

We are thrilled to present four brilliant “firebox” or illuminated lightbox works by Vancouver based artist Dana Claxton (B. 1959, Lakota). In these intimate portraits of First Nations womxn the face of each sitter is subsumed by their cultural belongings—layers of beaded necklaces, embroidered bags, hairpieces, feathers, and quilled earrings, implying an identity formed by relations and exchange. Most of the belongings of each sitter were gifts or they made them, suggesting the extent to which each womxn’s identity has been shaped by kinship. The items reflect the care and labour of their making, as well as their roots in Indigenous trade, stretching back hundreds of years.

Complex questions regarding beauty, cultural appropriation and the construction of identity are prevalent throughout. Claxton often alludes to the destructive legacy of colonialism, but in these works also celebrates First Nations’ presence and contemporary identity. What emerges are works with ever greater manna and conviction as she continues to critically reimagine space to uphold new understandings of indigenous beauty.

Included in our presentation at Armory is a new work, “Shadae and her Girlz”, commissioned by the Baltimore Museum of Art that will be on view in Baltimore as part of her solo exhibition “Spark” which opens this August 2024.

Dana Claxton is a critically acclaimed artist who works with film, video, photography, single/multi-channel video installation, and performance art. Her work has been shown at the Museum of Modern Art (NYC), Metropolitan Museum of Art (NYC), Walker Art Centre (Minneapolis, MN), Sundance Film Festival, Salt Lake City (UT), Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, Indianapolis (IN), Museum of Contemporary Art (Sydney, AU), Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art (Bentonville, AR), Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University (Durham, NC), Memphis Brooks Museum of Art (TN) and the Minneapolis Institute of Art (MN). Her work is held in public, private and corporate collections throughout North America.

Claxton has received the Eiteljorg Fellowship (2007), Hnatyshyn Foundation Visual Arts Award (2019), YWCA Women of Distinction Award (2019), Governor General’s Award in Visual and Media Arts (2020), the Scotiabank Photography Award (2020), and the Audain Prize for the Visual Arts (2023). Fringing the Cube, her solo survey exhibition, was mounted at the Vancouver Art Gallery (2018) and the body of work Headdress premiered at the inaugural Toronto Biennial of Art, Toronto ON (2019).