

The background of the entire image is an abstract composition of overlapping, hand-painted geometric shapes. The primary colors are bright yellow and orange, which are layered over a dark, almost black, background. The shapes are primarily rectangular and triangular, creating a complex, woven pattern that suggests depth and movement. The brushstrokes are visible, giving the artwork a textured, organic feel.

ERIN GENIA
Okonwanžidan

Urbano presents:

Okonwanžidan

A solo exhibition by **Erin Genia**

October 15 - December 21, 2019

Opening Reception

Thursday, October 24, 6:30-8:30pm

Artist Talk | Sound, Air, Earth

Rachel Allen, Nancy Valladares, and Nicole L'Huillier

Thursday, November 14, 6:30pm

Open 1-6pm Tue-Fri and by appt

Free admission

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*“How can we create **okonwanžidan** - oneness, being of one mind, as we handle climate change, mass ecological destruction, and sociopolitical disparities?”*

Okonwanžidan

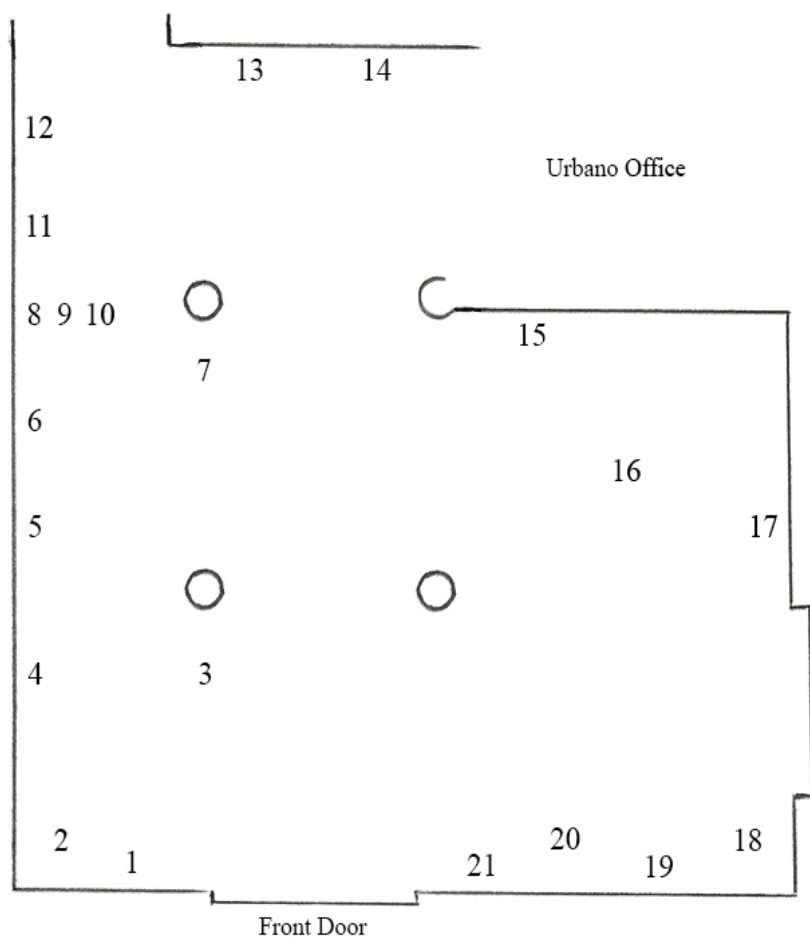
How can we create *okonwanžidan* - oneness, being of one mind, as we handle climate change, mass ecological destruction, and sociopolitical disparities? We can begin with questioning the ways we think, act, and produce work that are based on deeply embedded, centuries-old colonial assumptions and systems of violence, and reorient towards the laws of the natural world and our evolutionary potential as human beings. This means addressing the historical legacy present in our communities that is built upon the genocide and assimilation of Indigenous people.

In Dakota philosophy, all things exist within a continuum of life, and the concept of *mitakuye oyasin* - we are all related, extends not only to other people, but also to animals, plants, minerals, electricity, air, objects, and everything in existence. As we operate within political and economic systems that divide us, people have forgotten that we are not separate from the earth – we are the earth. With this in mind: How can we respect the agency of the inherent life of everything around us? How do our current relationships and responsibilities to ourselves, each other and the natural world shift?

