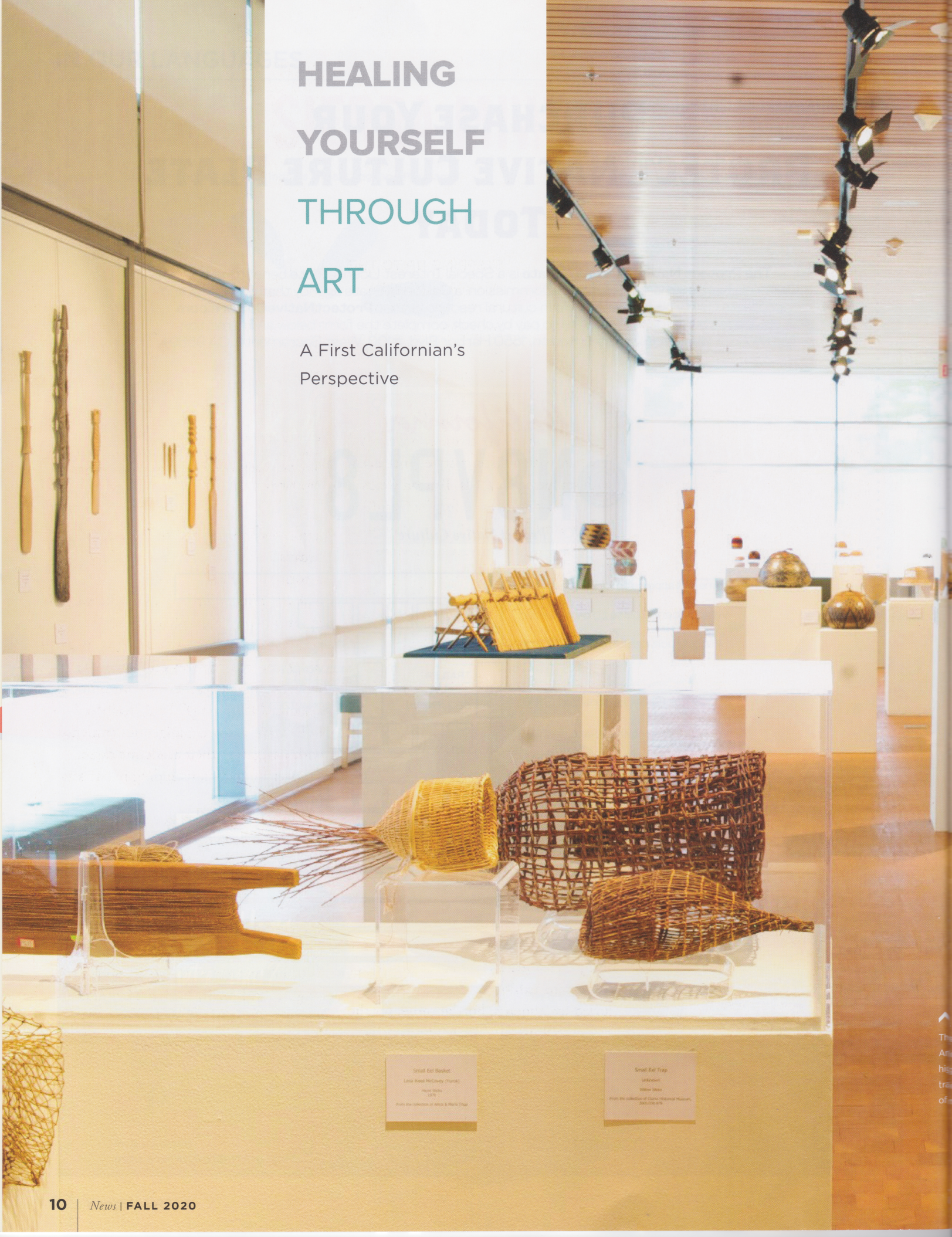


HEALING YOURSELF THROUGH ART

A First Californian's
Perspective



Small Fish Basket
Lena Reed McCleary (Yonk)
1850-1860
From the collection of Africa & World Trust

Small Fish Trap
Unknown
1850-1860
From the collection of Costa Rica Natural Museum,
2001.001.014



by
Jeanne
Ferris

STEPPING UP TO THE HELM AS THE NEW DIRECTOR OF THE REESE BULLEN ART GALLERY IS BRITTANY BRITTON (HUPA),

a First Californian and alumnae of Humboldt State University (HSU). She is a multimedia artist who wears a few hats with a distinct style, once even with sculpting clay. Ms. Britton wears another hat as director for the Goudi'ni Native American Arts Gallery (Goudi'ni is the Wiyot name for Arcata). Moreover, she has proven her mettle in the past year. Her motto for success? "Do it now and make it happen, or it will pass you by."

With both galleries on the HSU campus, one can say she doesn't stand in one spot long enough to let grass grow under her feet. Synchronicity in action and a single person staff: "I got hired on June 1 and came into an empty exhibit gallery calendar," Ms. Britton said. "But I'm enjoying my problems. Reese Bullen has been around for fifty years and has a strong base."

