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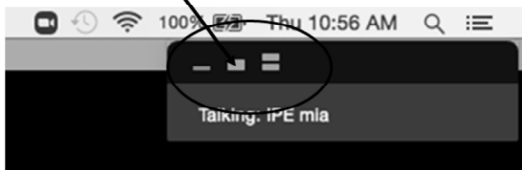
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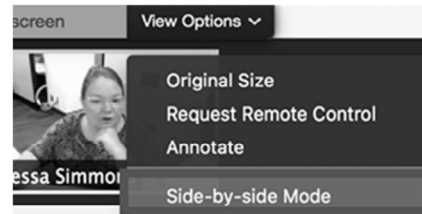


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In Our Hands: Native Photography, 1890 to Now



Mia

Introduction

Heh ... Hello ... and welcome to the Minneapolis Institute of Art, also known as Mia. My name is Marne and I am pleased that you are joining me today for our *In Our Hands: Native Photography, 1890 to Now* special exhibition.

A few brief words before we begin ...

- Mia houses more than 90,000 objects of art
- Mia's art spans cultural traditions that are as diverse as they are global
- Mia's entire collection comprises art covering 5,000+ years
- Mia was founded in 1883

Introduction

It is important and respectful to remember that

- Mia is situated on the traditional homeland of the Dahkóta.
- Mia acknowledges that “the people are still here.”
- Mia is aware that the art that was - and is - created is respectful of the past, mindful of the present and aware of the future.

Today’s tour will focus on photography created with, for and by Native photographers. This exhibition reflects their direct experience and a shared feeling of responsibility to the communities that have and do sustain them. Most important we see their personal and collective worldview of what it is to be Native.

“Being a Native person, you learn from a young age of the two worlds you have to live in and navigate, and both of those worlds declaring they are the truth of what happened to your people.”

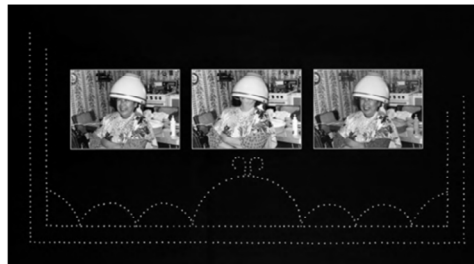
— Jaida Grey Eagle

ALWAYS HERE. STILL HERE.

Direct experience, personal remembrances, deep engagement and the need to speak the truth lead these artists to use the medium of photography to convey historic accuracy, provide insight, capture family connections and show their need to restore and promote what is real.

“Native photographers and the canon of Native photography have the ability To restore people to their rightful place. It has the capacity and power to be healing and transformative, and address the legacies of colonization.” - Veronica

Passalacqua



Shelley Niro
Bay of Quinte Mohawk,
Six Nations Turtle clan, born 1954
The Iroquois is a Highly Developed Matriarchal Society, 1991
Hand-colored gelatin silver prints
Courtesy of the artist
© Shelley Niro

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“No longer is the camera held by an outsider looking in, instead the camera is held with brown hands opening familiar worlds. We document ourselves with a humanizing eye, we create new visions with ease, and we turn the camera and show how we see you.”

- Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie

In essence, Native photographic artists utilized the power of photography to “rematriate” the narratives. It confronted the complex political histories from the past and present, directly, firmly, to arrive at striking images of existence and continuance.



Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie
Diné (Navajo) / Seminole / Muscogee (Creek), born 1954
When Did Dreams of White Buffalo Turn to Dreams of White Women?, 1990
Photo collage
Minneapolis Institute of Art.
Gift of funds from Nancy and Rolf Engh 2022.44
© 2023 Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie

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NATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY

PART 1: A WORLD OF RELATIONS

Alwa

- Land as character. Personal portraiture.
- Making captivating, impactful connections
- Native-ness. Inspiring. Motivating. Grounding.
- Experiencing the culture visually and be the light.
- Teaching visually in a good way.

