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Skirball Cultural Center Presents
On the National Language: The Poetry of America's Endangered Tongues
by Artist B. A. Van Sise

**Forty-Six Portraits—Each Depicting a Person Who Speaks an Endangered Language—
Reveal the Rich Linguistic Diversity and Complex History of the United States**

October 17, 2024—March 2, 2025



MOHAWK | Nihahsennaa Peters | St. Armand, New York
tekariho:ken *between two worlds*

“The ‘person’ of the language speaker and the deeper meanings of their linguistic anchors are revealed by B.A.’s innovative, creative, and humorous vision in ways that occasionally take you by surprise but always feel authentic.” — Cary Benbow, *f!stop Magazine*

LOS ANGELES, CA—The Skirball Cultural Center presents *On the National Language: The Poetry of America's Endangered Tongues*, a poetic, visual, and linguistic invitation to reflect on cultural heritage and diversity in the United States. The exhibition, on view from October 17, 2024, through March 2, 2025, features a selection of forty-six portraits taken by

artist B. A. Van Sise of speakers and students of endangered languages living in the country today.

Van Sise worked closely with the subjects on the development of their portraits, which are accompanied by a word or phrase that was usually chosen by the subject in their endangered language. The artist and subject also provide a poetic interpretation of each word in English.

“At the Skirball, as an institution steeped in Jewish and American ideals, we honor the contributions of those who came before us—on whose shoulders we stand—in all their diversity,” said Skirball Vice President and Museum Director Sheri Bernstein. “*On the National Language* celebrates the vibrant tapestry of cultural and linguistic traditions that have shaped and continue to enrich the United States.”

The exhibition includes languages spoken by dozens of cultural groups in the United States, including Jewish languages such as Yiddish and Ladino, indigenous languages such as Apache, Choctaw, and Navajo; and European-derived languages such as French Creole and Pennsylvania Dutch.

Working in collaboration and consultation with many indigenous and diasporic cultural organizations as well as Native Tribes and Nations, Van Sise aims to bring awareness to these languages and the efforts of their speakers to revitalize them today.

An audio component in the exhibition will enable visitors to listen to the subjects of the portraits reciting their word or phrase in their endangered languages, connecting the speakers to their voices in an immersive and dynamic way. Additionally, visitors will have an opportunity to share their own language and poetry through writing or audio recording, further showcasing the legacy and impact of immigration and the power of pluralism within American society.

The exhibition coincides with the publication of Van Sise’s new monograph *On the National Language: The Poetry of America’s Endangered Tongues* (Schiffer Publishing, September 2024).

Curatorial Acknowledgment

On the National Language: The Poetry of America’s Endangered Tongues is co-curated by Associate Curator Vicki Phung Smith and Exhibition Coordinator Sarah Daymude.

On the National Language was produced with the assistance of the Tribal Trust Foundation, a 501(c)3 dedicated to the preservation of indigenous cultures and wisdom through philanthropy and education. The project was awarded the 2024 Anthem Award for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion by the International Academy of Digital Arts & Sciences,

and was made possible by the generous support of the New York State Council on the Arts and the Phillip and Edith Leonian Foundation.

About the Skirball Cultural Center

The Skirball Cultural Center is a place of meeting guided by the Jewish tradition of welcoming the stranger and inspired by the American democratic ideals of freedom and equality. We welcome people of all communities and generations to participate in cultural experiences that celebrate discovery and hope, foster human connections, and call upon us to help build a more just society.

Visiting the Skirball

The Skirball is located at 2701 N. Sepulveda Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90049. Museum hours: Tuesday–Friday, 12:00–5:00 pm; Saturday–Sunday, 10:00 am–5:00 pm; closed Mondays and holidays. Reservations are recommended for General Admission and the permanent exhibition Noah's Ark at the Skirball, which requires timed entry and is ticketed separately. Tickets are \$18 for adults, and \$15 for seniors, full-time students, and children 2-17 years old. The Skirball is always FREE for Members and children under 2 years old. For general information, the public may call (310) 440-4500 or visit skirball.org.

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