

Love Letters to the Collection
Guest curator selection #7



Corwin Clairmont (Salish Kootenai), *Split War Shield*, cast, handmade paper, lithographs, and mixed media, 2001, 83¼ x 50¾ x 3¼ inches. MAM Contemporary American Indian Art Collection, Purchase and partial gift of Corwin Clairmont, 2007.01.

Selected by Cameron Decker

Decker is the Head of the Fine Arts Department at Salish Kootenai College in Pablo, MT. He received his Bachelor of Fine Arts in Art History at the University of New Mexico. He recently received his Masters of Fine Arts in Integrated Arts in Education through the University of Montana. He teaches courses in drawing, ceramics, art history, and portfolio. He takes pride in advising his students and introducing them to the art world. His interest lies in community arts and bringing people together for meaningful art experiences.

Dear Split War Shield,

I have been meaning to write to you for quite some time. Our paths have crossed at interesting times and your influence reaches me almost daily. Besides my admiration for your creator, you are the piece I see every day. I live in Arlee and drive to Salish Kootenai College 5 times a week. It's a path I have taken my entire life since I was a child and now as an adult. It's amazing that what we are familiar with can be seen in new ways as we grow as if seeing them for the first time.

I notice many things about you. Paper pressed into the form of tires (taken from actual tires your creator picked up), the zig zag through the middle, the "split" representing the road running through the reservation. The red beads, representing the running blood of wildlife wedged between the texture of the tires, there is so much to see. The zig-zag split can best be seen as you pass Ninepipes and make your way down to the lower valley heading south. I noticed your adornments, but now I live them. Every time I crest the hill and "see the split" I am reminded of you and your creator. Many people, I am afraid, do not see these things.

I wonder how many have traveled the same road, through the same place, and do not carry the same burdens that you do. I wonder how to make people see that you represent the damage that has been done. People fly through the landscape, distracted by the natural beauty to the east. They do not question the path they are on. Physically on the path, but disconnected in every other way. Before seeing you, I have to admit I was the same way. Look at our resources to the east, the Bison Range on the right, ignorant to the history of the asphalt split. An artificial drawn line, disconnection manifested.

This piece educates me. This piece holds memories, and it carries me forward. As part of an arsenal of artworks that say, "Look at how we live, look at what we have done and what we are doing!" We have to do better.

Lemlmtš Spilt War Shield,

Cameron Decker