We begin with ... A World of Relations. The world has finally acknowledged that Native people are still here! And with that realization comes the knowledge that the visual arts firmly includes photography. Yet, how has that translated to how Native photographers see themselves and their communities? What interests them and why? And what does that mean for those who are not Native in understanding what we see.

Inspiration comes from many directions. The significance of light. The songs sung and the stories told. The natural world and how it is intricately intertwined with Native philosophy and being. What is appreciated and found by many Native photographers is the immediacy, the descriptive-ness and the permanence of a photo. Yes, it literally stops time and yet, it also represents a moment in time where much happens. That moment endures. It is grounding. Memories are captured and made; by looking at older photographs

one experiences those intangibles made tangible – the history of the time, the show of who these relatives are, and the traditions that made them.

By visually showing a person or a landscape, that photograph reveals and allows one to explore, to discern what is there (or not). Particularly when it is of historic import, cultural meaning is built in and thus becomes more impactful in understanding what one is seeing. Native people are documenting themselves and also documenting history for their families, their relations and the outside world. The interdependence on one another is seen, acknowledged and creative in its response. Seeing one's community, one's relations represented positively has meant finally telling the whole story. Native cultures are so individual, beautiful, wise, humorous and inspiring. By showing the full range of what it means to be Native allows these photographers to encourage their sitters to speak their history, be expressive and full of life, and be the cultural voice that still speaks clearly.



Left:
 Ryan RedCorn
 Osage, born 1979
Celena White, ʌʌʌʌ ʌʌʌʌ (Osage Cook), 2018
 Sublimated fabric print
 Courtesy of the artist
 © Ryan RedCorn

Below:
 Shan Goshorn
 Eastern Band Cherokee, 1957-2018
Why We Dance, 2016
 Arches watercolor paper splints printed
 with archival inks, acrylic paint, artificial sinew
 Detroit Institute of Arts, Museum Purchase,
 Flint Ink Endowment Fund, 2021.286.1
 © Shan Goshorn



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9

As we enter we are met with the dignified, proud, modern yet traditional young Osage woman as photographed by **Ryan RedCorn**, a writer, photographer and filmmaker whose work is a commentary of Native-ness. His photography explores his community through imagery that honors identity and how vital it is today. This stately image records her beauty and elegance through the brilliant colors and dress that speak to Osage culture. The photo speaks of today and now, and makes “no apologies” for “who we are.” His signature photography is mostly portraits, showing his fellow Native Americans, as they chose to be seen. They highlight *“the dynamic ways that Indigenous artists have leveraged their lenses over the past three decades to reclaim representation and affirm their existence, perspectives, and trauma”* as RedCorn says.

Contrast this direct photo with the traditionally woven yet thoroughly

new baskets by **Shan Gorshorn**. Using photographs and historical documents she creates baskets that are compelling in their intricacy and in their references to historical context. This particular basket duo had Shan ask the question of what this work conveyed ...*“When I posted a request asking for responses from members of all tribes to the questions “Why Do We Dance?” the feedback was poignant and powerful. Beautiful words such as “To breathe,” “We dance to connect with those who have walked on,” “We dance for those who cannot,” “To sacrifice, to suffer, to restore the earth and ourselves” and “To Honor” are only a small fragment of the comments that are woven into this basket, inside and out. Ceremonial and even social dancing is sometimes difficult but despite the struggle it is joyful and restorative; it is such a deep, integral part of who we are.”* Her basket showcases the various dances stepped by both men and women, and illustrates the flow of movement beautifully.



Left:
Cara Romero
Chemehuevi, born 1977
Hermosa, 2021
Archival HD pigment print on
Canson Baryta Prestige paper
Minneapolis Institute of Art,
Gift of funds from Eric and Celita Levinson 2021.81
© Cara Romero



Right:
Henry Payer, Jr.
Ho-Chunk, born 1986
a[MUSE] II, 2021
Mixed media and collage on canvas
Courtesy of J.W. Wiggins Native American Art,
University of Arkansas, Little Rock
© Henry Payer, Jr.

