

# Wheel: Overlays

## An Installation by Hock E Aye VI Edgar Heap of Birds

UBC Museum of Anthropology  
March 20 – April 29, 2007

**Tree 8** explores the historical relationship between education and indoctrination for the Cheyenne and other peoples. The artist names boarding schools as well as prisons that shared a strategy of subduing Indians into a new way of life. One panel features alternating motifs of a non-Native teacher and a petroglyph spirit figure; the spirit figure grows larger as it rises, inverting past experiences of the imposed education system. On the opposite side, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act marks the resilience and empowerment of Native peoples.

**Tree 9** celebrates Native alliances and global cooperation among Indigenous peoples. Multiple references are brought together here: the American Indian Movement, international human rights organizations, and symbolic motifs from Zimbabwe, the Cheyenne people, and Aboriginal Australians.

**Tree 10** completes the circle with themes of cultural strengthening, renewal, and growth. Here acronyms refer to academic accomplishments, and statistics compare populations of tribes between 1890 and the present day. The spiral motif is open, indicating optimism for the future of Indigenous nations.

*Each tree comprises 4 OCE digital prints on Mylar, suspended from a steel armature. Total size approx 320 X 91 X 51 cm.*

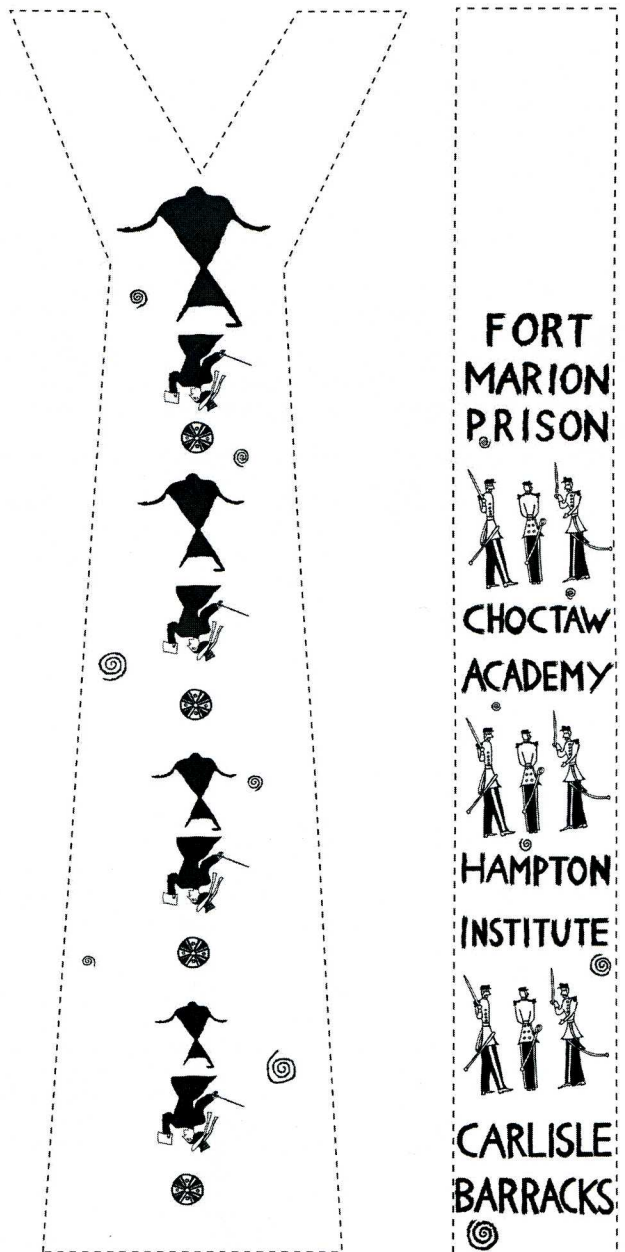
### Artist Profile

Hock E Aye VI Edgar Heap of Birds is a leading artist of Cheyenne and Arapaho descent who lives and works in Oklahoma. A Professor at the University of Oklahoma, he has been exhibiting since 1979, including numerous site-specific installations and public art projects across North America as well as in Europe, South Africa, Asia, and Australia. His sign series, *Native Hosts*, will be installed on the UBC campus in Spring, 2007. In June, 2007, Heap of Birds will represent the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian with a major public art project at the 52<sup>nd</sup> Venice Biennale, Italy.

Project Curator: Karen Duffek  
Project Designer: Skooker Broome

UBC Museum of Anthropology  
6393 N.W. Marine Drive  
Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z2  
604.822.5087 www.moa.ubc.ca

Image: Tree #8 (detail)





### Place and Placement— Experiencing *Wheel: Overlays*

Edgar Heap of Birds makes art that declares itself through text and symbol, plays on the authority of the sign, seeks universal connections—and brings attention to the very ground on which it is positioned.

