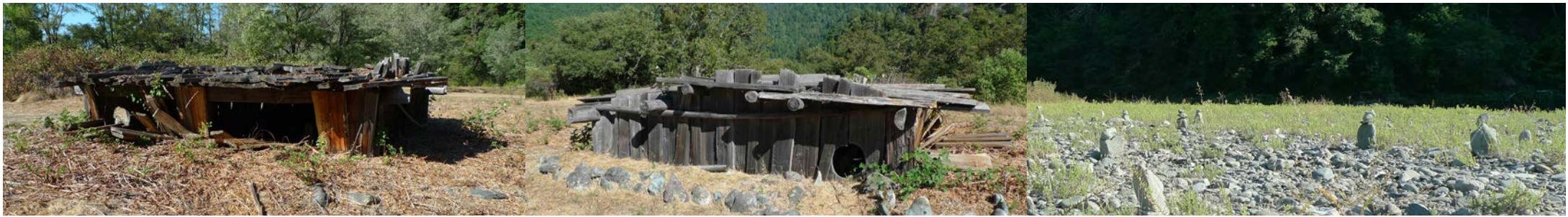


BRIAN D. TRIPP

there is no such thing  
as the 21st century



A BOOKLYN MONOGRAPH

## imprint

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# content

## Artist's Statement

Page 05

## Introduction

Page 07

## Biography

Page 08

## Notes on the Karuk

Page 10

## About BDT

Page 12

## Indian Island (Poem)

Page 16

## Studio

Page 20

## Figures

Page 24

## Other Artwork

Page 30

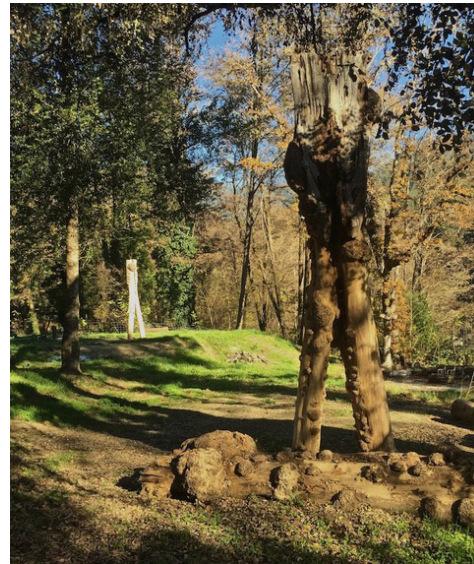
## Notes on BDT's Artists' Books

Page 35

# recent awards & commissions

2018 California Living Heritage Award, from Alliance for California Traditional Arts

2019 Installation of *Sentinel* sculptures at Mid Klamath Watershed Council in Panamint, Karuk Nation, (Orleans, California). Photos below.



## press

Karuk Master Artist Brian D. Tripp Receives 2018 California Living Heritage Award / <https://www.actaonline.org/karuk-master-artist-brian-d-tripp-receives-2018-california-living-heritage-award/>

'I am These People' Artist Brian D. Tripp and the land of the fix-the-world people / <https://www.northcoastjournal.com/humboldt/i-am-these-people/Content?oid=12063321&fbclid=IwAR1laAyawhINOGyEjRnxkaE1YwcpJQdNr4fVwTXbnfzPY007clqBEYfPOE4#.W-2hHcDlOK4.email>

# artist's statement

"I do the geometric thing because it's what we do—it's Indian. All the wood sculptures are things I see in the woods. The faces are just right there; all you have to do is look at them." [BRIAN D. TRIPP](#)

Most of the wood and stones for Tripp's sculptures and mixed media comes from the mouth of the Klamath River. A two or three mile walk to the source from his home, Tripp carefully chooses the pieces that "talk" to him and carries them out in a sack. Piles and piles of special pieces of wood and stones fill his home studio, waiting to be assembled into figurative, "living" sculpture.