My work considers *okonwanžidan* in the context of *mitakuye oyasin*, ecological decline, and Dakota cultural endurance through creative investigations of auditory reality, macro- and micro- universes, vibrations of color, light, movement, and sound itself as material.

Erin Genia (Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate)
Urbano Fall 2019 Artist in Residence

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- 1. Eclipse (2017)**
MDF particle board, LEDs and acrylic
36" x 36"

This work was inspired by the experience of viewing the total solar eclipse that occurred on August 21, 2017. Depicted with Dakota iconography, layered surfaces are painted with the colors of the four directions to render the unique play of light that occurs when heavenly bodies align.

- 2. Morningstar Light Chamber (2017)**
Mixed media: wood, lens, pvc pipe, arduino boards, RGB LED, epoxy, hardware, rockite, acrylic
16" x 22" x 24"

Morningstar Light Chamber is an optical projection unit that transmits light through a mirrored chamber crafted into the shape of an eight-pointed star. It is programmed to produce ambient colored light in colors from the RGB spectrum and projects a powerful symbol that projects a Dakota worldview.

- 3. InVisible (2017)**
Pieced organza and shawl fringe
60" x 60"

When worn as a shawl, InVisible provides a symbolic skin of protection against pervasive cultural supremacy. The Morningstar form is an expression of cultural power which is used here to transform. Is white cultural supremacy, which expropriates and erases other cultures, a translucent veil so permeating it is nearly invisible to those living under it? As a Dakota person, I experience cultural supremacy as a tool of the dominant culture that sets itself as the standard, forces assimilation and constantly perpetuates itself to reinforce structures and institutions which maintain a limited picture of reality. The white gossamer fabric of this shawl is nearly transparent, but as it moves, it reflects rays of light in a full spectrum of colors, which affirms its self-possessed strength of presence. It is a reminder that other realities are possible. In this installation, Morningstar Light Chamber's projection is superimposed upon it.

4. **Wicahnpi Topa/ Four Stars (2017)**
Pieced cotton fabric, silkscreened prints, jingles, beads, embroidery thread and grommets
14" x 36"
5. **Reverberations (2018)**
Acrylic on canvas
62" x 49"

Reverberations is a color study of the overlapping sound wave fronts emanating from objects in an urban space.

6. **Low Frequency Reverberations (2019)**
Acrylic on canvas
30" x 30"

This painting depicts the low frequency sounds of a thunderstorm with the lowest frequency color in the visible light spectrum, red.






7. **Diaspora & Discord (2017)**
MDF particle board, ribbon, wire, glass beads, screen printed fabric, jingles, dentalium, disco ball motor
30" x 14" x 14"



As a Dakota person living in the diaspora that was created as a result of the U.S. - Dakota War, I explore the confusing tangle of paths traversed by thousands of Dakota survivors, to places spanning the Midwest, the Great Plains and into Canada between 1862 and the 1880s. Using ribbons, jingles and dentalium used in creating powwow regalia, I have created a column of vitality, which shows that, despite our separation and struggle over generations after being forced from our sacred homeland of Minnesota, we remain a people with our culture.

As a mobile structure, the piece engages gravity and the air currents of its surroundings, subtly moving with them. Beginning with a structural form of a Morningstar, four arrows wind around the piece and each other, illustrating back-and-forth paths taken across distance. The arrow's points are made from silkscreened Morningstar forms which have been cut into four pieces, representing our separation in all four directions.

