

Remanence of the Painted Plateau

On Friday, February 15th, 2019, the opening of Chandlee Begay's *Remanence of the Painted Plateau* at the Hive Gallery in Phoenix, Arizona was a huge success for the up-and-coming contemporary artist. This exhibition, which includes a variety of digital photographs, hand-woven textiles, and intricately cut paper collages, is Chandlee's first solo exhibition.

Entering the gallery, viewers' eyes are met on the western wall with four large, intricately woven mandalas (also known as God's eyes), which were arranged in a circular shape resembling that of a compass. Each mandala, nearly two feet in diameter, is intricately woven to create layers of detail, pattern,



and geometric design. The four colors of the mandalas (black, white, blue, and yellow) and their placement, which are also present in three of his small woven rugs, are symbolic of the four cardinal directions. These four colors and their meanings are often subtle and complex in Navajo tradition, interweaving deep cultural meaning into Chandlee's material work.

On the opposite wall is a series of eight smaller mandalas, each with its own unique color palette, showcasing even further variation in geometric pattern and design. On the northern wall are dark digital photographs in black and white of fossilized dinosaur footprints and seashells that he found on and near his grandmother's property. Juxtaposed on the southern wall of the ancient remnants were color photographs of Navajo dogs observing and interacting with the landscape. These photos are particularly successful because of the contrasting complimentary colors, their composition, and the subject matter that is so easy for viewers to connect with through Chandlee's lens. Further integrating traditional Navajo colors into the presentation of his work, the dark photos on the northern wall could be said to represent the black of the North, while the color photos on the southern wall could be said to represent the color blue of the South.



Adding even further dimensionality, Chandlee also created two finely detailed, nine-layer paper collages that represent an ariel view of the Colorado Plateau. Intricately cut by hand using a utility knife, these two works are contrasts of each other in many ways. One is of the *Ancient*



Lakes when the water was plentiful and the colors were vibrant, and the other represents the *Heart of the Plateau* in the present day where water levels have dwindled to rivers and the once vibrant colors are now desaturated. The deep color blue used to represent water also resembles veins in one of the works, so Chandlee cleverly matted it with an outline of the anatomical shape of a human heart. Further juxtaposing these two works, Chandlee was thoughtful in his framing and matting — one matted gray with a white frame and the other matted white with a gray frame, presenting the two works as opposite parts of the whole.

As an artist of Navajo descent living in the Phoenix metropolitan area, Chandlee straddles life between two worlds, evident in the many layers of all his artwork, both literally and metaphorically. Working with wool shorn from his grandmother's sheep and gathering inspiration while on her property, Chandlee's work shows a deep appreciation for his native traditions while breaking the mould of conventional Native American art. Through his study of multiple mediums such as photography and textiles, and through his intelligent interpretation of ideas, Chandlee's artwork unlocks a world that is unrevealed to most. Chandlee Begay is certainly an artist to keep on your radar as he continues to break out into the art world.

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