ERIC-PAUL RIEGE

THE BELL

SEPTEMBER 3–DECEMBER 7 ▪ 2025

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

ojo|-|*ólǫ́* is a major solo exhibition by Diné artist Eric-Paul Riege (b. 1994, Na'nízhoozhí [Gallup, New Mexico]) featuring an immersive installation of textiles, sculptures, collages, and video activated with moments of live performance. Customary Diné practices of weaving, silversmithing, and beading are the foundation of Riege's monumental soft sculptures and other mixed-media works that reference Diné mythology, recall the history of settler trading posts inside and adjacent to the Navajo Nation, and question the notion of "authenticity" as a value marker of Indigenous art and craft. His artworks, made from natural and synthetic materials sourced from traditional and hyperreal sources, invite viewers' touch and play while initiating challenging conversations about Native sovereignty, the global art market, and the role of educational institutions in both disseminating and dispossessing knowledge about Indigenous art and cultures.

Developed in partnership between The Bell / Brown Arts Institute and the Henry Art Gallery at the University of Washington, *ojo*|-|*ólǫ́* brings together Riege's work across media in his largest solo presentation to date. To create the new pieces featured in the exhibition, Riege conducted material research with the Navajo collections held by Brown University's Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology in 2023 and the University of Washington's Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture in 2024. The resulting body of work—from large-scale jewelry and tools to weavings made from unexpected materials—disidentifies with the colonial hoarding practices of institutional archives yet still celebrates the ancestral traditions of labor contained within Indigenous-made objects.

Extending Riege's collage-based practice and iterative approach to artmaking, *ojo*|-|*ólǫ́* includes Navajo objects held by the Haffenreffer Museum shown in conversation with jewelry, sketches, regalia, and assorted ephemera from the artist's personal collection. In the synthesized archive room, the boundaries between private and public, past and present, real and fake are blurred, animating the ways that Indigenous identities and knowledges are in dynamic, constant flux.

For Riege, durational performance is a necessary mode of learning from and with materials and objects. At different moments during the run of the exhibition, Riege will activate the space with "weaving dances" that wake up objects through sound and movement. The September 18 opening celebration will be the artist's first performance with **Hóló́ǫ́**, his collaborator and the exhibition's namesake. On October 9–10, a two-day convening will generate caring yet critical interrogations of the ways Indigeneity is represented in museum and university settings. These events are free and all may be present as co-witnesses.

Ultimately, *ojo*|-|*ólǫ́* invites a collective reflection into the practices of university museums and other institutions that have accumulated Indigenous art and ancestors, and simultaneously forwards a call for Indigenous cultural resurgence in the present and towards the future.

— Thea Quiray Tagle, PhD
Associate Curator, The Bell / Brown Arts Institute

ALL OUR RELATIONS

A Conversation Between Eric-Paul Riege + Thea Quiray Tagle

**Edited and condensed from a Zoom conversation on July 9, 2025*

THEA QUIRAY TAGLE

Eric-Paul, you and I have known each other for three years, and since then we've had many conversations about your creative process and the themes and topics that inform it. Today, I want to talk with you about relation, both in terms of the relationships that you have with materials and with the central people in your life. Over the years you've said that it takes many hands to make your work, and I'm wondering if you can start with sharing more about that.

ERIC-PAUL RIEGE

When I think about hands, I have always said that, as a maker, my hands know what I'm doing before my brain does. As part of my journey as an artist, I have to submit to [my hands] and let them decide how something is formed or strung together or woven. This has allowed the work to have its own agency in so many different ways.

As for many hands making the artwork: if I'm using wool yarn, I think about the family that raised the sheep and the person who washed and sheared it. I wonder if that wool went to another person who spun it. With mass-produced fibers, I think about the person that's working in the factory or the person that put it in the box to ship it to a craft store. I consider how material is shipped and handled and is thus nomadic.