Dakota Diaspora after 1862

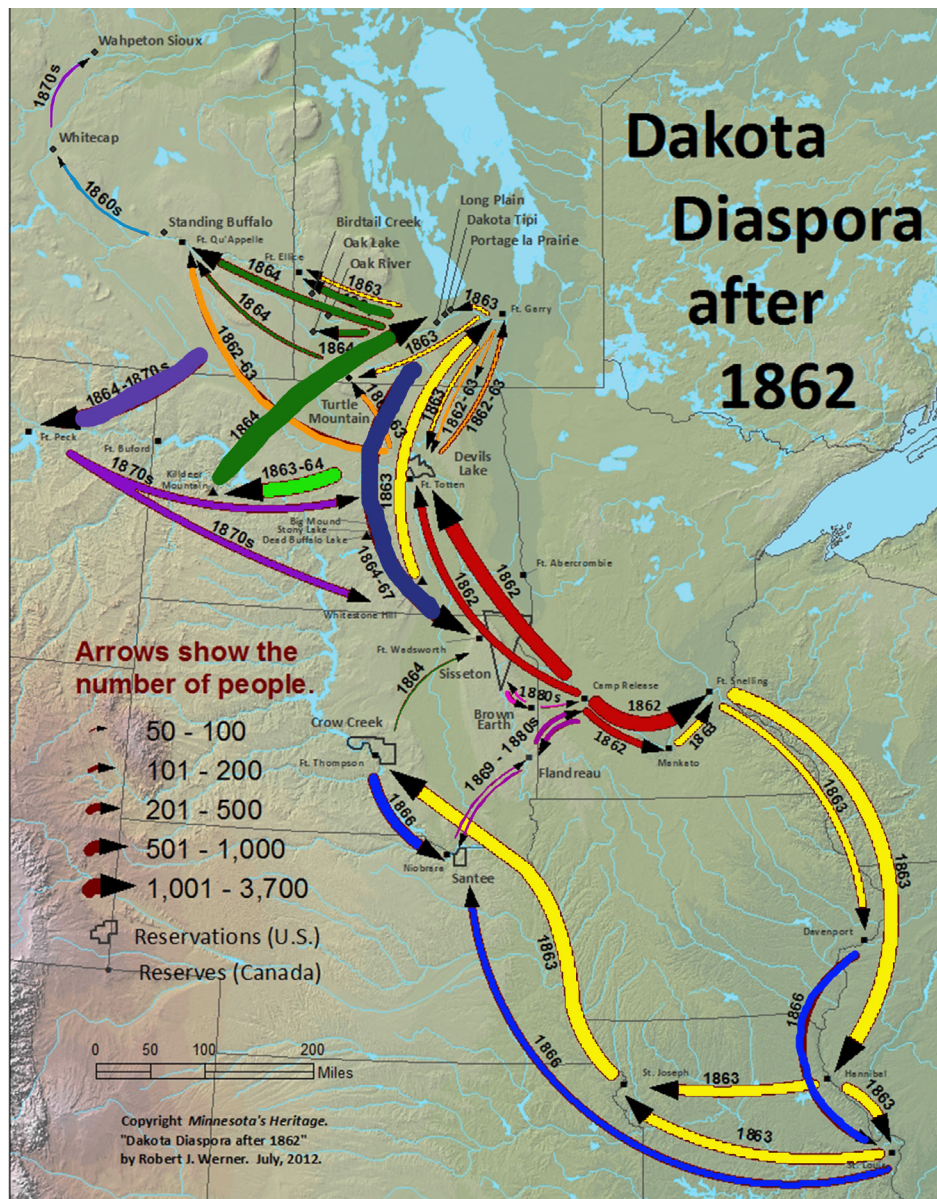
Arrows show the
number of people.

-  50 - 100
-  101 - 200
-  201 - 500
-  501 - 1,000
-  1,001 - 3,700

-  Reservations (U.S.)
-  Reserves (Canada)

0 50 100 200
Miles

Copyright Minnesota's Heritage.
"Dakota Diaspora after 1862"
by Robert J. Werner. July, 2012.



The work is based upon a color-coded version of the map, "Dakota Diaspora after 1862," created by geographer Robert J. Werner, published in Minnesota's Heritage magazine in 2012. The map shows the places where Dakota people were forced to go after the war and displacement and dispossession by white settlers:

Camp Release, Fort Snelling, Fort Totten, Upper Agency, Lower Agency, Mankato, Spirit Lake, Fort Garry, Birdtail Creek, Turtle Mountain, Fort Qu'Appelle, Whitestone Hill, Portage La Prairie, Dakota Tipi, Fort Ellice, Hannibal, Davenport, Saint Joseph, Fort Thompson, Saint Louis, Crow Creek, Killdeer Mountain, Long Plain, Oak Lake, Sisseton Wahpeton, Standing Buffalo, Whitecap, Fort Wadsworth, Wahpeton Sioux, Fort Peck, Niobrara/ Santee, Flandreau, Brown Earth.

Over time the Dakota diaspora has expanded, as the result of mass re-settlement stemming from urbanization caused the Indian Relocation Act, and many other reasons. Still, Dakota people agree that Mni sota, today known as the state of Minnesota, remains our homeland and place of origin.

