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The Armory Show and Independent Art Fair

VARIOUS LOCATIONS, New York

March 2–6, 2017

The gestures of the Native American Cheyenne River Tribe are shown by Donald Ellis in fuller force with a series of ledger drawings and two larger paintings on animal hide that form the oldest ensemble of work at the fair, dating back to the 1850s. The imagery transmitted in many of these pieces, collected and traded from indigenous peoples, documents the shifting of indigenous culture under colonialism for future generations and other peoples—via depictions, for instance, of early, hostile encounters between Native Americans and U.S. military, or in the very medium or the drawings themselves: accounting ledger books introduced by U.S. government agents starting in the middle of the nineteenth century and used by indigenous artists as a new material resource. Such an unintended outcome is all the more potent and poignant at the moment that a series of confrontations at Standing Rock over land rights and the threat of environmental degradation in the Dakotas has brought issues relating to the U.S. government's disregarded treaties for native land back to public attention, but then was superseded yet again by onslaughts of bad-faith politics and rapid-fire modern media news cycles.



5 Cheyenne pictorial hide, Central Plains, ca. 1890-95.