

Art Curating

by Marjorie Vecchio, director of the Sheppard Fine Arts Gallery

In the years since the Winters case, in addition to federally designated Indian reservations, other federal reservations of land have also been granted reserved water rights, such as military reservations or National Parks.

An example of how native sovereignty connects to the realm of water rights can be found in the Northern Arapaho and the Eastern Shoshone of the Wind River Reservation. The Shoshone were granted land rights to the Wind River Reservation under a treaty in 1868 and a decade later the Arapaho were moved by the U.S. Army onto the Wind River Reservation. Since that time, the boundaries of the reservation were changed through a series of land cessions and restorations, but both tribes remained on the reservation. Despite their traditional differences, both tribes came together to secure water rights for the places both valued on the reservation. In 1985, after years of conflict and litigation between the tribes and the state and ranchers, a court decree awarded the Wind River tribes more than a half-million acre-feet* of senior water rights to the Big Horn River and Wind River.

Exerting their powers as a sovereign government, the tribes developed and enacted a Water Code in 1990 and, under the terms of the code, the tribes issued a permit for instream flows for the reservation to enhance conditions for fisheries and to ensure flows through the reservation. The state of Wyoming disputed the administration of water rights by the tribes as well as the instream flow permit that had been issued, and in 1992 the Wyoming Supreme Court ruled in favor of the state. While the tribes have not had success in asserting their administrative powers over water, they were able to secure water rights for the reservation and, in the process, developed institutional capacity that allows them to continue work on water rights matters and exert the powers as sovereigns. [N](#)

*An acre foot of water is the volume of water it takes to cover an acre of land to a depth of one foot, or approximately 325,853.4 U.S. gallons. An acre foot of water is roughly the amount of water a family of four uses annually.

1. A curator designs exhibitions by theme or artists, chooses the artists and then goes through their artwork deciding which pieces to show.

2. Many artists are “crossing over” to curate in order to reclaim artistic freedom in exhibitions, which in most institutions — museums and commercial galleries — are inspired by the market and audience income rather than the joy and intelligence of art.

3. Some artists prefer to have a conversation with a curator and design their own exhibitions, or make new work for the show, which is an exciting (or scary) prospect for a curator.

4. Studio visits with artists can end up as three-hour discussions.

5. Some curators follow, support and show the same artists for a lifetime.

6. Until recently, curators never went to school to learn their craft; they often just fell into it and programs did not exist. In the last 15 years, many master of arts programs for curatorial studies have popped up around the globe. This is a controversial topic in the art world as many believe the development of these programs are a part of the commercialization of higher education and doesn't make better curators.

7. Sheppard Gallery spends on average two to eight days installing an exhibition.

8. Not all exhibitions are purely between an artist and curator. If an artist is represented by a commercial gallery, the curator also has to deal with the dealer as an intermediary, often for approval of the exhibition, image rights for photographs, shipping of artworks, any sales that occur, etc.

9. Staying informed about the newest contemporary art means traveling to at least one or more international art fair each year,

10. A curator has another equally time-consuming and important job — especially in smaller galleries — as a writer. They have to write grants, public relations pieces, catalog essays and curatorial statements.

Marjorie Vecchio, Ph.D., is the first professional curator to serve as director of the Sheppard Fine Arts Gallery since it opened in 1960 as one of the few experimental, professional, contemporary art spaces in northern Nevada. Vecchio will curate “Orion's Belt,” her first exhibit as gallery director at the University of Nevada, Reno, Sept. 10 to Oct. 5.



Photo by Jean Dixon

Marjorie Vecchio