

MOST SERENE REPUBLICS

HOCK E AYE IV EDGAR HEAP OF BIRDS

Artist Draft Statement

All republics or nation states exist as a result of acts of aggression, displacement or replacement.

The nature of their creation is to eclipse or absorb previous societies and governmental groups.

The title: "Most Serene Republics" for my 2007 Venice Biennale project, supported by the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian, refers to a historic designate of the past known as Venice, Italy. The phrase "Most Serene Republics" fosters a link to an ironic assessment of very hostile policies carried out by the church and kingdom during the "Fourth Crusade", years 1201-1204, in European history. These deeds of war were based primarily on religious, xenophobic and business interests that, when re-examined, reveal similar tactics relating to the current tragic war in Iraq.

For Native Americans, displacement and the dissolving of their own indigenous republics has become a common suffering endured and shared throughout Indian Country. During the 1880's our turbulent Native condition was placed on display, as a human spectacle, in William "Buffalo Bill" Cody's Wild West Show in Venice, Italy and across Europe. Warrior Chiefs representing the Sioux Nations participated as subjugated performers in theatre venues and played to some of the largest audiences ever assembled in Europe for entertainment purposes. Therefore, Native presence in Venice has historically articulated a double displacement of peoples having been removed from tribal homelands, in North American prairies, by war and treaty only to be exiled again and exhibited in Europe.

Warrior Chiefs died (Long Wolf of Pine Ridge) from illness during this exodus to Europe and struggled to survive the exposition and subsequent ridicule. As a primary action in my project for the 2007 Venice Biennale, I wish to erect sixteen memorial text sign panels, size 24" X 36", along the tree colonnade which connects the Biennale Pavilions and Arsenale. These memorial messages shall be multi-lingual, deployed in Italian, English and Cheyenne and dedicated to respecting the spirits of our 1880 Warrior Chiefs.

The Venice Biennale and its vast international tourist audience can be described as a contemporary spectacle and associated with a like-minded event such as the Wild West Show in its relationship to entertainment and commerce. As another important venue for the Warrior Chief memorial messages, I would desire to present large scale billboard texts at the welcoming check point for tourists at Venice's Marco Polo International Airport.

In reflecting upon possible Native American reactions to their 1880's experience in Europe, the Warrior Chiefs were not given an opportunity to offer personal editorials about the European host histories because only Native existence was presented and scrutinized. In the Venetian Royal Gardens, created by Napoleon, I plan to install eight text sign panels, size 24" X 36", which share emotions regarding religious crusades, stolen plunder, repatriation of artifacts, Venetian achievements, both artistic and nautical, along with an investigation of the Italian custom of ghetto creation which became a precursor to the confinement policies of U.S. Indian reservations.

It is most fitting that Native American voices resound in describing Venice and its legacy. A critique of Venetian history and society will inform the modern day public with a new and clearer lens of observation. Perhaps the Venetian republic and biennale will be understood as a deeper chronicle to include Native America while present day global conquests and crusades may be critiqued. As a very significant fourth and final component of my Biennale project, offering a balance to critical analysis, I wish to reaffirm our Native presence in Venice by a constructive and celebratory artistic fabrication. My mission shall be to realize colorful and lyrical creations in glass from the island of Murano and my Neuf (Cheyenne ceremonial number four) Painting series. This painting series has emerged from imagery in the Oklahoma post-reservation landscape and should translate well into the splendor of polychromed glass.

Venice does certainly hold many exemplary properties. The exquisite tradition of Venetian glass executed at the Murano studios will provide a merger of my own artistic freedoms in painting and the fine qualities of Venice. Together these two entities, along with the public art expressions, shall resolve how one negotiates a problematic past while inventing a celebration whose forward looking prospectives speak of acceptance, tolerance, diversity and beauty.