



**Virgil Ortiz: La Renaissance Indigène** and **Will Wilson: Auto Immune Response** were organized by the Heard Museum, Phoenix, Arizona, and curated by Joe Baker (Delaware Tribe of Indians), Lloyd Kiva New Curator of Fine Art.

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At top: Will Wilson, *Auto Immune Response* #7 (detail), 2004. Archival  
inkjet print, 112 x 198 cm.  
Collection of the artist.

At left: Virgil Ortiz, cryptic callig-  
raphy (detail).

# WILL WILSON AUTO IMMUNE RESPONSE

**Virgil Ortiz**

LA RENAISSANCE INDIGÈNE



Will Wilson, *Auto Immune Response #5*, 2004. Archival inkjet print, 112 x 277 cm. Collection of the artist.

As a photographer and installation artist, **WILL WILSON** (Diné/Bilagaana, b. 1969) creates a deliberate counternarrative to romantic visions of Native people living in an unchanging past. Though born in San Francisco, he draws inspiration from the many years he spent living on the Navajo Reservation as a child.

In his latest work, Wilson offers a powerful vision of a postapocalyptic future that elicits an eerie sense of foreboding. The panoramic vistas created by Wilson's intricate photomontages show a world that is both breathtakingly beautiful and, as the ominous gas masks suggest, poisonous, while the interior scenes describe technology and ritual. The artist himself reappears throughout the narrative as the anonymous protagonist.

In this imagined environment, comforting symbols of cultural persistence, such as a hogan (a traditional Navajo dwelling), coexist with computers, wires, and futuristic furnishings. By constructing a steel hogan in the gallery, Wilson transforms the visitor from observer to participant. Enveloped by the artist's landscape, we are asked to consider our own place in the universe and, as exhibition curator Joe Baker from the Heard Museum states, "the complex environmental and social issues that are a consequence of contemporary society."



Virgil Ortiz, *Master & 2 Tics*, 2002. Cochiti red clay, white clay slip, red clay slip, black (wild spinach) paint, 69 x 38 x 30 cm. Collection of Cyndy and Bob Gallegos. Photo by Chad Tanner.

**VIRGIL ORTIZ** (Cochiti, b. 1969) is an artist whose work defies easy definition. He is a ceramicist, sculptor, jeweler, painter, fashion designer, trendsetter, and provocateur. Situated between the traditions of his Native community and the expansive frontier of the international art world, Ortiz's work is personal, electric, and audacious.

Ortiz, who began making pottery with his family at the age of six, has adapted the artistic techniques and principles of Cochiti traditions to his innovative multimedia works. His early work ranges from bold, graphic designs on olla forms to daring, sensuous renditions of clergy, circus performers, and dominatrixes. By adding provocative details such as pierced nipples, leather clothing, and tattoos to his figures, Ortiz continues Cochiti's use of figurative pottery as social critique.

Ortiz's fascination with surface decoration and body adornment, paired with a prescient collaboration with fashion designer Donna Karan in 2003, led to the creation of his first couture collection. The artist's signature calligraphic style, use of diverse textures and media, and uninhibited approach to contemporary subjects are magnified in this new body of work.

Kathleen Ash-Milby (Navajo), 2006  
Assistant Curator, National Museum of the American Indian