

‘Ways of Knowing’ at the Walker explores new ways to view our world

“Ways of Knowing” is on display through Sept. 7, 2025 at the Walker Art Center.

by **Sheila Regan**

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In “530 National Treasures,” Gala Porras-Kim looks at sites and objects that have been designated as national treasures by North and South Korea. Credit: MinnPost photo by Sheila Regan

In her first exhibition as curator of visual arts at the Walker Art Center, called “Ways of Knowing,” Rosario Güiraldes points her attention toward the notion of research as an artistic practice.

The group exhibition, curated by Güiraldes with curatorial assistant Brandon Eng, is an exploration of knowledge. Artists from around the globe work to upend and critique mainstream systems of categorization, investigate Indigenous wisdom and chart new ways to see and understand our world.

Güiraldes began working on the exhibition when she arrived from New York, where she was an associate curator at the Drawing Center. Her early conversations with Henriette Huldish, the Walker's chief curator and director of curatorial affairs, honed in on the role group exhibitions have for contemporary art museums.

"Contemporary group exhibitions are really important and crucial to the mission of institutions like the Walker, because they are the vehicles in which we can engage with urgent thematic and ideas, and identify tendencies in contemporary art," she told me in a tour of the exhibition. "They're also a platform to introduce our audiences to new generations of artists."

Rather than focusing on a theme, Güiraldes wanted to understand how artists are working in today's world, and what drives them to create the work they make. She discovered artists are faced with a need to question what's presented as truth. Ultimately, the show looks at ways artists are "critical interrogators of knowledge who engage with research and information in a range of different ways."

Featuring photography, drawing, film, moving image works, sculpture and installation, the exhibition showcases artists who share a sense that research is not neutral.

"So many of the artists in this show are turning research on its head to confront the uses and abuses of research and knowledge," Güiraldes said.

The first section of the exhibition features artists working with the notion of collections. The works reminded me of how encyclopedic museums have their origins in the cabinet of curiosities (*wunderkammer*) of the 16th century – which attempted to arrange art and science into categories, and often were a vehicle for othering non-European cultures. The artists in the "Poetic Taxonomies" section push against that history.

In "530 National Treasures," (2023) Gala Porras-Kim looks at sites and objects that have been designated as national treasures by North and South Korea. In four large panels, Porras-Kim has used color paper and paint to create cabinets, atop which she offers examples of treasures ranging from vases, bowls, jewelry and sculptures as well as paintings, drawings, and architectural works.

"You can see how what a nation values and finds worthy of cultural preservation shifts over time depending on who the person is that's behind the designation," Güiraldes said.

Because Porras-Kim was working with publicly available records, in some cases she leaves a space blank on one of the shelves.

"Those empty spaces are accounting for a treasure that may or may not be there, or may or may not be designated," Güiraldes said.

Another artist, Iosu Aramburu looks at the development of modernism across the Andean region in “Atlas of Andean Modernism” (2022-current). Scanning modern art books and brochures, Aramburu creates a kind of print-out of transnational art history for the region. The sheets of paper are then taped to the wall, with some of them still showing the artist’s finger from the scans.



Iosu Aramburu looks at the development of modernism across the Andean region in “Atlas of Andean Modernism.” Credit: MinnPost photo by Sheila Regan

Like Porras-Kim’s work, Aramburu’s “Atlas” says as much by its omissions as by what is included. The installations are also similar not only in the way they both harken back to notions of the cabinet of curiosities, neatly organizing art history – and how the organization in some ways is the form. Both artists offer examples of artworks from the past – either painted versions in Porras-Kim’s case and print-outs in Aramburu’s work. In both cases, the referred works are called upon but perhaps not the main focus. The organization structure itself seems to take primary focus.

Chang Yuchen creates her own language in “Coral Dictionary (sentences)” (2019-current), built from bleached and fragmented coral found on the Malaysian island of Dinawan. The artist assigned each coral shape to a different Malay word, and then used the words to create sentences found in “Kamus Sari,” a Malay to English and Mandarin dictionary, published in 1973. The work results in a new codified language that is connected to the water and land where the Malay language is based. It’s a beautiful and neatly organized project, with a lingering question around it. As someone that doesn’t speak Malay, Yuchen is imposing a form of her own device to transform it into a visual work of art using corals, and is also taking a natural resource – albeit not living coral.

Almost as if in response, Rose Salane’s “Confessions” (2023) documents a series of apology letters people have written when they’ve returned objects they’ve taken from Pompeii. Salane was able to access an archive of these letters – along with fragments of rock, marble and dirt – that people had returned.

