Of Root & Bone: Women of the Ramapough Lenape Nation

Of Root & Bone: Women of the Ramapough Lenape Nation brings together the work of three artists—photographer Lisa Levart, sculptor Joan Harmon, and sound artist Quasia Powell—in a collaborative, site-specific installation at the Paterson Museum. Rooted in the mythology, ancestral knowledge, and living traditions of the Ramapough Munsee Lenape Nation, the exhibition creates a space where portraiture, plant forms, and sound converge.

Lisa Levart's suspended fabric banners feature fifteen Ramapough Lenape women. Each woman portrays an ancestral myth or story of her choosing—one that resonates with her contemporary life. Through these images, ancestral stories become a living dialogue between past and present, connecting cultural memory, identity, and the enduring presence of women within their community and on the land. This ongoing series, begun in 2017, extends Levart's interest in the intersection of fine art and social engagement. Her process is collaborative, making space for personal agency and the radical act of declaring, "See me."

Joan Harmon has created an environment drawn from indigenous medicinal plants from the Hudson Valley to surround and engage with Lisa Levart's portraits. The leaves of the maple tree, sassafras, bloodroot, and tulip tree inspire forms made of layers of paper, wax, and pigment, suspended so that they move and cast shadows on the women's portraits as if they were within a forest. The sculpture hanging in the center of the installation is inspired by the black cohosh rhizome and is made of paper, wax, and metal.

Moving through the installation is an evocative soundscape by Quasia Powell, a member of the Ramapough Munsee Lenape Nation. Natural sounds and voice extend the work beyond the visual, immersing the viewer in an atmosphere that evokes the presence of the living landscape.

Created with the guidance of Grandmother Clara Soaring Hawk, Ambassador of the Ramapough Munsee Lenape Nation, Of Root & Bone brings together contemporary artistic practices with stories and knowledge carried across generations.

Portrait, plant, and sound become interconnected forms—body and earth, memory and place, root and lineage. Together, the portraits, plant forms, and sound create an immersive environment that invites a deeper connection between the viewer and the natural world.