



ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Lewis deSoto, a Cahuilla, is known for his installations, sculpture and public art that engages cosmological questions, notions of self, and plays with inherent phenomena. Born and raised in San Bernardino, California, he did his undergraduate work at University of California Riverside in 1978 and received an MFA from Claremont Graduate University in 1981. His work has been exhibited in Japan, Europe and the U.S. and is in the collections of the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, Museum of Modern Art in New York, and Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, as well as private collections. <http://sotolux.net/>

Mezzo-soprano Erin Neff has been featured at many festivals including The Mendocino Music Festival, The Gilmore and The Telluride Music Festival where she also writes and directs. As a proponent of new works, she performs many world premieres, most recently *The Bonesetter's Daughter* and the west coast premiere of *The Great Gatsby* with Ensemble Parallèle at San Francisco's Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. She has also performed with the San Francisco Opera, Sacramento Opera, Festival Opera, West Edge Opera Company, and Composer's Inc. <http://erinneff.com/>

Erin Neff worked closely with artist Gerald Clarke Jr. to organize the Cahuilla Bird Singers for the February 4th performance. He is a member of the Cahuilla Band of Indians and serves on the Tribal Council as Vice-Chairman. He has exhibited his work at a variety of venues throughout the country and abroad. In 2007, he was awarded an Eiteljorg Museum Fellowship for Native American Fine Art. www.geraldclarke.net

Lewis deSoto & Erin Neff: Tahquitz is co-curated by Tyler Stallings, Artistic Director for Culver Center of the Arts & Director of Sweeney Art Gallery, and Jonathan Green, ARTSblock Executive Director, University of California Riverside.

Major support for *Lewis deSoto & Erin Neff: Tahquitz* is provided by grant awards from the National Endowment for the Arts, Art Works; the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian Indigenous Contemporary Art Program, made possible through a generous gift from The Ford Foundation; City of Riverside Arts and Culture Program; and the American Composer Forum's First Nations Composer Initiative; with additional support from UCR's College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences.

RELATED PROGRAMS

Film and Discussion | A Good Day to Die, USA, 2010, 90 minutes
Friday, February 3 | 7:00 PM

Dennis Banks co-founded the American Indian Movement (A.I.M.) in 1968 to call attention to the plight of urban Indians in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and traces Banks' early life up to the subsequent founding of a movement that changed the lives of American Indians forever. The film is followed by a discussion with Michelle Raheja, Associate Professor of English at University of California Riverside, specializes in Native American and early American literature and visual culture.

Film and Discussion | Keeping the Songs Alive: Southern Californian Indians, 2010, USA, 40 minutes

Saturday, February 4 | 4:30-5:30 PM

The first film of secular songs that recall creation, family and other stories of Native American cultures in Southern California. It was completed by researchers at the University of California, Riverside: Cliff Trafzer, Professor of History and Costo Chair in Native American History; Jonathan Ritter, Assistant Professor of Music and an ethnomusicologist; and William Madrigal Jr., a Cahuilla who graduated from UC Riverside in anthropology 2010.

Exhibition Reception and Performance

Saturday, February 4 | 6:00-9:00 PM

During the exhibition reception for *Tahquitz*, Erin Neff will perform with Cahuilla Bird Singers a unique, exciting and intimate expression of the maiden singing her plight of being trapped in the rock where *Tahquitz* has taken her to live.

Wood, Rocks!!!

First Sunday Workshop | February 5 | 1:00 PM-4:00 PM

The ARTSblock First Sunday DIY team will be assisting participants in turning their pick of wood and rock sizes to construct sculptures that honor both the great mysteries of the natural world as well as our own human creativity. Supported by the UCR Gluck Fellows Program, and made possible by the generosity of the Maxwell H. Gluck Foundation.

