

'Birdman Rising': Native American photographer visits Edwardsville

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EDWARDSVILLE - Southern Illinois University Edwardsville's Native American Studies program, the University Museum, and the Edwardsville Arts Center (EAC) welcome internationally renowned Urban Iroquois photographer Jeff Thomas to Edwardsville for a series of events, including an exhibit entitled "Birdman Rising: Conversations beyond Colonialism."

On Wednesday, March 21, a showing of the documentary *Shooting Indians: A Journey with Jeffrey Thomas* (1997) will be held at 6 p.m. in SIUE's Peck Hall, room 2304.

Thomas will give a lecture, “A Necessary Fiction: An Urban Indian in the Archives,” from 7-8:45 p.m. in that same room following the film.

An opening reception for “Birdman Rising” will be held from 6-8 p.m. Friday, March 23 at the EAC, with Thomas in attendance. The show runs through April 20. It is free and open to the public.

The exhibit will feature photographs Thomas took during his last visit to the area, including photographs of Native American artifacts from the University Museum collections and landscapes at local Native sites such as Cahokia Mounds. It is curated by Thomas, and Cory Willmott, associate professor in the SIUE College of Arts and Sciences Department of Anthropology.

“We are extremely fortunate to have this opportunity to collaborate with Jeff Thomas,” Willmott said. “As an urban Indian today, he identifies strongly with the urban nature of Mississippian society. The exhibit represents one step in Mr. Thomas’s journey to find the Mississippian Birdman and bring the significance of this indigenous icon to the public.

“Here in the shadow of Cahokia Mounds, the center of the Mississippian urban complex and trade network, Mr. Thomas brings a fresh and different vision to precolonial North America. The dual voices in this exhibit, the indigenous artist and the anthropologist, raise questions and open up space for viewers to explore their own ideas.”

“As SIUE is located adjacent to one of the largest sites of ancient Mound culture, we are thrilled to have the opportunity to work with a Native artist who is engaged with our collection,” added University Museum Collections Manager Erin Vigneau-Dimick.

“The exhibit juxtaposes the contemporary and prehistoric local environments, and the peoples who interacted with them,” she explained. “It looks into and beyond colonialism to the pre-colonial glory of the Mississippians in order to create a dialogue about living in a world beyond colonialism through Thomas’s focus on portraiture in Amerindian stone carvings, colonial photography, and his own original photographic works.”

Thomas’s visit is exemplary of the strong collaborations forged between SIUE’s University Museum and the EAC. While here, Thomas will meet with students from Edwardsville High School to discuss his work.

Additionally, he will meet with SIUE students in the museum studies and Native American studies programs, providing an invaluable opportunity for students to gain first-hand experience with indigenous art and curation practice.

The production of the exhibit and associated series of events is supported by the College of Arts and Sciences' Targeted Funding Initiative.

Central to SIUE's exceptional and comprehensive education, the College of Arts and Sciences has 19 departments and 85 areas of study. More than 300 full-time faculty /instructors deliver classes to more than 8,000 undergraduate and graduate students. Faculty help students explore diverse ideas and experiences, while learning to think and live as fulfilled, productive members of the global community. Study abroad, service-learning, internships, and other experiential learning opportunities better prepare SIUE students not only to succeed in our region's workplaces but also to become valuable leaders who make important contributions to our communities.