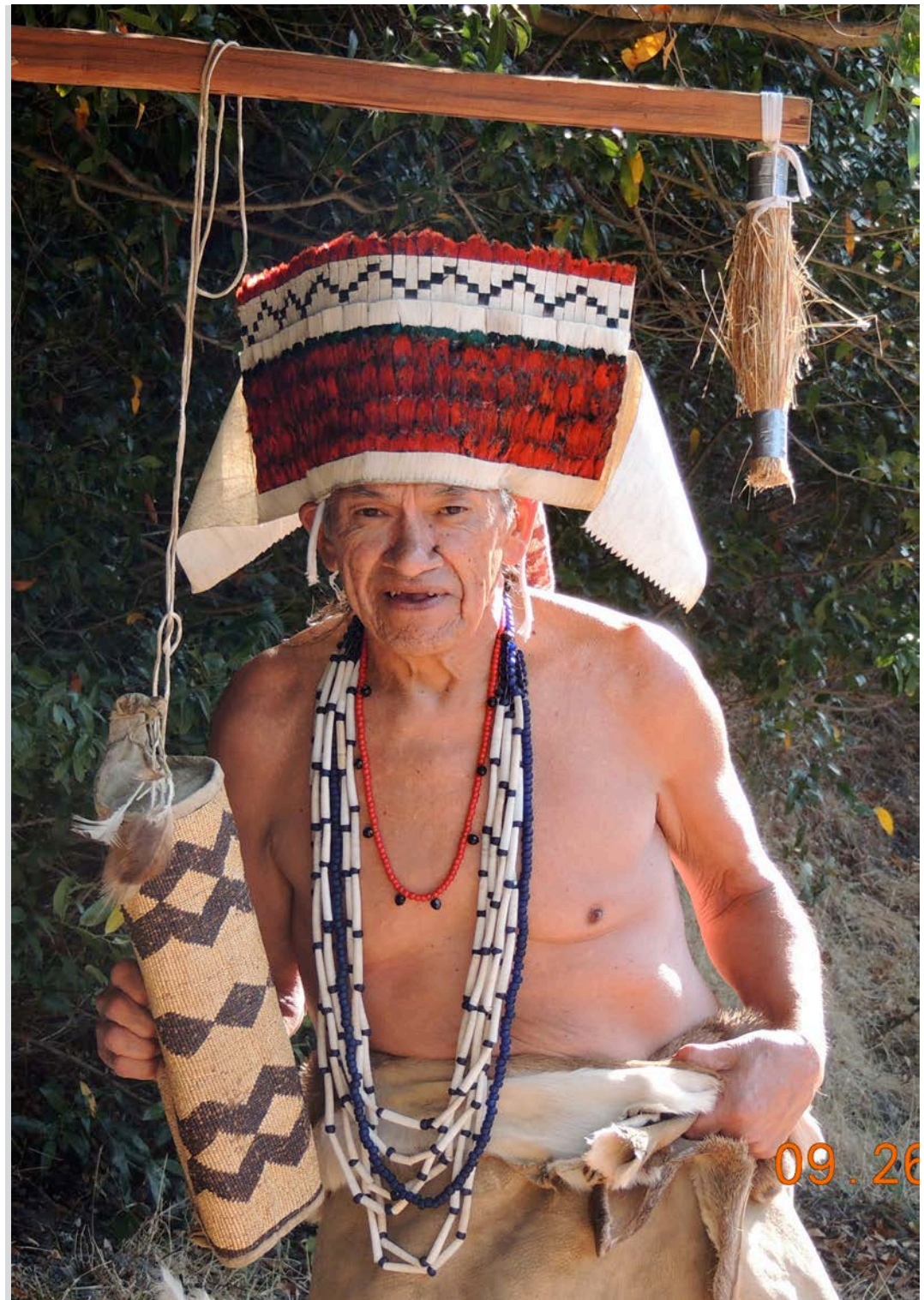
Tripp has taught art at Humboldt State University and has been an artist-in-residence at the Headlands Center for the Arts, at Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Tripp's work has been exhibited widely, especially in northern California, and has also been shown in Texas, New York, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania and New Mexico.

“Through my  
body flows the  
blood of singers  
and dancers...

...makers of dance regalia, carvers and  
basket makers, gatherers, hunters, and  
fishermen, all believers in the traditional  
religion and the old way.

I know I am  
these people  
and I have done  
all those things  
before, many,  
many, years  
ago.”

BRIAN D. TRIPP



# introduction

Walking into Brian Tripp's house is like walking into more outdoors. Brian D. Tripp is honored both as a traditional dancer and singer, and an enigmatic, outspoken contemporary artist and poet in his Northern California Karuk Tribal community and beyond. Tripp uses his artwork to demonstrate his commitment to his community and Native American culture, and his life-long devotional interest in giving life to traditions and history.

Tripp's artists' books and drawings are related to the "ledger drawings" made by Native Americans who were displaced from their Nation and lands and moved to reservations in the Great Plains. Given old accounting ledger books, artists kept distant images alive by drawing their past lives and native lands.

Tripp's art provides a new perspective on imagery familiar to the artist and Native American tradition: motifs from basket work, arrowheads, ceremonial objects and Karuk regalia—symbols passed down for generations are reinvigorated by Tripp's use of vibrant color and formal geometric iconography. His contemporary renditions pay homage to the inherent power of images long in use.

