



**EDUCATION GUIDE**  
**INFORMATION AND IDEAS FOR EDUCATORS**

**IN THEIR OWN WORDS**  
**Classic and Contemporary Native American Art**

**Guest Curator Jennifer Garey**

February 19 - September 5, 2011



**EXHIBITION INTRODUCTION**

*In Their Own Words—Classic and Contemporary Native American Art* presents classic art from North America’s indigenous artisans shown alongside paintings by four native-Californian contemporary artists: L. Frank, Robert Freeman, Billy Soza Warsoldier and Catharine Nelson-Rodriguez.

The classic art of the indigenous peoples of North America is as diverse as the nations that created it. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, Native American classic art became popular with tourists. Styles and designs were changed to meet the demands of this new market of settlers, trading companies and collectors. As many native nations were removed from their homelands and moved to reservations, selling crafts and art often became a means of survival.

Today, Native American art encompasses every style, medium and message and is as distinct as the individual artist. The four California artists represented in this exhibition share two things: they predominantly work on canvas with oils or acrylics, and they all project a personal message in their work.

# GEOGRAPHIC CONNECTION



*California Native American root languages and tribal locations*

## EXHIBITION THEMES

### **Classic vs. Traditional**

Classic art, defined by its age and style, often refers to highly esteemed objects of beauty created by ancient cultures. Yet, for a longtime while artists in Europe and Asia were creating works labeled “classic,” Native American artists were creating art equally inspired, but labeled “traditional” and displayed in ethnographic museums rather than art museums.

## **What is Art Anyways?**

How we perceive art is a personal relationship between the artist and viewer. The way we interpret art depends on many factors, including historical context, form, content, function, intent, the creator and our own perceptions of the world.

## **The Continuum of Native American Art**

Native American art is not something only of the past, it is alive today. Contemporary Native American artists reference classic styles and a diverse cultural history with a contemporary eye, approach and materials.

## **Personal Identity**

The contemporary artists presented in this exhibition identify themselves both personally and as members of their native tribes. All four artists combine personal experiences and expressions with social and political statements that are meant to challenge the viewer and question preconceived notions of the Native American experience.

## **EXHIBITION VOCABULARY**

**Classic Art** – Highly esteemed objects of beauty created by ancient cultures of both East and West

**Traditional Art**- Art of ancient Native American cultures have mostly been termed traditional, this exhibition calls them classic to recognize their excellent quality and to place them within mainstream art of the world

**Indigenous** – Originating in a particular region or country. Indigenous peoples from North America are also referred to as Native American or First Nation

**Contemporary Art** – Art that has been and continues to be produced in our lifetime

**Context** – Understanding the art and artist on political, economic, religious, social and/or artistic levels. Context can include political, economic, religious, social and artistic influences that have affected the production of a work of art

**Personal Identity** – How a person views himself/herself

**Palette Knife** – A spatula-like tool used by artists to mix, apply or scrape oil paint

**Continuum** – A continuous time frame, where it is impossible to tell just where one thing ends and another begins

**Artisan** – A skilled worker or craftsperson

**Etching** – A method of printmaking in which an image is “carved” into the surface of a metal plate using a stylus and then acid

## MINGEI INTERNATIONAL VOCABULARY TERMS

**Mingei** – A Japanese word meaning *art of the people* or, literally, *everybody's art*, and referring mainly to useful objects of everyday life made by hand

**Folk Art** – Often refers to art produced using the traditional practices of a particular nation or region, usually reflecting traditional culture, everyday customs, history and/or religion; Folk Art objects are often created by artists who have not received an academic education or formal training, but rather, have learned traditions passed down within a culture

**Craft** – Often refers to objects created by a skilled artisan or tradesperson, requiring training and manual dexterity. Pottery, woodworking, metalsmithing and weaving are all examples of craft

**Design** – Today often refers to the creative process leading to objects of use mass produced by machines

## CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS

### ROBERT FREEMAN (Hunkpapa Sioux and Luiseño) b.1939

Robert Freeman is a self-taught artist. He paints from childhood experiences and observations growing up on reservations in Rincon CA and Crow Creek SD. His creativity stems from personal reflections of society and his responses to social issues. He works in various media and forms, from house paint to oils, pencil to etching and sculpture using stone, wood, welded steel and bronze. Along with life-size bronze public art sculptures throughout California, Freeman's State of California Commemorative Seal design is embedded on the steps of the State Capitol. An avid explorer of styles and techniques, he enjoys the process of creating as much as the finished object.