Named in honor of a founding professor of the art department, Reese Bullen Art Gallery offers students unique hands-on experience with "work to install," along with gallery curation and design. Historically, the bachelor's degree in fine arts exhibit by the art grads is juried by students. Furthermore, for the students chosen, permanent art instal-



Brittany Britton (Hupa) is the new director of both the Reese Bullen Art Gallery and Goudi'ni Native American Arts Gallery at Humboldt State University. Photo by Amy Kumler.

lation becomes an additional accolade because HSU will purchase student artwork outright.

HSU offers a BFA and a certificate in art museum and gallery operations, which is "unusual in an undergraduate program," Ms. Britton said. "We also have the Indian Teacher and Educational Personnel Program (ITEPP) available." ITEPP has assisted Indigenous students with navigating their academic career for over fifty years, including in the arts discipline.

Having physical classes on campus this fall requires daily compliance with state-mandated health protocols of cleaning, social distancing, masks, and a small class count of twenty-two students. "I've had to reconfigure the gallery in six-foot boxes," Ms. Britton said. "But I'm excited that school begins August 25. I finally have the key and went inside for the first time even though no one is on campus yet. Of course, everyone will have the two-week mandatory quarantine so there will be classes online in the beginning."

Reese Bullen Art Gallery and Goudi'ni Native American Arts Gallery at Humboldt State University exhibit works of contemporary art and feature works by local Native American artists. Photo courtesy of Humboldt State University.

Switching hats—what is on the Goudi’ni calendar?

The answer starts with a story: “Well, while working on my master’s degree at the Oregon College of Art and Craft in Portland, I often visited a contemporary gallery nearby. It featured a retrospective by (late) Native American artist Rick Bartow (Mad River Band of Wiyot Indians).” Mr. Bartow’s work is held in major public and private collections worldwide and has only increased in its prestige over the last four decades. In 2012, Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC, commissioned one of his creations. With a nod to his heritage, he chose a single old-growth red cedar tree and carved a pair of sculptures towering at twenty-six feet. They grace the northwest corner of the National Mall with the perfect title: *We Were Always Here*.

“After reaching out to my Portland contacts, I feel fortunate that we can plan on a spring exhibition featuring Rick Bartow: fifteen to twenty of his pieces. Originally, it was to coincide with a radio play about his life but sheltering-in-place has interrupted those plans,” Ms. Britton said.

With Mr. Bartow’s ancestral ties to the area, it is especially meaningful that the spirit of his pieces is coming full circle to HSU. Also significant:

“There are only two Native American art galleries in the academic system and HSU has the [distinction] of having one on campus,” Ms. Britton said.

“***Art is healing because it forces you to forge a connection between your mind and your body. Unlike exercise, which works your body, or meditation, which clears your mind, art-making accesses both mind and body to promote healing.***”

Lately, California Arts (CalArts) advocates have been petitioning lawmakers that, “cultural workers are essential to the disaster recovery process.” This appeal has been at the core of state-level conversations defending threatened funds (\$26 million) usually earmarked for art and culture.

Ms. Britton then mentioned an intriguing phrase shared among the CalArts groups that, “Artists should be considered the second responders.” Indeed, mental health professionals often use art as an effective modality for healing. Art is a proven catharsis: “Art is healing because it forces you to forge a connection between your mind and your body. Unlike exercise, which works your body, or meditation, which clears your mind, art-making accesses both mind and body to promote healing.” Besides, how will society hope to continue evolving if art and culture disappear? It is the very ethos of civility and healthy human expression.

Recently, Ms. Britton dipped her hands into sacred craft and although it’s not a Hupa tradition, she chose beadwork. Borrowing her mother’s looms, Ms. Britton created a physical elegy to her great-grandmother, a medicine woman. She resurrected a spectacular replica of great-grandma’s lawn chair, which was frequently present at their

world renewal ceremonies. In muted silver aluminum, the intricate detail of red, blue, gold, and silver glass beads becomes a sparkling homage to love.

When asked if she plans to exhibit in the Goudi’ni, she vehemently replied, “No.” Ms. Britton declined to self-promote. The public’s interest, however, is foremost in her mind. “Since outsiders can’t be on campus, we’re exploring ways to bring art into the communities. We’ve been playing around with the idea of putting the artwork on lawn signs and placing them in strategic areas for public enjoyment. Also, possibly producing monthly speakers through virtual access for public engagement. We need to produce eight shows next year. And then of course, there’s fundraising.”

Ms. Britton’s palette is more than full. But changing hats complements her expansive multimedia repertoire. Her effusive boldness in coloring outside the lines can only enhance a highly regarded art legacy at HSU. When her mother attended the art reception for great-grandma’s folding chair, her one comment was, “It’s sharp.”

Mom is right; Ms. Britton is sharp and envisions a healthier future through art. Rest easy, Reese Bullen and Goudi’ni Native American Art Galleries are in caring authentic Californian hands.