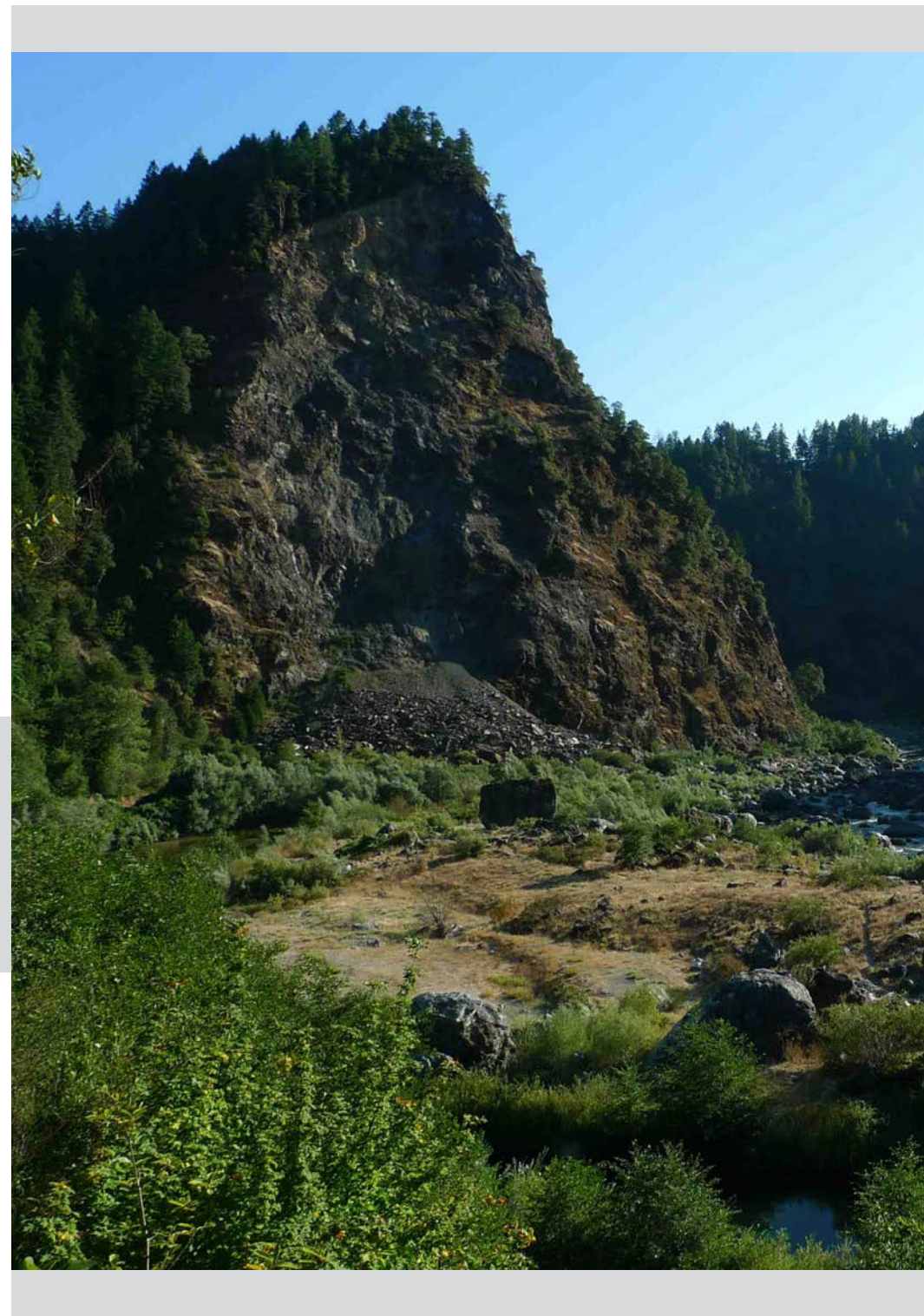
MARSHALL WEBER

# biography

Brian Tripp (Karuk) was born in 1945 in Eureka and graduated from Del Norte County High School in Crescent City. A traditional Karuk dancer and singer, he is actively involved in the ceremonies of northwest California and is deeply committed to the ongoing struggle for Native American sovereignty.

Tripp grew up near the Klamath River. His father, a logger, was killed in a logging accident in 1962. Drafted into the army in 1965, Tripp followed in his father's footsteps working in a mill, but became more interested in his own culture after returning from Vietnam. "I learned how things really were when I was in the army... I was a finance clerk... never had to fight, but when I came home I got more involved in my culture." Seeing the horrors of the Vietnam War, he says, helped him understand what his own people had gone through.

As an art student at Humboldt State University from 1970–1976, Tripp studied printmaking, drawing, design, and calligraphy. After leaving the studios and equipment of the University behind, he began to experiment with different, looser drawing styles, trying to develop more personal







imagery. He increasingly relied on the symbols and designs from his Karuk culture as the foundation for his art. “I never could do perfect realistic drawing,” he admits.

