

# HIGH DESERT MUSEUM

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## **Award Announced for High Desert Museum's *Desert Reflections: Water Shapes the West***

***Ambitious original exhibition, on display now, receives prestigious award***

BEND, OR — The Western Museums Association, the esteemed nonprofit organization for museum professionals serving 11 Western states and Canadian provinces, has named the High Desert Museum's original exhibition *Desert Reflections: Water Shapes the West* the recipient of the 2019 Charles Redd Center for Western Studies Award for Exhibition Excellence.

The award will be presented at the Western Museums Association's annual meeting October 4 – 7, held this year in Boise, Idaho. The award recognizes outstanding original, temporary exhibitions that further the study and understanding of the American West.

Past recipients include the Boise Art Museum, the Oakland Museum of California and the J. Paul Getty Museum. The High Desert Museum received Honorable Mention for the award in 2016 for *Art for a Nation: Inspiration from the Great Depression*. The exhibit merged contemporary and historic artwork to explore the artistic legacy of the Works Progress Administration in the High Desert.

"The success of *Desert Reflections: Water Shapes the West* hinged on the collaborative and interdisciplinary approach of its organizers," said Michael Fiegneschuh, who led the 2019 selection committee. "It is a sterling example of an exhibition that is both timely and enduring, as well as accessible to a diverse community of learners."

*Desert Reflections* opened on April 27 and will be on display through September 29. The exhibit weaves together science, history, art and contemporary issues to explore the role of water in the region's past, present and future. By connecting visitors to water and its management through the lens of three different basins in the region—the Mid-Columbia River Basin, Great Salt Lake Basin and Klamath Basin—the exhibit illuminates how water has shaped the High Desert's natural, cultural and geological history and explores how it features prominently in contemporary issues such as resource consumption, Indigenous sovereignty and climate change.

"This award is a great honor for our entire staff and the artists who committed their time and talents to the exhibition," said Museum Executive Director Dana Whitelaw, Ph.D. "*Desert Reflections* shows how collaboration across disciplines, artistic mediums, viewpoints and cultures can reveal new understandings of how water shapes the natural and cultural landscapes of the American West."

In addition, *Desert Reflections* connects visitors to the significance of water through visual art, music and spoken word performances. With the support of an Oregon Community Foundation Creative Heights grant, the Museum commissioned work from renowned artists for the exhibition and took them on field trips into the desert with experts to spark discussion and inspiration for the pieces. The artists

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include Bend Creative Laureate and spoken word artist Jason Graham, known as MOSley Wotta; Klamath-Modoc visual artist Ka'ila Farrell-Smith; Eugene mixed-media art collective Harmonic Laboratory; and Dana Reason, composer from Oregon State University. During a live performance of Dana Reason's composition, artist Andrew Myers completed his 3D sculptural drawing inspired by her work.

The High Desert Museum partnered with a long list of scientists, experts and instructors who led training sessions for the artists and curators and served at the Museum as speakers. They include Eric Quempts, director for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation Department of Natural Resources; Perry Chocktoot, director of the Culture and Heritage Department for the Klamath Tribes; Dennis Jenkins, senior research archaeologist at the University of Oregon Museum of Natural and Cultural History; Daniele McKay, adjunct instructor with the University of Oregon Department of Earth Science; Rebekah Burchell, senior fisheries biologist with PGE; and Jason Gritzner, U.S. Forest Service hydrologist and watershed program manager.

Programs associated with *Desert Reflections* have brought together scholars, literary artists, performing artists, educators, resource managers and community members to deepen our understanding of water in the West. On September 11 at 6:00 pm as part of the exhibit, Klamath Falls-based journalist Emma Marris will tell the story of Upper Klamath Lake and the Klamath River in a talk titled "Klamath 2050: River of Hope." Space is still available. For more info, go to [highdesertmuseum.org/river-of-hope](http://highdesertmuseum.org/river-of-hope).

*Desert Reflections: Water Shapes the West* ([highdesertmuseum.org/desert-reflections](http://highdesertmuseum.org/desert-reflections)) will be on display at the High Desert Museum through Sunday, September 29, 2019 and is free with Museum admission.

*Desert Reflections* is made possible by Alex Hodge Construction, Avion Water Company, Bend Cultural Tourism Fund, The Bend Foundation, The Ford Family Foundation, FM News 100 & 1110 AM KBND, KTVZ-KFXO, The Oregon Community Foundation Creative Heights grant, the Oregon Cultural Trust and Visit Central Oregon, with support from Bend Magazine, Central Oregon Radiology Associates, Chubb, The Jackson Foundation and the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies.

## ABOUT THE MUSEUM:

THE HIGH DESERT MUSEUM opened in Bend, Oregon in 1982. It brings together wildlife, cultures, art, history and the natural world to convey the wonder of North America's High Desert. The Museum uses indoor and outdoor exhibits, wildlife in natural habitats and living history demonstrations to help people discover and appreciate this diverse region. The Museum is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization accredited by the American Alliance of Museums, is a Smithsonian Affiliate and was a 2018 finalist for the National Medal for Museum and Library Services. [highdesertmuseum.org](http://highdesertmuseum.org)

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