

# Bockley Gallery



## *Frank Big Bear*

Opening Reception: Friday, February 17, 6 to 9 pm

Exhibition: February 18 through March 17, 2012

Bockley Gallery is pleased to announce its upcoming exhibition of Frank Big Bear's new work. *Skull Paintings: an Homage to Fritz Scholder* presents new paintings, drawings, and collages that reveal Frank Big Bear's current inspirations and obsessions. Consisting of bold portraits of skeletal warriors, among other images, his current series of paintings responds to work by the American artist Fritz Scholder (1937-2005). Another of Big Bear's muses, the rocker and poet Patti Smith, is revealed in a large work incorporating 150 individual collages created on Smith's portrait—actually invitations for Bockley Gallery's past exhibition *Patti Smith American Artist, Photographs by Frank Stefanko*.

Big Bear's images also play on a traditional trope which curator Todd Bockley describes as “mediations on the artist in studio—a classic Western subject—but with the American Indian artist as warrior.” We see the artist with paintbrushes that become arrows, a side table and still life that become a palette that becomes a war shield. Other images foreground spectral faces against a backdrop of the dark cosmos. Often, behind all these images, the artist creates a frame, a window onto the horizon, a reminder of Big Bear's life on Lake Superior.

*...I think my portraits have a spiritual quality to them, but are also psychological profiles and hybrids of several people, including the artist. ---Frank Big Bear, (Tweed Museum of Art, 2009)*

These portraits—grimacing skulls, some patched with stitches like the bones of Frankenstein's monster—suggest the American Indian artist as both “freak” and “warrior,” as Big Bear says. His works also suggest a conundrum: the contemporary American Indian artist regarded as both stereotype and anomaly at once.

Frank Big Bear's work is in the collections of The British Museum, London, England; Walker Art Center; Weisman Art Museum, Minneapolis; Tweed Museum of Art, Duluth; Plains Art Museum, Fargo; Minnesota Museum of American Art, St. Paul; Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul.