

Joke's On You: New Red Order Parodies Society's Deepest Settler Desires

A carnival of funhouse mirrors, *Feel at Home Here* stretches and distorts perceptions of reality to reflect on the paradoxical settler desire for indigeneity.



New Red Order, "Cover the Earth (detail)" (2021), painted mural with cut vinyl, dibond prints, kiddie pool, sod, in atable alligator, turtle sandbox, beach towels, towel racks, beach balls, beach chairs, beach umbrella, real estate lawn sign, cooler, and pool noodles; dimensions variable (all images courtesy Artists Space, New York; photo: Filip Wolak)

In 1834, a group of politically powerful and patriotically inclined white men formed the Improved Order of Red Men. Modeled after their perceptions of Indigenous cultures, members of the fraternal organization, which included influential figures such as Warren G. Harding and Theodore Roosevelt, would dress in redface and perform "sacred" rituals — a demonstration of not only their affiliation within the brotherhood but also with the land they claimed as their birthright. New Red Order (NRO), whose core members include Indigenous artists Adam Khalil, Zack Khalil, and Jackson Polys, plays off of the Improved Order of Red Men, by interrogating the role that the exploitation of indigeneity has played in shaping our present. Collectively, members imagine what an Indigenous future could look like. In *Feel at Home Here*, now on view at Artists Space, NRO creates a carnival of funhouse mirrors, stretching and distorting our perceptions of reality to open up new reflections on the ultimately paradoxical desire for indigeneity.

Self-identified as a public secret society, NRO deals mostly with that which is hidden in plain sight — namely the profiteering off of and erasure of Indigenous experiences. The mysterious organization, which enjoys a rotating membership of secret "informants," often uses a combination of satire and cryptic messaging to facilitate a state of confusion, providing a fresh lens through which viewers can question and even reframe their conflicted relationships with indigeneity.

Feel at Home Here, welcomes viewers with "Conscientious Conscriptor" (2018 – Ongoing), a functioning recruitment booth that extends an open invitation to any and all interested in joining the organization as an "informant." The booth is accompanied by "Never Settle: Calling In" (2019), and "Never Settle: The Program" (2018 – Ongoing), mock-documentary videos in which an upbeat white recruiter appeals to the settler guilt of the presumably non-Indigenous viewer, proposing a way for recruits to harness and re-channel their illicit desire for indigeneity toward the growth of an Indigenous future. Coated in the positive professionalism of a corporate diversity training video or LinkedIn post, NRO's parodic recruitment pieces hone in on a deeper existential uneasiness, assuaging viewers who have inherited the role of the oppressor. Rest assured though, in NRO's Indigenous future, "there is a place for you."

After a year in which many have taken to the stage of social media (either by personal choice or due to external pressure) to publicly work through their relationships with race, privilege, and complicity in systems of oppression, these works, with their manifestos for decolonization projected over stock videos, take on new dimensions. With social media activity ranging from the educational to the self-flagellating, the performance of confronting a decolonial reality has proven a messy, if not somewhat embarrassing, project. However, where some may see only empty gestures, NRO identifies a site of potential, asking: How can cringe be repurposed and organized for material change?



Installation view of *New Red Order: Feel at Home Here*, Artists Space, 2021 (photo by Filip Wolak)

While NRO thrives within the realm of contradiction and the abstruse, at times *Feel at Home Here*'s use of entendre and innuendo risks burying the organization's work in the detritus of over-stimulation. "Cover the Earth" (2021), for example, NRO's commentary on retail experience and lifestyle aspiration, creates a beach zone backdropped by a collage mural that overshadows the nearby "Progenerator" (2020 – Ongoing), one of the show's more interesting works, in which a speculative historical timeline superimposes the founding of New Red Order onto that of the Improved Order of Red Men.

The culmination of a multi-year collaboration between NRO and Artists Space, *Feel at Home Here* provides a thoughtful survey of the group's history of productive antagonization both within and outside of the art world. In the past, NRO has used their power as "informants" as leverage in effecting institutional change, such as the incorporation of land acknowledgement practices. Most recently, they played a role in the removal of MOCAD's director, Elysia Borowy-Reeder, by withholding artwork until museum employee demands were met. In



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"CULTURE CAPTURE: CRIMES AGAINST REALITY" (2020), NRO turns its focus to a different locus of power, the monument. Located on the bottom floor of the exhibit, the video depicts a speculative technology where accomplices, informants willing to commit "crimes against reality," are dispatched to monuments to digitally capture their images, like the Theodore Roosevelt statue in front of the American Museum of Natural History. These images are used to compile 3D models of the monuments that the organization can then manipulate virtually, redistributing the power of both implosion and metastatic regeneration into the hands of the people.

With an organization whose practice of constructing speculative realities has been a bellwether for societal change, a natural next question is: So where are we headed? "Give it Back"(2020), a street-facing window installation that emulates a real-estate office, proposes the repatriation of land to Indigenous people. Curious passersby on White Street are able to peruse listings detailing instances of land being released to Indigenous groups or individuals. While this might seem like an unrealistic and substantial undertaking, recent events present a harsh reality that make repatriation seem like the bare minimum. In the past months, excavations of residential schools in Canada have unearthed the remains of hundreds of Indigenous children in unmarked graves. A weapon of cultural genocide, these schools, run by the Catholic church, housed Indigenous children who were forcibly removed from their families and communities for re-education. Notably, 10 Catholic churches on Indigenous land have been set on fire in the past weeks.

As NRO's speculative futures merge with present realities, they offer a reminder that burning, too, can be an act of genesis.

New Red Order: Feel at Home Here continues through August 22 at Artist's Space (11 Cortlandt Alley, Tribeca, Manhattan).

The exhibition is curated by Jay Sanders with Stella Cilman