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Exhibiting Artists Summer 2024

Gerald Clarke • Megan Geckler

More Information: Karlie McLaughlin • 903-821-3422 • karlie@breckcreate.org • breckcreate.org/bifa

Breckenridge, CO - Breck Create, producer of the annual Breckenridge International Festival of Arts (BIFA), announces this summer's exhibiting artists: [Megan Geckler](#) and [Gerald Clarke](#), who are both based in California. Geckler and Clarke's work will be on display at Old Masonic Hall throughout the summer; both artists also will be featured in BIFA's signature program, Trail Mix, alongside local talent Bill Orisich.

"The work of both these distinguished artists deeply resonates with BIFA's focus this year on the complex relationship between humans and nature," says Tamara Nuzzaci Park, president/CEO of Breck Create. "Clarke and Geckler will each, in their own way, ask us to question our closely held beliefs and perspectives."

Clarke, a citizen of the Cahuilla Band of Indians, works with an astonishing number of artistic mediums. He has described his perspective and resulting work as a "creative response to the world that the Cahuilla have exercised since ancient times." Geckler, on the other hand, creates immense, highly architectural and ephemeral installations using flagging tape—a common construction material—to question the human desire to define the space that surrounds us.

Breck Create will host a free [reception](#) to celebrate the opening of both exhibitions on Friday, June 14th, at Old Masonic Hall. Geckler will be on hand to speak about her artwork. Rounding out the reception will be live music by [Cipriano Ortega](#), a Breck Create artist-in-residence, and light refreshments.

The first floor of the gallery will feature Geckler's two-dimensional *Woven Panels* series created from meticulously layered flagging tape on top of 18x18" panels (each panel took 40 hours to create) as well as the stunning, large-scale installation *Tunnel Vision*. Both will be on display from June 14th

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through Sept. 1st. Typically used in industries like forestry and construction, the extruded PVC film will suspend from the gallery ceiling to the floor, forming a mesmerizing, floating mass of gradients that shift between a spectrum of hues. The precise application of each color of tape is based on pointillism, a painting technique in which small distinct dots of color are applied in patterns to form an image.

The exhibition title reflects Geckler's process. After hoisting the flagging tape, she will cut pathways through it for viewers to navigate. These tunnels offer multiple entry points into the installation, allowing individuals to explore and engage with the artwork in their own unique way. By encouraging visitors to move beyond the perimeter of the installation and immerse themselves in the colorful strands, Geckler invites them to create their own journey through this playful and immersive environment.

"A lot of people enter an art gallery and look left, look right and then leave," Geckler says. "My job is to reward those who investigate the piece. The more time they spend with it, the more they explore, the more they will be rewarded."

Upon entering the main entrance of Old Masonic Hall, those wishing to explore will have options: turn right and into a maze; turn left and into an "exploded rainbow" room outfitted with inflatable bean bag chairs inviting viewers to kick back and look up.

"I've done my job if it looks like a computer threw up in the space," Geckler says.

Geckler's innovative use of flagging tape, a material she discovered in 1999 and available in just 12 colors, has become her signature medium. Through computer-aided design (CAD) and three-dimensional modeling, she designs immersive experiences that sit at the intersection between craft, design and fine art. The intensity of creation falls between the conceptualization phase of the piece—the architecture, the math, the modeling—and the actual installation, which Geckler likens to a sewing

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circle featuring many sets of hands performing repetitive tasks like cutting and tying, over and over, for hours and hours throughout a span of several days.

The process for an installation begins with an invitation from an organization, such as Breck Create, and a sight visit follows. Geckler's work demands perfection: she must have a sense of scale and be aware of any creative challenges that may be lurking. For example if a duct protrudes into the space, Geckler needs to know about it so that she can design around it. Flagging tape, while not exactly a delicate material, is essentially ribbon. It is flexible, lightweight. It will move with air currents. Geckler needs to know which way the wind blows, so to speak. No job is without an unexpected hiccup that requires refinement, but something truly surprising could require the project to be altered.

At the conclusion of the exhibition, Geckler will return the flagging tape to be recycled and re-extruded, ensuring that the materials used in her art can be repurposed for future projects.

The second floor of the gallery will showcase a retrospective of Clarke's work entitled, *The Door is Open*. It will be on display from May 24th through Sept 1st. This career-spanning exhibition will include sculpture, paintings, mixed-media artwork, artifacts and video art that spans 30 years. This will be Clarke's first opportunity to show his artwork in Colorado, and he expressed humility and gratitude for the recognition.