In the art world, meanwhile, the hand of the maker deems its worth. I think about strings of beads at the craft stores and at different pawn and trade shops in [my hometown of] Gallup. I wonder who gets to declare the value of an object: why is something valued less when it's on a thrift store rack than when it's under a museum display case?

You really jump scales to consider multiple ways "the hand" impacts the valuation of Indigenous art and craft. Relatedly, I am ruminating on the long history of Diné makers (including you!) transforming everyday domestic objects, from shower curtains to Mexican silver pesos, into beautiful and valuable art objects like concha belts. I'm excited for viewers to witness some of this process when they enter *ojo|-|ólǫ*.

I think of tobacco can lids becoming jingles, which have been used in Indigenous ceremony and powwows and have become an intertribal sound and material that you see across different peoples' regalia. You can buy jingles made from previously used lids that are cleaned, or you can buy mass-produced jingles that are brand new, flat pressed or pre-rolled.

With jingles, trash is radically altered into something that is ceremonial, sonically resonant, and that generates its own value.

And that's cool! There's always different ways to transform materials and objects, and it's about how embedded you want to be in that process.

Could you talk about three influential people in your larger web of relations who have helped lead you to this moment, either to this exact moment of you working in the studio today, or to this moment in your career?

Because I have worked with her the longest, the first person that comes to mind is Szu-Han Ho, who I had as a performance art professor when I was a college student [at the University of New Mexico]. We developed multiple projects alongside each other and then when I graduated and had my exhibition at ICA Miami, I reached out to her about doing a writing collaboration, two of which will be reprinted in this publication! When I took the performance art class with her, I had never worked in performance before. I found that performance was this amalgamation of so much of what I do in terms of weaving and textiles and wearable art. With Szu-Han, I learned that performance for me oftentimes means carrying as a gesture of care. Going back to the nomadic

properties of material, oftentimes material is being carried from place to place.

Another influential person is a direct family member: my great-grandmother, a master weaver from Burnt Water, Arizona [Tó Díílidí]. She passed away in 2004 at around 106 years old, when I was ten. She always recognized people by their hands. When you would go and sit with her, she would hold your hand and just pat it, and that's how her memories with you would come back to her. I'm lucky enough to have some of her weavings. I'm going to have one of her weavings on a collage wall at The Bell, which I'm excited for.

I think about this third person not only because of their work, but also because of the way they made me feel: Jeffrey Gibson. I learned about his work through school and was super inspired by him. When I graduated, one day he called me and said, "hey, I enjoy what you're doing, keep it up," which was just good encouragement! Then I was lucky enough to collaborate with him for his deCordova Sculpture Park commission in 2021, which was a celebration of being gay and queer that I had never experienced before. I felt a type of belonging that was like a hug from our ancestors and friends and all the people who've done the hard work over the years. There were multiple performances scheduled over two days, and during the last performance there was a DJ playing "I Feel Love" by Donna Summer, which is my favorite song of all time! Things were aligning and I felt this energy from being together with queer icons, queer friends, and my best friend who I dated for a couple years. So Jeffrey Gibson remains important to me because of how he made me feel in that moment. He's an amazing artist and that was a special time.

This story speaks to the most important forms of relation, right? It's not about the art market or "making it" in the art world, but about something more meaningful like creating a community, inspiring pride, or helping set the stage for another person's coming into being.

Can you talk a bit about your family? Every visit to Gallup, New Mexico [Na'nízhoozhí] I've made has been amazing, and getting to know your parents and brother has been very special. It has helped me get to know you better as well, because they very much are an extension of you and vice versa. The fact, too, that your art studio/apartment is behind the family home that you lived in for many years, and both buildings are next door to your childhood home! Can you say how your relationships with your parents and home have shaped your creative practice?

