

FORT GANSEVOORT

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Art Reviews

What to See Right Now in New York Art Galleries.

By Holland Cotter
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Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds

Through March 7. Fort Gansevoort, 5 Ninth Avenue, Manhattan;
917-639-3113, fortgansevoort.com.



Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds's "Standing Rock Awakens the World" (2019), which is made of dozens of monoprints. Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds and Fort Gansevoort

Edgar Heap of Birds, whose Cheyenne name is Hock E Aye Vi, has been an important figure in contemporary American art, including Native American art, for some 40 years. "Standing Rock Awakens the World," his stirring show at Fort Gansevoort, isn't exactly the career survey we've been waiting for — that will require the resources of a major New York museum — but it gives a good sense of the span and variety of his work.

Much of it has been, and still is, text-based, and no artist better understands the political weight and expressive velocity of language. The show's earliest piece, "American Policy II" from 1987, is a mural-like ensemble of 15 pastel drawings composed of English-language phrases evoking the colonial stresses imposed on Native American life. "Know Young Death" one panel reads. "Relocate Destroy" another says. Drawn with feathered lines and in coded colors, the words are individual images that collectively form a chantlike piece of concrete poetry.

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Abstract paintings from the artist's long-continuing "Neuf Series," including this one from 1996, are installed throughout the show. Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds and Fort Gansevoort

In the show's similarly monumental 2019 title work, "Standing Rock Awakens the World," made of dozens of monoprints, the palette is reduced to mostly shades of red-brown and the words are specific in their historical reference. With phrases like "Stop Settler Terror," and "Water Is Our First Medicine," written in stark white and in some cases on blood-red ground, the prints read like a wall of placards carried by an invisible army of resisters at the 2016 Dakota Access pipeline protests.

Installed throughout the show are abstract paintings from the artist's "Neuf Series" (examples here date from 1996 to 2019). A set of steel signs installed in the gallery's courtyard suggest a Native American claim to that world, or part of it, namely the New York land underfoot. Although the signs indicate that Indigenous stakeholders have granted us access to that land, history tells us that we have done everything not to earn their welcome.

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