Robert Freeman video: [www.mingei.org/intheirownwords/freeman](http://www.mingei.org/intheirownwords/freeman)



Robert Freeman, *Lady in Waiting*, acrylic on canvas

## **BILLY SOZA WARSOLDIER (Cahuilla, Soboba Band and Apache) b. 1949**

Billy Soza Warsoldier studied at the Chicago Art Institute and the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) in Santa Fe NM. An active participant in the American Indian Movement of the 1970s, he experienced numerous injustices firsthand. His work reflects wild and free imagery that often contradicts his personal experience as a member of a large indigenous movement. He works with oil paint that is applied to canvas with a palette knife or directly from the tube. Warsoldier includes captivating, entrancing and healing experience in his paintings in order to share profound moments with the viewer.

**Billy Soza Warsoldier video:** [www.mingei.org/intheirownwords/warsoldier](http://www.mingei.org/intheirownwords/warsoldier)



**Billy Soza Warsoldier, *Elka # Four*, oil on canvas**

## **L. FRANK (Tongva, Ajachmem and Raramuri) b. 1952**

L. Frank has studied at excellent art schools but was most influenced by studying with Sister Corita Kent at Immaculate Heart College in Los Angeles CA. She has served on the boards of directors for the California Basketweavers Association, Advocates for Indigenous California Language Survival and The Cultural Conservancy. Her business card reads: ‘decolonizationist.’ In addition to working with different media and forms, including acrylics, cartooning, sculpture, basket weaving and regalia, she has also written two educational books. She uses her art to communicate the sometimes difficult subject of living with the fall-out of attempted colonization. Through her work, she exposes the viewer to the dichotomies of our society, for both Indigenous America and the disenfranchised. She asks viewers of her work to think and to question, and she does it with humor and style.

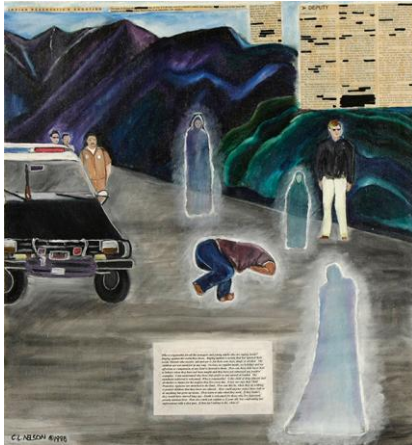
**L. Frank video:** [www.mingei.org/intheirownwords/frank](http://www.mingei.org/intheirownwords/frank)



**L. Frank, *Even Where the Ancestors Live*, acrylic on canvas**

## CATHERINE NELSON-RODRIGUEZ (Luiseño, Wailaki and Choctaw) b.1953

Catherine Nelson-Rodriguez is a self-taught artist and paints memories of her childhood and intimate personal experiences. After growing up on four California reservations, she finally settled on her own La Jolla Reservation. She paints from deep within her mind, frequently exposing her inner self to the viewer, allowing us in and trusting us with her sometimes fragile existence. She shares her struggle to make sense of her life, crossing the boundaries of comfort and touching upon issues of womanhood, mental illness and identity.



Catherine Nelson-Rodriguez, *Another Dead Indian*, oil on canvas

## CLASSIC WORKS

### Classic Art

Indigenous America's classic art is defined by age, technique and style. The artist who created each piece has established artistic values of the highest quality applying recognizable techniques and personal style to the art. These examples of Native American classic art, from the Museum's collection, span the period from 700 AD through the nineteenth century.

### Classic Art in the Twentieth Century

In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century indigenous artists began to incorporate new designs and materials in the classic styles, to meet demands of a new market. These examples from Mingei International's collection represent blended styles and a world in flux.

### Contemporary Artists working in Classic Styles

In the later part of the twentieth century artists began to incorporate more of themselves and their own identity into their works. These examples from Mingei International's collection represent contemporary artists working in classic styles representative of Indigenous Nations.



