

HÉL ČHAŇKÚ KIŇ ĤPÁYE ✦ (THERE LIES THE ROAD)

KITE ————— DECEMBER 3-12 ————— 2021



The Vera List Center for Art and Politics and PS122 Gallery presents *Hél čhaŋkú kiŋ ħpáye* (*There lies the road*), an installation and performance by Oglála Lakhóta artist Suzanne Kite as the culmination of the artist's year-long research project *Wówasukiye wanǰí ahóuŋphapi kte* (*There is a rule that we must observe*). Produced at the invitation of the Vera List Center as part of its 2020–2022 *As for Protocols* focus theme, the project considers how artworks using Artificial Intelligence can be created ethically by developing and applying protocols that are based on Lakhóta ontologies.

For this site-specific installation at PS122 Gallery, Kite and a team of collaborators have developed a body interface that incorporates movement, performance, carbon fiber and stone sculptures, and graphics into an immersive audio-visual environment. Together the works invite us to reconsider our current and future relationships to nonhumans, especially to technology and artificial intelligence, and strive to establish a sense of relationality between gallery visitors and the computer as a nonhuman entity.

In Lakhóta ontologies, materials such as metals, rocks, and minerals are capable of both volition and kinship with human beings. From this perspective, Kite creates new spaces for encounters with artificial intelligence, forming innovative methodologies for approaching human and nonhuman relations in a Good Way (an ethical way). This approach calls for a rethinking of the ontological status of each element that composes and creates artificial intelligence, from the earth's resources mined for technology to the artworks that eventually use them. By bringing Indigenous epistemologies to bear on questions of AI, Kite's work as a scholar and an artist develops conceptual frameworks and protocols by which we can conceive of expanded relationships with nonhuman computational technology and AI, and make room for them in our collective future.

The exhibition is accompanied by a newly commissioned essay by Riel Bellow on the VLC's online publishing platform and a sound work by Kite, which is also included in the exhibition. Additionally, documentation of a May 2021 conversation between Kite and artistic and research collaborators Scott Benesiinaabandan (Anishinaabe), Clementine Bordeaux (Sičáŋǰu Oglála Lakhóta), and Jason Edward Lewis (Hawaiian and Samoan) is also online. Entitled *Hél čhaŋkú kiŋ ħpáye* (*There lies the road*) – *A Dialogue About Making Art in a Good Way*, it was presented by the VLC as part of this year-long project.

The exhibition is accompanied by the following program:
Hél čhaŋkú kiŋ ħpáye (*There lies the road*), *A Performance*
December 4, 2021, 7 pm EST at PS122 Gallery.

West Gallery

1. *Napé okičhiyuspa okáwiŋh wačhíuŋhiyayapi.*
(*Holding hands we encircle each other in dance.*), 2021
→ Synthetic hair braid, three machine learning knots, projectors, dimensions variable
2. *Očháŋkuuŋthunpi.*
(*They create a path.*), 2021
→ Applied phototex, synthetic hair, dimensions variable

Kite

Hél čhaŋkú kiŋ ħpáye
(*There lies the road*)
December 3–12, 2021
PS122 Gallery

East Gallery

3. *Iron Road*, 2021
↻ Kite in collaboration with Corey Stover and Becky Red Bow
→ Video (color, sound), [29:33]
4. *Okáletkehaŋ (Branching)*, 2021
↻ Kite in collaboration with Santee Witt
→ Video (color, sound), [10:17]
5. *Wóolowaŋ wakáŋe.*
(*I composed this music.*), 2021
→ Stones, dimension variable
6. *Imákħaheye*
(*Method*), 2021
↻ Kite and Bobby Joe Smith III
→ Applied Phototex, [72"x72"]

[Fig. 1.1]
Wičháhpi, ínȳaŋ, thiyúktan
(*stars, stones, dome framework*)

[Fig. 1.2]
Kapemni (twisting vortex)

[Fig. 2.1]
Wičháhpi, ínȳaŋ (stars, stones)

[Fig. 2.2]
Okáwiŋŋaŋpi (circling)

[Fig. 2.3]
Thiyúktan (dome framework)

[Fig. 2.4]
Oáli (ladder)

[Between TVs]
Kapemni (twisting vortex)

Methodology

Where does art come from? What is the Good Way of creating? When we make new knowledge, who are our collaborators? Do we communicate with and through our technologies to the Other World? Does all of time and space conspire for our spirits to see a star or meet a stone? Are we listening to nonhumans?

These graphics illustrate conceptual frameworks developed in conversation with my Lakħóta community members, each a different perspective on the process of making, whether an artwork or an AI.