8. Recombinant (2018)

Silkscreened fabric, glass beads, thread
12" x 14"

Through the accumulative process of beading, I investigate the relationships between imprinted bodies, overlaid negative space and the new forms that are created when they are spliced together.

9. Morningstar Drum (2018)

elk hide, wood frame
13" x 13"

10. Listening to the Land (1997)

Plywood and acrylic paint
14" x 24" x 8"

A canyon portrayed as an ear reflects the Dakota concept of mitakuye oyasin, and the understanding that humans are not separate from the earth.

11. **Morningstar Reverb (2019)**
60" x 52"
Acrylic on canvas

The echo of two drumbeats, reverberating in space.

12. **Inner Ear (2018)**
Acrylic on canvas
86" x 62"

This painting is the result of an auditory meditation on sound waves being received by my inner ear.

13. **Fourth World Flag (2018)**
Hand-pieced ripstop nylon
5' x 8'

"The Fourth World is the name given to indigenous peoples descended from a country's aboriginal population and who today are completely or partly deprived of the right to their own territories and its riches. The peoples of the Fourth World have only limited influence or none at all in the national state to which they belong."

- George Manuel, World Council of Indigenous Peoples, 1975

Presented on this flag is the powerful Dakota symbol, the Morningstar, which signifies a way of life that is deeply connected to the natural world and teaches respect for relationships between living systems. Many colors, some hand-dyed, are pieced together to celebrate the diversity of Indigenous peoples around the globe. Promoting unity across peoples of the Fourth World, it serves as a symbol to rally around while working together for shared causes. Many different kinds of people, many ways of thinking and being make us stronger if we embrace our differences as well as our similarities.

14. **Earthling Takes a Walk (2019)**
Video projection

"The imminent and expected destruction of the life cycle of world ecology can be prevented by a radical shift in outlook from our present naive conception of this world as a testing ground of abstract morality to a more mature view of the

universe as a comprehensive matrix of life forms.”

- Vine Deloria, Jr. *God is Red*, 1973

Earthling is a character, a person, a being, who is at once playful and unnerving. Earthling is a reminder that underneath people's closely held ideas, underneath the systems that capitalize upon us and colonize us, our adopted ideologies, we are earth-based beings. We are not just of the earth – we are the earth.

Looking back through history, all cultures of the world stem from earth-based ways of knowing. For the past couple centuries, earth-based ways have been targeted for erasure and indeed nearly erased by dominant societal forces, in order to prop up false hierarchies. Part of the decolonization process involves understanding this historical perspective, and working to shed those ideologies that have been harmful to us and the world around us. Can we shift our orientation to creating economies, scientific practices, technology, social structures and culture that is based upon this fundamental aspect of life?

Human understanding has come far away from the reality that we are not separate from the earth. How would our responsibilities to ourselves, each other and our world change if this reality was the basis of our collective thought and action? By observing Earthling's existence in a variety of situations, captured in “Earthling Takes a Walk,” we can consider some of these questions.

15. **After Powhatan's Robe (2018)**

Acrylic, gold leafed ceramic shells on curtain
60" x 75"

This piece is a reflection upon Powhatan's Mantle, an intricately beaded hide that was thought to be a robe owned by Wahunsunacock, leader of the Powhatan Confederacy. It is an exquisite garment that lives in the collection of the first museum in the world, and was part of an extensive Wunderkammer, a cabinet of curiosity, from which the museum was founded.

Due to our colonial history, Indigenous people don't often have access to our own treasures. The tribes and peoples that created works like Powhatan's Mantle have been decimated by colonization, and the same mentality that was used to deprive peoples of their lands, lives, and cultural properties still exists in



Powhatan's Mantle (1601-1700), Deer hide with shell bead decoration and sinew, 93" x 63", said to have been owned by Wahunsunacock, place of creation: Virginia Colony. Image © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

the successor to cabinets of curiosity—museums. That a piece of such significance as Powhatan's Mantle ended up in the world's first museum as an oddity, a prize, and a specimen, set the tone for how museum spaces thereafter have treated Indigenous peoples. Recognizing the legacy of the Wunderkammer in today's museums, is essential to understanding how Indigenous people have been considered by them. By extension, this consideration reverberates into public space and into the art-making process itself.

