



**PETER BLUM** GALLERY

Nicholas Galanin  
*The Value of Sharpness:  
When It Falls*

Art Basel Miami Beach  
Meridians Booth M12

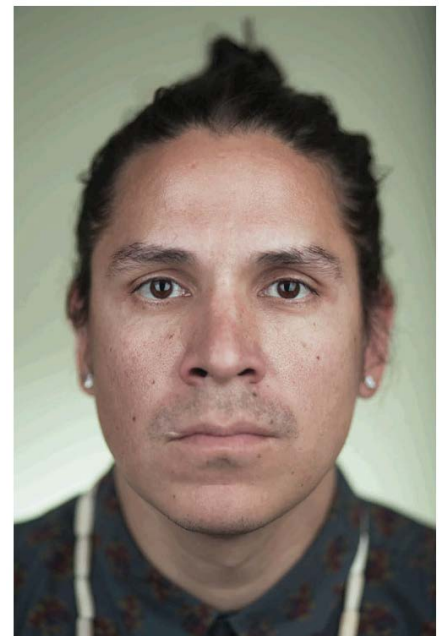
Peter Blum Gallery is pleased to exhibit for Art Basel Miami Beach's Meridians Sector the installation by Nicholas Galanin entitled, *The Value of Sharpness: When It Falls*. The work will be on view from November 30 - December 4, 2021 at the Miami Beach Convention Center.

The work of artist Nicholas Galanin (b. 1979, Sitka, Alaska) engages with the complexities of Indigenous identity, culture, and representation. His Tlingit/Unangax background informs a conceptual practice that includes the installation: *The Value of Sharpness: When It Falls*.

Comprised of an arc of 60 porcelain hatchets suspended mid-air, covered in Dutch Delftware faience. Galanin describes the hatchets as fragile, decorative representations of powerful tools. They speak to the restriction of Indigenous sovereignty through colonial/settler violence and legislation tolerant of only fragile and decorative representations of Indigenous people. The blade of each hatchet is edged with gold luster, supposedly another decorative motif. However, this is also a reminder of the value in sharpness, of Indigenous technology, and the capacity to create and destroy. Furthermore, the power of the hatchets is not in their ability to split wood or bone, but in their ability to shatter as decorative representations.

Delftware patterns date back to the 17th century when Holland began producing less expensive imitations of Chinese porcelain covered in Dutch appropriations of Chinese (and later Japanese) ceramic motifs popular at the time. Galanin's use of material and form layers interwoven histories of theft, violence, and erasure; embedded in objects that speak to the continuing legacies of colonial desires, and their precarity.

**Nicholas Galanin** (b. 1979) lives and works in Sitka, Alaska. He earned his BFA at London Guildhall University and his MFA at Massey University in Wellington, New Zealand. Galanin participated in 2021 Desert X Biennial, 2020 Biennale of Sydney, 2019 Whitney Biennial, and 2017 Venice Biennale Native American Pavilion. His work is in public collections including The Museum of Modern Art in New York, Art Institute of Chicago, Detroit Institute of Arts, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, and Princeton University Art Museum among others. He is the 2020 recipient of the Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Award in Art, Academy of Arts and Letters, New York and a 2020 recipient of a Soros Arts Fellowship.



*The Value of Sharpness: When It Falls* was exhibited in 2019 at Open Source in Brooklyn, New York, a non-profit arts organization, and then exhibited in the touring exhibition titled *Art for a New Understanding: Native Voices, 1950s to Now* at both the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, NC (August 29, 2019 – January 12, 2020) and the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Memphis, TN (February 22 – May 17, 2020).





**Nicholas Galanin**

*The Value of Sharpness: When it Falls, 2019*

60 porcelain hatchets

13 1/4 x 5 x 1 inches (33.7 x 12.7 x 2.5 cm) each; installation variable



Installation view of *Art for a New Understanding: Native Voices, 1950s to Now*, Nasher Museum, Duke University, NC, 2019-20

"The capability of the hatchets is not  
in their ability to split wood or bone,  
but in their ability to shatter."

— Nicholas Galanin





Installation view of *Art for a New Understanding: Native Voices, 1950s to Now*, Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, TN, 2020

60 white porcelain hatchets, patterned with red and blue florals, tumble end over end in a shallow arc. Suspended from the ceiling by threads of clear fishing line, they fly as if thrown. Rising from chest height, the visitor can just barely walk under the peak of their crest before the axes fall and come to a stop at eye level. Their shadows dance on the walls as the hatchets sway on their strings, the angular shades appearing out the corner of one's eye like another crowd of blades thrown from out of sight. Walking around the installation, one cannot help but step directly into the arrested trajectory and look head-long into the drove of spinning earthenware. Staring down the gilded edges, the light shines off their delftware glaze, a glimmering hint at their true fragility.



"The particular style of hatchet was intentionally chosen to evoke the tomahawk, the stereotypical weapon of choice in popular imaginings of the 'Indian.' The ambiguity in the installation between hatchet and tomahawk, tool and weapon, plays on the assumptions, stereotypes, and fetishes that the viewer brings and accordingly must confront from their own position."

— Christopher Green, "Nicholas Galanin: The Value of Sharpness: When It Falls," *The Brooklyn Rail*, March 2019





Installation view of Nicholas Galanin, *The Value of Sharpness: When it Falls, Open Source*, Brooklyn, 2019

"These cultural transmutations, whereby a cheap imitation acquires the status of Indigenous art, are a hallmark of Galanin's practice and are insightful commentaries on the commodification of Indigenous culture. The delaware hatchets are likewise outsourced, made by a non-Native porcelain studio based in Colorado after a commercial hatchet design that provided the mold. Thus Galanin, in a Duchampian move, doubly transforms the non-Native products, the readymade commercial design and the Colorado-sourced porcelain, into a conceptual work of contemporary and 'authentic' Indigenous art."

— Christopher Green, "Nicholas Galanin: The Value of Sharpness: When It Falls," *The Brooklyn Rail*, March 2019