**Classic objects listed from left to right:**




*Basket*, Chippewa, c.1950, coiled pine needles



*Necklace*, Navajo, c.1940, silver, U.S. Dimes and turquoise

*Beaded European-style Gauntlets*, Blackfoot, c.1900, glass beads, hide and cotton

*Spoon with Bullet Inserts*, Northwest Coast, c.1900, carved horn and bullet caps

## SYMBOLS, STORIES AND LORE

Name	Image	Description
<p><b>The wolf</b></p>	 <p>Billy Soza Warsoldier, <i>Omega Waiting</i>, 2005-2006, oil on canvas</p>	<p>The <b>wolf</b> is a powerful and mysterious animal, associated with medicine, hunting and life. The wolf is an important animal because it hunts and provides for his family, tends to older members and defends his territory, just like humans.</p>
<p><b>Tribal Criers</b></p>	 <p>Catherine Nelson-Rodriguez, <i>Tribal Cryers</i>, 1992, oil on canvas</p>	<p>When a loved one passes away, the <b>tribal criers</b> sing songs of grief for the entire tribe. These songs are sung exclusively by women and never in public performance.</p>
<p><b>Peon Players</b></p>	 <p>Robert Freeman, <i>Peon Player</i>, 1979, etching</p>	<p><b>Peon</b> (“pay-own”) is a popular gambling game that takes place at social events. The men on one side hold a blanket with their teeth, while the men on the opposite side hold game pieces, made of bone or rawhide. Peon is a game of close observation and stamina, with tension added to the event by the singing of the crowd.</p>

<p><b>Gaan Ceremony</b></p>	 <p>Billy Soza Warsoldier, <i>Gaan in Motion</i>, 2007-2009, oil on canvas</p>	<p>Part of Apache culture, <b>Gaan</b> is believed to be a supernatural, healing spirit that lives throughout the land. This spirit appears as masked dancers during the gaan ceremony. Due to the elaborate headdresses worn by the dancers, they are also called “Crown Dancers.”</p>
<p><b>Mustang</b></p>	 <p>Billy Soza Warsoldier, <i>Wild Horses 'Mustang' Series</i>, 1989-2006, oil on canvas.</p>	<p>A <b>mustang</b> is a free-roaming feral horse. Horses were first introduced into the United States by the Spanish, and Native Americans quickly adopted the horse as a primary means of transportation in the plains. Mustangs are often referred to as wild horses.</p>

## CORE QUESTIONS

- How can art help us to understand history?
- Why might the context of a work of art be important?
- How can an artist express both personal and cultural identity in a work of art? Why might this be important?
- How do the words we use to describe a culture, and the objects that are produced within it, change our perception of that culture?

# HANDS-ON ACTIVITIES

## Paper Woven Mat

Grades K - 5<sup>th</sup>

### OBJECTIVES

- Students will recognize shapes, lines and colors in a work of art
- Students will recognize simple geometric patterns and duplicate them
- Students will explore how art reflects cultural values and traditions
- Students will think critically about a work of art and evaluate its message and composition.
- Students will explore the relationship between art and objects that are made to be used,

### MATERIALS

- Construction paper
- Ruler
- Pencil
- Glue stick
- Scissors

### WARM-UP

- Show students several weavings from the Museum's exhibition (high resolution images are available on the museums website). Allow students to study each image for at least thirty seconds, and before sharing any background information on the objects, ask them what they see. Engage visual literacy skills by asking students to think critically about what they see, *What are you looking at? What do you think it might be made of? How do you think it was created? What do you think it might be used for? **What do you see that makes you say that?***
- Discuss what they saw and explain how a weaving is created:

*Weaving is a textile craft practiced by both women and men in which two threads (or fibers) are interlaced together to form a fabric. Typically, a series of vertical strings is set up on a loom, and a horizontal thread is strung across the vertical strings, either above or below. Various patterns can be created depending on the over/under pattern that is created by blending the vertical and horizontal threads together..*

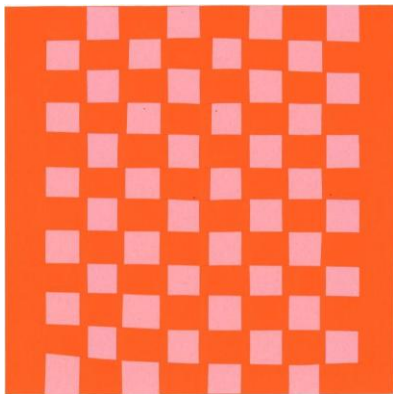
- Students will now have the opportunity to create their own weaving using construction paper.

