

FEATURED

On Exhibit: Going 'Outside the Box' at Howes Cave Iroquois Museum

Indiana Nash
May 11, 2024



Lauren Ashley Jiles performs "Peace, Power and Righteousness."

What do marching band gear and extravagant burlesque costumes have in common?

They're both on view at the Iroquois Museum in Howes Cave this season as part of "Outside the Box," an exhibit highlighting ways Haudenosaunee artists are upending expectations surrounding Indigenous art and activism.

"The idea here was to celebrate those who are pioneering, breaking new ground and, in some cases, in areas where there's either absolutely no Indigenous representation or Indigenous representation is rare," said Colette Lemmon, the museum's curator of exhibitions.

The exhibit was partly inspired by the Iroquois Indian Marching Band from Tuscarora. The 20-member, multigenerational group performs American marching band tunes wearing traditional Tuscarora regalia. It's one of just two tribally initiated marching bands in the country, according to Lemmon.

One of the group's shimmering jackets, displaying the band name, is on view at the museum, along with a trumpet, drum, saxophone and trombone.

It's a stark contrast to the work of Lauren Ashley Jiles. The popular Mohawk neo-burlesque dancer, who performs as Lou Lou La Duchesse De Riere, is known for creating dances that are at once seductive and rooted in Indigenous issues.

Albany adoptee raising funds to meet her birth mother in South Korea

A towering mannequin at the museum features her royal purple costume for "Peace, Power and Righteousness," with incredibly intricate beadwork and gems dotting the corset. The dance is deeply personal and reflects Jiles' frustration that sexuality among Indigenous women is often referenced only in relation to rape or murder.



Photo by Indiana Nash. Costume for Lauren Ashley Jiles' "Peace, Power and Righteousness" burlesque dance.

The costume, which features beadwork by Jiles, is also a rejection of colonialism.

“It’s an act of decolonization of the body, and a reclamation of sexuality,” Jiles writes in the label copy.

Not far away are striking photographs from Ian R. Miracle, a Tuscarora Nation Bear Clan photographer and filmmaker whose work captures unrehearsed moments in and outside his community.



Photo by Indiana Nash. "Fancy Dance Shawl for Skywoman," by Hannah Claus.

In one, titled “Peace,” a woman stands at the center, wearing a camo jacket, her long hair down, some strands caught in a breeze. Her eyes are closed, and she seems separated from the photographer and the viewer.

“What I liked about Ian's work is that in my mind it's much more along the lines of photojournalism, where you don't get the sense that most of these people are aware that the photographer is there at all. The photographer in this is almost nonexistent,” Lemmon said.

Out to Eat . . . at The Nest, now a Schenectady staple

Nearby is a shimmering installation from Hannah Claus, a Montreal-based artist and member of the Tyendinaga Mohawk of the Bay of Quinte. The ethereal piece features discs with images of historical beadwork strung together with fine string and suspended from a platform. The piece moves with the breeze as visitors walk past, making it look as though the discs are dancing.

Lago by Druthers set to open on Saratoga Lake - Bite-Sized

“The threads speak to connections between sky and earth, between people, between the natural world and our relationship to it,” Lemmon said. “Those threads are very ... they're strong, but they're also very, very delicate. They can be broken so easily.”

The exhibit also features handmade guitars, a video game, short films and claymations. One video shows the acrobatic work of Feryn King, a Wolf Clan Mohawk from Akwesasne. King is an accomplished hoop dancer and aerialist who previously performed with Cirque du Soleil.



Photo by Indiana Nash. The Iroquois Museum, located at 324 Caverns Road, Howes Cave.

The video, which shows King working in the studio and getting her stage makeup ready, is featured in the museum's new Nicholas J. Juried Education Room. The room marks the first expansion at the museum since its opening in 1992, and coincides with a busy summer and fall of "Outside the Box" programming.

Many of the artists featured in the exhibit will be giving talks and demonstrations over the next few months. Previously, the only places that those kinds of events could take place was in the exhibit spaces.

"We have a number of workshops coming up this summer that are going to be out here," Lemmon said. "People can work uninterrupted. They don't have to be in the middle of the gallery."

📄 Schenectady poet Jackie Craven weaves local landmarks into latest collection

Some of the more intensive programs are the steel sculpture workshops and demonstrations with Margaret Jacobs. She's one of few Haudenosaunee women working in the physically demanding metalsmithing medium. Her pieces on view at the museum are striking, with delicate-looking flower and herb bouquets forged from steel.

"I see my work as a way for others to learn; to break stereotypes and misconceptions about native peoples and to share accurate and contemporary narratives that show us not as something of the past, but as living, thriving contemporary peoples," Jacobs wrote.

Jacobs' demonstrations will take place Saturday and Sunday, July 20-21, and her workshops are scheduled for Friday and Saturday, July 26- 27. Both are free, though the latter requires registration in advance.

Another highlight of the season will be a performance by the Toronto-based Kaha:wi Dance Theater titled "The Mush Hole: Truth, Acknowledgement, Resilience," which reflects on the traumatic experiences of Indigenous people who attended the Mohawk Institute Residential School in Canada.

The performance, free to attend, is set for 7:30 p.m. Saturday, June 29, at the University at Albany Performing Arts Center.

For the full list of programming, visit iroquoismuseum.org.

 **Albany adoptee raising funds to meet her birth mother in South Korea**

 **Out to Eat . . . at The Nest, now a Schenectady staple**

 **Lago by Druthers set to open on Saratoga Lake - Bite-Sized**

 **Schenectady poet Jackie Craven weaves local landmarks into latest collection**

Reach Indiana Nash at inash@dailygazette.net or [@Indijnash](https://twitter.com/Indijnash) on X.

Indiana Nash

Senior writer