Clarke, a self-described "30-year emerging artist," reckons with personal, national and Cahuilla tribal histories through his practice. He uses humor to uplift Indigenous narratives, interrogate the impacts of colonialism and disarm viewers into absorbing his art. The mixed-media piece *Ethnopoly* demonstrates the ways in which racial inequalities manifest via the universally-recognized board game *Monopoly*. Players cannot play the game without considering who has access to the American dream and who doesn't, Clarke says, noting that, when given the opportunity to discover knowledge and ideas on their own, people may walk away with evolved viewpoints.

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His artist statement reads: “I aspire not to romanticize the subjects or content of my work. I strive to ‘keep it real’ and have found that my best works are inspired by my personal experiences. Beer cans, branding irons, and gourd rattles represent aspects of my reality. These materials reflect who I am and not how the mainstream might understand the contemporary Native American experience. They represent my community as well: a community that struggles with various issues but that also laughs, loves, and continues to evolve.”

“Oftentimes, the art world tries to categorize things,” Clarke says. “People will ask me if I ‘create traditional Native American art or contemporary art.’ That is a narrow viewpoint. I do not view the artwork on a binary, but as a continuum of artwork created by Native people for thousands of years. My art exists as the creative expression of a Native person who carries a unique perspective of the world through the filter of their culture.”

Later in the summer, each artist will create an outdoor installation that will be unveiled at and free to view during BIFA, August 16 – 25. These installations are part of the Trail Mix series, where art and nature converge on popular hiking trails in Breckenridge. Geckler’s [You Need to Come Home: Tomorrow Isn’t Soon Enough](#) will be accessible via the Moonstone and Iowa Hills trails. Mental-health advocacy group [Building Hope](#) will lead a Guided Mindfulness Hike to the installation on Friday, August 16th, at which Geckler will give an artist talk.

Hikers on the Moonstone Trail will delight in the Seussical effect Geckler creates by wrapping tree trunks in flagging tape. On Iowa Hill, Geckler along with a group of volunteers will weed out false chamomile. These pretty flowers unfortunately deter the growth of new trees. Geckler and her team will remove them then mark the spot with small lawn flags. Each patch will be a different color, and thousands of flags will be used. The installation will remind us that sometimes humans need to intervene to help nature. Moreover, by enlisting volunteers, the members of the community will take ownership of the project, becoming ambassadors for the art.

“Community engagement is a really important part of my process,” Geckler says. “I create these projects and leave town, but the art lives on in the community.”

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Geckler refers to these two installations as “fraternal twins;” one installation honors her mother and the other her father, both of whom have passed away. The title of the piece references the conversation she had with each of her parent’s partners, who shouldered the responsibility of letting her know that time was fleeting and precious.

In [To the Next Generation](#), Clarke’s Trail Mix installation on the Illinois Creek Trail, the artist is influenced in part by roadside monuments placed by various historical societies and similar civic and governmental organizations. Many of these monuments romanticize American historical events (both national and local) and erase the history and presence of Indigenous people, cultures and place names.

In contrast, Clarke’s series incorporates local histories (including Native histories) to challenge the reductive trope of the “last Indian.” He approaches the project with a Native concept of time and history, where time is cyclical and is tied to place. Whereas historical monuments are focused on the commemoration of the past, *To the Next Generation* features text that both reimagines Breckenridge’s past but also projects events tied to the land that take place in the future. Clarke’s research for this project included delving into Ute Nation and Summit County histories, as well local geography and environmental issues.

While researching the Breckenridge area, Clarke was struck by the similarities between the Colorado and California gold-rush histories—these histories are much more diverse than the mental images they conjure of bearded white men with pickaxes, he says.

“I was very intrigued by the story of Barney Ford,” Clarke says, referring to the escaped slave who became a wealthy Colorado businessman and civil rights leader. Ford opened a chophouse in Breckenridge prior to moving to Denver where he developed education programs for African Americans and pushed for African-American suffrage. “That story points to the diversity of our country’s history, which often gets erased.”

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Clarke also will deliver an artist talk during BIFA, on August 23 at 6pm. During the talk, participants will hear firsthand about the inspirations and processes behind the installation and exhibition. Clarke will describe his approach to incorporating Summit County and Ute history and answer questions from the audience. The next day (August 24), Clarke will create new works for his series, *Branded*, in which he scorches pieces of paper and other objects using branding irons he forged himself. Branding irons that read “Native” and “Indian” satirize non-native peoples’ and the art world’s obsession with Indigenous authenticity. Heated up and burned onto a surface, they highlight how that obsession essentializes and stereotypes the infinitely varied lived experiences and artwork of Indigenous people. Other branding irons and the compositions they create contrast the precariousness of immigrant status and the erasure of immigrant history in the U.S. with the permanence of the branding medium.