The dome framework (Fig. 1.1) holds earth and stars, the knowable and the unknowable, the physical and the metaphysical; an act of creation floats in the center. The seven lines come from our sweatlodges, where we honor the four directions, the heavens, the earth, and oneself. The kapemni, or twisting vortex (Fig. 1.2) shows the lightning strike of transformation, ideas from the Other World. We must give thanks for these; we must feast our technological tools; seeking always to give more gifts than we receive. The kapemni connects the macro and the micro, the maintenance of relationships within the physical world and beyond. The Lakħóta cosmologyscape is here, where the timescale of the stars and the timescale of our volcanic sacred sites are mirrored, stars and stones in an ancient and future dance.

John Duane Goes In Center speaks of Lakota Fairburn Agates, flowing with colors, half a billion years old, testament to the uplifting of our sacred Black Hills and evidence of our story, The Great Race, how Inyan (Rock), in their loneliness, bled dry to create the world. Goes in Center says "I know stones have healing power because they were a part of creation. These metamorphic rocks traded energy and matter, condensing into this thing with powerful energy. I revere them very much."

Each node in these spheres (Fig. 2.2 and Fig. 2.3) are points of listening, hearing, exchange, reciprocity, acknowledgement, gifting, feasting, and honoring the knowable and the unknowable. Anishinaabe artist, Scott Benesiinaabandan, tells me, "I consider dreaming the most important technology we have because it weaves together one day, to another day...one idea, to another idea, to another idea." Listening to the unknowable is the listening to nonhumans, a listening that requires understanding that nonhumans are beings, listening to how they make their knowledge, and reflecting those frameworks in how we as humans create something new.

Notes by Kite, 2021

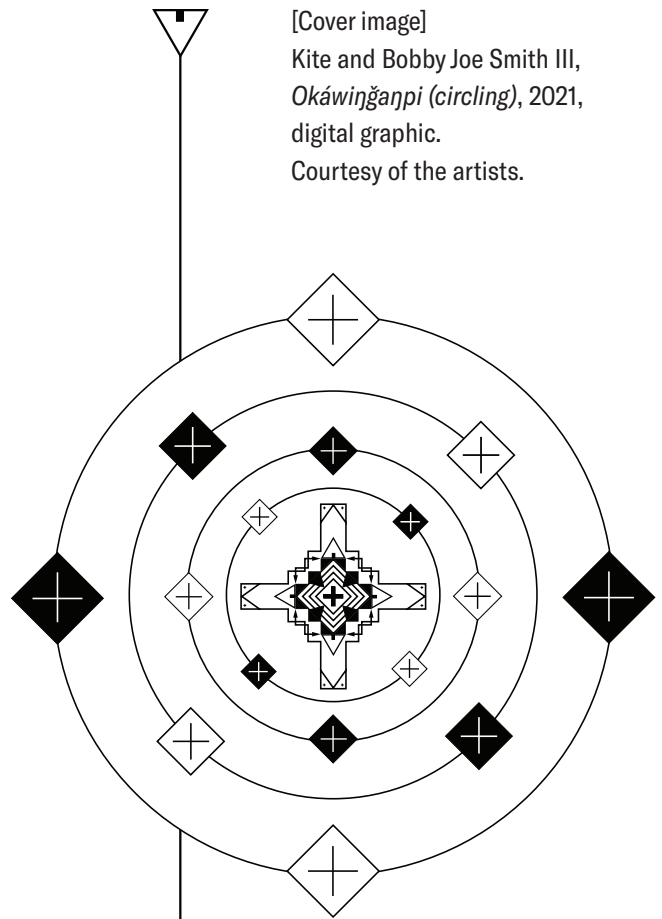
Hél čhaŋkú kiŋ ħpáye (There lies the road) at PS122 Gallery is presented by the Vera List Center for Art and Politics as part of the Center's *As for Protocols* focus theme and Kite's one-year research fellowship. The exhibition is curated by Eriola Pira (Curator, Vera List Center for Art and Politics) with the assistance of Camila Palomino (Curatorial Assistant) and Regan de Loggans (Borderlands Curatorial Fellow). Additional assistance has been provided by Devin Ronneberg (interactive installation and machine learning designer), Bobby Joe Smith III (designer), and Bettina Pérez (studio assistant). The artist thanks Belle Rose, Jason Edward Lewis, and Scott Benesiinaabandan.