### DIRECTIONS

- Cut a piece of construction paper into a square about 9" x 9".
- Fold the square in half. Along the folded edge, use a pencil to draw horizontal lines about  $\frac{3}{4}$ " apart from the folded edge to about  $\frac{3}{4}$ " from the cut edge.
- With the edge still folded, cut along the drawn lines and open up the paper. These lines will serve as the warp.
- Using another color, cut paper strips about  $\frac{3}{4}$ " wide and 9" long. These strips will serve as the weft.

- Take one strip and weave it horizontally across the slits, going over and under the slits to the other side.
- Push the woven horizontal strip to the top. Choose another horizontal strip and weave this in an opposite pattern. If the first strip of paper is woven over and under the strips, the second strip should go under and over the slits.
- Weave more horizontal strips in an alternating pattern until it is full.
- Glue the ends of each horizontal strip down to secure the weaving.
- Experiment with various colors, types and sizes of paper and patterns.

YouTube video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GOKN4L2Ayg4>



*Student Paper Weaving*

## **Palette Knife Painting**

**Grades 6<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup>**

### **OBJECTIVES**

- Students will create increasingly more complex original works of art reflecting personal choices and increased technical skills
- Students will identify and describe the ways in which artists convey the illusion of space
- Students will use non-traditional tools in creating a work of art
- Students will an active role in group discussions around a work of art

### **MATERIALS**

- Heavy acrylic paint in a variety of colors (options: tempera thickened with a cornstarch and water mixture, tempera thickened with an acrylic gel medium)
- Palette knives or plastic knives
- Heavy weight board or canvas

### **WARM-UP**

- Show students a selection of paintings by Billy Soza Warsoldier from the Museum's exhibition (high resolution images are available on the museums website). Allow students to study each image for at least thirty seconds, and before sharing any background information on the objects, ask them what they *see*. Engage visual literacy skills by asking students to think critically about what they see, *What is going on in this picture? What do you think it*

*might be made of? How do you think it was created? What do you see that makes you say that?*

- Explain how painting with a palette knife or directly from a paint tube shows a physical action by looking at one of Billy Soza Warsoldier's paintings. Investigate the lines and texture of these pieces, the positive and negative space, and how movement is portrayed.
- Assist students in creating their own palette knife (or plastic knife) painting!

## **DIRECTIONS**

- Ask students to draw or trace a simple line drawing onto heavy weight board, canvas or cardboard. The drawings should look like a page out of a coloring book, with clear and simple lines.
- Have students squeeze a small blob of paint into each region of the drawing.
- Using the palette knife (or plastic knife), have students spread the paint in each region, as if spreading peanut butter or icing a cake. Allow students to experiment with different hand movements (for instance, quick and jagged movements versus smooth and long), notice how the lines and texture of the painting changes.
- Continue applying the paint and spreading it in other regions of the drawing. Once all regions are filled in students may use the palette knife (or plastic knife) to blend the colors together by slightly mixing the paint.
- Students may also remove paint from their work by using the palette knife (or plastic knife) to scrape paint off of the surface, this will create texture and volume to an otherwise two-dimensional work.

## **IN PREPERATION FOR YOUR VISIT:**

- Schedule a Museum visit and Docent-led tour through the Education Department
  - Email: [ec-asst@mingei.org](mailto:ec-asst@mingei.org)
  - Call: 619-239-0003 ext. 135
  - Complete an online tour request form:  
[www.mingei.org/education/museum-tour-request](http://www.mingei.org/education/museum-tour-request)
- Discuss Museum etiquette:
  - Touching harms the art; refrain from touching objects in the Museum. A Museum Docent will point out any objects that may be touched.
  - Running and roughhousing in the Museum is both dangerous and distractive to others – instead, walk quietly, talk softly and listen carefully to the interesting information your Docent will share with you.
  - All food and drinks must be left at the front desk prior to entering the galleries.
- Explain to students that a Museum Docent will guide them through the exhibition. Explain that a Docent is a knowledgeable Museum-trained volunteer who will share lots of valuable information with them.