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10

Striking and bold, *Hermosa* is a portrait of **Cara Romero**'s daughter, Crickett Tiger (Muscogee Creek/Cochiti). Dressed in the regalia of the first peoples of California and photographed at sunset (with a surprise wave coming onshore) this image evokes the oral history and creation story of Chemehuevi, known as Great Ocean Woman (Hutsipamamow), a spirit of the ocean that is seen and known throughout all of Southern California as the creator of all life. Arresting and powerful it halts the viewer and stands as a counter-narrative in the face of the ongoing erasure and genocide of California First peoples that our landscape and coasts are still revered as sacred places of creation. It is a photo of a strong woman that pays homage to the original caretakers and Cara's visualization of the indigenous worldview of this place. Firmly based on capturing depictions of identity, history and social issues that affect Native communities her narratives were developed and honed during her time at university where she realized that Indigenous identity was

misrepresented and mis-portrayed, and totally not authentic!

Contrast this black-and-white photo with mixed media collage artwork by **Henry Payer, Jr.** His work is focuses on traditional narratives from a decidedly contemporary approach. He appropriates magazine photos for his collages using an approve that visually fragments. He uses the space and inherent symbolism to support his Ho-Chunk history via modern cubist techniques. He tells the stories of Native identity, consumerism and inaccuracies. *“I’m doing these hard edge paintings that look like collage because the hard edges are similar to the end result of having something cut out and then placing it on something. I’m combining that as a painting style with collaged elements. And I’m getting back into that identity of who we are as Ho Chunk people, and having to identify as Winnebago and all the things that just saying “Winnebago” brings to mind.”* (NOTE: Winnebago is a corruption of the Algonquin word, "winnepiko," which translates to "people of the foul smelling water.") *“I try to pack my work with historical references so that people can spend time questioning our own motives and presumptions, because we are taught a lot of things ... Ultimately, I’m trying to get people to question and learn more about not only their cultural perspective, but about history. This is not just my history that I’m talking about. It’s American history.”*

NATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY

PART 2: ALWAYS LEADERS

Alwa

- Unique vantage point of the community.
- Arrive at a true understanding and knowledge.
- Share how vibrant and resilient Native culture is.
- Preserve the daily life of then ... for those now.
- Blur the boundaries between documenting and artistic.

Continuing the conversation ... What does it mean to be Always Leaders? Native photographers loved their communities! They loved their families, the small and large inter-connections between clans, the (sometimes) hidden messages between friends. Taking personal images showed how much they valued their Native world and that sharing that photo meant sharing a vital piece of themselves. Taking pictures meant preserving the moment and also, the clues as to who they were and how their place in the world was important.

Rescuing the precious moments and archiving the special moments was deeply personal and yes, at times, quietly radical! Making visible the complexities of traditional life, highlighting historical memories and family stories, and locating one's self consistently with one's subjects demonstrated the love of place and the longstanding connections to being Native.

Horace Poolaw who spent over 50 years taking photographs of the many tribes residing in Oklahoma - Arapaho, Caddo, Cheyenne, Delaware (Lenape), Kiowa, Apache and Fort Sill Apache, Osage, Otoe, Pawnee, Ponca, Wichita and Comanche - he documented the complex societies of those communities and their individual and connected worlds. His techniques employed - such as judicious cropping and hand coloring - shows a reverence and respect. He placed each person or event “front and center” and allowed their truth speak clearly.