Brian Tripp has maintained his creative practice and exhibited his art for over 30 years. His work has been exhibited at the New Museum, New York; Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento; Oakland Museum of California and New York’s Museum of Art and Design. His works are in the permanent collections of the Berkeley Art Museum, Crocker Art Museum, Heard Museum, Morris Graves Museum of Art, The Oakland Museum of California and Washington State Museum among others.

“Up there [on the Siskiyou County line] where the Salmon River runs to the Klamath...this area is what we call the Center of the World. That’s where I’m from. A-u-ich, is the big mountain that looks like a big pyramid, right in the Center of the World. I call it an anchor that holds everything down. The River is blue and it runs past the mountain. On the other side of the river is Kat-a-meen, which is like the capital, in the Karuk Center of the World.” **BRIAN D. TRIPP**

# notes on the karuk



The Karuk Tribe is an indigenous people of California (Siskiyou County and Humboldt County) who speak a unique isolate language (Karuk). For an unknown amount of time (possibly for thousands of years) the Karuk, whose name means “upriver people” have resided in villages along the Klamath River, where they continue such cultural traditions as hunting, gathering, fishing, basket making and ceremonial dances. The Brush Dance, Jump Dance and Pikyavish ceremonies last for several days and are practiced to heal and “fix the world,” to pray for plentiful acorns, deer and salmon, and to restore social good will as well as individual good luck.

The Karuk speak an isolate language though they have close relations with the Hoopa and Yurok. Their origin myths start at a local mountain in Humboldt County they call the Center of the World. Their culture is distinguished by “finding” — an affection for finding art and human figuration in stones and tree branches and creating assemblage rather than manufacturing.



# about bdt



## ORLEANS POET, ARTIST, SUMMONS SPIRIT PEOPLE FOR UPCOMING ART SHOW

MALCOLM TERENCE, Two Rivers Tribune (Hoopa, CA)

We would not exactly confuse Brian Tripp's sculptured birds with real pileated woodpeckers, *iktakatákaha*, but if his artwork took flight, we might not be too surprised. It's easy enough to imagine if a pileated woodpecker could turn into a person, he'd turn into somebody very much like Brian Tripp.

Old time story tellers around here talk about when the long-ago world was full of spirit people. Eventually, the

Even if he was never once a woodpecker, Brian Tripp certainly has an affinity with them. His paintings and sculptures, which depict many spirits, keep returning to woodpeckers. Brian's artwork is part of a new showing at Eureka's Gallery Piante with an opening ceremony at 6:30 p.m. Saturday, October 26. (Note: Exhibit occurred in 2012.)

Brian's studio these days is his home in Karuk elder housing in Orleans. His work space is reminiscent of a beach after a high water recedes. There are river rocks of every color and shape. And wood, some of it painted in primary colors.

Some of the rocks and some of the sticks are assembled, or half assembled, into figures like little people. Brian moves

The work area of Brian Tripp's Orleans studio might, at first glance, look like a jumble of cobble and driftwood after high water has receded. Do not be fooled. It's one small crowd of his spirit people, *ikxaréeyav*, getting ready for an art show. Watch your step.

There were other people in the room including Marshall Weber, an art curator and agent from New York, and Shan Davis, a 20-year-old Orleans neighbor just home from a stint in the Marines.

Shan proudly showed off a hand made knife. The handle was made from the jawbone of a deer and the blade from the jaw of an elk.



stories go, some turned into animals and others into rocks and trees. Some even turned into humans. So surely, the large woodpecker with its swooping meandering flight, its bright top notch and its distinctive cry could choose to be a poet and a singer like Brian.

around the room showing off his miniature entourage. He picks up a few, but carefully, because the stone heads are not all attached yet to the wooden bodies. The entire room has the feeling of a work in progress.

Brian nodded appreciatively and rifled through some of his inventory. He found a bone fragment and handed it to Shan, a gift he'd saved for him. Shan's already big smile became a huge smile and he started rifling through his smartphone to show Brian pictures of other recent knives.

Brian mentioned his own military history—a draftee in the Vietnam War—and then talked about his whole life.

He served two years as the finance clerk of a helicopter company and made it through unscathed, except for serious skin infections that he attributed to Agent Orange herbicide exposure from swimming in Cam Ranh Bay in the South China Sea.

He said, with some irony, that he was a good soldier, and then launched, as he often does, into the cadence of one of his poems: One day this Johnny went off to war, Didn't know what he was fighting for.

Brian will start a poem at the drop of a hat and it will become a song, maybe in English but then changing to Karuk

ship that never actually took place but was used by Lyndon Johnson used to escalate the war.)