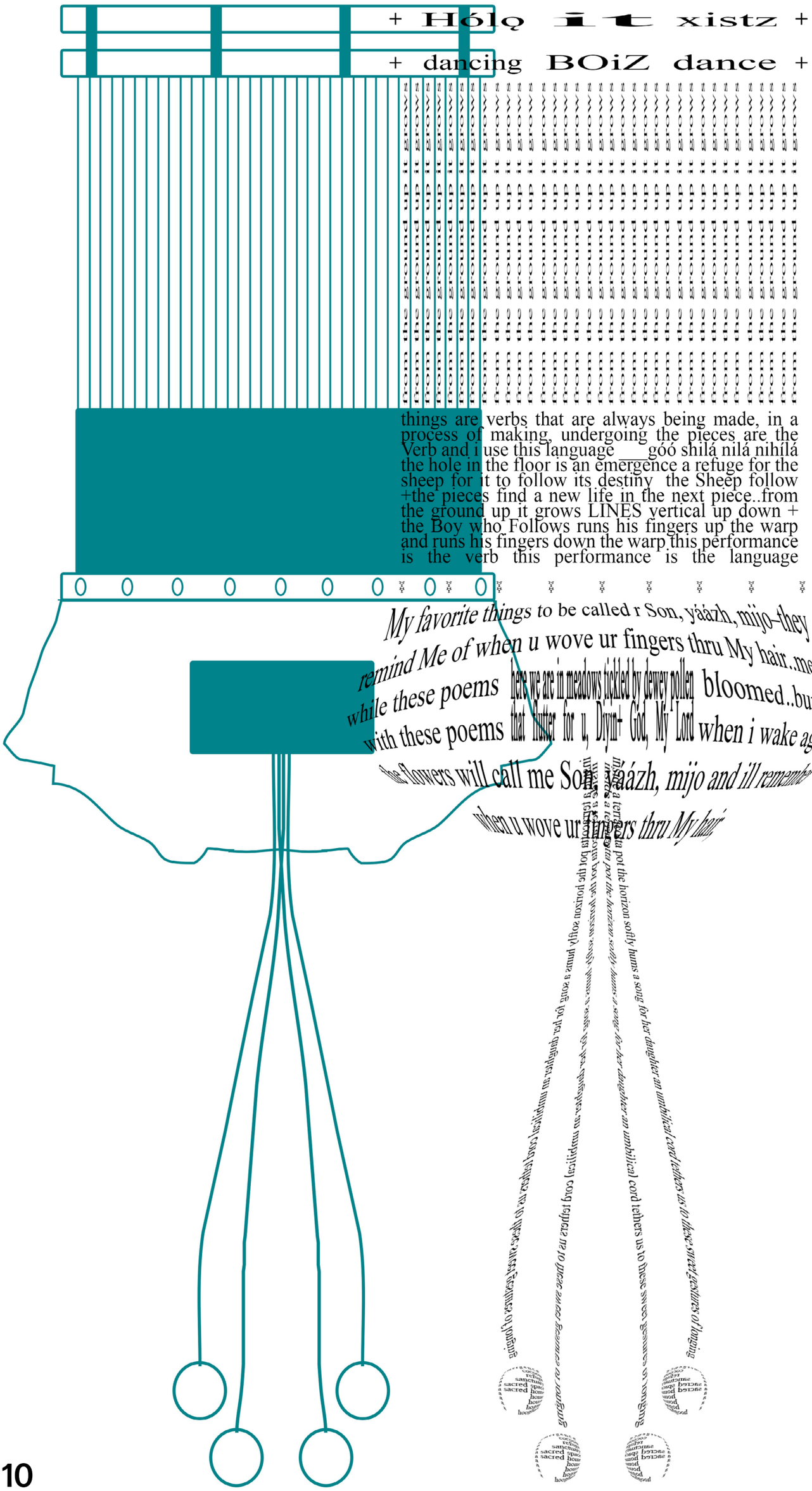
For the past twenty-five years, I've lived in one of these three houses on this one corner block. At home when I was a child, my parents were always so encouraging of me being an artist and flamboyant and playing with dolls and crafting clothes for them. My mom sewed doll clothes for me when I didn't know how to sew yet, and then she taught me how after I was curious.

