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JESSE GREEN | THEATER REVIEW

SARA KRULWICH/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Great White Way, Indeed

Spotted lurking off the coast of Broadway, a play about the making of 'Jaws,' Hollywood's (and Steven Spielberg's) first summer blockbuster.

The Shark Is Broken
Golden Theater

FOR NINE WEEKS in 1974, off the shore of Martha's Vineyard, the shooting of "Jaws" was repeatedly delayed by the whims of its temperamental stars. And by "stars," I mean Bruce.

Bruce was the name given to the three mechanical predators built to simulate the great white shark at the heart of the story. As one after another became bloated with saltwater or entangled in seaweed and failed to operate or flat-out sank — the crew called the movie "Flaws" — there was little the three equally temperamental human stars could do but try (and usually fail) to be patient. Occasionally they wondered if it might not have been better to train an actual great white for the role.

After seeing "The Shark Is Broken," a play about that disastrous shoot, you may wonder the opposite: whether it might not have been better to cast the movie with mechanical humans. The real ones were nearly as glitchy as Bruce. Aboard the Orca, the lobster boat on which much of "Jaws" was filmed, the actors Robert Shaw, Richard Dreyfuss and Roy Scheider bickered, brawled, vomited, kvetched, drank, backstabbed and, like Bruce, broke down.

All of that is faithfully rendered in "The Shark Is Broken," which opened on Thursday at the Golden Theater, in a production directed by Guy Masterson. There's a perfect replica of the Orca bobbing prettily on a C.G.I. sea, and costumes minutely matched to the film. (Duncan Henderson is the designer.) Accents, postures, props and hairstyles are fanatically accurate; there's even a hat-tip (by Adam Cork) to John Williams's sawing, rasping theme at the start.

But these details do not on their own cre-

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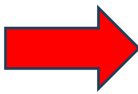
From left, Ian Shaw, Colin Donnell and Alex Brightman as the actors Robert Shaw, Roy Scheider and Richard Dreyfuss in "The Shark Is Broken." The play was written by Ian Shaw, Robert's son, and Joseph Nixon, and directed by Guy Masterson.

HOLLAND COTTER | ART REVIEW



Indigenous Visions Along the Hudson

Performers, videomakers and sculptors make themselves felt in the art world.

CRITIC'S PICK
Indian Theater: Native Performance, Art, and Self-Determination Since 1969
Hessel Museum of Art at Bard College

ANNANDALE-ON-HUDSON, N.Y. — A MAGA-style baseball cap, scarlet and sloganeering, sits on a shelf, as if for sale, surrounded by other promotional retail: T-shirts, totes, lighters. "Make Amerika Red Again" is embroidered on the front of the cap, which is also stitched with pretty bead work and topped by a yellow feather.

Where are we? Apparently in the merchandise section of what looks like a combination campaign headquarters, tech showroom, surveillance center and stage set. It's furnished with desks, chairs, posters and multiple digital screens all belonging to something called the New Red Order, a self-declared "public secret society" of artists and filmmakers seeking to lay bare the "open secret" of Western expansion. Want to know more, maybe join? Call 1-888-NEW RED1 on the (red) office rotary phone (or your cellphone) for details.

Where we also are is at the Hessel Museum of Art here at Bard College, and more specifically at an exhibition called "Indian Theater: Native Performance, Art, and Self-Determination Since 1969." The college recently established a Center for Indigenous Studies, and under its auspices a Bard faculty member, the Indigenous scholar Candice Hopkins, has organized a frisky intergenerational group show of some 30 Native American artists (oldest 96; youngest 29), among them Jeffrey Gibson, who will be representing the United States at the 2024 Venice Biennale.

Acknowledgment by the art world — never mind by the real world — of even the

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TONY CENICOLA/THE NEW YORK TIMES

At the "Indian Theater" exhibition at the Hessel Museum of Art at Bard College, fiber weavings modeled on Indigenous jewelry are part of an installation by Eric-Paul Riege, who performs with his sculptures, and invites the audience to do so too.

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Indigenous Visions Along the Hudson

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existence of contemporary Native American art has been pitifully slow to arrive, and has mostly been generated from within the Indigenous community itself. Hopkins takes one of their initiatives as the springboard for the show.

This one dates from 1969 and coincided with the politically galvanizing occupation of Alcatraz Island by a group of Indigenous activists called Indians of All Tribes. Earlier in the same year, the Native American fashion designer Lloyd Kiva New (1916-2002), co-founder of the Institute of American Indian Arts, then a fledgling school in Santa Fe, N.M., introduced a quietly radical cultural project.

In collaboration with the institute's dance and drama instructor, Rolland R. Meinholtz, he wrote a treatise proposing the development of a new "American Indian Theater," basing it on the premise that much traditional Indigenous art was fundamentally theatrical in nature, incorporating movement, sound, masking, storytelling, communal action, and that these elements could be marshaled to create distinctive new forms. He printed the proposal as a 40-page booklet, an original copy of which opens this show.

His ideas had takers, among them three New York sisters of Kuna/ Rappahannock descent — Lisa Mayo (1924-2013), Muriel Miguel and Gloria Miguel, the show's senior artist — who in 1976 formed Spiderwoman Theater, now one of the longest-running female companies in the United States.

The group's low-budget, high-energy presentations were fueled — still are — by a head-spinning cocktail of radical feminism, ethnic consciousness, and raucous humor, all evident at Bard in a full-length video of their "Cabaret: An Evening of Disgusting Songs and Pukey Images" from the late 1970s. (I saw them perform it at the Theater for the New City and they practically blew out the walls.)