His family was from the river but he grew up in Eureka, where his father worked logging, and Brian was what he called a “Coastal Kay-Rook,” intentionally mispronouncing the tribal name. Brian’s mother was Violet Donahue from Ike’s and his father was Amos Duane Tripp from Offield, both in the Somes Bar area. One of Brian’s brothers, also Amos Tripp, is a member of the Karuk Tribal Council.

By age five, Brian had started art work and by high school he was totally immersed.

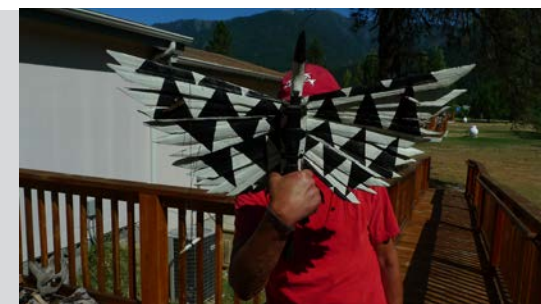
He remembered that the Indians around him were mostly Yurok, and men like Merkie Oliver gave him his sense of

kets and ceremonies. Brian explored many styles: painting on plexi-glass, use of Northwest Coastal designs, then adding geometrics and suggestions of sturgeon backs and frogs hands.

Sue Natzler, the owner of Gallery Piante, said that Brian Tripp is a personal favorite and classed him among the most important Native America artists in the region.

A particularly cherished memory, she said, was once at her home, sitting around the table when Brian started singing a Coyote love song.

Her gallery is flooded with offers by artists, Natzler said, and she turns most away. Her calendar is booked into 2016.



or maybe just chant and then, maybe, back to English. “The songs are all prayers,” he explained.

“I became Anti-war,” he said. “Anti-Army, Anti-United States. I think I’m still that way. They lied to the US soldiers about the Gulf of Tonkin,” (citing an attack on a U.S.

pride. Through it all, he recalled his mother telling him, “You’re Indian, and not only that, but you’re Karuk Indian.”

When he returned from the military, he studied art at Humboldt State with Indian teachers like William T. Anderson and learned more and more about tribal culture, bas-

“I have to love the work and think it’s important. I want contemporary work or work with a story. I have admiration for people who’ll put their soul into their work.”

Prepping for the show, Brian returned his attention to the throngs of little people on the floor. He would lift them one

by one, a proud parent. Most the figures beamed back, a few glowered. There were chunks of wood carved and painted into small white deerskins. There were figures with multiple heads, facing different directions.

Then he turned to the woodpeckers. He lifted a frame of alder painted black and started attaching wings carved of redwood. The wing fell to the floor and Brian grinned. "It's like the Icarus story," he said, recalling the Greek myth of the man who made his son wings with feathers and bees wax. In that story the boy flew too close to the sun, the wax melted and the boy plunged to the earth.

Then Brian role-played the parts: "Get you ass back down here, son!"



Woodpecker, whose Karuk name sounds like the cry and rattle we hear in the woods, just carved the hole bigger and Coyote was free. Coyote had some paint of the color red, a rarity, and gave it to the bird.

"Red is the hardest color to make," Brian explained and he lofted another of his woodpeckers into assisted flight. "That's the secret of their beauty. The Red is red. The Black is black. The White is white."

The red plumage has long made woodpeckers a favorite for regalia in ceremonies like the Brush Dance and the Jump Dance. He showed off photos of himself and other Indians in full regalia.

"I became  
Anti-war, Anti-  
Army, Anti-  
United States.  
I think I'm still  
that way."

"I can't, Dad. It's too much fun to fly."

Then he switches gear from Greek to Karuk tales: How ik-takatákaha, Woodpecker, rescued pihnêefich, Coyote, from a cavity in a tree when all the other animals had tried and failed.

He wandered again around the work space, like a real-life woodpecker floating from tree to tree, before starting the rata-tat-tat search for lunch. He stopped again before his sticks-and-stones little people and said they were ikxaréeyav, the spirit people. Reanimated in his studio.

# INDIAN ISLAND

OUT ON THE ISLAND.  
IN THE MIDDLE. OF THE BAY.  
THE SUN SET TWICE.  
ON THE PEOPLE. THAT DAY.  
THE WORLD. THEY WERE MAKING.  
SOMEONE ELSE WAS TAKING.  
SAYING. EUREKA.  
I FOUND IT. CLAIMING.  
IT'S MINE. TO OWN.  
OUT ON THE ISLAND.  
IN THE MIDDLE OF THE BAY.  
SURROUNDED. BY GREED.  
THAT HAD COME.  
AND PLANTED. ITS SEED.  
THE SUN SET TWICE.  
ON THE PEOPLE THAT DAY.  
THEN. CAME. MUFFLED SILENCE.  
SNEAKING UP. OUT OF THE DARK.

