practice aesthetics.

le taking selfies and geotagging their location—you know,
 open air. And I have mixed feelings about that. Even beyond
 d other movements where there's military presence,
 :h a big deal. In some ways I think it's bad that social media
 ss to sensitive information. But at least it's getting out there,
 tter than only having the *Bugle*. Nowadays, you have multiple
 o many. How valid is the information? And who is it coming
 a of disseminating our own independent voices, and more

out about certain injustices, and movements they can or allies in, and that's great. But at the same time, in many of environmental justice movements, there is real work to be done t. You'll see people at the first meeting, the next meeting and so on. We live in an age of short attention spans, so if aged then it's just like, your time's up and on to the next thing. ant gratification and immediate results kills a lot of civic prevents people from getting involved and getting their hands vant to put in the hours and be present for longer than three

d I think we value that practice as a way of slowing down. I s about slow looking and structural viewing, which is a ncept of how one breaks down chords and patterns based on . You talk about the self and maybe that's a kind of pause in lieu of all this noise out there and all the contradictions—I il tourism. There appears to be a lot more noise and energy Rock than there was in 1973 around Wounded Knee. And yet of the struggle and you rarely hear victory. How do you turn ggle into victory? I'm still thinking the answer's in the so grew up in an era when it was thought that a painting or n't compete with the 24/7 news cycle. So I'm conflicted.

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els or alleviates a lot of what I would call intentional stress and natural lives. In my own experience, if I'm stressed out or , I go to the art museum, or the street. I like to look at graf, at e made. If it's one versus the other: studio painting versus ng on the sides of buildings because they can, I find more

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. I don't watch TV news anymore, let alone read it online. My he news of my community and different struggles going on. I wfinder as clean as possible, so when something magical there to witness it. A lot of the stuff I've created in recent ed in protests or activist events, and I like the ephemerality of cts to graffiti, painted one night and gone the next day. And , then it's everybody's property. But I'm also interested in : is monumental and can withstand the test of time.

e crossing the same street in opposite directions. Because I've
 ome stuff on newsprint that I want to wheat-paste up around
 even know why. I just want to inject fun and impulse back into
 ntioned being stressed and going out to a museum or to
 ies ago, people were probably looking at rock paintings on
 as street art. Those were the galleries of the day, these canyon
 l I were born in. And we can take it in for free.

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now in Albuquerque it's actually a bit easier to get to the
 jo out and see the petroglyphs.

what you're saying about post-Smithsonian delinquency with
 of these public lands or sacred sites that are culturally
 enous people in the Southwest. We had a conversation about
 sacred items, displayed as artifacts.

at the Met's *Art of Native America* exhibition. Interesting title. Going through, talking about these artifacts. I'm not sure if *looted* is the right term for what happened to them; it makes me think of slave ships or something. But way back these items had amazing, like this ceremonial rattle in the American Indian Collection at the American Museum in Kansas City, which I think still retains its original value, sitting in its glass cage. Are you talking about somehow these objects?

It's the mechanism by which these things become artifacts. I feel like it's always been the impetus of the colonizing mission of this country as a people. If not physically—by genocide, the removal of Native people—then by decommissioning the way we live, our culture, taking away the sacred places that connect us to the land. There are fights happening now, as we are trying to protect Bears Ears National Monument in Utah, where all the available Bureau of Land Management property is about to be leased to developers. There's a ten-mile stretch of land that borders the actual Chaco Canyon, but it's part of a larger network of national monuments that exist all along the San Juan Basin. Many of these have already been bulldozed over and developed by the oil and gas industry. This area has the largest methane cloud in the country, right there in the Four Corners area. This plume comes from leaks from the natural gas fields. The Four Corners is contributing to global warming and the ozone. It's the decommissioning of Mother Earth, of our land, for a short-term gain.

It's original purpose. Native culture is the foundational culture of this country. It's shocking how little people know about it.

