ABOUT THE ARTIST

Douglas Miles is a San Carlos Apache-Akimel O'odham artist, designer, photographer, filmmaker, muralist, and public speaker that assembles traditional and non-traditional materials and images to tell Native American stories. Miles was born in 1963 in the San Carlos Apache Nation in Arizona. Miles grew up in Phoenix before attending the Western Alternative High School and later the Al Collins Graphic Design School before moving back to San Carlos. A professional artist for two decades, Miles’ work has been shown at Pravus Gallery, Princeton University, the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History, and the Institute of American Indian Arts Museum in Santa Fe, among others. Several pieces of his work are in the collection of the National Museum of the American Indian and in the permanent collections of the Moncrystal Art Museum, the Elkhorn Museum of American Indians and Western Art, Warner Brothers Studios and the Eddie Bauer Collection.

CATALOGUE

Praying Hands
Aerosol on wood
18” x 24”

Stronger Than Pride
Aerosol on wood
18” x 24”

Husband with Guns
mixed media paint on wood
31” x 7”

Wife with Guns
mixed media paint on wood
31” x 7”

Daughter with Guns
mixed media paint on wood
31” x 7”

Indeh X Apache Geromino Waits
mixed media paint on wood
31” x 8”

Apache Ramos: The Orphan
mixed media paint on wood
31” x 7”

In America (Rita Moreno)
mixed media paint on wood
31” x 7”

Hector Lalico
mixed media paint on wood
31” x 7”

Star Spangled Banner
mixed media paint on wood
31” x 7”

Hector with Guns
mixed media paint on wood
31” x 7”

Apache X Apache Arrows In The Back
mixed media paint on wood
31” x 8”

Warning Apaches Ahead 1 & 2
Mixed media collage diptych on found metal sign
12” x 36” (future skateboard designs)

*The first mass produced Apache Skateboard

India on the Ramp
C-Print
18” x 22”

Joanita’s Girls
C-Print
18” x 22”

Doug at Two Guns
C-Print
18” x 22”

Reuben Ringlero
Defy Gravity, 2014
C-Print
30” x 20”

The Team in Fort Duchesne
2015
C-Print
20” x 20”

APACHE Rain Digital, 2016
C-Print
18” x 22”

Reuben Ringlero and Douglas Miles
Flight, 2015
C-Print
18” x 22”

APACHE Chronicles: The Art of Douglas Miles
GALLERY at the CENTER
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
NOVEMBER 17, 2016
DOUGLAS MILES' MOVING HISTORY

We did not plan it this way. But less than two weeks after a tense 2016 election in which the winning campaign's slogan was "Make America great again," and in tandem with protests against the construction of an oil pipeline near Native American land in North Dakota, the Gallery at the Center presents The Apache Chronicles: The Art of Douglas Miles, a rich sample of iconic Apache artist Douglas Miles' work. Indigenous art both visualizes Apache freedom, resistance and creativity in the face of centuries of settler colonialism; and poses the urgent question of how to remember the past to open up more hopeful futures.

Miles' themes and core questions would already make his work relevant, yet his formal boldness makes it vital. Defying decades of curatorial and pedagogical practices that have sought to limit Native artistic expression to traditional art forms like basket weaving and jewelry making, Miles keeps the spirit alive otherwise. Aware of custom but not constrained by it, Miles interlaces non-traditional materials, including steel, spray paint and contemporary fashion with diverse visual styles from comic books, skateboarding culture and Apache historiography, into a distinctive artistic vocabulary. Equally important, although Miles shows his work in galleries and museums, his artistic project is of an entirely different kind: a participatory praxis that "turns any alley or walkway into a world class museum or canvas."

Accepting Miles' invitation, The Apache Chronicles features twenty-three works on photographic paper, wood, and the artist's signature skateboard decks, which offer a particularly compelling entry point into his art. Miles first considered painting Apache motifs on skateboards in the 1990s when his son wished for a board with Apache imagery. While the gift certainly fulfilled the son's request, it did significantly more: it literally put Apache "myth, legend, [and] history" into motion and turned young skaters into active bearers of Native tradition and knowledge.

The emphasis on movement by both skaters and artist is not a coincidence: rather, it is a direct challenge to the settler project that has attempted to physically and metaphorically confine peoples that once moved freely in isolated reservations. Moreover, it recalls what critic David Martinez described the "toxic world" of photographers such as C. S. Fly, who took some of the few photos of the Apache Chief Geronimo. To the extent that Native Americans are almost always portrayed in US visual culture as part of a fixed and distant past, Miles' moving history seizes on a tidy: modern "devices" and crashes into those assumptions with the full weight of living Native bodies. To skate with "Apache style" is then not only to "zoom" through space but also to liberate the collective imagination.

Skateboarding similarly recalls and renews Native warrior traditions, including painting on war horses—another mode of transportation and pride—in order to protect, honor and heal. As the practice of skateboarding entails risk and the "willingness to blaze." When successful, skaters are warriors, glide and float over obstacles, and transform physical barriers into testaments to their skill, bravery and endurance—on and off the skatepark. Flying high, the art of Apache skateboarding is a way of "going to war" against hopelessness.

Fittingly, many of Miles' images are of Apache wielding weapons. Some critics have understood the apparel of the Apache as an update to the familiar cuts and curls. On the one hand, quite a bit more complex. On the other hand, it alludes to Native America's "fighting spirit" and the fundamental role of cultural practices in that fight. In Miles' own words, "The art of tribal people/people of color is probably the most powerful weapon we possess in our "survival arsenal."

This vision is evident in his skateboard tributes not only Native icons such as Chief Geronimo but also to Puerto Rican and African-American cultural figures, particularly those who have added the terms "Indian" or "Apache" as part of their own names like salsa singer Linda "La India" Viera Caballero, or who have fiercely challenged stereotyped knowledge in US popular culture like Rita Moreno ("In America"). In this way, Miles' moving history knowingly alters perceptions of Native Americans. Instead of freezing in time, isolation from others, and absent from contemporary art, they appear free, present, and already drawing from the future.

The modern-day visitor to San Carlos cannot spend much time here without encountering Doug's art. He has painted dramatic public murals that juxtapose Apache figures in locations across the reservation, ranging from the recently constructed Apache Gold Center, the site of the skate park near the tribal headquarters. This last site is no accident. Although Doug works in various media—primarily photography, video, and print—his skateboard that has proven one of the most enduring vehicles for his art and skateboarding's improvisational ethos that has inspired much of his work. As he puts it, "I don't really want to do anything in a part of any scene except one that is purely skateboarding—which absorbs and acculturates all nationalities and people without regard to face or ethnicity.

Doug's ability to convey such messages to audiences outside of San Carlos can be seen in the multi-layered project that he created in the South Bronx neighborhood of Hunts Point this past summer. During the urban revolt of the 1970s, Hunts Point was known (not always affectionately) as Fort Apache, the Bronx. Yet Hunts' Point was also the birthplace of hip hop, graffiti, and breakdancing, art forms which have gone on to enjoy global influence over the past half century. Doug's project that he created in the South Bronx neighborhood outside of San Carlos can be seen in the multi-layered project that he created in the South Bronx neighborhood of Hunts Point this past summer. During the urban revolt of the 1970s, Hunts Point was known (not always affectionately) as Fort Apache, the Bronx. Yet Hunts' Point was also the birthplace of hip hop, graffiti, and breakdancing, art forms which have gone on to enjoy global influence over the past half century.