

# WHITNEY

Whitney Museum  
of American Art  
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# PRESS RELEASE

## ARTIST NATALIE BALL CREATES NEVER-BEFORE-SEEN ARTWORK FOR EXHIBITION AT THE WHITNEY



Natalie Ball: *bilwi naats Ga'niipci* explores and recontextualizes understandings of Indigenous life.

**New York, NY, November 17, 2023** — *Natalie Ball: bilwi naats Ga'niipci*, opening at the Whitney Museum of American Art today, November 17, 2023, is the first New York solo exhibition for boundary-breaking artist and community leader Natalie Ball.

The exhibition presents a group of never-before-seen sculptural assemblages that deepen and destabilize understandings of Indigenous life in the United States. Ball, who is Black, Modoc, and Klamath, lives and works in her ancestral homelands in Southern Oregon and Northern California, where, in addition to creating artworks, she serves as an elected official on the Klamath Tribes Tribal Council.

Her artwork draws from various sources, including found, hunted, purchased, and gifted objects. Ball explores how the lives and meanings of materials interconnect with her sense of self. Through the layering of quilt tops and T-shirts, elk hides and animal bones, synthetic hair, shoes, beads, and newspapers, among other commercially produced items, Ball's work carries the textures, stories, and scents of the places they have been and traces the history and future of her communities.

"It has been an honor to work with Natalie on this exhibition and to witness these new works come into the space of the Whitney," says Jennie Goldstein, Jennifer Rubio Associate Curator of the Collection and organizing curator for the exhibition. "Through her gathered materials the artist prompts us to acknowledge where we have been, where we are, and to question the complexities of belonging."

The exhibition's title, *bilwi naats Ga'niipci*, which in maqlaqsyals (the Language of the People), translates to "we smell like the outside." It is a variation of an expression that Ball associates with her childhood and family in both Black and Indigenous spaces. With this phrase, she highlights her artistic aims: to channel her ancestors while reflecting on her lived experience, including as a future ancestor. Additionally, the exhibition is contextualized in English, Spanish, and, for the first time at the Whitney, in maqlaqsyals, which supports the reawakening of this language.

"With his exhibition, I hope to reach an expansive audience to share my work with as I challenge mainstream ideas of Indigeneity with my personal, community, and our Nation's history," says Natalie Ball. "My work disrupts the mainstream definition of *Indian* and uncovers the complexity of Native American lives, like my own, for a better understanding of ourselves, the Nation, and our shared experiences and histories."

*Natalie Ball: bilwi naats Ga'niipci* is on view in the Museum's Lobby gallery through February 19, 2024. The Lobby gallery is accessible to the public free of charge, as part of the Whitney Museum's enduring commitment to support and showcase the most recent work of emerging artists.

This exhibition is organized by Jennie Goldstein, Jennifer Rubio Associate Curator of the Collection, with Rose Pallone, Curatorial Assistant.

### **About the Artist**

Natalie Ball (b. 1980) was born and raised in Portland, Oregon. She has a Bachelor's degree with a double major in Indigenous, Race, and Ethnic Studies and Art from the University of Oregon. She continued her education in New Zealand at Massey University, earning her Master's degree focusing on Indigenous contemporary art. Ball then relocated to her ancestral Homelands in Southern Oregon/Northern California to raise her three children. In 2018, Natalie earned her M.F.A. in Painting & Printmaking at Yale School of Art. Her work has been shown nationally and internationally. She is the recipient of the Native Arts and Cultures Foundation's Oregon Native Arts Fellowship 2021, the Ford Family Foundation's Hallie Ford Foundation

Fellow 2020, the Joan Mitchell Painters & Sculptors Grant 2020, Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant 2019, and the Seattle Art Museum's Betty Bowen Award 2018. In 2022, Natalie Ball was elected to serve on the Klamath Tribes Tribal Council.

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## PRESS CONTACT

For press materials and image requests, please visit our press site at [whitney.org/press](https://whitney.org/press) or contact:

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## EXHIBITION SUPPORT

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## ABOUT THE WHITNEY

The Whitney Museum of American Art, founded in 1930 by the artist and philanthropist Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (1875–1942), houses the foremost collection of American art from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Mrs. Whitney, an early and ardent supporter of modern American art, nurtured groundbreaking artists when audiences were still largely preoccupied with the Old Masters. From her vision arose the Whitney Museum of American Art, which has been championing the most innovative art of the United States for ninety years. The core of the Whitney's mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit American art of our time and serve a wide variety of audiences in celebration of the complexity and diversity of art and culture in the United States. Through this mission and a steadfast commitment to artists, the Whitney

has long been a powerful force in support of modern and contemporary art and continues to help define what is innovative and influential in American art today.

### **Whitney Museum Land Acknowledgment**

The Whitney is located in Lenapehoking, the ancestral homeland of the Lenape. The name Manhattan comes from their word Mannahatta, meaning “island of many hills.” The Museum’s current site is close to land that was a Lenape fishing and planting site called Sapponckanikan (“tobacco field”). The Whitney acknowledges the displacement of this region’s original inhabitants and the Lenape diaspora that exists today.

As a museum of American art in a city with vital and diverse communities of Indigenous people, the Whitney recognizes the historical exclusion of Indigenous artists from its collection and program. The Museum is committed to addressing these erasures and honoring the perspectives of Indigenous artists and communities as we work for a more equitable future. To read more about the Museum’s Land Acknowledgment, [visit the Museum’s website](#).

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## **MUSEUM VISITOR INFORMATION**

The Whitney Museum of American Art is located at 99 Gansevoort Street between Washington and West Streets, New York City. Public hours are Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday, 10:30 am–6 pm; Friday, 10:30 am–10 pm; and Saturday and Sunday, 11 am–6 pm. Closed Tuesday. Member-only hours are: Saturday and Sunday, 10:30–11 am. Visitors eighteen years and under and Whitney members: FREE.

**Image caption:** Natalie Ball, *Burden Basket*, 2023. Elk rawhide, cotton, newspaper, wood, leather, plastic beads, willow branches, artificial hair, aluminum foil, chalk, metal clamps, rope, makeup, and graphite, 80 × 60 × 24in. (203.2 × 152.4 × 61 cm). Collection of the artist. Photo by Audrey Wang

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