After graduating college and moving back home, when [I began making artwork] on a large scale, my family began to curate a home where we can move the furniture very easily. Our home has become really modular—my mom rearranges the furniture, art, and decorations every weekend. That makes me think about my own work as modular and as always being able to be repositioned, restrung, remade. **I see a limitless potential for objects, and the way that they can be deconstructed and reconstructed.** I think that is part of living in a home that's always being moved around: the energy is always shifting.

A lot of the pieces in this show, and in all my exhibitions in general, are never completely new, but always something that has existed before. Objects are always being remade, like this string of jingles here [points] are the same as over there [points to another work]. My pieces are familial and they're cousins, brothers, sisters. Everything is connected because things end up looking like each other, as family members typically do. The objects are never finished. Like our own bodies bruise and get tattooed, so much of the work is adorned, scarred, and changes over time. Sometimes you'll see it more physically in an object, like some unraveling from being dragged on the ground or stains from getting wet. I'm never one to hide the growth and aging of something that's existed for so long.

I'm deeply curious about your relationship with touch. My understanding is that your performing in regalia and touching the sculptures creates a particular kind of relation and is a way for you to understand the materials. When you perform, you also invite other people to activate the work. I've been asked several times already "are people allowed to touch these pieces if Eric-Paul's not there?" I love this invitation for others to enter into a relationship with your work, both when you're there and when you're not. For example, a visitor might touch some beads and realize they're made of plastic instead of "authentic" dentalium shell.

This issue always comes up, sometimes as a point of contention, between me and museums because I welcome touch in so many ways. Thinking about the history of these objects and materials, I don't think


+ Hólǫ it xistz +
+ dancing BOiZ dance +
things are verbs that are always being made, in a process of making, undergoing the pieces are the Verb and i use this language ___góó shilá nilá nihílá the hole in the floor is an emergence a refuge for the sheep for it to follow its destiny the Sheep follow +the pieces find a new life in the next piece..from the ground up it grows LINES vertical up down + the Boy who Follows runs his fingers up the warp and runs his fingers down the warp this performance is the verb this performance is the language
My favorite things to be called r Son, yáázh, mijo–they remind Me of when u wove ur fingers thru My hair..meanwhile these poems here we are in meadows tickled by dewey pollen bloomed..bury Me with these poems that flutter for u, Diyin+ God, My Lord when i wake again these flowers will call me Son, yáázh, mijo and ill remember when u wove ur fingers thru My hair

it's right for me to say it ends with me and that the works can no longer be accessed through touch. I learned about the integrity of these objects myself through touch—I'm the person that most physically interacts with them, so I know that they can handle it.

I never call the sculptures static when they're hanging; they're just still. Like us when we rest, we're still breathing and we're still moving. It's the same thing for the work: it's always going to be endlessly moving, at least in some state, and I feel that invites audiences to engage. For people that can't see, how else can you interact with this material? That's also why touch is encouraged.

When I was previously talking about the scarring and bruising of the work... when audiences touch the work, the grease of their fingers is now on it. Because it's made of fiber, it just inherently gets contaminated. Fiber is a magnet for so much. I call my earrings totems of memory which hold not only the memory of my family and my people, but also contain the tactile memory of this stranger that's forever going to live in the work. It gets to continue there as a future memory.

When you said "these objects are never static, they're still," that reminded me of when we were visiting the Haffenreffer Museum's collections and you found the weaving comb that was stored wrapped inside of the sample loom. You removed the comb so that it could rest. What's changed for you over time as you've done more research inside archives holding Indigenous art and objects?

