



## Plastic Spirit

### RIVER GARZA

Opening reception: Thursday, March 12, 6:00 PM  
March 13 - May 31, 2020

Soul Center for the Arts (within Castello D'Albertis Museum of World Cultures)  
Corso Dogali 18, 16136 Genova, Italy

Operating Hours: Tuesday - Sunday 10:00 AM - 5:00 PM; Thursdays 10:00 AM - 6:00 PM

River Garza, *Buy the Dream*, 2020, acrylic on canvas.

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For immediate release.

Soul Center for the Arts is pleased to present *Plastic Spirit: Sociological Concepts of Indigenous Contemporary Life*, an exhibition of new works by River Garza. This is his first exhibition in Italy, following his participation in a one-month Artist Residency in Genova where he was tasked with creating site-specific works on canvas and conceptual installations to be unveiled for the first time during the exhibition's opening reception on Thursday, March 12, 2020.

Garza's *Plastic Spirit* is intended to incite dialogue about the ongoing social, cultural, political, and economic domination over Indigenous people within the birthplace of the American colonizer. Through the conceptual incorporation of sociological theory and literary text on canvas, the exhibition critiques the extent to which colonialism affects the everyday lives of Native American peoples indigenous to the Western hemisphere.

The exhibition's testimonial image, entitled, *Buy the Dream* (2017—) is a part of a tantalizing pop-art series of prints and acrylic works on canvas that serve as a reflective counter to the rather infamous American Spirit tobacco logo, which is most notorious for drawing on stereotypical themes of Indigeneity that strongly misrepresent the authenticity of Native American culture. Through various saturated hues depicted in the backdrop of each piece of the series, Garza engages in a push and pull between ideology and relationship of sociology and capitalism, further perplexing the viewer's attempts to envision the depiction of Native media representation in the market place. The bold acrylic lettering at the top register causes the viewer to internalize how traditional herbs used throughout Native American ceremonial and healing practice have to become inaccessible due to the greed of global economics.

Garza primarily works with acrylic and spray paint on canvas. His artistic practice sources inspiration from traditional Indigenous aesthetics; Southern California Indigenous maritime culture; Graffiti; and the works of Andy Warhol, Jean-Michele Basquiat, and David Bradley. Garza is now pursuing a Masters in Sociology at California State Polytechnic University where he has merged his sociological interest with his innate gift of the brush stroke to explore the traditional Native American knowledge, emotion, and everyday life.

*Invisible Man* (2018) is a personal and theoretical outcry for Indigenous identity presented in the form of literary abstraction. The fading red text that reads "Indian" is a symbolic representation of being invisible in society. At the top of the canvas, the red acrylic paint provides a juxtaposition to the white background that then consumes the text as the viewer repositions his or her focus to the bottom register as the painting transforms into descending invisibility. The weakening of literary positioning and the magnification of abstract detraction represents the systemic cultural eradication and forced assimilation Indigenous youth experience on their homelands throughout history, at the hands of the Catholic Mission education system.

At its core, *Plastic Spirit* is a conversation on colonialism and the commodification of Indigenous culture. The exhibition is conceptually grounded in what Garza envisions an Indigenous pioneer's role to be in the community. His goal is to unsettle colonial conventions and steer the conversation in a direction that sheds light on community issues that come forth as a byproduct of capitalism and ongoing colonial encroachment.

River Garza's exhibition represents the first concrete step of the collaboration, started last year, between the Municipality of Genova's Culture and City Office; Castello D'Albertis; the Soul of Nations subsidiary Soul Center for the Arts; the Accademia Ligustica; and the Foundation Palazzo Ducale, with the aim of working in synergy to multiply the impact of the artistic and cultural activities of the participating institutions. The opportunity is given by the CreART project (City Network for Artistic Creation) which is promoted and co-financed by the European Union. This collective institutional partnership will culminate in an artist round table and performance by River Garza on the European Day of Artistic Creativity scheduled at Palazzo Ducale on Friday, March 20, 2020. River Garza has made himself available for a series of workshops reserved for students and artists attending the Ligustica Academy of Fine Arts that will result in an exhibition in Sala Dogana, where the artists of the Ligustica Academy will exhibit.

River Garza (1994—) is from the Tongva Nation, a Native American Tribe indigenous to the Los Angeles Basin. He currently lives and works in Los Angeles, California. Garza earned a Bachelor of Arts Gender, Ethnicity, and Multicultural Studies; and Native American Studies from California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. He is now pursuing a Masters in Sociology at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. Garza's previous institutional exhibitions include *ilik xon*, Seventh Letter Gallery, Los Angeles, CA (2016); *First Peoples*, San Fernando Valley Arts and Cultural Center, Los Angeles, CA (2017); *Winter Group Show*, Loom Indigenous Art Gallery, Gallup, NM (2018); *People of the Earth*, Santa Monica History Museum, Santa Monica, CA (2018); and *We Rise*, We Rise Gallery Los Angeles, CA. Garza participated in an Artist Residency at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico in 2019.

#RiverGarza

Soul Center for the Arts is an art gallery dedicated to exhibiting Indigenous contemporary works and life. This center will also facilitate workshops to encourage international art programming for aspiring and emerging Indigenous artists native to the Western hemisphere. Through a triennial partnership with Castello D'Albertis, Soul Center for the Arts will provide a platform for free expression and the opportunity for a much needed intercultural dialogue.

Support for Soul Center for the Arts is provided by Blu Logistics, The Jaques and Natasha Gelman Foundation, The Kalleopia Foundation, and the Endeavor Foundation Inc. Operational support is also provided by the U.S. Consular Agency of Genova, the Comune di Genova, Castello D'Albertis.

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## **Press**

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