

Hood Museum Exhibition *Cara Romero: Panûpünüwügai (Living Light)* Will Travel to Phoenix Art Museum

***Panûpünüwügai (Living Light)* Is the First Major Solo Museum Exhibition of Photographs by Artist Cara Romero**

On View at the Hood Museum January 18–August 10, 2025



(Left:) Cara Romero, *3 Sisters*, 2022, archival pigment print. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth: Purchased through the Acquisition and Preservation of Native American Art Fund; 2022.47.2. © Cara Romero.
(Right:) Cara Romero, *Golga*, 2021, archival pigment print. Collection of the artist. © Cara Romero.

October 15, 2024—Hanover, N.H.—The Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth, is pleased to announce that its landmark exhibition *Cara Romero: Panûpünüwügai (Living Light)*, the first major solo museum exhibition of artist Cara Romero’s photographs, will travel to [Phoenix Art Museum](#) in Phoenix, AZ, February 28–June 28, 2026, among other venues to be confirmed. Including over 60 large-scale photographs, this exhibition showcases Romero’s iconic images—spanning two decades—alongside new work on a scale never seen before. The exhibition is curated by Hood Museum Associate Director of Curatorial Affairs and Curator of Indigenous Art Dr. Jami Powell and will be on view at the Hood Museum from January 18 through August 10, 2025.

Romero explains, “The title of the exhibition, *Panûpünüwügai*, means living light in the Chemehuevi language. The way that we’ve put the words together, *Panûpünüwügai*, is a translation of the spirit of light. So, it has multiple meanings. It’s not

just about the subject matter that's in the show, it's also about the spirituality of how light plays with the subjects, how the light is alive, and how the subject matter is also living. It speaks to the nature of photography being a painting with light."

Powell adds, "Cara Romero is a fine art photographer and an exceptional storyteller. Her images are complex and generous, inviting people to ask questions they might otherwise be afraid to pose. I am excited for the opportunity to share this exhibition with audiences across the nation, and particularly at the Phoenix Art Museum, which is just a few hours from the Chemehuevi Reservation. The opportunity to have a venue so close to where Cara grew up and in a city with a large Native population is something we've hoped for since the earliest stages of this project."

Powell has organized the exhibition into themes based on throughlines found in Romero's photographic series: *California Desert & Mythos*, *(Re)Imagining Americana*, *Rematriation: Empowering Indigenous Women*, *Environmental Racism*, and *Ancestral Futures*.

In this exhibition, Romero's storytelling will transcend the two-dimensional realm with the inclusion of two installations that invite visitors to interact with her process. In *(Re)Imagining Americana*, an installation inspired by Romero's *TV Indians*, museum visitors can sit within a set of vintage televisions playing looped images and videos featuring behind-the-scenes content. Framing the background of the installation is a new monumental landscape image featuring the California desert. Visitors will be encouraged to take their own photos in this interactive space.

In *Ancestral Futures*, visitors will be immersed in a futuristic space surrounded by cobs of Indigenous corn suspended from the ceiling. Here, visitors will explore concepts of Indigenous futurisms and learn about the importance of ancestral foodways that can inform healthier futures.

The checklist also features multiple new and never-before-seen works, including four photographs that Romero created while in residency with the Hood Museum in June 2024. At this time, she collaborated with four Kānaka Maoli Dartmouth students to create four new works, two for her *First American Doll* series and two new underwater photographs. Romero has released one of these works ahead of the exhibition, a stunning black-and-white photograph titled *Ha'ina 'ia mai*. Romero and Teani DeFries '24, the subject in the photograph, collaborated to create an image that evoked joy but also sparked conversations about water as a life force for humans and the impacts of pollution upon it. *Ha'ina 'ia mai* (2024) will be on view in *Panûpünüwūgai (Living Light)*, as will the three other photographs Romero created while in Hanover. Those latter works will be unveiled on **January 17, 2025**, during the museum's **press preview**.



(Left:) Cara Romero photographs Teani DeFries '24 underwater during the creation of *Ha'ina 'ia mai* in June 2024. Photo courtesy of the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth.

(Right:) Cara Romero, *Ha'ina 'ia mai*, 2024, archival pigment print. Collection of the artist. © Cara Romero

Cara Romero is a renowned photographer whose visual storytelling brilliantly challenges dominant narratives of Indigenous decline and erasure. Her work disrupts preconceived notions about what it means to be a Native American and shows the diversity within Indigenous nations and communities. Romero speaks powerfully about her photographs and the stories they tell, which visitors will be able to experience through an audio tour produced by the Hood Museum and Lantern Audio. Audiences will also hear from six of Cara's collaborators. In addition to exploring the meanings and intentions of selected photographs, the audio tour also provides a glimpse behind the scenes into the process of their creation.

Romero says, "In a photographic practice that blends documentary and commercial aesthetics, I love to create stories that draw from intertribal knowledge to expose the fissures and fusions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultural memory, collective history, and futurity."