After Powhatan's Robe was created in my studio space in the Festung Hohensalzburg, an ancient fortress atop a mountain in Salzburg, Austria. It is a response to the loss of Indigenous peoples and cultures and the injustice of our masterpieces ending up in the collections of colonizers. As I was making it, I tried to artistically recreate the spirals embroidered on the original hide, using handmade ceramic roanoke shells with gold leaf, but I was unsuccessful. That failure made me reflect on the difficulty of producing such a work. I thought about who made it, how incredibly skilled they were, and how long it must have taken to finish it. My best efforts produced one large spiral, in which the shells are spaced to represent culture loss, loneliness, but also continuity.

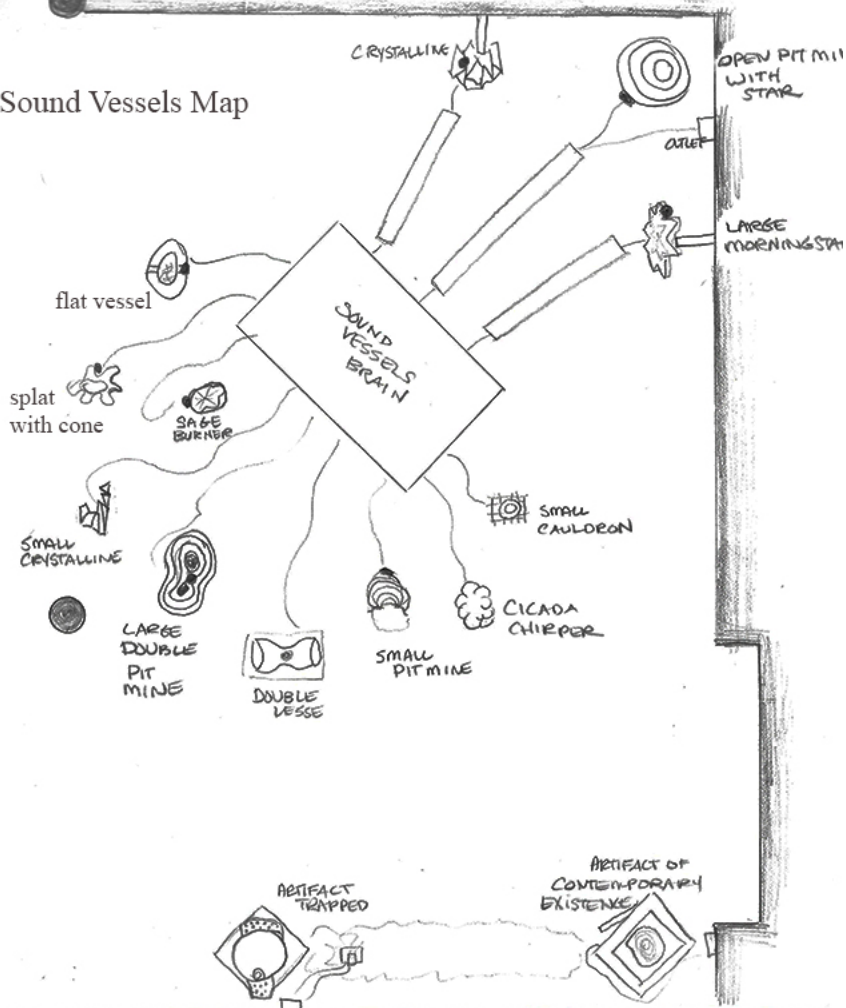
16. Sound Vessels (2019)

brain: 50" x 27" x 24"

neurons: glazed, gilded ceramic vessels, surface transducers, amplifier, mp3 player, speaker wire and soundscape composition

Sound Vessels is an installation of ceramic sculptures that transmit sounds. The ceramic vessels are built to hold and transmit sound, rather than the usual use of clay vessels as containers for solids or liquids. Using sound as a material, this work explores how it can interact with objects, through the medium of earth, by experimenting with various types of sounds and shapes. In Dakota philosophy, all things exist within a continuum of life, and the foundational concept of *mitakuye oyasin*, that we are all related, extends not only to other people, but also to animals, plants minerals, electricity, air objects, and everything in existence. This piece illustrates this philosophy and concept by linking the materiality of sound to form.