- Explain that Mingei International is a Museum of folk art, craft and design that shows work from all over the world, and that “Mingei” is a Japanese word that means “art of the people.”
- Use the Museum’s mission statement to encourage understanding:

*Mingei International Museum is dedicated to the understanding and appreciation of 'art of the people' (mingei) from all cultures of the world; this art shares a direct simplicity and reflects a joy in making, by hand, useful objects of timeless beauty that are satisfying to the human spirit. The Museum collects, conserves and exhibits these arts of daily life — by unknown craftsmen of ancient times; from traditional cultures of past and present; and by historical and contemporary designers.*



## EXTENSIONS

### California Content Standard Aligned

#### KINDERGARTEN – GRADE 2

Focus on Robert Freeman’s *Curandero*, and have students analyze the elements of art and principles of design. Review the basic elements of art (color, line, shape, texture, space, balance, etc). What geometric and organic shapes do they see? What colors and types of lines do they see? Locate and identify shapes in relation to one another; above, below, to the side of. (**Math:** K 2.1, 1.2; 1<sup>st</sup> grade 2.1; 2<sup>nd</sup> grade 2.0-2.2; **Visual Arts:** K 1.3; 2<sup>nd</sup> grade 1.3, 2.3, 4.4)

Identify the various materials in the exhibition (clay, bark, root, metals, stones, oil and acrylic paint, etc). Where do they come from? How are they used? How are they similar and different? Why were these materials used? Are different materials being used today? Compare color, shape, texture, size, weight, etc. (**Science:** K 4a-d; **Visual Arts:** K 5.4; 1<sup>st</sup> grade 1.2, 1.3; 1<sup>st</sup> grade 4.2; **History Social Science:** K K.6.3)

## GRADES 3 – 5

Study two different Native American cultures, compare how their geographic locations (weather, terrain, animals, plants, ect.) have affected the objects create by that culture (clothing, pottery, furniture, shelter). How are they similar or different? Why is California important in Native American history? What are the physical and human geographical features of California? Illustrate a portion of this history by creating a timeline. (**History Social Science:** 3<sup>rd</sup> grade 3.1, 3.2; 4<sup>th</sup> grade 4.1, 4.2; 5<sup>th</sup> grade 5.1; **Visual Arts:** 4<sup>th</sup> grade 3.2)

Review how Elements of Art and Principles of Design (color, line, shape, form, texture, etc) can create the mood or expression of a work of art. Remind students of Catherine Nelson-Rodriguez’s painting, *Blue Catherine*. What feelings does this painting evoke? What if it were painted in any other color? What do some other colors express? Have students paint a self-portrait of themselves expressing a specific mood or emotion through color and the elements of design. Introduce the idea of proportion when sketching a face. (**Visual Arts:** 3<sup>rd</sup> grade 1.5, 5.2; 4<sup>th</sup> grade 1.4, 1.5, 5.3; 5<sup>th</sup> grade)

Billy Soza Warsoldier’s *Aspen Wolf Series* is inspired by a face-to-face encounter with a grey wolf. Explain to students how artists can illustrate an experience from their lives through art. Have students think of an experience they have had with an animal or in nature, perhaps their first pet or visiting the zoo with their family. Have students first write a short summary of this experience and then draw the scene on paper. (**English Language Arts:** 3<sup>rd</sup> grade 1.0, 2.0; **Visual Arts:** 4.1, 4.5)

## GRADES 6 – 8

Explore the historical development of Native Americans, both pre- and post-contact. How has this affected both Californian and American culture today? Have students write a research report or create a timeline presenting their findings and present orally to the class. (**History Social Science:** 6<sup>th</sup> grade 6.2; **English:** 6<sup>th</sup> grade 2.2; 7<sup>th</sup> grade 2.3; **Visual Arts:** 7<sup>th</sup> grade 3.2)