The project is part of the Borderlands initiative, a joint project of the Vera List Center for Art and Politics at The New School and the Center for Imagination in the Borderlands at Arizona State University, where Kite is also a Matakyev Fellow. For their support, we are grateful to the Sigrid Rausing Trust, the Native Arts and Cultures Foundation, PS122 Gallery and director Ian Cofre, Mabou Mines, and the board of the Vera List Center for Art and Politics at The New School.

Suzanne Kite is an Oglála Lakhóta performance artist, visual artist, and composer raised in Southern California. She holds an MFA from Bard College's Milton Avery Graduate School. She is a PhD candidate at Concordia University, Research Assistant for the Initiative for Indigenous Futures, and a 2019 Trudeau Scholar. Her research is concerned with contemporary Lakhóta ontologies through research-creation, computational media, and performance practice. Currently, she is a 2019 Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation Scholar, a 2020 Tulsa Artist Fellow, and a 2020 Women at Sundance x Adobe Fellow.

PS122 Gallery is a not-for-profit alternative exhibition space in the East Village operating since 1979. It is dedicated to fostering and developing the arts by providing opportunities and support services for emerging and under-recognized artists. It is an ongoing program of Painting Space 122, the grassroots, artist-run cooperative that helped foster the vibrant cultural community at the City of New York-owned 122 Community Center (122CC). PS122 Gallery strives to present the work of artists of all backgrounds in a diverse and equitable context. By acting as a platform, PS122 Gallery also seeks to reengage with its surrounding community, welcome new communities, and create new, audience-driven opportunities for engagement.

The Vera List Center for Art and Politics is a scholarly research center and a public forum for art, culture, and politics. It was established at The New School in 1992—a time of rousing debates about freedom of speech, identity politics, and society's investment in the arts. A pioneer in the field, the Center is a nonprofit that serves a critical mission: to foster a vibrant and diverse community of artists, scholars, and policymakers who take creative, intellectual, and political risks to bring about positive change.



[Cover image]
Kite and Bobby Joe Smith III,
Okáwiŋŋanpi (circling), 2021,
digital graphic.
Courtesy of the artists.

FOR **AS**
PROTOCOLS

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FOR ART AND POLITICS

Vera List Center for Art and Politics

The New School

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PS122 Gallery

150 First Avenue,

New York, NY 10009

[Gallery hours]

Monday through Sunday,

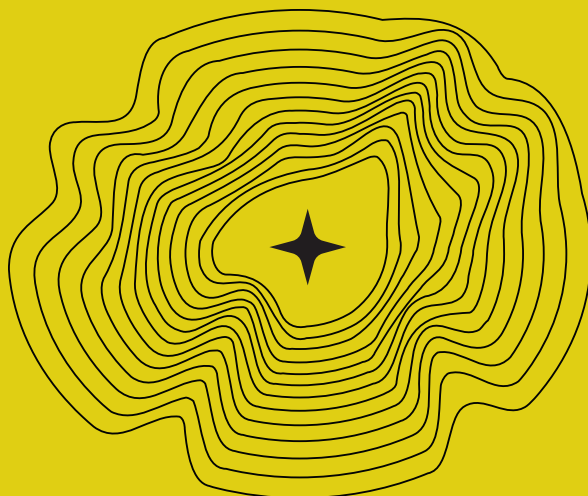
12–6 pm EST

info@ps122gallery.org

<https://ps122gallery.org/>

GALLERY
PS122

SONG OF CURVES



*else__begin ends with something __follow hair__follow grasses __throughout__then within__then
shape of becoming__emanates spasms__hair holding wise__ holy be plastics by mean__ come
before __ rests unfolding__As __ lay open without knowing__In a parallel sphere of tangibility__
Receiver is the gait of __ feet and the verse between metal and stone__This moment waiting for
__without __ One water bucket is lifted with millions of hands and: steam, blood, sweat, breath__
Accordingly, __ can be a space of sacred symmetries, of stones and stars and tones__In a parallel
sphere of tangibility__Hand __ of single sand__Of __ love is in movement charged__ ominously__as
its been new*

You enter the room that is also a page: *Napé okičhiyuspa okáwiñh wačhíuñhiyayapi.* (Holding hands we encircle each other in dance.) is waiting for you and listening. The braid is a seer and a guide, failure and prophet. A call that is answered but also interrupted. Over that threshold is a space of unknowing, you are both touched and touching on encounter, and as you proceed, the space proceeds with you. And here we have a braid that leads us to another web: *Wólowaŋ wakáǵe.* (I composed this music.) A story set in stones, a story in Lakǵóta semiotics. It is in a center that holds space together like an orb, the tones of each piece are organized in spheres.