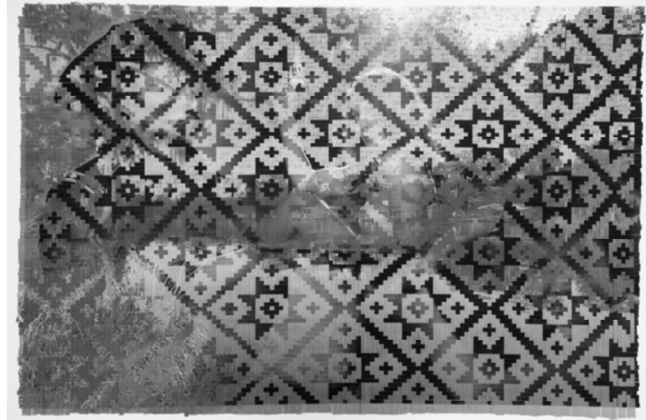
Rosalie Favell fell in love with photography “*running towards it (or maybe the person taking the pictures.*” She loved the intentional aspect of capturing and sharing special family moments, and found clues to her identity from the snapshots saved and from her own taking. “*To reveal and sustain our presence ...*” she has returned to her family’s photographic archives to discover who she is and also to her own process of recording history by “*situating myself in the simple context of family.*” She learned early on in her journey to be firmly grounded in the technical and historical aspects of the medium so that she could expand her sense of belonging.

In essence, these preserved and new images represent personal and social statements that show a sense of self, a respect for their culture and offer visually conversions that reflect on an on-going presence in the world.



Above:
 Greg Staats
 Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk), Six Nations
 Hodinohs:ni, born 1963
Auto Mnemonic Six Nations, 2005
 Six gelatin silver prints mounted on aluminum
 Courtesy of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa,
 Photo: NGC
 © 2005 Greg Staats

Right:
 Sarah Sense
 Chitimacha / Choctaw, born 1980
Custer and the Cowgirl with Her Gun, 2018
 Woven archival inkjet prints on
 rice paper, pen and ink, wax, tape
 Courtesy of the Collection Pamela and Kevin Wolf,
 Courtesy of Bruce Silverstein Gallery, New York



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12

Gregg Staats's work, *Auto Mnemonic Six Nations*, is a multi-panel view of a particular person's history; a massive eroding tree, folding chair, planked up building, a clearing, and a stone monument. These segments are a visual story, directing the viewer to recall their own history within the quietness of landscape the resilience of memory, and the nature of living beings to desire a place for peace. A Toronto-based artist he works in photography, performance, video installation, and sculpture. His most current work is engaged in an ongoing process of reconnecting with a traditional Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) restorative aesthetic related to condolence ceremonies occurring after the death of a community member or titleholder, relies on the shared repetitive experience of trauma and renewal. Staats' practice uses language, mnemonics, and the natural world to reconnect with this cultural history. *"We're sharing the great law of peace to elevate the mind."*

Sarah Sense draws inspiration from the traditional basketry of her Chitimacha and Choctaw heritages. Her work documents the authentic narratives of Indigenous peoples with imagery that tell the stories. She collaborates with her family, her community and other tribal groups to give life to and explore topics such as historical maps and the impacts of colonization. By cutting paper into strips, opening them, moving them apart., recreating spaces for differing interpretations and then re-inserting Indigenous patterning (from the very same locations where those ancestors were removed), she takes and kills and decolonizes. These new maps are layered over each other with her photographs; interwoven, again, she re-Indigenizes the object seen. These new landscapes then unveil the hidden stories that are relevant as they create new borders and claim the space and territory for “our own.” *“I am practicing familial patterning with photo-weaving of digitally reproduced images that retell settler-colonial stories of plantations, treaties, wars, forts, displacement and deforestation.”*



Above Left
 B.A. (Benjamin Alfred) Haldane
 Tsimshian, 1874–1941
*Benjamin A. Haldane self-portrait
 in studio in Metlakatla, c. 1919–1920*
 Image courtesy of Ketchikan Museums
 Photograph by Benjamin A. Haldane,
 89.2.14.21



Far Left:
 B.A. (Benjamin Alfred) Haldane,
 Tsimshian, 1874-1941
Family in Regalia, c. 1899-1910
 Image courtesy of Ketchikan Museums:
 Photograph by Benjamin A. Haldane,
 2018.2.30.54