About Megan Geckler: Megan Geckler, an American artist born in 1975 in Abington, Penn., currently resides and works in Los Angeles, California. She holds a BFA from Temple University's Tyler School of Art and an MFA from Claremont Graduate University. Geckler's vibrant, large-scale installations and drawings have been showcased globally at venues including Customs House in Sydney, Paris Fashion Week, and The Courtauld Institute in London. In the United States, her site-specific installations have been featured at prominent institutions such as the Utah Museum of Contemporary Art, Wexner Center for the Arts, and Laguna Art Museum. Geckler has received numerous public art commissions, including projects at LAX Airport, and was honored with the City of Los Angeles (C.O.L.A.) Individual Artist Mid-Career Fellowship in 2016. Her work is held in corporate collections including Creative Artists Agency, Nike and Facebook. Her work has been featured in numerous publications and media outlets, cementing her position as a leading figure in the field.

About Gerald Clarke: Gerald Clarke is a visual artist, educator, tribal leader and cultural practitioner whose family has lived in the Anza Valley for time immemorial. As an enrolled citizen of the Cahuilla Band of Indians, Gerald lives in the home his grandfather built (c.1940) on the Cahuilla Indian Reservation and oversees the Clarke family cattle ranch. He is a Professor of Ethnic Studies at the University of California Riverside where he teaches classes in Native American art, history, and

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culture. Clarke has exhibited extensively and his work can be seen in numerous major museum collections. In 2007, Gerald was awarded an Eiteljorg Museum Fellowship for Native American Fine Art and served as an Artist-in-Residence at the Institute of American Indian Arts (Santa Fe, NM) in 2015. In 2020, the Palm Springs Art Museum hosted Gerald Clarke: Falling Rock, the first major retrospective of the artist's work. Clarke holds a B.A. in Art from the University of Central Arkansas and the M.A./M.F.A. degrees in Painting/Sculpture from Stephen F. Austin State University.

About BIFA: BIFA is a 10-day celebration of Adventure + Creativity + Nature + Play. Local, national and international artists intersect to deliver traditional and unconventional experiences across music, dance, film, visual arts and family entertainment. From August 16 to August 25, 2024, the festival will transform the Town of Breckenridge into a vibrant hub of cultural exploration, with events spanning venues, public parks, trails, and open spaces. Explore ticketed performances, immersive art installations, and art classes and workshops as well as dozens of opportunities for free, family-friendly fun. Learn more at breckcreate.org/bifa.

BIFA embodies Breck Create's commitment to respecting the natural and cultural environment. With thought-provoking exhibitions and immersive experiences, we question assumptions and address critical issues of our time from sustainability to marginalized identities. Each aspect of BIFA, including the performers, culturally relevant artist talks, and recycled material used in exhibited artworks is driven by a commitment to our values and the community we serve. This year's focus on the complex relationship between humans and earth comes to life through a county wide weed pull turned outdoor art installation, interactive theater inspired by the mysterious life of bees, a physicist-narrated string quartet confronting a planet under siege and so much more. Tickets are on sale now at breckcreate.org/bifa.

To learn more about the artists, the exhibitions, installations and BIFA, please visit breckcreate.org.

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About Breck Create Breck Create aims to build a dynamic, year-round creative community in Breckenridge. The organization's mission is to deliver inspiring creative experiences that enrich the quality of life for all residents and quality of place for visitors. Breck Create supports and serves artists, creatives, cultural enthusiasts, visitors and the community at large by providing a year-round schedule of performances, exhibitions, screenings, art classes and workshops as well as other engagement opportunities.

The organization maintains, manages and operates the Town of Breckenridge's exceptional cultural facilities and also hosts arts-based events in public gathering spaces throughout Breckenridge. Breck Create's core attractions are the Riverwalk Center—a 750-seat, heated, indoor performance venue—and a lively Arts District campus of renovated historic structures that now function as studio spaces for art classes and workshops. These structures also include affordable rentals for local artists and visiting artists-in-residence participants. The Breckenridge Arts District is a certified district within the [Colorado Creative Industries](#) Creative District program.