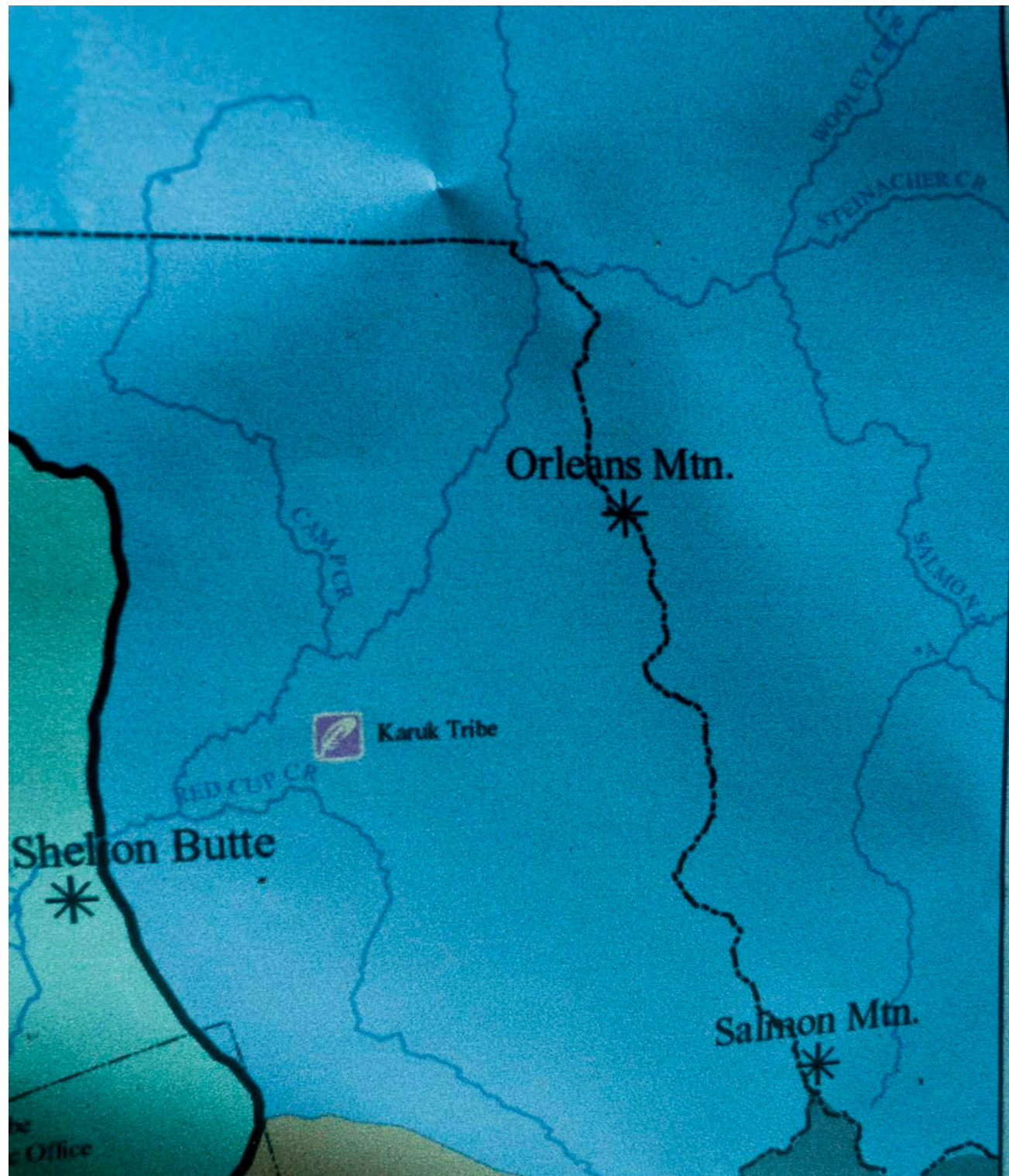






SOMETHING. SO EVIL. THE  
DOGS. COULDN.T EVEN BARK.  
WE KNOW. IT'S NOT OVER.  
WE KNOW. IT'S NOT DONE.  
WE KNOW. FOR US.  
OUR FIGHT HAS JUST BEGUN.  
BUT. MEANWHILE.  
WE MUST TAKE TIME.  
TO REGROUP.  
WE MUST TAKE TIME.  
TO REST.  
BECAUSE. WE KNOW DAYLIGHT  
IS COMING. AND WE WILL  
HAVE TO GIVE IT. OUR BEST.  
OUT. ON THE ISLAND.  
IN THE MIDDLE. OF THE BAY.  
THE SUNSET. TWICE.  
ON THE PEOPLE. THAT DAY.  
THEN. CAME. COLD. MORNING.  
REVEALING LIGHT.  
ALL BRAND NEW. SHINING BRIGHT.  
MAKING PROMISES. OF A BRAND NEW