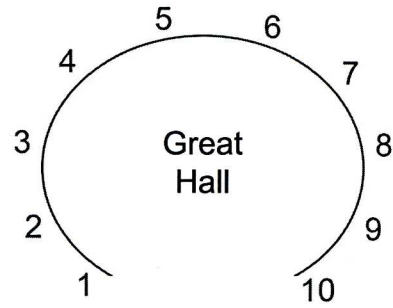
*Wheel: Overlays* is an installation made to be placed in the Great Hall of the Museum of Anthropology. Inspired by Native American architecture and medicine wheels, its ten semi-transparent pillars carry the outlines of forked “tree forms” and are arranged to create a 9-meter circular space. The four sides of each tree are layered with words, symbolic motifs, acronyms, maps, tribal names, dates, and other markings. Together, the forms and texts chronicle the clash of Native and non-Native peoples in Colorado, with particular focus on the cosmology, history, and renewal of the Cheyenne.

“I’m there to uncover or reveal the history between the Native and the Anglo populations,” says Heap of Birds, who is of Cheyenne/Arapaho descent. “These events changed the Native world in a very rapid and negative way forever.” Mourning, defying, exposing, honouring, renewing: in *Wheel: Overlays*, the artist offers a possibility of creating change through exchange, stimulating dialogue through the weapon—and regenerative tool—of art. The work is unabashedly polemical. Yet it also welcomes you inside the circle, offering a contemplative space defined by the interplay of material, light, and the visual impact of its words and symbols.

*Wheel: Overlays* will be seen differently in the public space of the Museum than the way in which its previous incarnation—a red porcelain-on-steel sculpture, *Wheel*, permanently installed outside the Denver Art Museum in 2005—is experienced in Colorado. Here in Vancouver, in an anthropological museum located on the traditional territory of the Musqueam Indian Band, a reading of the artist’s work must also encompass issues of place and placement specific to the political history of British Columbia.

“In the Great Hall,” says Heap of Birds, “our own Cheyenne renewal lodge and many other Native forms share the bond and support of the standing tree. We—the Cheyenne and British Columbia First Nations—both believe in the spirit of the growing tree to lead us, support our dwellings, and offer guidance for our ceremonial structures and ways. An exciting experience shall be to look through the drawings and perhaps see other combinations of my symbols—a chance to see the great poles through a new tribal window.”

Karen Duffek  
Curator, Contemporary Visual Arts



### The “tree forms” and their themes:

**Tree 1**, the starting point of *Wheel: Overlays*, displays petroglyph images and ceramic patterns from the ancient Anasazi culture of Utah and Colorado territories. Notice the spiral motif that carries through this and each of the other tree forms: a universal symbol used by the artist to represent the perseverance of Indigenous peoples.

**Tree 2** tells of the history of Bent’s Fort, a fur-trading post founded in 1833 on the Arkansas River. The words *peace*, *share*, and *trade* describe the relationship among the trading nations named here; the question marks point to the end of peaceful trade in 1857, when the United States Army attacked the Cheyenne Nation.

**Tree 3** depicts the encroaching railway tracks in Oklahoma as sutured wounds on the landscape. Railway expansion and the United States Army brought traumatic declines to the Tsistsistas (Cheyenne) and Inunaina (Arapaho) peoples through the Sand Creek Massacre in 1864 and the Washita River Massacre in 1868.

**Tree 4** addresses the Colorado Gold Rush and its impact on the Ute, or Yutah, peoples. Symbols of mining, gold, and population decline intersect with the tracks of overlapping mining claims, statistics, and beadwork patterns. While Yutah territories diminished along with their population, the word *renew* speaks to the tribe rebuilding its strength today.

**Tree 5** speaks to the Cheyenne people’s transition to reservation life. The texts on each panel summarize the impact of legislation transforming communal lands into 160-acre farming allotments. Images from ledger drawings allude to the near extinction of the bison, while groups of crosses mark the conversion of Native people to Christianity and the deaths that occurred during this era.

**Tree 6** displays the acronyms of programs and agencies now prevalent in the lives of Native Americans. From the Department of the Interior (DOI) to the National Indian Gaming Association (NIGA) to the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), the acronyms encode diverse actions for, and responses to, social change.

**Tree 7** acknowledges the protection of belief systems for Native Americans through the Indian Religious Freedom Act, enacted through federal legislation in 1978. Images depict an earth renewal lodge, a peyote water-bird motif from the Native American Church, and repeating patterns—crescent moons and circular suns—associated with the Ghost Dance.

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