



# Nicholas Galanin

Aáni yéi xat duwasáakw (I am called Land)

**LARGE EXHIBITION TEXT**

# Nicholas Galanin

Aáni yéi xat duwasáakw (I am called Land)

**MAY 22–NOVEMBER 30, 2025**

Nicholas Galanin (b. 1979) is an acclaimed Tlingít and Unanga̋ artist based in Alaska. His multidisciplinary practice is grounded in awareness and activism. By blending traditional craft with contemporary art, Galanin affirms that Indigenous art is always evolving. His work champions and celebrates Indigenous identity, narratives, representation, and cultural contributions. Through his sculptures and site-specific pieces, he advocates for decolonization, responsibility to the land, and Indigenous self-determination.

The Tlingít, whose name means “people of the tides,” are a Native group from the Pacific Northwest Coast, especially the southeastern coast of Alaska. Galanin’s exhibition and artwork, *Aáni yéi xat duwasáakw* (*I am called Land*) expresses the belief that land and water are the beating heart of all life, and that all humans have a duty to care for the earth. The work includes a moving sculpture and immersive video projection. It invites us to think about the deep connections between land, people, and culture.

Upon entering the darkened gallery, we step into a watery underworld. In the center hangs a large wooden Tlingít box drum, or kóok gaaw. These drums are traditionally hung from the ceilings of clan houses. Kóok gaaw are made from natural materials and decorated with symbols important to each clan. The drums hold strong cultural and spiritual meaning, and are played during ceremonies, such as memorials.

In this installation, a robotic arm strikes the drum to the rhythm of a human heartbeat. The sound and vibrations tirelessly fill the darkened space. Galanin explains, “The absence of a living player for the drum points to the extraction of culture from people; automation as a tool for erasure; and forced compliance with extractive systems. The work’s title is a reminder that everything living, engineered, and built, comes from Land, and depends on Land and Water. *Aáni yéi xat duwasáakw* reflects on the impacts of our movements (what we build and what we destroy) on Land, Water, and ourselves.”

This exhibition coincides with the inaugural Boston Public Art Triennial. Please visit Galanin’s monumental public installation, *I think it goes like this (pick yourself up)* around the corner on Evans Way. MAAM is proud to be the only museum partner commissioning a second project by a Boston Public Art Triennial artist.

MAAM gratefully acknowledges the engineering contributions of Ani Prasad and Aaron Size of Helbling USA, Cambridge, MA. MAAM's unique and imaginative exhibitions, events, and programs could not happen without the support of Anonymous, Natalie and Jake Lemle, The Jean Gaulin Foundation, and The Andrée LeBoeuf Foundation  
—thank you!

Additionally, the artist would like to thank the Alturas Foundation for their support of the creation of *Aáni yéi xat duwasáakw (I am called Land)* as part of its Artist In Residence program. The Alturas Foundation Residency Program encourages artists to explore fresh directions and provides opportunities to develop new ideas over an extended period of time.