Above Right
 Horace Poolaw, Kiowa, 1906-1984
*Gus Palmer (Kiowa), side gunner
 and Horace Poolaw (Kiowa) aerial
 photographer, in front of a B-17 Flying
 Fortress, MacDill Field, Tampa, Florida,
 ca. 1944 (45UFL14)*
 © 2014 Estate of Horace Poolaw Collection
 of National Museum of the American Indian,
 Smithsonian



Far Right:
 Horace Poolaw, Kiowa, 1906-1984
*Eula Mae Narcomey Doonkeen
 (Seminole) in the American Indian
 Exposition Parade, 1952*
 Courtesy of the Poolaw Family
 and the University of Science and Arts of
 Oklahoma, Chickasha,
 Horace Poolaw Collection, (45EXCW6)
 © 2023 Estate of Horace Poolaw

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B.A. Haldane is what I would call one of Native Photography’s “Legacy Grandfathers.” A Tsimshian photographer and musician he is considered one of the first professional Indigenous photographers to placing his lens upon his people, taking his first portraits at age 16. By the time he was in his middle twenties he had a thriving business where his photos spotlighting both his traditional Native community and also, as those clearly “of the modern age.” His work was a means of photographing sovereignty and also, how his people saw themselves.

Horace Poolaw drew inspiration from his friends and family and events that were important to them—weddings, funerals, parades, fishing, driving cars, going on dates, going to war, playing baseball. When he sold his photos at fairs and community events, he often stamped the reverse: “A Poolaw Photo, Pictures by an Indian, Horace M. Poolaw, Anadarko, Okla.” Not simply by “an Indian,” but

by a Kiowa man strongly rooted in his multi-tribal community, Poolaw's work celebrates his subjects' place in American life and preserves an insider's perspective on a world few outsiders are familiar with—the Native America of the Southern Plains during the mid-20th century. He was proud to document Native subjects during a time of immense change for Native people. Born one year before Oklahoma was granted statehood and six years after the U.S. government began its allotment policy, he was determined to show the cultural significance of Oklahoma's Native communities through his lens within this “new” artistic medium called photography. He challenged viewers to re-evaluate what being Native was like before and through everyday life, and was fiercely dedicated to telling the stories of their lives. *“I do not want to be remembered for my pictures, but through my pictures I want my people to remember themselves.”*



Left:
Donna Garcia
Muscogee, born 1976
Muscogee, 2018 from *Indian Land For Sale* series
Archival inkjet print on rag paper
Courtesy of the artist
© 2018 Donna Garcia

Below:
Frank Big Bear
White Earth Nation, born 1953
We Are Still Here, 2014
Collage on found paper
Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art,
Overland Park, Kansas, 2014.37
Photo: EG Schempf
© 2022 Frank Big Bear



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14

Donna Garcia uses photography to grasp movement and “slow capture” that movement so that her images spring to life. A lens-based artist whose work illustrates a semiotic dislocation (that has been organically reconstructed in a way that gives her subjects a voice in the present moment) her images rise above what they actually are and become empathic recreations in a fine art approach. Exploring topics such as gender and race, she explores the concept of sovereignty in a way that contrasts how one shoots today vs. how photographs were done in the past. She often utilizes self-portraiture with motion and the idea of animism to provide an indication of *the other* in her work; a surplus threat to the perpetuity of our cultural grand narratives in defining elements like gender and race. Otherness is much more because it is grounded in *being* and is non-binary in nature. In her words ... “*I subjugate my personal bias of what's real and allow myself to be absorbed into the formal structure of an image.*”

In contrast, **Frank Big Bear**'s multi-panel collage may seem too busy, over-powering, or well, just a miss-mash of themes. Yet ... the images can be hilarious and perhaps a little bit of "what" in which there appears to be a bit of mania resident in the collective art. The work, however viewed, shows a creative side that Big Bear says captures the kinetic energy of his subjects, and not necessarily a realistic image. Viewed individually or as a whole or in sections, this collage confounds and also, places in perspective the many narratives that are evident in today's Native world. Environmental changes. Societal identity. Political issues. Portraits reflecting a wide array of emotions. Nationalist icons. Cultural monuments. You name it. This work has it!