That's a great question, because **this body of work is so much about the protection of the archive and what that means for cultural objects.** One of my weaving professors once said that when you're weaving the loom is alive, and the comb should be kept separate from the loom. Seeing it all wrapped together, I felt like that comb was buried alive. It was still alive, but trapped.

The first archive I ever visited was at Montclair Art Museum [in New Jersey], and I was at first uncomfortable and confused. A lot of those objects have the toxic chemical arsenic on them; an object had a little sticker on it if it did.

The second collection that I got to see was at the Haffenreffer with you, Sháńdíín Brown, and Thierry Gentis. This experience was different because Sháńdíín was there, lightening the mood by making jokes the whole time. But in seeing [the weaving comb] buried alive, I remembered that utilitarian objects are like an instrument that's meant to be played and create songs. This one was silenced. Getting to unravel the comb from the loom and now putting it in the show at The Bell, I hope it's going to be viewed in a different way.

My third collection visit at the Burke Museum at the University of Washington was really exciting to me because I got to spend a lot of alone time with the Diné objects for five days. In that time I really got to see beyond them as archival objects, so they began to seem almost familial. A lot of the objects that I handled reminded me of things in my own home or of the dolls at thrift stores here in the Southwest, yet sometimes they were in better condition than at the Burke! The way things are presented and protected is so different [between these contexts].

I have two last interrelated topics to ask you about. I'd love to understand why you refer to your earring pieces as "totems of memory," which is such an evocative phrase. And can you tell us about **Hóló** and your shifting relationship to him now that he's a teen? He looks a bit spider-like in his current form, almost as if he's a child of you and Spider Woman.

The earring pieces have always been part of my work because of a conversation I had with my grandmother who said, "as you navigate the world, you wear earrings because they're listening just as much as your ears are. When you take them off for the day and you put them back on the next time, it'll help with your memories coming back and it'll hold onto those just as much as your ears do." Another grandmother said that we adorn our bodies as Diné people so that our holy people can recognize and protect us. When I heard that story, I was visualizing it like a children's book of these giant monsters wearing giant earrings, looking for kids that are wearing earrings like theirs.That's when I started making the large jewelry work and calling them totems of memory. I see the earrings almost as the holy person themselves, or as containing my ancestry and all that which came before me which allows me to be here.

Creating **Hóló** was a way for me to pass on this ancestral knowledge. Since I don't have a child at the moment, my artworks are like my children. The womb of my mind gave birth to **Hóló**, and in January 2019 I performed with him for the first time, wearing him as a headdress. Then [later he] existed as his own separate body placed on a cradle board. But maybe like in cat years, **Hóló** ages differently, because now I see him as a teenager, no longer a child.

One of the reasons I've now made three connected exhibitions based on **Hóló** is because of the world building that I have done within the shows. I see **Hóló** as a son, a collaborator, or an alter ego. Maybe it's even some sort of drag persona! I love ***Paris is Burning***—it's one of my favorite movies, even though

I know there's problems with it. When Dorian Corey says [in the documentary] that "realness" is the ability to blend into reality, I thought that was such a beautiful way of explaining how queer people exist in the world. There are so many ways that queer people need to perform in their day-to-day lives to be safe or, you know, just to exist. My art has never been explicitly about queerness, but after working with you, Sháńdíín, and then Nina Bozicnik, I see now that how I talk about identity, storytelling, and performing is through a queer lens.

This exhibition ***ojo*|-|*ółǫ́*** shares a version of **Hółǫ** growing older, coming more into himself, and then being able to see [with his eyes].

⤫

Ojo is the Spanish word for "eye." *Ojos* are also Diné objects that are going to be installed at The Bell, which we are borrowing from your home.

○

That's why the title of the show can be broken down in sounds as ***ojo Hółǫ́***: eyes exist, sight exists, coming into seeing, and then "I exist." That's the lore of the exhibition title!

