



Above: Marie Watt, *Skyway*, 2024. Photo: Kevin McConnell.

Marie Watt: *Telegraph*
North and South Galleries

Cannupa Hanska Luger: *Mirror Shield Project*
Media Room, presented in collaboration with Garth Greenan Gallery

On view September 21 – November 16, 2024
Opening reception: September 21 from 3 – 5pm; artist remarks at 4pm

San Francisco: Catharine Clark Gallery opens its Fall 2024 program with *Telegraph*, a solo exhibition by Marie Watt, in our North and South Galleries, and *Mirror Shield Project*, a video by Cannupa Hanska Luger, in the Media Room. Both presentations are on view September 21 – November 14, with an opening reception on Saturday, September 21, from 3 – 5 p.m.

Watt's ambitious exhibition is her second solo presentation with the gallery and her first to encompass the fully expanded space. Her newest works incorporate an extensive material vocabulary—including neon, welded steel, tin jingles, and textile—as part of a deeper meditation on what it means to communicate across languages, geographies, and generations.



Above: Marie Watt, *Transformer*, 2024. Photo: David Schulze.

Watt writes that “my Portland studio looks out on a huge radio tower in the West Hills once known as the KGON tower. Towers and columnar forms have been a constant in my practice. I’ve found inspiration in Constantin Brancusi’s *Endless Column* (1938), the conifers of the Pacific Northwest, overstuffed linen closets, and, more recently, San Francisco’s Sutro Tower. Radio towers keep calling to me, and when I imagine myself calling back, I picture the text SKYWOMAN tumbling down from the sky and climbing up the tower in neon letters.” Watt realized this concept in the exhibition with her vertical neon work, *Transformer* (2024).

Watt writes that “the earth/sky ladder-like orientation of the tower connects to the Haudenosaunee creation story, in which Skywoman falls or is pushed from the Sky World through a hole, clutching seed matter as she falls, before she is assisted by birds, then by ground animals, as she arrives on Turtle Island. I am interested in how learning the history of a place can reframe our relationship to it. Is it possible to change how we steward our relationships to place, water, earth, animals, and humans by understanding it through a different lens?”

Watt writes that *Transformer* was “the entry point for the rest of this body of work. This is the first time that radio towers specifically appear in my work. Multi-channel communication towers are now ubiquitous in our world as radio towers and cell towers communicate both verbal and nonverbal information. They telegraph information: a call and response, two-way conversation, sending and receiving, back to ancestors and forward to future generations.” *Telegraph* features several of Watt’s signature blanket stacks, but with the I-beams replaced by ham radio towers. Watt writes that “these towers amplify information and distribute it to people who then further expand the information’s reach. Blankets do all this as well. They receive physical and metaphysical information about our lives. The blankets I use come from thrift stores or are given to me. They are yet another material for communicating our personal stories.”

Telegraph features several new double-long blanket works in Watt’s series *Placeholder* (2017 – ongoing); the first work in this series was previously featured in the 2020 group exhibition at the gallery, *To the Person Sitting in Darkness*. Watt writes that this “first beaded blanket text piece contained the words EPHEMERAL MONUMENT. This phrase was drawn from John N. Low and the book he authored titled *Imprints: The Pokagon Band of Potawatomi*

Indians and the City of Chicago. He argues that the Potawatomi people and other tribes who count Chicago as part of their indigenous homeland are present amongst us in Chicago, and their presence is an ephemeral monument.”



Above: Marie Watt, *Placeholder (Envelope)*, 2024. Photo: Kevin McConnell.

Watt continues: “I used a Scotch Roman typeface for the embroidered text, as it is a font historically employed on bronze plaques that accompany monuments. The word placeholder refers to something that holds a space or acts as a substitute for something yet to come. I deliberately used clear beads when embroidering the text on these pieces to emphasize the ephemerality of the language. From a distance, the text may not be legible, only becoming clear as you move through the space and interact with the artworks. I am interested in the way language, ideas, and conversations come in and out of focus. The language I employ is connected to stories I seek to unearth and make visible.”

