

January 12, 2021

For Immediate Release

**Native Art Department International: *Bureau of Aesthetics*
January 22 – April 16, 2021**

The Crisp-Ellert Art Museum and Flagler College are pleased to announce the forthcoming exhibition *Bureau of Aesthetics* by Native Art Department International (NADI), a collaborative project by Toronto-based artists Maria Hupfield and Jason Lujan. The exhibition is organized by Mercer Union, a centre for contemporary art, Toronto, and is guest curated by Julia Paoli, Director and Curator. Encompassing sculpture, video and installation, *Bureau of Aesthetics* will open to Flagler College students, staff and faculty on Friday, January 22, and will be on view through April 16.

We will kick off the exhibition with a virtual talk with Julia Paoli on Friday, January 22 at 4pm. This event is also a part of Flagler College's Diversity and Inclusion Week. This event is free and open to the public, and [registration](#) is required.

While Hupfield and Lujan both have separate artistic practices, they produce work together under the moniker of Native Art Department International (NADI), a collective that produces artworks, exhibitions, events and screenings. The administrative language ingrained in the collective's name, along with the title of the exhibition, provides the artists with greater freedom to frame their work on their own terms. They short-circuit potential expectations and stereotypes built into the name of the collective itself, communicating in terms that are broader than and strengthened by the work of its members and allies.

The works in *Bureau of Aesthetics* are selected from exhibitions, programs and performances over the past five years that reflect NADI's cooperative and multi-modal approach which often includes collaborations with fellow artists and cultural producers. Working across various platforms, NADI's projects prioritize kinship, relationality and non-competition in order to liberate artists, artworks and aesthetics from classifications ingrained in systems of power and interpretation. Their multi-disciplinary practice—comprising performance, sculpture and video—engages in a collaborative approach to bypass essentialist readings of contemporary artworks and reject reductionist positions projected onto the work of Indigenous cultural producers. One work in the exhibition that speaks to NADI's methodology is *Untitled (Carl Beam)*, a neon over lithographic print work from 2017. Beam (1943 – 2005) was an internationally acclaimed Canadian artist of Ojibwe descent. In his training, Beam was influenced by American artists such as Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg for their collaging of images from popular culture and photo-silkscreen processes. Beam employed a similar range of media to bring together subjects and events to challenge constructed histories and offer a rethinking of how those histories are told. NADI's work references this history of Beam's work

and is a direct response to the artists' experience of Beam's retrospective at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian in New York City in 2011. Hupfield and Lujan noted that "the works on view without clear Indigenous references or traditional signifiers were not purchased by major institutions, galleries or private collectors." In their response, the artists layered a neon No U-Turn sign over one of Beam's artist proof prints, entitled *Traffic*, (1997). Their intervention recognizes the significance of Beam's work in art history and signals a commitment to continue moving forward and expanding Indigenous discourse, calling for a simultaneous need to reroute value beyond fetishizing identity.

One of the ways in which Hupfield and Lujan challenge the systems of power within the art world is through exhibition design. *Bureau of Aesthetics* prioritizes the body and in-person experience. At CEAM this is gestured through the changing space of the gallery as a site for gathering during the pandemic. During their artist residency in February, NADI will assemble new display architecture that alters the exhibition layout. The artists will document these interventions by mounting photographic doubles at the original site of each artwork, continuing their exploration of reflections in the exhibition space. By relocation their artworks onto new structures, Hupfield and Lujan's transformative reorganization of the exhibition recognizes the gallery as a dynamic site for engagement and inclusion.

A 3D virtual exhibition of both iterations of the *Bureau of Aesthetics* will be available online for the public to engage with the work due to limitations resulting from the pandemic.

Native Art Department International (NADI) is a collaborative long-term project created and administered by Maria Hupfield (Canada) and Jason Lujan (United States). NADI focuses on communications platforms and systems of support in the art world while at the same time functioning as emancipation from essentialism and identity-based artwork. NADI seeks to circumvent easy categorization by comprising a diverse range of activities such as curated exhibitions, video screenings, panel talks, collective art-making and documenting, and an online presence, however all activities contain an undercurrent of positive progress through cooperation and non-competition.

MERCER UNION is a non-profit, artist-centered space in Toronto. We have a unique track record of presenting innovative exhibitions by diverse Canadian and international artists in formative and established stages of their careers. We are dedicated to supporting the production of new and experimental work.

Mercer Union has the will and flexibility to take on ambitious projects. We foster an intimate and supportive space for artists to develop and take risks with their work. In turn, their exhibitions play a role in shaping the cultural landscape of Toronto, Canada and beyond.

Mercer Union. Cultivating artists and challenging audiences since 1979.

Bureau of Aesthetics was produced and organized by Mercer Union, a center for contemporary art, Toronto. The exhibition is made possible with Leading Support from TD Bank Group and the NuytenDime Foundation

The Crisp-Ellert Art Museum is located in an accessible building. If you are a person with a disability and need reasonable accommodations, please contact Phil Pownall at 904-819-6460. Sign Language Interpreters are available upon request with a minimum of three days' notice.

For further information on our programming, please visit the website at www.flagler.edu/crispellert, or contact Julie Dickover at 904-826-8530 or crispellert@flagler.edu. Please note that the museum and Flagler College are currently closed to the public due to campus Covid guidelines.