

Native American artists speak at MAM



“Scottsdale Yaquis: Generations” by Mario Martinez. This work is in MAM’s “Constructing Identity in America (1766-2017),” which runs through Jan. 5, 2020. COURTESY MONTCLAIR ART MUSEUM

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For Montclair Local

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Two Native American artists discussed their work and showed their differences as well as similarities in a panel “Native American Art: Crossing Boundaries.” The panel at [Montclair Art Museum](#) held Wednesday, March 21, was moderated by Elizabeth W. Hutchinson. Both artists’ works held strong cultural values while also remaining very fresh and modern. What was really striking was the stark difference between the artists.

Mario Martinez, the older of the two artists, was first to speak. He called his abstract paintings “Celestialscapes” and “Cosmicscapes.” His paintings are very colorful and ethereal. They provide a kind of floating feeling to the viewer. Despite this cosmic feeling, Martinez’s paintings remain very rooted in cultural values and history. He is a Yaqui Indian, who believe they are created from the heavens – hence the “cosmicscapes” – and value flowers as symbols above all else. These images are present in his work, one of which is at MAM, which juggles contemporary, abstract style with ancient cultural values.

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Michael Namingha’s work feels very different. His work (not on exhibit at MAM) provides an earnest sense of youth, and his medium is a stark contrast to Martinez. Namingha focuses in photography and utilizes modern technology, including drone

cameras. His work is bold, and roots itself in reality. While his work at first might seem very simple or minimalistic, there is beauty and deeper meaning in its simplicity. Rather than overtly representing Native American history, Namingha addresses issues such as oil drilling on Native land and destruction of land in a more covert, broader sense.

Both artists' work is contemporary, but are very different in their sensibilities. However, both artists radiate a sense of joy, dedication and love for their work which leaves the viewer with a light, glowing feeling.



“BP10” by Michael Namingha. Namingha’s work is not on exhibit at MAM. COURTESY MONTCLAIR ART MUSEUM