IMAGES (Front, insert, back cover) *Lewis deSoto & Erin Neff, Tahquitz*, 2012, sound, voice, foam, steel and fiberglass boulder, speakers, transparent map, glass gobo of Cahuilla basket design, Edison Home Phonograph (wax cylinder recorder/player), table for phonograph, tables for books, and video monitors. Photos courtesy of Lewis deSoto. Installation views at Culver Center of the Arts, University of California, Riverside. [Fig. 1] Lewis deSoto, *Tahquitz*, 1994-1996, sound, voice, ceramics, galvanized steel, speakers, animated map, wood, pulverized pearl dust, variable dimensions, collection The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Photo courtesy of the artist. Installation view at Nelson Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. [Fig. 2] Lewis deSoto, *From The Tahualtapa Project*, 1983-1988, photograph and cement stain, custom frame, and raven feathers, 32 x 32 inches, collection of Seattle Art Museum. Photo courtesy of the artist. Tahualtapa means "Hill of the Ravens" in Cahuilla.





Fig. 1



Fig. 2

Lewis deSoto & Erin Neff *Tahquitz*

January 28 – March 24, 2012

Lewis deSoto & Erin Neff: Tahquitz is a site-specific installation using sound and light technology that animates the majestic forty-foot atrium of UCR’s Culver Center of the Arts. “Tahquitz” (pronounced tah-kwish) is the name of a primordial creature, a *nukatem*, part of the creation story of the Cahuilla people who live in the Southern California areas of Palm Springs, San Geronio Pass, Hemet and Anza Borrego. This primordial being, according to the Cahuilla, wanders in the San Jacinto mountain range where a peak is named for him.

In the mid 1990s, Lewis deSoto presented an installation work with the same title, commissioned by Martin Friedman and Adam Weinberg of the American Center in Paris and the Denver Art Museum [Fig. 1]. This earlier version of “Tahquitz” is now in the collection of The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. In creating another version for Culver Center of the Arts, deSoto has come back to this story in collaboration with mezzo-soprano Erin Neff, who lends her study of the Cahuilla language and her abilities as a composer/singer to the project. In the past, the artists have worked together in 2009 on *KLAGE* (Lament) at the San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art, San Jose, California, and in 2002 on *Haunt* (Cantus) at Wave Hill in Bronx, New York.

The peak that is named after Tahquitz, which is to the Cahuilla a sacred place, is represented by a large, eight-foot diameter, roughly shaped boulder that hangs just above a viewer’s head in the atrium. Although it is one constructed by a theatrical prop house, there is a sense of gravity and weight that evokes the presence of Tahquitz’s dwelling place. Additionally, it is a reminder of the dry desert location where Tahquitz exists and the reality of living in such a harsh environment, as well as an embodiment of endless hunger and desire, whether by the primordial being, craving for other life energies, or as commentary on today’s society.

deSoto has installed an enormous translucent map of Tahquitz’s location, the San Jacinto Mountain range, across the glass grid of the magnificent glass skylight that lights the Culver Atrium. This map, derived from a USGS map printed in the early 1900s, reverses gravity:

one is at once below the map and floating above the land. It suggests that the world has been turned topsy-turvy literally as you enter into the timeless space of Tahquitz. As if told by a Cahuilla, you may become so disoriented as to be unable to leave and return to your family and friends.

On the backside of the atrium’s open space there is a large light projection of a Cahuilla basket pattern that is slowly rotating. Made graphic and enlarged, the spinning design suggests that of a spiral galaxy too, as if to remind the viewer of the cosmic order of things referenced in everyday details of utilitarian objects, such as baskets.

On an antique table, opposite the boulder, there is an Edison cylinder phonograph from the early 1900s. It is similar to the kind used for recording Cahuilla Bird Singers in 1918 by anthropologist Lucille Hooper. These recordings reside at UC Berkeley’s Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology and in the Smithsonian’s collections. The inclusion of both the phonograph and the USGS map from the early 1900s is also fitting as they connect with the installation’s site at Culver Center, a building built originally in 1895 as a department store. The phonograph recording represents also the first time that the sound of another culture could be captured. It also points to how the technology used to record a culture can shape our views, whether that be framed by the two-minute limit of the wax cylinder, the scratchiness of its recording, or which native cultures and songs were selected for dissemination and thus given more importance over others.