When we talk about the idea of foundation and sacred areas, I think we have to talk about it. It's the elephant in the room, clearly. You and I come from the West. Now you live in New York, so you have access to some of the sacred areas in the country. *(laughter)*

It's not the same here. Here on the East Coast it seems almost plentiful. Too many people are protesting during the storm activity and all that. It's difficult to generate a path from New York City for big protests, such as Standing Rock. It just feels so far away for the average citizen here in Fort

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to make these social stances accessible and engaging. But best, it's a completely different story, no?

of the historical vantage points on water have informed water use, because of the Pueblo tribes here in the Southwest, many of them have been used for agricultural spaces and drinking water as well. With several of them around the tribes where I grew up, near the Jemez River, all the water runs off the mountains and flows down the valley into an irrigation system that's about twenty miles long. This is how we've been cultivating the land. The state has set things up so that if we don't use it, we lose it: if we don't use the water to sustain agriculture or the tribe itself, then those rights will be taken from us and used farther upstream or for other purposes. The Jemez flows into the Rio Grande, which has been the border between the US and Mexico for millennia. Even this river is polluted at times—a million gallons of sewage poured into the river due to a spill in Albuquerque and then upstream we have Los Alamos Natural Laboratory, where the Manhattan Project started. A lot of the weapons testing and nuclear waste has impacted the water through contamination, and other things like uranium mining is poisoning the aquifers, affecting groundwater and surface water. And obviously all of that is carcinogenic and affects the health of the people near the river, Indigenous people, Pueblo people. And we're not just talking about the Colorado, which is also contaminated.

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personally—I know I'll be drinking bottled water when I visit. It's a little bit disheartening: returning, suddenly everybody's drinking bottled water and not talking too much about it. I don't know if that's the

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when the drinking water at my Jemez Pueblo community is contaminated with high levels of arsenic. And that's led to a rise in different types of cancer, including pancreatic cancer.

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going last night about Chaco Canyon, and the panel was a group of Navajo allies who are working on a campaign to stop new oil drilling in the San Juan Basin and the Four Corners region. They were talking about how they're fighting right now and the negative effects of the oil industry. And someone from the audience asked, "Can't you just stop it?" *(laughter)* And maybe this is what's going to have to happen: we need to protect our homelands, our spaces that we've been in for millennia,

re point it will be time to have to find somewhere else to go. Idaho. Or I don't know—

est Alaska.

it having been up there, Alaska presents an interesting 't really have reservations; you have what they call ch are sort of a new model. I witnessed first-hand very right-individuals teaming up with Native communities to protect tact wildlife migration patterns because everyone feeds off hem. It struck me as an interesting example of how individuals er against corporate interests, at least from what I saw. In the seem to be very strict lines of ownership. I'm thinking about oenix. The Gila River Tribe actually has some rights, similar to g about.

is on, instead of asking about the weather, we'll be asking how ight's happening everywhere. I just got an email from a friend s camp in the bayou swamps of Chitimacha and Houma in o stop the development of the Bayou Bridge Pipeline. It's d of the Dakota Access Pipeline. This is where the results of all e flowing through. It's a pretty big deal. People are getting isobedience, strapping themselves to the workers' equipment y the construction as much as possible. These frontline d more coverage via independent media, and also just our rt, and prayer. Man, I have no idea what's going to happen in ng my best to cope with the possibilities of scarcity because I t's tough to think about.

alternatives, and you and I will be continuing this conversation me down in the Southwest. I was reading that if oil falls below ars a barrel, it suddenly becomes economically unfeasible to ies, so maybe that's another thought. As artists we should king about these things and about what we can do.

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more of my energy to water, beyond what I've already been
s artwork goes, maybe we should collaborate on a water

ing about this, I'm thinking, How do you make these private
'd love to do something together. Maybe we should stop the
d get to it. I have some ideas...

we already know there's a synthesis there. And I think carrying
uld be great too.

sound component, there's something about the sensorial idea
the volume on that.

t sound design.

d stay clear of any New Age aspirations. (*laughter*)

Apache reservation, San Carlos. You have to drive out.
that looks particularly desolate; it's so functional—there's a
; grid of irrigation all over Arizona, pecan farms and all of that.
en that and fresh rainfall would be interesting for us.

acred element in the desert for sure.

se foundational ideas of purity, you know, I work
a lot, as do you, elevating it. It's not a black and white
ve're talking about the original well—another idea. I was up at
Mississippi, way up in Minnesota, and I was struck by how
en it gradually turns into this giant vein, this life force.

ck to music. Hybridization, certainly musically, is so much a
re, and it seems that the art world is finally catching up. It's
ative art world, but I think it's good for us to position

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happening later in the day. I'd be super interested in seeing
New York more, so we can collaborate on some sort of

good way to put it.