DAY. WITH A BRAND NEW WAY.  
FOR THE ISLAND. OUT. IN THE MIDDLE.  
OF THE BAY.  
BRIAN D. TRIPP.  
THE KARUK PATRIOT  
AT SIXTY-FOUR  
JUST IN CASE. ANYONE IS  
INTERESTED. JUST IN CASE  
SOMEONE. OUT THERE.  
MIGHT BE KEEPING SCORE.  
ON APRIL SIXTH. TWO THOUSAND.  
NINE. BDT TURNED SIXTY-FOUR.  
MY BODY IS SORE. IT ACHES.  
A WHOLE LOT MORE.  
SOMETIMES IT HURTS.  
RIGHT DOWN TO THE CORE.  
I TEND TO MOVE A LITTLE  
SLOWER. BUT MY EXPECTATIONS  
AREN'T ANY LOWER. I TRY  
TO WORK HARD EVERY DAY.







## STUDIO

2013

From the home of Brian D. Tripp.

(L) BDT living room, works in progress

(R) Completed figures

(SUB) Phonenix woodpeckers

ROCK TALK  
2013

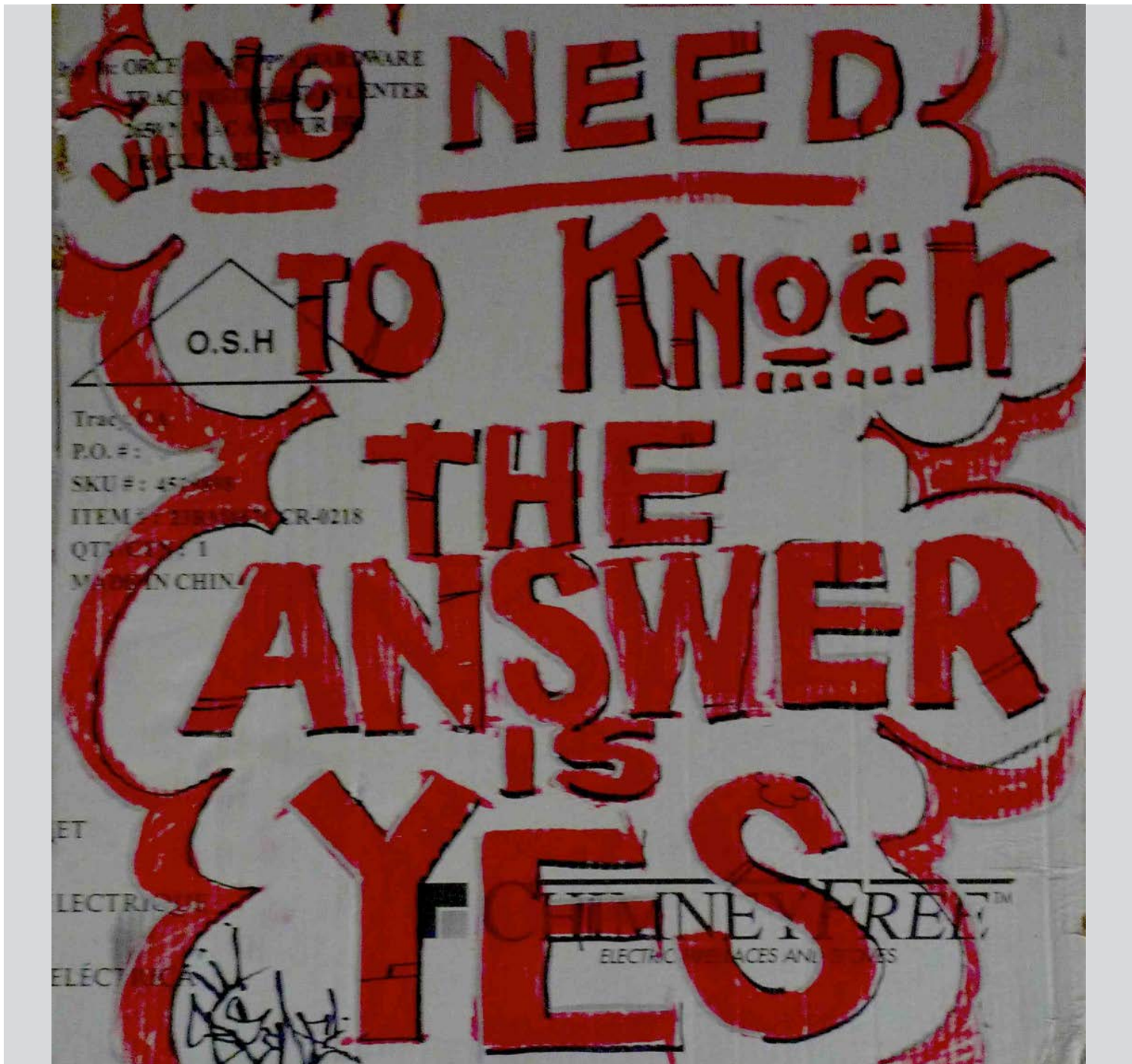




## STUDIO

2013

From the home of Brian D. Tripp.



NO NEED TO KNOCK  
UNDATED



STONE FACE MAN

UNDATED



STONE FACE  
UNDATED





MEN  
UNDATED

LARGE MAN  
UNDATED





ICARUS WOODPECKER  
UNDATED

WHITE DEER  
UNDATED





PORTRAIT (ANONYMOUS)

UNDATED

DANCE APRON  
UNDATED





## WINDOW PAINTING

UNDATED



WINDOW PAINTING  
(ME, MYSELF, AND I)  
UNDATED



# exhibitions & collections

## Selected Exhibitions:

Gallery Paule Anglim, San Francisco, CA  
American Indian Community House Gallery, New York, NY  
American Indian Contemporary Arts, San Francisco, CA  
Berkeley Art Museum, CA  
Crocker Museum of Art, Sacramento, CA (catalog)  
Falkirk Art Center, San Rafael, CA  
B. Sakata Garo, Sacramento, CA  
CN Gorman Museum, UC Davis, CA  
Heard Museum, Phoenix, AZ  
Humboldt State University, CA  
International Association of Art Critics, New York, NY  
Meridian Gallery, San Francisco, CA  
Mission Cultural Center, San Francisco, CA  
Morris Graves Museum of Art, Eureka, CA  
Museum of Art and Design, New York, NY  
Oakland Museum of California  
Piante Gallery, Eureka, CA  
New Museum, New York, NY  
Sacramento State University, CA  
San Francisco State University Gallery, CA  
Terrain Gallery, San Francisco, CA

## Selected Collections:

Amherst College, MA  
Berkeley Art Museum, UC Berkeley  
Crocker Museum of Art, Sacramento, CA  
Dartmouth College, Rauner Library, Hanover, NH  
Denver Art Museum, CO  
CN Gorman Museum, UC Davis, CA  
Emory University, Atlanta, GA  
Franklin and Marshall College, Lancaster, PA  
Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, CA  
Library of Congress, W.D.C.  
Newberry Library Chicago, IL  
The Oakland Museum of California  
San Diego State University, CA  
Smith College, Mortimer Rare Book Room, North Hampton, MA  
