

1)

Oregon Country Fair is located on an



indigenous burial ground and a traditional village site;

2) Archeology is rooted in racism;

3) Colonial nostalgia doesn't rinse out in the ~~sauna~~ shower.

A brief history of Oregon Country Fair playing Indian, disrespecting tribal members, and a "totem pole" made by white people with LED lights for animal eyes...

Robert DeSpain, one of the fair's early managers and founder of the archeology committee, shared publicly,



~~The Fair~~
 appropriation
 that we
 were
 practicing [in
 the
 early
 days of
 the
 Fair]
 was
 really
 a
 desire

for a deeper, more meaningful, spiritual way of life that we saw in Native traditions. I realized it was a fantasy I was trying to live imagining myself as Native.

DeSpain was in the minority of fair-goers who have listened to Native voices and questioned his actions.

By now we all know the early story with The Ritz, the independent business operating at OCF with a cover-charge for showers and saunas used by attendees. The initial makeshift setup with ten showers and a small sauna was expanded to 80 showers and two large saunas, including one called the Eagle Sweat Lodge, which was "built in the tradition of Native American Sweat Lodges," according to a now-defunct Ritz webpage.

Founder
of the
Ritz,
George
Braddoc
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gone on
record
saying
that he
“became
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iconography and the form-line style after a trip to Alaska,” hence, he made the decision to cover the showers and saunas with Native American stylized art and murals. Braddock hired non-native artist, Brad Bolton, and together they tried to imagine “if by some magic of nature flamingos lived in the Pacific Northwest, how the Native Americans would have iconized them”...and so the Native-ization of the saunas began. Apparently there are still about 160 white people who continue to call themselves part of the “Flamingo Clan” at Fair.

Additions and alterations on the grounds of Oregon Country Fair must be approved by an archeological organization because it takes place on a Native American burial site. Why an archeological organization and not local tribes? Good question. As Alex Ronan cites in his piece *Playing Indian*, “arrowheads were kicked up each year on the dance floor,” and never have the Kalapuya, the longstanding stewards of this region, been consulted or involved.

In 2017, The Ritz wanted to raise a “story totem pole,” and the Oregon Country Fair board stepped in. Concerned that the

placement could disturb potential undiscovered Kalapuya artifacts, they agreed to place the “totem pole” in a different location. OCF claims to have contacted the tribe for input as well, but tribal members deny that there were any attempts made to involve them.

The “story pole” incorporated Haida-style artwork, but no one on the carving crew at the Ritz Sauna and Showers was Native. It appropriates Northern Native tribes, says Brian Bull, and “has nothing to do with the actual history of the indigenous people in the area.”

Native communities and tribal members contacted OCF, attended diversity task force meetings, wrote letters & even created a Facebook page urging OCF to remove the “totem pole” (Sophie June). Native activists and community members who criticized the pole on Facebook were told by white Ritz supporters, to “go do something important, like defend Standing Rock.” Siletz tribe member, Autumn DePoe-Hughes, called the pole an “abomination.”

It was eventually removed and put into storage.

“These are white people calling themselves part of a clan that take Northwest coastal Native American-inspired images and change them a bit to make them their own to tell their own history,” DePoe-Hughes tells WW. “It’s problematic in a number of ways...”

The Ritz Sauna then commissioned Tlingit artist and Alaskan native, Pattrick Price, who had heard about the controversy and offered to create real Native art for OCF (Brian Bull, 2020). In 2025, *Eugene Weekly* reporters sought to confirm in-person at Fair, if all the Native-style artwork inside the Ritz is finally attributed to Native artists, but were prohibited from entering, told by volunteers “we have to guard the sanctity of the Ritz.” That same year according to *The Oregonian*, a man was arrested at the Fair for allegedly

filming people showering and changing in the Ritz...so it seems the bar for entrance isn't actually that high if you're not asking hard questions.

In 2024, Native artist, Marcy Middleton, pushed to create the Native Arts and Crafts Market section at Fair. This area includes seven different booths with varying styles of art by local Indigenous artists. Due to the comments and stereotypes from non-Native people that Native artists were experiencing at Fair while vending, a need for a more intentional and supportive space became necessary. Middleton notes

Past claims of inclusivity at Fair have often been intertwined with privilege, as OCF's idea of inclusivity may not take into account everyone's individual experiences. As far as NACM is concerned, people think it's the Fair that's doing this [Native inclusion]...but we've always been here and we know how to make opportunities for ourselves.

Turns out OCF is "the primary site of cultural reproduction for Eugene's form of errant whiteness" (Alfredo, 2026), and even though the OCF website FINALLY has a land acknowledgement posted, nobody is holding their breath for this to change.

To learn more about the Native burial mounds located near The Long Tom River (named after The Long Tom band of the Kalapuya), check out The Quartux Journal and other writing by David Lewis.

~Anonymous Collaborators