Catherine Nelson-Rodriguez paints memories and experiences from her own life. Her work is intimate and emotive, and she often includes text from newspapers or that she has written to enhance the emotion in her work. Think of a special memory from your own life, or choose an event that is occurring in the news today. Use magazines to create a collage of the scene and write a short poem or clip words from the newspaper to include on your final image. Compare and contrast students’ work with Nelson-Rodriguez’s. (**Visual Arts:** 6<sup>th</sup> grade 2.4, 7<sup>th</sup> grade 4.1, 8<sup>th</sup> grade 3.1)

What makes something “contemporary”? Where have students heard this word before? Research a contemporary art work, either from Mingei International’s collection or of their own choosing. How is the artwork refelective of the time in which it was created? What do you think the artist was trying to say with this work? What evidence can you point to in the work that makes you say that? Complete a contemporary art piece as a class that reflects your school, classroom or neighborhood. Make sure that every student adds something. Use materials that are available either in the classroom or on campus that reflect the environment and a shared experience. (**Visual Arts:** 6<sup>th</sup> grade 2.5, 3.1, 7<sup>th</sup> grade 3.1, 3.2)

## GRADES 9 – 12

Research the development and history of weaving, exploring its role in Native American culture and beyond. How has the design and subject matter in some Native American weavings changed over time? Have students research different styles of weaving, and the history of that style. How was it created? Have students create their own cardboard loom and weavings using yarn: [http://www.eiteljorg.org/ejm\\_EducationActivities/TeacherInformation/ClassroomResources.asp](http://www.eiteljorg.org/ejm_EducationActivities/TeacherInformation/ClassroomResources.asp) (**Visual Arts:** 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades 4.1, 4.2; **English Language Arts:** 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades 2.6)

Investigate the scientific process involved in creating an *etching*, what materials and chemicals are needed? How does the medium of etching contribute to Robert Freeman’s work? What are acids? And what are their chemical properties. Have students work in groups to create an etching, ask them to record the chemical changes to the materials and document the process. (**Science:** 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade 5.0; **Visual Arts:** 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade 1.3, 1.5)

Examine the terms “classic” and “traditional,” and how they relate to regionally specific artwork. What regions of the world have art that is categorized as “classic?” What regions have art that is categorized as “traditional?” What is the difference between these words and how they have been used historically? Have students research the subject and respond in essay form. (**Visual Arts:** 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades 3.3, 4.1; **English Language Arts:** 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades 1.2, 1.4)

## WEB RESOURCES

### Mingei International Museum

[www.mingei.org](http://www.mingei.org)

### *IN THEIR OWN WORDS – Classic and Contemporary Native American Art*

<http://www.mingei.org/exhibitions/details/897>

### Robert Freeman

<http://www.robertfreemanartist.com/>

You Tube video - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FanI8qc54OE>

### Billy Soza Warsoldier

<http://warsoldierartwork.com/>

Indian Artist & Philosopher video - <http://current.com/1d5g44c>

You Tube video - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vQSPR869CWw>

### Catherine Nelson-Rodriguez

<http://www.yessy.com/Nelson>

### L. Frank

<http://sawols.tripod.com/l.frank/gallery.html>

[http://www.kuaainaassociates.com/Kuaainaassociates.com/L\\_Frank.html](http://www.kuaainaassociates.com/Kuaainaassociates.com/L_Frank.html)

You Tube video - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KA32en5G71M>

**Native American Fine Arts Resource Guide PDF – Heard Museum**

<http://www.heard.org/pdfs/fine-arts-web.pdf>

**Gifts Created by the Creator –**

**Online exhibition exploring contemporary Native American artists**

<http://researcharchive.calacademy.org/research/anthropology/art/Gallery1/Image101.htm>

**Circle of Stories – NPR interactive website on Native American storytelling**

<http://www.pbs.org/circleofstories/>

**Weaving traditions**

<http://www.montessoriworld.org/Handwork/weave/weaving1.html>

**Music**

**Digging Roots**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wAR70fiuQBg>

**Mils & EsKwol**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uv1C8FMaLPc>

**Shane Yellowbird**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iv-FWQmNscM>

**Short Dawg Tha Native**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VP46xKoGQyg>

**Jan Michael Looking Wolf**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uoqBcMr-cwI>

**Derek Miller**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cPUA2-4svH4>

**Skylar Wolf**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=88H812ojCsM>

**Stevie Salas**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBTHp9Jvlk>

**Lucie Idlout**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q6a25dGU9Uc>

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