School of the Museum of Fine Arts/Tufts University, Boston, MA  
The University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill  
University of California at Berkeley, The Bancroft Library  
University of California at Irvine  
University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT  
University of Denver, CO  
University of Wisconsin, Kohler Art Library, Madison, WI  
Yale University, New Haven, CT

# notes on BDT's artists' books

Brian's artists' books function as prayer and song books, as journals and as iconographic histories of the Karuk nation. Some follow the ledger or composition book found format and some are assemblages or collages of material that construct a narrative sequence. But it would be a mistake to assume that Brian's sequential structure is chronological in the Western European sense. Brian does not date his work and his books may coalesce over a period of years and even decades. He often works on dozens of books at a time, It's a way he can work out and rework songs and stories for years, honing the aesthetic and ethical integrity he seeks.

Brian's themes and texts focus on the preservation of Karuk culture not for its own sake but as an example of moral and ecologically sustainable life that is not nostalgic or static but dynamic and vital. Unfortunately the Karuk are still struggling against the inherent white supremacy and colonial belligerence of Federal and State institutions and individual beliefs. In this context Brian was one of many Native American Elders, leaders and activists who went to the 2016-17 Oceti Sakowin Camp at Standing Rock. They took this journey not only to protest the Dakota Pipeline but to ignite a global movement against ecological injustice.

The iconic language that forms the bedrock of his books originates from the Karuk visual language but is extended by Brian's own additions and complications. This is a language that can really only be shared specifically by the indigenous peoples of northern California and in general by most Native American peoples. It is a profoundly spiritual language, If you don't live it, you can't see it and if you can't feel it, you can't read it. Brian often uses the English language in addition to his iconographic Karuk. This greatly expands his audience, however, to fully understand Brian's work, you need to travel to where he lives and walk through the storybook of his beloved mountains and rivers.

MARSHALL WEBER



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