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New Curator Makes Striking Debut with Roots & Journeys

Lawrence, KS, June 13, 2013 – Lavishly beaded gauntlets, or gloves, created by indigenous peoples of British Columbia and Alberta. Works painted by the contemporary artist recognized, in his native Senegal, as the “dean of reverse glass painting.” Beaded 19th-century moccasins displayed alongside fashionable Vans skateboarding shoes painted by 21st-century artist Chris Pappan. What do these objects have in common? They share gallery space in the [Roots & Journeys](#) exhibition, but the unexpected conceptual threads connecting these works run deeper.

Cassandra Mesick, who joined the Spencer Museum as curator of global indigenous art in late 2012, has assembled a complex, multifaceted set of works exploring the ways in which today’s indigenous artists both incorporate and transform traditional visual culture for their own purposes. Mesick calls this rotation of the changing *Roots & Journeys* exhibition “traditions in transformation.”

“Too often,” Mesick explains, “ideas about ‘natives’ are linked to outdated stereotypes, which can make these communities seem frozen in a particular time and place. The reality is that their traditions have undergone as many transformations in form, medium, meaning, and aesthetics as European or Asian art has.”

Mesick will lead an exhibition tour over the lunch hour, from noon-1 PM, on Friday, June 14. During this tour she will discuss, among other things, her first acquisition for the Spencer Museum: a set of colored pencil drawings on lined paper. These drawings embody the notion of a tradition transformed by changing circumstances and the

passage of time. After the 1874 Red River War, United States military troops detained surviving Native American leaders and sought to westernize their detainees through education. Jailors supplied the Native Americans with ink, crayon, colored pencil, and paper from unused ledger books. Ledger art is a genre that evolved from the presence of these new materials which the young Kiowa, Cheyenne and Arapaho men used to create narrative scenes depicting their own histories. The practice, with roots in the long-standing tradition of pictorial hide painting on buckskin, spread beyond the prison walls and still endures as a genre in its own right.

Cassandra Mesick gives a tour of *Roots & Journeys* from 12-1 PM, Friday, June 14 at the Spencer Museum of Art in Lawrence, Kansas. *Roots & Journeys* will remain on view throughout the 2013-2014 academic year.

About Cassandra Mesick:

Cassandra Mesick, curator of global indigenous art, reported for duty in Lawrence, Kansas on October 29, 2012. With a PhD in Anthropology from Brown University, Dr. Mesick participated in archaeological research and field work in Guatemala from 2004-2009, and served as an intern, research associate and board member at Brown University's Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology from 2006-2010. During her time at the Haffenreffer, she guest curated a number of exhibitions, including *Facing Mesoamerica* and *Reimagining the Americas*. She went on to conduct object research on ancient art of the Americas at the Metropolitan Museum of Art while completing her dissertation.



[Cassandra Mesick](#)

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