The Hood Museum has long been dedicated to building a strong collection of contemporary Indigenous and Native American artwork, and increasingly so over the past 15 years. The Hood Museum started collecting Romero's work in 2017 with the purchase of *TV Indians* (2017). Since beginning her tenure at the museum in 2018, Powell has acquired six additional photographs by Romero for the museum's collection—*The Zenith* (2022), *Water Memory* (2015), *Oil Bloom* (2015), *Kaa* (2017), *3 Sisters* (2022), and *17 Mile Road* (2019)—all of which will be featured in *Panûpünwügai (Living Light)*. Over the past four years, Romero's photographs

have been used for teaching purposes in over 45 Dartmouth courses and featured in three Hood Museum exhibitions.



Cara Romero, *Alika No. 2*, 2024, archival pigment print on Canson Legacy Platine Photo Paper. Collection of the artist. © Cara Romero

Selected Special Events

Press Preview | January 17, 2025, 9:15–11:30 am

Artist Cara Romero and Associate Director of Curatorial Affairs and Curator of Indigenous Art Dr. Jami Powell will give a tour of the exhibition and unveil never-before-seen works.

Opening Reception | January 17, 2025, 5:00 pm

A public opening reception featuring remarks from the artist, music and light refreshments.

Cara Romero and Joy Harjo in Conversation | May 1, 2025

Cara Romero will be joined by former U.S. Poet Laureate Joy Harjo (Mvskoke) for a discussion about the exhibition and its corresponding publication in the Hood Museum's auditorium.

Publication

The exhibition will be accompanied by a catalogue co-published by the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth, and Radius Books. The catalogue will feature contributions by notable scholars including Suzan Shown Harjo (Mvskoke), former U.S. Poet Laureate Joy Harjo (Mvskoke), and Jordan Poorman Cocker (Kiowa and Tongan), Curator of Indigenous Art at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, among others.

Audio Tour

Visitors can hear directly from the artist and six of the collaborators depicted in her photographs in an audio tour produced by the Hood Museum of Art and Lantern Audio. The audio tour, like the museum, is free.

Travel

Following its presentation at the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth, *Cara Romero: Panûpünüwügai (Living Light)* will travel to Phoenix Art Museum in Phoenix, AZ, February 28–June 28, 2026, among other national and international venues to be confirmed.

About the Artist

Cara Romero, b. 1977, Inglewood, CA (American / Chemehuevi), is an artist known for dramatic fine art photography that examines Indigenous life in contemporary contexts. An enrolled citizen of the Chemehuevi Indian Tribe, Romero was raised between contrasting settings: the rural Chemehuevi reservation in Mojave Desert, California, and the urban sprawl of Houston, Texas. Informed by her identity, Romero's visceral approach to representing Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultural memory, collective history, and lived experiences results in a blending of fine art and editorial styles. Maintaining a studio in Santa Fe, New Mexico, Romero regularly participates in Native American art fairs and panel discussions and was featured on PBS's *Craft in America* in 2019. Her award-winning work is included in numerous public and private collections, domestically and internationally, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, Guggenheim Museum, Amon Carter Museum, Peabody Essex Museum, and Forge Project Collections, among others. Romero travels between Santa Fe and the Chemehuevi Valley Indian Reservation, where she maintains close ties to her tribal community and ancestral homelands.

About the Hood Museum of Art

The Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth, centers art and people in teaching and learning through inclusive and robust academic, cultural, and civic engagements with art and its histories. Dartmouth's collections are among the oldest and largest of any college or university in the country, but it was not until 1985 that they were all housed under one roof and made available to faculty, students, and the public. For four decades, the Hood Museum has sought to advance learning, care, and connections through the reach and relevance of visual art and material culture as a nexus for the exchange of ideas.

In 2025, the Hood Museum of Art will commemorate its 40th anniversary with landmark exhibitions and innovative programs that support a visionary future for

art at Dartmouth and the communities of the Upper Valley region of New Hampshire and Vermont.

The 68,000 objects in the Hood Museum's collection represent the diverse artistic traditions of six continents, including, broadly, Native American, European and American, Asian, Indigenous Australian, African, and Melanesian art. The museum collects, preserves, and makes available for interpretation these works in the public trust and for the benefit of all.

In early 2019, the Hood Museum concluded a physical expansion and renovation project with architects Tod Williams and Billie Tsien and their team, as well as a reinvigoration of what it does and how it does it. More information:

<https://hoodmuseum.dartmouth.edu/explore/museum>

About Dartmouth College

Dartmouth College educates the most promising students and prepares them for a lifetime of learning and of responsible leadership through a faculty dedicated to teaching and the creation of knowledge. The Dartmouth model is unique in higher education: the fusion of a renowned liberal arts college and robust research university where students and faculty partner to take on the world's great challenges. Since its founding in 1769, Dartmouth has provided an intimate and inspirational setting where talented faculty, students, and staff—diverse in background but united in purpose—contribute to the strength of an exciting academic community that cuts easily across disciplines.

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