The exhibition also features several tin jingle sculptures, which are being exhibited in the Bay Area for the first time. Watt notes that “jingles were historically created from the rolled tops of tobacco cans and other tin lids. They are grounded in Indigenous histories of making and storytelling, adornment and ritual. The jingle cones in these pieces acknowledge the Jingle Dress Dance, which began as a healing ritual in the Ojibwe tribe during the 1918 influenza pandemic. The idea for the dance came to a tribal elder in a dream. The elder had a very sick granddaughter, and in the dream, he was instructed to attach the jingles to a dress. It was believed that when the dress was danced around the sick child, the sound created by the movement of the jingle cones would be healing. We can assume this medicine worked because the dance was shared with other tribes and continues to be danced today at pow wows.”

“Like the towers in this exhibition, the jingles are amplifiers and receivers, both of sound and light.” In *Telegraph*, these jingles take the form of cloud-like sculptures that are suspended from the ceiling, as well as mixed media works in which the jingle clouds are suspended from the ham radio towers. Watt writes that “I am now looking at other ways these pieces can inhabit space using other structures as a vehicle. I am interested in the way these pieces can communicate movement and immateriality. Can they capture a fleeting moment in time?”



Above: Cannupa Hanska Luger, still from *Mirror Shield Project*, 2016.

In conversation with Watt’s exhibition, the gallery presents *Mirror Shield Project* (2016), a video by Cannupa Hanska Luger. Watt and Luger previously collaborated on the monumental sculpture *Each/Other* (2020 – 2021), an artist-guided community artwork in the form of a massive she-wolf created from bandanas, metal, leather, and other materials. The artists were also the subject of a major traveling two-person exhibition of the same name, organized by the Denver Art Museum. Luger’s video work, presented in collaboration with Garth Greenan Gallery, is drawn from his social activation of the same name. The *Mirror Shield Project* was initiated in support of the Water Protectors at Oceti Sakowin camp near Standing Rock, ND, in 2016. The project began out of urgency when Luger learned that the water of his father’s homelands, where he grew up on the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Reservation, was under threat through the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline.

The pipeline was originally planned to cross the Missouri River, north of Bismarck, North Dakota’s capital, but the city protested for fear that it would contaminate their water supply. The pipeline was rerouted downriver and just upstream from the Standing Rock Reservation.



Above: Cannupa Hanska Luger, still from *Mirror Shield Project*, 2016.

In addition to the threat to the water, this new path of the DAPL was to desecrate several marked ancestral burial sites of both the Mandan and Lakota peoples. Over the course of nearly a year, an estimated 15,000 people from around the world traveled to the Water Protector camp areas just outside of Cannonball, ND, to stand in solidarity with the protection of the water and in support of the Indigenous-led actions in opposition to the DAPL. The mirrored shields were engaged and have since been shared globally as an act of inspiration for art as peaceful resistance.

By using art as a measure of action and creating an open-source format call for participation with an instructional video, *How To Build Mirror Shields For Water Protectors*, filmed and edited by Razelle Benally at the Institute of American Indian Arts during his Artist-in-Residence program in November 2016, Luger launched *The Mirror Shield Project*. This call to participate inspired people from across the nation to create and transport what has been estimated at over a thousand mirrored shields to the Oceti Sakowin Camp near Standing Rock, ND. Once onsite, these shields were available for use by the Water Protectors in frontline actions as they stood up against the police and the DAPL. The *Mirror Shield Project* has since been formatted and used in various resistance movements across the world. The video will be screened in the gallery's Media Room.



Above: Marie Watt, *Amplifier*, 2024. Photo: Kevin McConnell.

Additional off-site exhibitions featuring Marie Watt's work in Northern California:

- *Storywork: The Prints of Marie Watt from the Collection of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation* at the Crocker Art Museum (through October 20)
- *Dwelling: New Acquisitions* at the Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University (opening October 4)
- *Future Dreaming... A Path Forward* at Montalvo Arts Center (through November 10)

Additional gallery programming in EXiT:

Tina Rath: Solo Presentation (through November 14)