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## Frieze Los Angeles



James Luna, *The History of the Luiseño People*, 1993, Silver gelatin print

For the 2023 edition of Frieze Los Angeles, Garth Greenan Gallery is pleased to present a selection of works by James Luna, which highlight his several decades of performance, installation, and visual art. Born in 1950, James Luna was an artist of Puyukitchum/Luiseño and Mexican American descent, who spent his career giving voice to Native American cultural issues and questioning the ways Native peoples are pictured and “honored” in the White imaginary – often critically, and sometimes subtly, assuming the role of Indigenous “artifact”. Luna lived on the La Jolla Indian Reservation in Northern San Diego County, California from 1975 until his death on March 4, 2018.

Central to this year’s booth is Luna’s video work *The History of the Luiseño People* (1993). In the corresponding installation work, *The History of the Luiseño People: La Jolla Reservation, Christmas 1990* (1993), the video plays on the TV before Luna’s chair surrounded by beer cans, his black house phone, and a small, sad Christmas tree topped with an empty Miller Light. In the 27-minute mundane pseudo-autobiographical narrative filmed by Isaac Artenstein, Luna sits alone on Christmas Eve in front of the TV. While the movie *White Christmas* plays on the TV, Luna cracks Miller Light after Miller Light, and lights one Salem cigarette after another. Luna makes and receives phone calls from friends, family, ex-lovers, and the like. He speaks with his mom, saying something about how there are “too many drunks on the road” to be leaving the

house for the family Christmas celebration and promising “No, I haven’t been drinking” while guzzling the remainder of a Miller Light. He talks sweetly to his son and then curses out his son’s mother regarding a check for child support. While talking to his White ex-girlfriend, he reflects that he used to have “good Christmases” when his grandma was alive – but that something happened to the family when she died; that there was not always an issue with Christmas just being a White vs. an Indian thing. By way of parody and performance, Luna draws from Indigenous traditions of self-narration and from the video tradition of the Euro-American avant-garde. Despite the promise of the title, Luna becomes the focus of the study, telling not the complete chronological history of the Luiseño people, but the everyday histories of himself – as a father, as an Uncle, as a stereotypical “Indian drunk” – and his banal relations.

Luna often challenged the use of Native bodies as anthropological specimens and the display of Native culture in White institutions and museums. In *Sometimes I Get So Lonely (Ishi) I* (2011), Luna places a portrait of himself next to Ishi, both with tears streaming down their faces. In 1911, Ishi walked into a White town and was deemed by anthropologists to be “the last wild Indian” and the lone Yahi survivor of California’s nineteenth-century genocide. Claimed to be for his own welfare and for the advancement of science, Ishi spent the remainder of his days as a subject of anthropological study in the University of California, Berkeley, where audio recordings were taken of him telling traditional stories and he entertained tourists with arrow making and “traditional” trades.

James Luna has been the subject of more than 41 solo exhibitions and has participated in over 85 group exhibitions. His works and performances have appeared in the New Museum (1990, New York), Museum of Modern Art (2009, New York), San Francisco Museum of Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa), Museum of Contemporary Native Art (2015, 2018, Santa Fe), Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego (1987, 2019), and Whitney Museum of American Art (1993, 2019, New York). In 2005, he was selected as the first Sponsored Artist of the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian presented at the 51st Venice Biennale (2005).

Luna was the recipient of numerous grants and awards, including the Bessie Award (1991), an Intercultural Film/Video Grant from the Rockefeller Foundation (1992), a Native American Public Broadcasting Consortium video grant (1995), an Andrea Frank Foundation Grant (2000), an Arts International Grant (2000), a Distinguished Artist Award and Eiteljorg Museum Fellowship for Native American Fine Art (2007), a Painters & Sculptors Grant from the Joan Mitchell Foundation (2010), a National Arts Fellowship from the Native Arts and Cultures Foundation (2015), and a Guggenheim Fellowship (2017). In 2012, James Luna was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Humanities from the Institute of American Indian Arts, Santa Fe.

Garth Greenan Gallery is pleased to represent the Estate of James Luna.

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