⤫

Thank you so much for sharing and for being in relation with me.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Eric-Paul Riege (Diné) is a weaver and fiber artist working in collage, durational performance, installation, woven sculpture, and wearable art. Using weaving as both means and metaphor to tell hybrid tales that interlace stories from Diné spirituality with his own interpretations and cosmology, he understands his artworks as animate and mobile. His practice pays homage and links him to generations of weavers in his family who aid him in generating spaces of sanctuary. Riege's recent solo exhibitions include ***iiZiiT [3]: RIEGE Jewelry + Supply*** at Canal Projects, New York (2025), ***Hammer Projects: Eric Paul Riege*** at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2022–2023), and ***Hółǫ́—it xistz*** at the Institute of Contemporary Art Miami (2019). His recent group exhibitions include the 24th Biennale of Sydney in Australia (2024), ***Indian Theater: Native Performance, Art, and Self-Determination*** (2023), Prospect.5 Triennial in New Orleans (2022), and the Toronto Biennial of Art (2022). He holds a BFA in Art Studio and Ecology from the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. His work is collected by Forge Project and ICA Miami, among others. He is represented by Bockley Gallery (MN) and STARS Gallery (CA). Riege is a member of the Charcoal Streaked Division of the Red Running Into the Water clan. He was born and is based in Na'nízhoozhí [Gallup, New Mexico].

TY / axxxhéhee'/ thank u 2::

Thea + Nina + ur teams
my mom my dad my bro
my friends from all over
Hółǫ – ur old now !

the material: those whose Skin + Hair is woven in the many Hands who touch this [past present future] [^^^^]

from where im from [<<<<] to where were at [vvvv]

Yiská- there's always tm ! [>>>>] xo epr

CREDITS

Opening Celebration With Performance:
September 18, 2025
5:30–8:00 PM

Artists' Convening:
October 9–10, 2025

The Bell
Albert and Vera List Art Building
64 College Street, Providence, RI

Gallery Hours
Saturday–Wednesday: 11 AM–5 PM
Thursday & Friday: 11 AM–8 PM

Free & Open to the Public
For info visit: bell.brown.edu
Instagram: @ bellgallerybrown

Designed by
Qiwen Ju, Brown Arts Institute

Printed by
MJ Sanqui at the Binch Press /
Queer.Archive.Work Studio.

Eric-Paul Riege: ojo|-|ólǫ is curated by Thea Quiray Tagle, PhD, Associate Curator at the The Bell / Brown Arts Institute and Nina Bozicnik, Senior Curator at the Henry Art Gallery. The exhibition is co-presented by The Bell / Brown Arts Institute, Brown University, and the Henry Art Gallery at the University of Washington, with support from the Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology at Brown and the UW Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture. The exhibition will be on view at The Bell from September 3–December 7, 2025 and will travel with a new iteration opening at the Henry Art Gallery from March–August 2026.

The exhibition team at the Brown Arts Institute includes Ian Budish, Exhibitions Installation Manager; Kate Hao, Curatorial Coordinator; Kate Kraczon, Director of Exhibitions and Chief Curator; Preparators Naushon Hale and Eddie Villanueva; and Nicole Wholean, University Curator and Registrar.

Brown University is located in Providence, Rhode Island, on lands which are within the ancestral homelands of the Narragansett Indian Tribe. We acknowledge that the Narragansett Indian Tribe was dispossessed from their lands by the forces of settler colonialism, and we acknowledge our ongoing responsibility to understand and respond to the legacy of those actions. We acknowledge that the Narragansett and other Indigenous peoples have called Providence home for centuries and continue to do so today. We acknowledge with humility and respect the Narragansett Indian Tribe whose ancestors stewarded these lands with great care, and we commit to working together to honor our past and build our future with truth.

THE BELL · BROWN Brown Arts Institute · PERELMAN ARTS District · Henry

The project is made possible at Brown with the generous support from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Terra Foundation for American Art, Becky Gochman P'27, and David Gochman '87 P'27.

The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts · terra Foundation for American Art