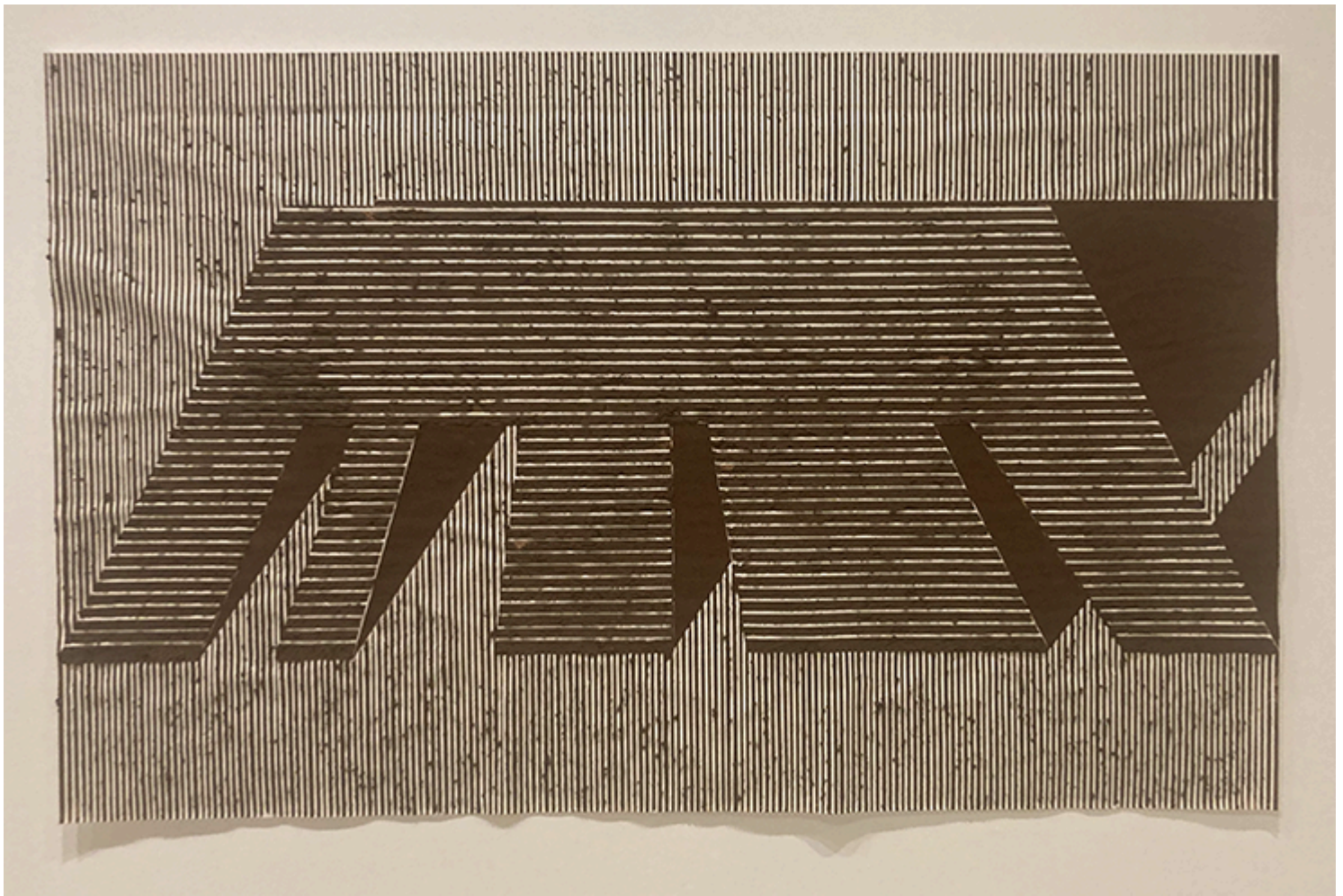
“These artifacts are kind of useless archeological data, and instead, they hold the most meaning for the people who decided to steal them,” Güiraldes said.

In the second section of “Ways of Knowing,” Güiraldes groups together artists who instead of deconstructing western methodologies of organizing knowledge, instead explore durational and place-based ways of knowing.

“The artists are examining how our lives are informed by stories of where we come from,” Güiraldes said.

From the Spanish missions in California to copper mines in the Congo, as well as St. Paul Island in Alaska and various sites across Europe and North Africa, the artists are “thinking about the role of localized knowledge in a globalized world,” Güiraldes said. They also often use time as a crucial form of engagement as they visit the different sites and read, think, walk and converse in them.

In “A Wall is a Shadow of the Land” (2020-current), Christine Howard Sandoval uses adobe – a building material made of soil, sand and clay – to create richly textured surfaces that recalls Christian missions built in California. In the works, Sandoval’s structures are disintegrating, and play with what’s in the foreground and what’s in the background.



In “A Wall is a Shadow of the Land,” Christine Howard Sandoval uses adobe to create richly textured surfaces that recalls Christian missions built in California. Credit: MinnPost photo by Sheila Regan

“There’s this attempt to deconstruct the structures and transform their meaning,” Güiraldes said.