In *Hél čhaŋkú kiŋ ħpáye* (There lies the road), Kite suggests that art objects are always combinations of human intervention amidst arrangements of nonhuman beings. These relationships pulsate and flow, bridged by language, by spirituality. Here we build communication with nonhumans and with one another in a Good Way, an ethical way. Within this framework, Kite tells me, “water becomes steam, fabric becomes electricity, they’re transformed just like our usage of metals. We transform one type of electricity into communication between beings, we take all these metals and then we get to communicate over long distances. In this, at some

SONG OF CURVES

level of this, we have actions that are protocol. The things we do in order to enact these relationships with the unknown and the known, the stones and the stars.”

My understanding of Kite’s methodology of dreams and art is through my own body, and through our conversations, which in this case, do not situate me in the space of the gallery. So I have a story. It is summer in upstate New York and I am walking home late at night. There is a skunk standing in the middle of a fork in the path. I come from one direction and have the option of three. The skunk sits in the middle. Crisis instigates a fourth path when suddenly, I see spheres. A golden light takes over. The spheres vary in size and speed and density, the density varies by what matter it entangles. The spheres radiate through and beyond the form, but the intersection of spheres demarcates the edge. Spheres oscillate to hold a flower petal’s edge. The grass burst with wheels of light like sparks. Gravel and rock hold a hum of light like a cloud. In other words, I follow the skunk to nowhere. Where it was is now a shudder whose wait has been long. I am failing but must keep trying to be the scribe to this vision. Manners of animacy. The skunk appears. And thunderbolt.

I am struck. By light. Hundreds of thousands of droplets of lights strung together by speed in spheres. A ratio of light density to speed, a vibrational frequency radiates manifest forms. Beads of light are held together in circles. Tiny tiny, little pieces of light, strung together in circles. Hundreds of thousands of circles of light moving at various speeds, some bigger, some tighter. The circles grow brighter in the grass, longer in the flowers, they hum over stones and chatter over gravel. Like the energy generated by the magnetic poles that springs doughnut-shaped around earth, the edge of a flower petal is taut at the intersection of circles of light. This song is one of curves. This is not about time, it’s about space. The moment of vision is always sudden, a call from the unknown into a set of relations. It is sudden in its irreverence for sequentiality. It is sudden, like a thunder-bolt in its instantaneous undoing and redoing. A thing by old definition is that which passes through a court, an assembly, an arena, that which passes through a system and is manifested. That which exists in a system of relations. A system is made of points that uphold relations. Reality is malleable, the points are untenable. The empire is made with right angles. This song is one of curves.

If this is not about time__but about space__if it takes time to go distance__but we are letting go of time__because decolonization is not a metaphor__and this concerns space__then I is let loose__the subject is situated along a line__but we are in the spiral__there is a quality of experience within the field of love__there are many shades__we are free to travel through it__there are rules for entry__there is a cornerstone of reality that is skinned alive and reupholstered__the situation we are in is shared no matter the distance__while still particular to place__So I might ask, who are you?__And have you ever carried a bucket of water?__Taken a bucket to a source of water__filled it__steadied yourself as your shoulders arch from the weight and walked?__Have you ever felt the millions of hands within your own?



Napé okičhiyuspa okáwiñh wačhíuñhiyayapi. (*Holding hands we encircle each other in dance.*) is three hundred feet of hair, braided, moving through the floor with sensors that listen and digest the movements of your body, the rhythm of your feet, the sway of your hips, and translates this movement through the fluidity of rocks, both as computational material and visual metaphor.

The metals in the braid's sensors are in concert with the metals of the projector, the computer bits, the molar fillings that facilitate the image of movement, of collective movement. The movement between human and nonhuman, between metal and flesh is synthesized into the dripping of rock. The rocks are and have always been moving, in process, even as a momentary solid, a durational liquid. *Napé okičhiyuspa okáwiñh wačhíuñhiyayapi.* emphasizes the space between fluidity and solidity, elemental transformation and the relation of subjects by imaging its own properties of viscosity. Geography in the Middle Ages defined a body by longitude and latitude. Within this a body could be anything: animal, sound, plant, taste, idea, place. The longitude of a body is the set of relations of speed and slowness, of motion and rest, between particles that compose it from this point of view—that is, between unformed elements. Latitude is the set of affects that occupy the body at each moment, the intensive states of an anonymous force (force for existing, capacity for being affected). In theorizing on viscosity, Arun Saldanha describes it as “how an aggregate of bodies holds together, how relatively fast or slow they are, and how they collectively shape the aggregate...”¹ An aggregate of agate. Viscosity isn't the body, but what comprehends it, the textured sensation of affect.