The California performance artist James Luna (1950-2018), creator of the beaded MAGA cap, also picked up on the notion that humor applied to grim histories could work. (He referred to himself as an "American Indian ceremonial clown.") In 1985, in response to objectification of Native Americans and the notion that the only good Indigenous art was in the past, he lay wearing only a loin cloth, for hours in a museum display case, motionless but perceptibly breathing.

And in a 1990 installation recreated at Bard called "AA Meeting/Art History," he tackles the lethal effects of alcoholism on Native life. In a video we see people sitting in a circle talking about trying to stay sober, and we see Luna guzzling what appears to be booze and monologuing about his love of art, as if the two were inseparable.

Other performance videos are different from Luna's in tone. Over four brief autobiographical pieces, Theo Jean Cuthand travels a path from lesbian to trans male identity with buzzing enthusiasm. Cannupa Hanska Luger's 2016 drone's-eye view of mirror-bearing demonstrators at Standing Rock turns a protest into a surging processional. And in a sweet short video by the Montreal-based Asinnajaq (a.k.a. Isabella Rose Rowan-Weetaluktuk), a figure (the artist) rises like an earth spirit from under a pile of stones, looking every bit as surprised by her emergence as we are.

Other artists approach theatricality more obliquely, through costuming. KC Adams's T-shirts stitched with politically loaded phrases — "Former Land Owner," "Scalping Is in My Blood" — were originally made for performances. In a series of large color

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JESSANN REECE, VIA GABRIELLE L'HIRONDELLE HILL AND COOPER COLE, TORONTO

Top, "Conscientious Conscripture," an installation by the New Red Order collective in the exhibition at Bard College; above, James Luna's "Make Amerika Red Again" (2018); above right, Gabrielle L'Hirondelle Hill's "Counterblaste" (2021), a part-human, part-animal figure made from pantyhose stuffed with tobacco, street debris and wildflowers; below, a still from Asinnajaq's 2015 film "Rock Piece," and on the table is Jeneen Frei Njootli's sculpture "He coats the warp and weft until a field emerges (Orange upright bottle)" (2021).

portraits of Indigenous women by the photographer Dana Claxton, the sitters (including Claxton) wear layers of beads and fabrics so dense as to suggest ceremonial regalia.

The multifigure painting "Paperdolls for a Post-Colombian World" (2021) by Jaune Quick-to-See Smith — whose powerful Whitney Museum career retrospective closes this Sunday — tells an entire, continuing history of colonial manipulation and repression through details of attire. A near-abstract early painting by Kay WalkingStick embodies a history too, a personal, domestic one. Its single image is of the plain gray work apron WalkingStick wore in the 1970s, as a young mother at home and as a young artist funding her way in her studio.

Big stand-alone sculptures are inherently dramatic. "Deer Woman's New Certificate-of-Indian-Blood-Skin" by Natalie Ball, which suggests a kind of quilted explosion, certainly has presence. So, in a spooky way, does Gabrielle L'Hirondelle Hill's "Counterblaste," a life-size nude female figure, part human, part animal, made from pantyhose stuffed with tobacco, street debris and wildflowers. Larger than either are fiber weavings, modeled on Indigenous jewelry forms, by Eric-Paul Riege, the exhibition's youngest participant. But though monumental in size, they're intimate in effect. Riege uses them as props in performances — pushes them aside, moves them around — and visitors are permitted (encouraged, even) to touch them.

(Several performances — by Gibson, Rebecca Belmore and Maria Hupfield — were commissioned for the show, but experienced only on a limited schedule.)

Sound was a vital component of the 1969 vision for a new American Indian Theater, which I take to mean a new Indian Art. In the early 1960s, when a craze for folk and ethnic music was high, a company called Indian Records, Inc. released many LPs of Native music. The company later went bust but some of the LPs survive and we hear them — the drumming, the chanting — playing on a gallery turntable and filtering through the show.

In the same gallery, but displayed under glass, are recordings made by Ida Halpern, an ethnomusicologist who came to British Columbia from Vienna in the 1930s to document Indigenous music, only to learn that not only was the playing of Native music outlawed by the government, but that Indigenous communities considered certain religious music too sacred to be heard by non-Native listeners. The doubly enforced silence turns Halpern's recordings into visual artifacts — you can look at but not listen to them — and is commemorated in Sonny Assu's wall installation of 136 glowing but unplayable copper records.

There's no such ban in effect in the loquacious audiovisual installation, "Conscientious Conscripture," that is the New Red Order (N.R.O.) headquarters. Founded by the artists Jackson Polys, Adam Khalil and Zack Khalil, the collective's project is essentially an extended satirical performance, soaked in dark humor and intent on exposing America's love/hate relationship with Native culture, which it has embraced in fantasy form and in reality made every effort to erase. N.R.O.'s goal is to get beyond land acknowledgments and diversity box-checking to, in its own words, "promote Indigenous futures and collect on colonial debts."

How's it doing on that agenda? Who can say? The project's still new and, after all, it's only art. But if enough "only art" accumulates — remember its role in the AIDS crisis? — it can generate usable power. And at the moment, Native American art has a presence in the art world it hasn't had before.

Venice is still a year away, but there's a major survey of contemporary Native work opening on Sept. 22 at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, organized by Jaune Quick-to-See Smith. Earlier that month a show of work by four young Native artists will open at James Fuentes Gallery on the Lower East Side, with Natalie Ball as co-curator. In November Ball will make a solo Whitney bow.

And with more coming, maybe new American art will finally trend red, as Luna insisted.

CRITIC'S PICK **Indian Theater: Native Performance, Art, and Self-Determination Since 1969**
Through Nov. 26 at the Hessel Museum of Art at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y.; 845-758-7598, ccs.bard.edu.

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