



Friend of a Friend Gallery

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## Second Skin First Body

Chelsea Kaiah & Ry La

Friend of a Friend is pleased to present *Second Skin First Body*, an exhibition of works by Denver artists Chelsea Kaiah and Ry La. The title of the exhibition refers to their first-generation identities as foundations for an exploratory journey into who they choose to be - adding and growing a second skin onto the historical, cultural and genetic circumstances they have been born into.

Kaiah and La use multifaceted ways of creation by flexing between the labor of making a living and the role of an artist. Working as a full time bead worker, Kaiah's practice is part of an ongoing exploration of storytelling. The imagery of a woman embodying a coyote for example investigates a character of chaos and disruption. As she states, "The Ute's knowledge about our creation starts with a coyote:

*In the beginning there was Sinawav (creator) and coyote. Creator left one day leaving an important job to coyote- a bag of sticks was to be spread equally over the land. Coyote is naturally curious and mischievous and disobeys the creator. Out came many sticks, all different kinds, fighting and having wars because they were so close together, creators' intention was to spread them out. When creator returned there were only a few sticks in the bag, they were noble and stayed. They became "the people" Nuuchuu later on the Utes. They were given kava-avich the Rocky Mountains, a favored land full of resources."*

It is very relate-able to be curious and mischievous like coyote. These traits, often perceived as negative ones, have become a character trope and carry over to other cultures' depictions of the animal. But in Ute mythology coyote's curiosity and mischief has more positive than negative connotations. Coyote's nature enabled him to play a vital role in our creation. Without these traits, a different reality might exist where people do not make mistakes and where coyotes roam being obedient. Coyote's role in the creation story has instead created a world where knowledge is built as a narrative rather than being bestowed or imposed upon us.

Ry La uses industrial materials and an amalgamation of imagery to delve into their own struggles with identity. As a self-taught tattoo artist, La is drawn to the grit and ugliness of disorderly processes and the beauty that evolves from it. For *Second Skin First Body* they are creating a framework made from galvanized pipe and fixtures with chained rope suspending a tattooed surface. This sculpture exposes a complex multiplicity of forces that perhaps does not want to be untangled but instead desires to transform and exude and exude comfortability in one's own skin. This drive for understanding via sculpture and drawing grasps for a sense of visual and conceptual balance in a world where there may be none.

## About the artists:

Born on the Uncompahgre Ute reservation spanning the border of Utah and Colorado, **Chelsea Kaiah** (b. 1995) is paternally Ute and Apache, and Irish on her mothers side. Her father taught her to hunt, camp, and value nature while her aunts and cousins taught her the craft of being a Native woman. These are lessons they also taught her Irish mother to uphold. This foundation created a multi-skilled creator as Chelsea moved off the reservation for better education. She later attended Watkins college of Art and Design in Nashville, Tennessee and received her Bachelors in Fine Art becoming the first on both sides of her family to be a college graduate. Relocating back to Ute ancestral lands she moved to Denver, Colorado in 2020, a journey that has led her to share her individual experience of being part of the historically excluded. Chelsea uses themes of sovereignty, healing, and power to remind her community and others that, "There is no rising without falling." Despite the knowledge that has been lost through acts of colonization, genocide, and assimilation, the Native people and culture today thrive in creativity and reclamation. As a mixed-Native, Chelsea believes in the importance of healing those traumas for the next generation. Chelsea works as a full time beadworker, activist, and artist.

**Ry La** was born in Wheat Ridge, Colorado and currently works out of their private studio in Denver. They developed a strong interest in the arts from an early age and sought classes that would later help strengthen their skills and deepen their love for art. In 2017, Ry studied visual arts at Metropolitan State University for two semesters before dropping out and pursuing self guided education. Having experimented with a multitude of mediums throughout the subsequent years such as photography, graphic design, music, and clothing, they landed on tattooing which has become the main focus of their time and energy. Their current work explores the intersection of tattooing and the fine arts with an everlasting effort to conjoin the two.

**Friend of a Friend** is a new, provisional and hopefully itinerant project space located in the recently renovated Evans School Building. Co-Directed by artist Derrick Velasquez and art historian Lauren Hartog, FOAF hopes to act as a bottle rocket that ascends quickly into the atmosphere, exploding and coming to an end in a shower of beautiful yet temporary sparks.

## Works on View:

Ryan La

*Flux 01*

2021

Graphite, newsprint, thread, incense, rubber sealant, wood, canvas, metal

\$600

Ryan La

*Flux 02*

2021

Thermal paper, thermal ink, masking tape, thread, incense, rubber sealant, wood, metal

\$600

Ryan La

*Flux 03*

2021

Steel, iron, metal, rope, rubber sealant, silicone, tattoo ink

\$2000

A piece on ever changing perceptions of identity formed by pattern and habit; a desire to adopt and explore fluidity within the parameters of our one body.

Chelsea Kaiah

*Anti-hero Bag*

2021

Quill work (porcupine quills), modern and vintage beads, deer hide, Blue Bird Flour bag (inside lining), sinew, and rope

\$1,800.00

This bag juxtaposes traditional Ute bead work of a gridded diamond, to a contemporary style of bead work using organic figures. It also contrasts in using beads, after colonization, with more ancestral materials and craft of quill work and hide-making. Its made with over 1,000 porcupine quills, each peak of the zig-zag pattern equals one quill flattened and hand trimmed. It is also made with sinew (bison) processed and made by Chelsea. Although it is a small piece, it is made and packed full of ancestral knowledge handed down within Chelsea's family.

Chelsea Kaiah

*Cattail Bag*

2021

Matte bugle beads, matte and gloss modern seed beads, 1930 multi-faceted beads, 24k gold beads, porcupine quills, vegan leather, and rope.

\$1200.00

Chelsea Kaiah

*Distance*

2021

10x10 gouache painting on wood panel

\$200.00

Chelsea Kaiah

*Polka Dot Head*

2021

Matte and gloss Czech beads, leather backing, pinback

\$200.00

Chelsea Kaiah  
*First and Second Coyote*  
2019-2020  
NFS

The first and second beaded pieces of Chelsea's coyote heads, a continuous project. Interest in commissioning pieces similar to these please reach out at [chelseakaiah.com](http://chelseakaiah.com)

Chelsea Kaiah  
*Three Faces*  
2021  
Clay, paint, foam, various textiles, sinew, metal install and mounts.  
\$250.00 each

Chelsea Kaiah  
*Bead Strand*  
2021  
Stoneware clay, spray paint, poly rope, metal hooks with hide.  
\$300.00

Chelsea Kaiah  
*Reproductive Sovereignty*  
2021  
Heavy cotton paper, gouache, watercolor  
\$250

This painting discusses the important role of cattails in connection with the coming of age of Apache women; it is a vital plant in ceremonies used today. The bold lines make a shape of ovaries, a single drop of blood disrupts the pattern. A celebration of women for all phases of life.