Sound Vessels Map



Sound Vessels plays individual sound compositions over 12 channels, creating a randomized orchestra of objects. Sound forms include: my heartbeat, a hand drum, a rattle, fire, a train, hydrophone recordings from the Quinobequin/ Charles River and the Venice Lagoon, spoken words in both Dakota and English languages, morse code, ambient recordings of birds, insects, frogs, a flute and a vocalization of the word *Okonwanžidan*. Vessels include crystalline forms, open pit mines, and sculptural forms which have been built to project sound.

17. Colonial Legacy: Uncontrolled Burn (2018)
Pastel on paper
16" x 20"

The work depicts a wild forest fire from above. The increasing number and severity of forest fires stems from the colonial legacy of destroying earth-based ways of knowing that are carried by Indigenous peoples. One of these ways of knowing is a centuries-old practice of stewarding landscapes through a variety of methods, including controlled burns to manage forests. The loss of Indigenous peoples practicing these methods over widespread areas, accompanied by a prevalent view that the natural world is a set of natural resources meant for human and industrial consumption alone inevitably leads to ecosystemic collapse.

18. Artifact of Contemporary Existence (2019)
Glazed ceramic, wood, cast acrylic, acrylic paint,
amp, mp3 player, acrylic on canvas
18" x 18" x 60"

This sound vessel, enlivened by a composition of landslides and explosions, is a model of the Bingham Canyon mine in Utah – the largest open pit mine in the world which extracts copper, gold, silver, and molybdenum. The mine is operated by Rio Tinto Kennecott, whose website states, “we mine essential elements that make modern living possible...Nearly everything used today relies on materials we produce.”

The work is installed on a pedestal to ground it in Western art collection aesthetics that stem from the Wunderkammer, cabinet of curiosity, origins. In considering the sources of the

the materials we use in the art world and beyond, this work draws aural attention to the destruction necessary to contemporary existence, and questions the boundaries placed on the art and creative practices of Indigenous peoples that have kept in place by Western practices of producing, displaying and preserving art.

19. **The Universe is My Regalia (2018)**
Acrylic on canvas, ceramic, gold leaf, ribbon
50" x 60"

This piece was created as symbolic garment, to show that those who wear it share lineage with the entire universe and our collective potential is bound by its limitless expansion.

20. **Artifact Trapped (2019)**
Micaceous ceramic, wood, amplifier, surface transducers, mp3 player, soundscape
24" x 22" x 14"

In my museum research, I have come across hundreds of Dakota ancestral works that remain trapped in museum collections, hidden away, inaccessible to our people. This piece probes the boundary between museum culture and Indigenous perspectives by challenging the Wunderkammer aesthetic. How can the Indigenous reality that ancient artifacts have a life of their own and their own agency be reconciled with the politics and practices of museum collection, preservation and display? The bowl is a ceremonial feast bowl depicting Iya, the spirit of gluttony. Through a sound composition, the piece speaks, to complicate the viewer's perception of a museum artifact.

21. **Facing/ Not Facing: Toxic Devastation from Oil (2016)**
Glazed terracotta, brass, plaster, wood, acrylic
18" x 12" x 3"

Broken pipelines delineate the four directions, the spill reaches out to all corners of the earth. At the heart of the crisis are humans who are both responsible for it and endangered by it.

Biography

Erin Genia (Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate) is a multidisciplinary artist whose practice follows various strands, merging cultural imperatives, pure expression, and exploration of materiality, with a response to past, present, and future matters.



Erin is concerned with creating a powerful presence of Indigeneity in the arts and sciences to invoke an evolution of thought and practice that is aligned with the cycles of the natural world and the potential of humanity.

Erin has a Master of Science in Art, Culture and Technology from MIT and studied at the Institute of American Indian Arts and The Evergreen State College. Her work has received attention from diverse audiences, and been exhibited nationally and internationally, most recently at “Personal Structures - Identities” in the context of the 2019 Venice Art Biennale, the Swamp Pavilion, Lithuania Pavilion, La Biennale Architettura di Venezia 2018, the Harvard Museum of Natural History, and the Weisner Gallery at MIT. Erin was awarded the 2019 MIT Solve Indigenous Communities Fellowship, the Harold and Arlene Schnitzer Prize – 2nd place, and the AAF/ Seebacher Prize for Fine Arts. She received her first public art commission for “Resilience: Anpa O Wicahnpi” from the City of Seattle Office of Arts and Culture, and is currently an artist-in-residence at Urbano Project in Boston.

<http://eringeniaportfolio.blogspot.com/>

