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Kenneth Tam: Silent Spikes

May 14, 2022 - February 5, 2023



Kenneth Tam, *Silent Spikes* (video still), 2021. Courtesy the artist and Commonwealth & Council.

Tucson, AZ— MOCA Tucson presents *Silent Spikes*, an exhibition by artist Kenneth Tam that investigates the intersections of masculinity, race, and labor. Featuring a two-channel video installation with accompanying photographs, the show examines the performance of gender and considers the power of image production and circulation, asking who has been silenced, erased, or left out of the frame.

Tam reflects on the underrepresented relationship between histories of Westward expansion and Chinese immigration in the United States. The central video installation is composed of vignettes of a group of self-identified Asian American men inhabiting the figure of the cowboy – an archetype of white American masculinity – and engaging in intimate conversations on a hazy, dreamlike set. These scenarios are combined with references to an 1867 strike undertaken by thousands of Chinese Transcontinental Railroad workers – the largest organized labor action in United States history to that point. The video is accompanied by three black and white photographic portraits depicting Tam’s cowboys at close range and in high relief, gazing resolutely into the distance. Working with contemporary subjects to unravel popular portrayals and expectations of masculinity, Tam reimagines longstanding stereotyped representations of Asian males in media.

Interweaving past and present, expression of self and performance, *Silent Spikes* establishes a realm of potential where vulnerability, hushed histories, inherited struggles, and revised tropes present counter-narratives and offer soft, sensuous, and more expansive forms of male embodiment.

Kenneth Tam: *Silent Spikes* is organized by Alexis Wilkinson, Assistant Curator, MOCA Tucson.

The exhibition is supported by VIA Art Fund and Wagner Foundation; Commonwealth & Council; Arts Foundation for Tucson and Southern Arizona; and MOCA Tucson's Board of Trustees, Ambassador Council, and Members.

In-kind support provided by The Downtown Clifton Hotel and Barrio Brewing Company.

The two-channel video installation *Silent Spikes* was commissioned by the Queens Museum with support from the Asian Art Circle of the Guggenheim Museum.

ABOUT THE ARTIST:

Kenneth Tam (b. 1982, Queens, New York; lives and works in Queens) received an MFA from University of Southern California in 2010 and BFA from Cooper Union in 2004. Recent solo exhibitions have been held at Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2021); Times Square Arts, New York (2021); Queens Museum, New York (2021); Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, WI (2021); The Kitchen, New York (2020); Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville, New York (2020); Visual Arts Center, University of Texas at Austin (2019); Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles (2019); 18th Street Arts Center, Santa Monica, CA (2018); Minneapolis Institute of Art, MN (2018); and MIT List Center for Visual Arts, Cambridge (2017). Selected group exhibitions have been held at The Shed, New York (2021); SculptureCenter, New York (2019); 47 Canal, New York (2018); Hollybush Gardens, London, UK (2017); Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2016); and Museum of Fine Arts Houston, TX (2016). Tam is faculty at Princeton University and the Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts at Bard College. Tam's work is in the collections of Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minnesota; Dallas Museum of Art, Texas; and Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

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For further information about the exhibition, installation photos, or to schedule interviews with the artist or curator, please contact Kevin Burns at: kevin@moca-tucson.org

MOCA Tucson's Open Hours

MOCA Tucson is open Thursday/Saturdays 11am-6pm & Sundays 11am-4pm. Adults \$7, Students/Senior \$4, Youth Free.

About MOCA Tucson

MOCA Tucson inspires new ways of thinking through the cultivation, exhibition, and interpretation of contemporary art. Established by artists in 1997, MOCA is Tucson's only museum devoted to local and global contemporary art. Housed in a repurposed firehouse, MOCA is a primary resource for arts education in our most vulnerable communities and maintains a full exhibition, public program and artist-in-residence schedule. Now in its 25th year, the Museum cultivates critical dialogue between artists and audiences about today's world; supports artists through the production and presentation of new, experimental work; and educates the artists and audiences of tomorrow.

MOCA Tucson resides on the ancestral lands of the Tohono O'odham people.