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REGION: Native American exhibit addresses stereotypes



AGUA CALIENTE CULTURAL MUSEUM/CONTRIBUTED IMAGE

"Where are the Tipis?...the changing perceptions about Indians" is a new exhibit at the Agua Caliente Cultural Museum in Palm Springs. The exhibit included a commissioned interactive art piece, on the left, by artist Gerald Clarke Jr., a member of the Cahuilla Band of Cahuilla Indians tribal council near Anza and Idyllwild Arts Academy visual arts chair. Many stereotypes people have about Indians came from the movies, and the exhibit also features movie posters.

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BY GAIL WESSON | STAFF WRITER | December 03, 2012; 10:25 AM | [Comments](#)

The Agua Caliente Cultural Museum has opened a new exhibition entitled, "Where Are the Tipis? ... The changing perceptions about Indians" to try to address some of the stereotypes about Native Americans in an educational way with a dose of humor.

The exhibit title has roots in the interaction of visitors with the museum staff. "The No. 1 question asked to our interpreters is, 'Where can we go find the Indians? Where are the tipis?'" curator Dawn Wellman said by phone. "It made me realize how little people know about Indians."

That started her research, where she learned, "Most everything that people know about Indians came from the movies." The exhibit includes movie posters and an exhibit video illustrates some of the


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stereotypes.

"We're trying to dispel some of that and let people know that not all are Plains Indians," she said, and wear feathered headdresses, ride horses or carry tomahawks.

"People think they're all the same, and there are almost 600 federally recognized tribes. They have their own culture, their own government, their own religion," she said.

Misinformation and preconceived ideas influence our view of Indians past and present, she noted in a news release. "It is an exhibition that is rich in humor and optimism, as well as historical fact."

Artist Gerald Clarke Jr., a member of the Cahuilla Band of Cahuilla Indians tribal council near Anza and the Idyllwild Arts Academy visual arts chairman, was commissioned to create an interactive piece of art to illustrate perceptions of Native Americans.

The plywood paper doll figure has a male side and a female side. Wellman said visitors may dress up the figure in stereotypical clothing, for example a male in jail clothes or a beer logo T-shirt, and female options include Pocahontas attire.

The exhibit also addresses issues related to how some sports team names are considered offensive by Native Americans.

Wellman said the exhibit is appropriate for all ages as a learning experience. She is the only non-Native American to be recognized as a lifetime honorary member of Nex'wetem — the Southern California Indian Basket Weavers Association. The Garner Valley resident is a fifth-generation member of a San Jacinto/Santa Rosa Mountain ranching family.

The exhibit runs through Oct. 20, 2013. Hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesdays through Saturdays, and noon to 5 p.m. Sundays. Hours change during the summer months. Admission is free. The museum is at 219 S. Palm Canyon Drive in downtown Palm Springs. Information: www.accmuseum.org or by phone at 760-778-1079.

Follow Gail Wesson on Twitter [@PE_GailWesson](https://twitter.com/PE_GailWesson) or online at blog.pe.com/san-jacinto

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