



Native twists on American sci-fi are a central theme of *Indigenous Futurisms: Explorations In Art And Play*.

PHOTO BY ASHLEY HAYES-STONE

The future in play

A new UC Davis exhibit explores geeky Native American art

There's a whole lot of *Star Wars* in the C.N.

Gorman Museum's latest exhibit, tucked inside Hart Hall at UC Davis. But the gallery of portraits from George Lucas' sci-fi series has a twist: The stormtrooper is tattooed with Native American symbols, as is Darth Vader. A *New Hope* plays on a wall monitor, except the dialogue is dubbed in Navajo.

A *New Hope*, re-released in 2013, marked the first major Hollywood film made available in a Native American language. It's a rare find, and it represents a big goal of *Indigenous Futurisms: Explorations In Art and Play*; displaying the lesser-known obsessions of contemporary Native American artists, including UFOs, video games, comic books and geek culture.

"Within the genre of Native American art, there's actually quite a lot of [sci-fi] material," said Veronica Passalacqua, the exhibit's curator. "It just has a lot of engagement and dialogue within Native American art ... And maybe, you know, I'm a little bit of a fan myself."

Lined along the entrance wall are new perspectives on classic American comic book superheroes. There's a framed cover of "The Indigenous Hulk" by Kiowa/Choctaw artist Steven Paul Judd. Blasting through the vintage-style print, this superhero is blood red and

long-braided, but still furious. "Super Indian" trades a cape for free-flowing hair, and instead of the Justice League, meet "The Council of Pueblo Justice:" Captain Owingeh, Laguna Woman, Silver Smith, The Hero Twins and Hummingbird.

"Almost 10 years ago, I had an exhibition with Australian and Pacific Islander artists," Passalacqua said. "And I really wanted to create a show that was more urban. ... And then it's been interesting because in the past three years or so, all of a sudden it's become this massive trend in the Native art world."

Video games are the last focus. A giant vinyl ink jet print produced by artist Sonny Assu reimagines the original Nintendo Entertainment System controller. Its directional pad is replaced with a "copper," an indigenous shield shape that for Northwest coast tribes are a display of wealth.

"They're quite prestigious, they're one of the ultimate items," Passalacqua said. "At potlaches or ceremonial events, you might have given it to someone, or a chief might break them up to give to other people to demonstrate his wealth."

The exhibit also features video game art you can play. Three indie games are playable with Xbox One controllers at a center kiosk. *Hold My Hand!* forces two players to use one controller as they navigate dungeons and solve puzzles by sticking their polygonal limbs together. *Terra Nova* is a split-screen side-scroller starring an indigenous woman and astronaut. For the story to progress, each player must accomplish a goal in their respective world, a village or a space ship.

Lastly, *Full of Birds* is an interactive art gallery. Like something out of *Super Mario 64*, stepping into a painting takes you to another world with fields, random wildlife and soft indie rock songs.

Take a seat at a nearby table, and you can play an indigenous take on *Dungeons & Dragons* as well as *Cards Against Colonialism*. The gaming section was curated by Ashlee Bird, a graduate student of Native American Studies at UC Davis.

With the exhibit, Passalacqua aims to surprise museum-goers.

"I want people to have an experience that Native art is more than what they think it is," she said. "And to show that Native artists are doing all kinds of things just like everybody else. We're progressive and moving forward." □

Indigenous Futurisms: Explorations In Art And Play runs through Jan. 31. C.N. Gorman Museum, 1316 Hart Hall, UC Davis. One Shields Ave., Davis. Open Mon-Fri, noon-5 p.m., and Sun 2-5 p.m. Admission is free. For more info, visit gormanmuseum.ucdavis.edu.



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