SONYA KELLIHER-COMBS (Inupiaq/Athabascan) creates sculptural and mixed-media work that captures both vulnerability and strength in her use of organic and synthetic materials. A repeating motif in her work, the amorphous pouch forms seem to have once covered some form or shape that has now vanished, and they appear as ghostly, empty shells. They are perfect containers for her to wrestle with secrets that are unspeakable or forced into hiding.

NADIA MYRE (Anishinaabe) explores scars, both personal and communal, in her mixed-media and video creations. Myre’s epic work, The Scar Project, includes hundreds of canvases, each representing an individual’s scar story. All of these “scars” tell stories of trauma and conflict but, like literal scars, the healing process itself can make the site of the wound stronger.

Above: Small Secrets (installation and detail), 2009. Walrus stomach, human hair, glass beads, and nylon thread.
HIDE
SKIN AS MATERIAL AND METAPHOR
MICHAEL BELMORE’s (Ojibway) sculptural works are meditative reflections on North American topography. With his work in hammered and chiseled copper he has transformed inert, heavy metal sheets into thin, undulating membranes. Like any skin its surface shows scars, whether from human activity or natural events.

KC ADAMS (Métis) creates enhanced images of people who are racial hybrids with both Native and European ancestry.

ROSALIE FAVELL (Cree Métis) draws her subjects from the Native community of artists and curators in Canada and around the world, celebrating their individuality and acknowledging their participation in a global indigenous community.

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The Urban Indian Series, by TERRANCE HOULE (Blood), is a narrative work that walks us through a “normal” day for an urban Indian, invisibly observing him and forcing us to face our assumptions about Indian identity.

HIDE: SKIN AS MATERIAL AND METAPHOR

For Native people, skin encompasses an entire universe of meaning. Our own skin functions as a canvas that we can inscribe with messages about our identity or use as a shield to protect and hide our secrets. As a material, animal skin or hide has had a long history within Native culture. It is a symbolic reminder of historical misrepresentation, exploitation, and racial politics. The artists selected for HIDE draw upon this subject in multi-faceted ways, using both the material and concept of skin as a metaphor for widespread issues surrounding identity and personal, historical, and environmental trauma and perseverance. In their work, they interrupt our understanding of race, distort our perception of "skin," and breach the artificial boundaries created by this potent subject matter. Rather than hiding difficult issues, they expose what is beneath the surface.

Sonya Kelliher-Combs, Nadia Myre, and Michael Belmore each present bodies of sculptural and mixed-media work that explore skin as a surface—revealing, concealing, and defining. The work of these artists awakens the senses, drawing the audience into a tangible experience of the materiality of their work as well as making them think about the complex ideas that emerge from this compelling art. The photographers invited to participate in the exhibition—Arthur Renwick, KC Adams, Terrance Houle, Rosalie Favell, and Sarah Sense—have created a diverse collection of portraits that play with and challenge our notions about the representation of Native people.

Kathleen Ash-Milby, Curator

SONYA KELLIHER-COMBS: MARCH 6–AUGUST 1, 2010
NADIA MYRE: MARCH 6–AUGUST 1, 2010

HIDE: Skin as Material and Metaphor is a two-part exhibition. Part One will be open to the public March 6, 2010 until August 1, 2010. Part Two will be open to the public September 4, 2010 until January 16, 2011.

George Gustav Heye Center
One Bowling Green
New York, NY 10004

Open: 10 am to 5 pm every day, and Thursdays until 8 pm.
Free admission
The museum is fully accessible.

To become a member of the National Museum of the American Indian, call 1-800-242-NMAI [6624] or email NMAImember@si.edu.