's good.

*Artist from Jemez Pueblo, New Mexico, whose work seeks to
deconstruct the dominant iconography, subverting the overconsumption of misappropriated
sign and identity. He has made banners and protest art for many
campaigns throughout the country.*

*sculptor, painter, performance artist, and musician in New York City.
Work collected by institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art and the
Museum of Contemporary American Art. Bowery Nation, his large installation in the collection
at the Museum of Contemporary Art Contemporary, is currently touring in South America. His work
will be on display at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center in Sheboygan,
March 2019.*

[in](#) [graffiti](#) [punk](#) [Indigenous peoples](#) [music](#) [collaboration](#)

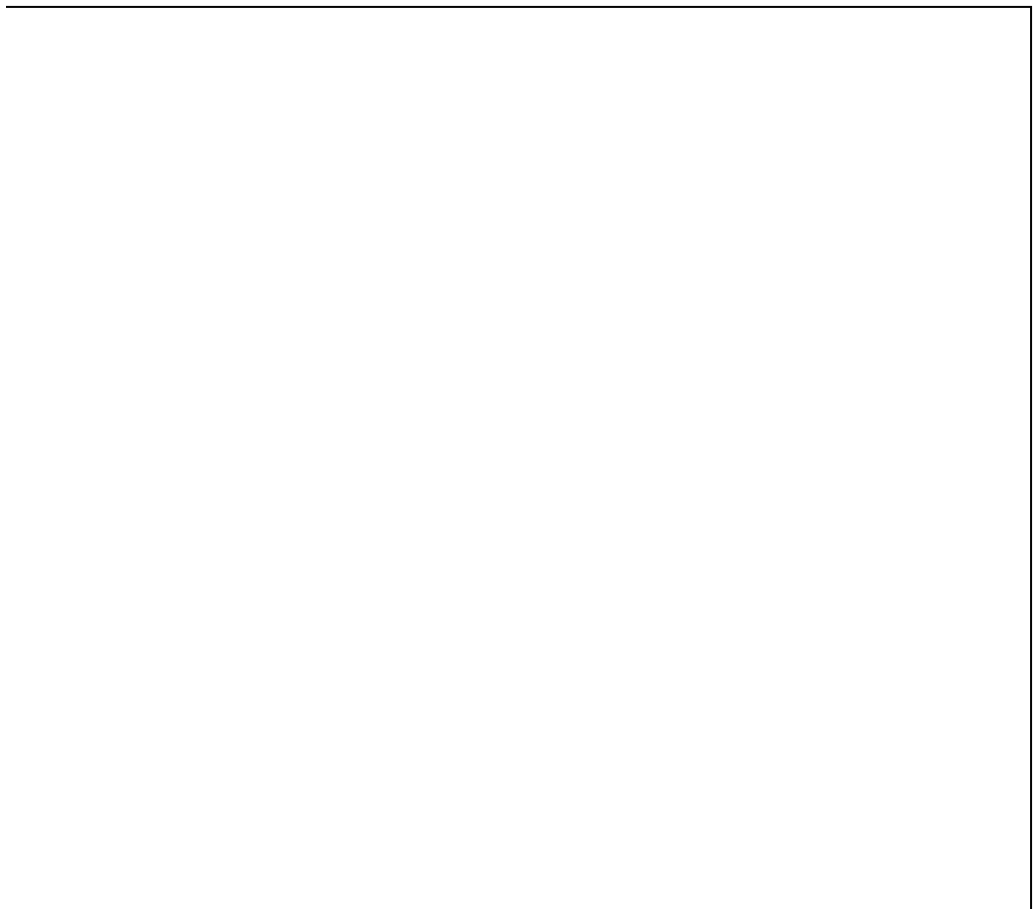
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...atest resource: water. With
 ...can Southwest to Iceland and
 ...together here—artists and
 ...ating water as site, ... and symbol, along with those
 ...m and calling for inter...

*views with Lauren Bon, ...azon, Jaque Fragua, Brad
 ...h Cuthand, Janaina Tsch...sica Grindstaff, Tomoko
 ...a Vicuña, and Alicia Kop...as writing by Laura van den
 ...iaz, Stefan Helmreich, and*

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