Sandoval’s research is very much embodied in the self, Güiraldes explained. As she interrogates the harm done by Christian missions on Native cultures in California, she researches by experiencing walking through the sites.

In the same vein, in “Time of Change” (2022) Anna Boghiguian’s research also involves visiting particular places and drawing directly from that place. She visited the Hall of Mirrors in Versailles, for instance to research a piece about the signing of the peace treaty in Versailles.

Boghiguian has spent much of her life traveling to different countries. Her work engages with different places she’s lived, often focused on historical moments of extreme turmoil, like the French Revolution and the Russian Revolution. She also follows the life of Aribert Ferdinand Heim, the Nazi doctor who killed and tortured concentration camp inmates in the Holocaust before fleeing to Egypt, where Boghiguian was born.

Boghiguian uses pencil, watercolor, glitter, ink and thread to create saturated images showing the ways history repeats itself and reverberates through time.

Sammy Baloji employs moving images and installation to think about colonization in relation to resource extraction.

“He talks about colonization not as being a phenomenon of the past, but an ongoing project,” Güiraldes said. In “Tales of the Copper Cross Garden: Episode 1” (2017), Baloji juxtaposes footage of factory workers producing copper wire in Lubumbashi with the sounds of a Christian boys choir recorded in 1937. The work also features a large photograph of the choir – the Singers of the Copper Cross – with the young boys all wearing white robes and holding crosses at their chests. Baloji points to the ways that both colonialism and religion aid in the extraction of natural resources.

Sky Hopinka’s video, “Visions of an Island,” 2016, collapses linear notions of time in its documentation of St. Paul Island in Alaska. As the camera pans wildlife, landscapes, people and vegetation, an elder named Gregory Fratis Sr., a speaker of Unangam Tunuu (Aleut), talks about the place names of things from Russian to English to Aleut. Rather than a linear narrative, Hopinka takes an almost hallucinatory approach. At a certain point, the sky and land are shown in opposite directions. Hopinka layers images and plays with color. Unlike a typical documentary that follows a particular structure with often a certain voice of authority, Hopinka’s work moves in a more meditative, abstract way.

In the last section of “Ways of Knowing,” “Parafictions,” Güiraldes features artists whose approach to knowledge takes on fictional, sensory and psychological directions. From the more esoteric works shown in the first section, the last section offers a kind of relief for the senses in the way the artists are creating works that not only stir the viewer’s intellect, but their senses and feelings as well.

Eduardo Navarro’s delightful “Cloud Museum” (2025) – which was commissioned by the Walker – surrounds the gallery with bizarre and ethereal costumes and hats that look like they could be from a set of a science fiction performance art piece. Indeed, dance students from the University of Minnesota will perform in the costumes on July 25. There’s no choreography per se, but rather Navarro invites the dancers “to let go of the human-centered individuality and work together to embody the experience of a cloud,” Güiraldes said.



Eduardo Navarro's delightful "Cloud Museum" surrounds the gallery with bizarre and ethereal costumes and hats that look like they could be from a set of a science fiction performance art piece. Credit: MinnPost photo by Sheila Regan

From there, the exhibition features Cabello-Carceller, an artist duo, whose video "Una voz para Erauso. Epílogo para un tiempo trans/ A Voice for Erauso. Epilogue for a Trans Time" explores the life of Antonio de Erauso, who, after some time as a nun, escaped and lived as a man and army lieutenant in the 17th century. In the moving channel piece, three transgender, nonbinary actors perform a script written by the artists, who they see as a queer ancestor. "But they also confront his violent legacy," Güiraldes said, referring to his participation in the slaughter and enslavement of Native people in Latin America. Besides the video, the installation has a 400 year old portrait of Antonio de Erauso.

Finally the exhibition ends with a haunting installation of Petrit Halilaj's "Very volcanic over this green feather" (2021). The artist creates a giant mobile inspired by drawings he made as a child after escaping war-torn Kosovo while working with a psychologist.

It's a very theatrical work that has a surprise to it that I won't share here so as not to spoil it. Its "way of knowing" is one of the more visceral in the exhibition. Rather than researching a particular period or a subject, or a place, or an idea, or even a historical figure, it's mining the artist's own personal experiences and therapeutic journey through a traumatic event.

That's not to say the work is better or worse than the other selections. I did notice as I walked through I felt more physically engaged the further I got through the exhibition. As an exercise in the relationship between

artmaking and knowledge gathering, “Ways of Knowing” weaves through the relationship between sharing information and creating a moving experience, and offers different artists working through those tensions.

“Ways of Knowing” is on display through Sept. 7, 2025 at the Walker Art Center, 725 Vineland Pl., Minneapolis. More information [here](#).



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