MoMA ANNOUNCES PROJECTS: GABRIELLE L’HIRONDELLE HILL, THE ARTIST’S FIRST SOLO MUSEUM EXHIBITION IN THE UNITED STATES

NEW YORK, February 11, 2020 [Updated on September 30, 2020]—The Museum of Modern Art presents Projects: Gabrielle L’Hirondelle Hill, the artist’s first solo museum exhibition in the United States. On view in the Museum’s street-level galleries from April 25 through August 15, 2021, the exhibition is part of MoMA’s Elaine Dannheisser Projects Series. Hill, a Métis artist and writer, has assembled multiple works in which her use of tobacco as a key material alludes to the plant’s complex indigenous and colonial histories. The exhibition features sculptures and drawings, including several new works, constructed primarily from tobacco along with other sourced and found materials collected from her Vancouver neighborhood. Projects: Gabrielle L’Hirondelle Hill is organized by Lucy Gallun, Associate Curator, Department of Photography.

Prior to colonization, tobacco was among the most widely traded materials in the Americas. Later, tobacco became the first currency in the colonies of North America, before the dollars in use today. English settlers established a system in which promissory notes representing amounts of tobacco—“Tobacco Notes”—could be used to purchase goods, as well as to leverage wages, taxes, and fines. Today, “the Indigenous economic life of tobacco continues, despite colonialism, criminalization, and the imposition of capitalism,” Hill observes, “it’s evidence that our economic systems survive and continue to offer an alternative.”

Occupying the gallery’s central tables will be Hill’s ground tobacco–stuffed sculptures—the largest and newest of which approximates the size of the artist’s own body. Some of these rabbits and hybrid human figures will stand proudly or playfully, while others languidly recline. Borrowing their proportions from the dimensions of the current United States dollar bill, five flags will hang high on the gallery walls. Three flags are sewn directly from gradually disintegrating tobacco leaves, while the other two are constructed through a labor-intensive process in which Hill coats paper in homemade tobacco-infused Crisco oil and applied pigments, which must dry over several months, after which additional materials are sewn or glued to the surface.

Made through the same process as her tobacco-oil-soaked flags, Hill’s Spells take the form of small, delicate, richly-colored drawings adorned with charms, wildflowers, beer tabs, and other collected ephemera. These spells, some of which have been made for Hill’s friends, represent the power of reciprocity, interdependence, and dispersal, attributes also central in a gift economy. Hill’s use of tobacco as material at once critiques settler colonial economic systems and celebrates the indigenous history of the gift economy—in which tobacco remains a key component.

ARTIST BIO
Gabrielle L’Hirondelle Hill (b. 1979, Comox, BC, Canada) is a Métis artist and writer who lives and works on the unceded lands of the Sḵwx̱wú7mesh, Musqueam, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples. Hill’s interdisciplinary artwork—encompassing sculpture, installation, video, and photography, among other mediums—uses found materials to probe concepts of land, property, and economy. Her work has been exhibited extensively in Canada, where she is represented by Cooper Cole (Toronto) and Unit 17 (Vancouver). Hill is a member of BUSH gallery, an Indigenous artist collective. Her writing has also been published widely, and she is co-editor of the anthology The Land We Are: Artists and Writers Unsettle the Politics of Reconciliation (2015). She holds an MFA from California College of the Arts and a BFA and BA from Simon Fraser University, Vancouver.

SPONSORSHIP:

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