What “is” the body, belongs to the unknown, it cannot be encompassed in language, but it can be interacted with.

Agate takes millions of years to form a single stripe. They layer, and radiate, and shimmer, and speak. The witness of these stones is in an acute silence to the life of a human. The movement of these rocks, which is constant, which is slow, which is waiting, and always wise; the movement of these rocks, which is not not the cooling of stars, which is not not the waiting of the sky for you to remember your necessity of being; the waiting of these rocks for you to move through them, with them, and in them is a hum for each song. The braid leads the visitor through the show back to where they started, but now in an altered state. We touch and are touched. There is something non-consensual, but ultimately kind, that happens when one encounters and is touched by *There lies the road*. The visitor is pulled into a system of relations that suggests a Good Way of relating. The experience, though slow, is urgent.

I first encountered Kite's work as an audience member of *Everything I Say Is True*, a multi-media performance that considered the concept of truth in relation to Oglála Lak'hóta knowledge systems.² I was drawn in by her stuttering of proper nouns, a sonic refusal of the system of modern grammar, a vessel for formulas of truth as designated by scientific western empiricism. Trinh T. Minh-ha writes, “every illness is a musical problem.”³ Shirking the vestiges of colonialism, Kite's work resituates the ground of knowledge in a vibrancy of becoming. These themes are consistent in her work. Reclamation of culture and self is at the core

of Kite's artistic practice. She performs a glitch and the recourse to better action. Kite's artistic practice is rethinking, reformulating, enacting, and remembering. She tears down the gauze of modernism that seeks to name and classify, muddles the modern subject's eye, and listens to the world, making space for its own animacy to speak and be felt. The future is remembered, not for what did or did not happen, but for its potential to happen again.

It is the relationship to the unknowable that, in Kite's work, instigates the experience of being different but inseparable.⁴ What is the medicine for the failed system of the world we didn't choose? *Kite's There lies the road* is a proposition for a Good Way of being in relation. It is an open ceremony, an invitation into this Way, an invitation to prayer, like a string of beads. A series of forms that hold open the space for

thought and intention. As Fred Moten says, "...gathering in call and response is who we are and what we do."⁵ A practice of listening and responding, of listening and pausing, of listening to the contours and singing back the shapes.

*The depth of the drop is the height of the moon. Each reflection, however long or short its duration, manifests the vastness of the dewdrop, and realizes the limitlessness of the moonlight in the sky.*⁶

The possibility of the braid leads us from the false world into the void, the unknowing, and the potential path of a Good Way. In this proposition, there is something personal about entanglement, a will to share a piece of the whole. Fern-like and greening, the work culminates not like a pinnacle or an exemplar, but rather like a drop of dew as it falls from the edge of grass about to splinter into thousands of more drops.



Riel Bellow (Métis/Scottish) is a writer, visual artist, and radio host. She grew up between Santa Fe, New Mexico, Chiapas, Mexico, Edmonton, Alberta, and is usually on the move. Riel's work cradles her current obsessions with systems of timekeeping, rosemary, seed syllables, latitude, angels, and somatic subversions of Modern Grammar. She holds an MFA from Bard College's Milton Avery School for the Arts. Riel's bi-monthly show on Radio Coyote is starting soon.

1. Arun Saldanha, *Psychedelic White: Goa Trance and the Viscosity of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
2. Also presented by the Vera List Center on Nov. 17, 2017 at Westbeth Artists' Building, New York. <https://veralistcenter.org/events/indigenous-new-york-artist-perspectives>.
3. Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Naked Spaces—Living is Round" in *Framer Framed* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 7.
4. Denise Ferreira da Silva, "On Difference Without Separability," in *32nd Bienal de São Paulo: Incerteza Viva*, ed. Jochen Volz and Júlia Rebouças (São Paulo: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 2016).
5. Fred Moten speaking at Trinity Church Wall Street, January 19, 2020.
6. Dōgen (1200–1253), *Shōbōgenzō-Zuimonki: Sayings of Eihei Dōgen Zenji* (Kyoto, Japan: Kyōto Sōtō-Zen Center, 1987).

This text was commissioned for the exhibition *Kite: Hél čhaŋkú kiŋ Ĩpáye (There lies the road)* at PS122 Gallery (December 3–12, 2021), curated by Eriola Pira with Camila Palomino and Regan de Loggans. Edited by Re'al Christian and Carin Kuoni and designed by Bobby Joe Smith III. Published by the Vera List Center for Art and Politics, 2021.