



24-year-old Riege weaves the womb experience

In a city of quaint, adobe-clad architecture, and museums and galleries galore, SITE Santa Fe stands out from the crowd. Open since 1995, the landmark contemporary art organization, broadly known for its distinct and interactive exhibitions, won the prestigious Jeff Harnar architecture award this spring for its striking and creative remodel.

So this is a big year for SITE, and it's also a big year for Gallup native Eric-Paul Riege, who, like SITE Santa Fe, stands out in his own right as the youngest artist to exhibit in the museum's 2018 biennial series, *Sitelines.2018: Casa Tomada*.

The series has received international acclaim, and the 2018 exhibit focuses on contemporary art from the Americas and features 23 artists from eight countries. Of these artists, only one hails from New Mexico. That one artist is Riege.

Half German and half Diné, Riege told the *Sun* he's always felt like a "maker," and his creative life began as a child. In fact, the 24-year-old said his work is a way of portraying his fascination with what it must be like to be in the womb.

"What does it feel like to be in a sanctuary that provides nothing but life to me?" he asked. "I guess I want my work to provide that in some way to myself and others and I think it's working, too."

Indeed, Riege's installation at SITE, as he puts it, "creates a home or womb that can be entered by the viewer."

In this case, Riege said his looms act as gentle, soft, fragile and light walls and windows for "air and energy and life" to move through.

When asked when his artistic life began, Riege recalled a memory of weaving as a child.

"I'm not sure if this is an actual memory or a dream I had," Riege said of a pink and brown weaving. "But either way, once I began weaving, my work began to exist entirely around that."

As a kid, Riege said he was drawn toward yarn, fabric and paper — how these could be collaged or sculpted together. Now, place, warmth, connections, ties, bloodlines, life's strands weave together in his work.

"Once I felt that I belonged to the land I stand on and the walls that house me and felt like they were breathing within me as I in them, my worldview and life completely changed," Riege said.

He graduated from Gallup High School in 2012, and in 2017, the burgeoning artist graduated summa cum laude from the University of New Mexico with a Bachelor's of Fine Arts in studio arts and a minor in Navajo language.

In 2016, Riege's relationship with SITE Santa Fe began when he participated in the SITE Scholar Program, an initiative for college- and graduate-level creative students to participate in the museum and contemporary art world.

That same year, he visited the SITE biennial show, *much wider than a line*, and it made a great impression on him.

"I was obsessed with everything I was experiencing there," Riege said. "It was so beautiful. I remember specifically thinking to myself that I would love to be in this show one day."

So when curators sought out the young artist to participate in the 2018 biennial, he was thrilled.

His current exhibit in *Sitelines* consists of regalia, photo collages and eight large looms, which he uses to recreate the ancient dwelling of Na'ashjé'íí Asdzáá (Spiderwoman), the holy woman who taught the Diné people to weave.

Anne Wrinkle of SITE Santa Fe told the *Sun* Riege's work is displayed alongside the work of the late Victoria Mamnguqsualuk, the oldest artist in the show (born 1930), whose work Riege calls "magnificent."

Wrinkle said the youngest and oldest artists' creations compliment one another beautifully, and Riege agreed.

"Her work and mine exist in this place of like part human part animal," he said. "The vibrant

colors of her work juxtapose well against my very subdued palette."

Riege has several upcoming shows and demonstrations on the calendar, including a trip to Miami, FL, but at the moment, he's also experimenting in his studio, "and just making," he said. "It's always fun seeing what my mind and hands decide to do. My body is often just the conduit of something higher telling me things and that's what my art is."

The SITE Santa Fe *Sitelines* exhibition opened in August and runs through Jan. 6, 2019. Riege's presence in the show entails demonstrations and artist talks, too.

His next performance at SITE will be Oct. 12, and Riege said he never knows what to expect; each performance is different.

"The performance paints a cycle of life weaving has from birth and to rebirth," he wrote in his SITE installation proposal. "In my performances I embody creatures, part human, part animal, part nature creating rituals of prayer and stories for healing, wellbeing, Hózhó, patience, love. My art and my stories are made and told by my hands and therefore the hands of my ancestors and therefore the hands of the Holy People, all reaching out to the audience into our blessed space."

Visit: www.ericpaulriege.com ; www.sitesantafe.org .

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