There are four zones of sound in the installation. They are created with “audio spotlight” technology that allow for laser-like, precise aiming of sound. As one enters the space, in alignment with the boulder and the recorder down the center of the atrium, the sound of Cahuilla Elder Alvino Siva telling the story of Tahquitz in English and Cahuilla is heard. Standing under the boulder, one hears the sound of Erin Neff, singing a rendition of Siva’s stories. If one passes into the zone of the Edison phonograph, one hears the sounds of “Tahquitz” vocalized by Lewis deSoto and Erin Neff, and then the 1918 Hooper recordings of the Bird Singers is heard. Otherwise, the room feels quiet for anyone not in these specific zones. The effect is not unlike hearing something “inside one’s head” and is an uncanny, unexpected experience. In effect, it is as though the primordial being, Tahquitz, is talking to you, and perhaps ensnaring you, beginning the process of absorbing your life energy.

Neff sings three verses of song that are, essentially, an abridged version of the story as told by Alvino Siva. She transcribed the story in its original Cahuilla, before beginning her composition, in order to become attuned to its rhythmic and percussive nature, as she felt that getting the natural cadence of the Cahuilla had to be foremost in the composition. The text was then set to melodies she developed from music samples notated in Hansjakob Seiler’s recording of Cahuilla spoken word stories, *Cahuilla Texts with an Introduction* (1970). The “voice” of Tahquitz was based on other written stories where it is noted that when Tahquitz makes his approach he makes the sounds “toooov” and “tevvvv.” This recording was made in a place with resonant, hard surfaces so as to replicate the acoustic feeling of the giant rock in the San Jacinto Mountains that is Tahquitz’s home and is where the Indian maiden was forced to live with Tahquitz.

Neff sings alternately as narrator, Indian maiden, Tahquitz, and fellow tribesman whose spirit has been stolen and consumed by Tahquitz’s deep appetite for the life energies of other living beings. She also sings the complex story of a maiden who is kidnapped and held within his lair: a home inside a seemingly solid boulder on the mountain. She is made to live as he does: consuming the spirits of others. Finally, after much pleading, she is released back into the world and back to her village. After much cajoling she tells the story after having her neighbors build her a house. She perishes after the telling of the forbidden story.

In addition to the Tahquitz installation in the Culver Center’s central atrium, there are long tables and video monitors in the North Atrium Gallery that display a variety of books and videos about Lewis deSoto’s past projects and Cahuilla culture. One can also experience through video documentation the Erin Neff contributions in *Cantus* and *Klage* (Lament).

For deSoto, Tahquitz continues his overriding exploration into the history of how humans have come to think the universe came to exist and operates, whether that is through religious, mythic, or scientific avenues, or a combination of all three. But they are all paths that suggest we look at the world through a language of some sort. In this light, Tahquitz reflects on the legend of the primordial being as existing in reality and through the retelling of his existence through the Cahuilla language. The exhibition perhaps asks how do this telling, this naming, and this lens of language, reform Tahquitz when told in English and when sung by an opera singer trained in European languages, though in concert with Cahuilla Bird Singers.

deSoto’s fascination with transformation of sacred landscapes can be found in a seminal, early, photo-based project, created just out of graduate school, and exhibited at UCR’s California Museum of Photography, *The Tahualtapa Project*, 1983-1988. Its name refers to “The Hill of the Ravens” in Cahuilla lore [Fig. 2]. The mountain in the San Bernardino Valley was later known as Mt. Slover, and for nearly twelve decades, the presence of the California Portland Cement plant in Colton, not far from Riverside, mined limestone and used 3,000-degree kilns to turn it into clinker bricks, and then ground the clinker into cement powder. It was the first such producer of cement in the United States. For this project, deSoto employed in his photographs a running motif that represented the outline of the once existing mountain. In essence, the project explored the theme of how a sacred mountain was transformed by both renaming it and grinding it down into the materials for the cities of a different kind of civilization.

However, this is not to say that although Tahualtapa has been transformed into cement, or that Tahquitz’s dwelling place is represented by a prop boulder, or the songs about his travails are recorded for non-natives to hear, there is always spiritual power in everything. Objects are not dead but alive, and should therefore be approached not only with curiosity, but respect. Or as Lewis deSoto said in a recent lecture on his work at Culver Center, “Everyday objects have energy too. They can be power objects that carry an idea forward. Nothing is anonymous and everything is authored.”

--Tyler Stallings, Artistic Director for Culver Center of the Arts & Director of Sweeney Art Gallery