It dazzles in its vibrancy and speaks to the seeing the world through his - and his Native communities' - eyes.



Left:
Sharon M. Day
Bois Forte Band of Ojibwe, born 1951
Walking for The Water, 10 x 10 in
Digital print
Courtesy of the artist

Below:
Jeffrey M. Thomas
Urban-Iroquois/Onondaga, born 1956
Corn = Life, 2021
Archival pigment print, 46 x 108 in
Courtesy of the artist



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15

“I don’t know what else to do but to walk, pray, and sing to the waters.” In this personal “portrait” **Sharon M. Day** is walking the waters. She believes water changes individuals, the same way any enlightened spiritual practice can when one gives themselves to the process. Once we get to the mouth or confluence, we are happy to pour the headwaters we have carried into the river or lake, to give her a taste of herself. *“This is how you began, pure and clean, and this is how we wish for you to be again.”* Nationally recognized for her activism, she and her companion activists carry pails of water, offering prayers of thanks. By documenting the concern for our waterways, she teaches that they are sacred to life for all.

A self-taught photographer, Jeffrey M. Thomas lives in Ottawa and is a founding member of the Native Indian/Inuit Photographer’s Association (NIIPA). His study of Indian-ness seeks to “re-contextualize” historical imagery of First Nations people for those

who are non-Native. Describing himself as an urban Iroquois, he takes back what would be considered as a slur and reclaims it so he does not forget where he came from. *“My work would eventually lead to self-describe myself as an urban-Iroquois and finding a balance between the Iroquois identity my elders at Six Nations instilled me with as a teenager and the agency of survival in the city, in essence my career began with a goal of weaving a new story from the fragmented cultural elements left in the wake of North American colonialism.”* These images that comprise Corn = Life symbolizes that a braid is a symbol of the Indigenous teaching that all things are interconnected, We are all related.

An interesting postnote – a prominent influence on him was the work of American photographer Edward S. Curtis. Curtis’ seminal work, *The North American Indian*, would create a tension point for Thomas that lead him to the idea to *not* to recreate a modern version of his study of tribal culture but to consider what he did ‘not’ photograph and move forward.

NATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY

PART 3: ALWAYS PRESENT

Alwa

- Sovereignty from a Native viewpoint.
- Owning what the Native narrative is.
- Reframing the conversation.
- Rematriation: restoring people to their rightful place.
- Healing, transforming, addressing the inaccurate legacies.

And so, we come to this ... What does it mean to be Always Present? One should reflect on the fact that Native photographers have been “here” since the not-so-distant past, The legacy of capturing who they were rested, originally, with the hands of a few, emerging from the need to document who they were, who their families were, how connected to each other they were and to gather these visions, these images for those who would come after. These early images conveyed heartfelt love and affection, relationships within and without, cultural beliefs and history. It meant showing that “we are still here” and “we are resilient and strong,” and that by documentation – through family and tribal portraits, community events, and the recording of the day-to-day allowed ownership by one who was of the people. An very important distinction as it meant reclaiming who tells the story and why it is important!

Below Left:
 Arthur Amiotte (Wanbli Ta Hócoka Washté or Good Eagle Center)
 Oglala Lakota, born 1942
Wounded Knee III, 2001 • Acrylic and collage on canvas
 The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago
 Gift of Miranda and Robert Donnelley Photograph © 2022
 courtesy of The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago



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Below Right:
 Jolene Rickard
 Tuscarora Nation, Turtle Clan, born 1956
Fight For The Line, 2012
 Single channel video projection onto Painted metal
 Courtesy of the artist

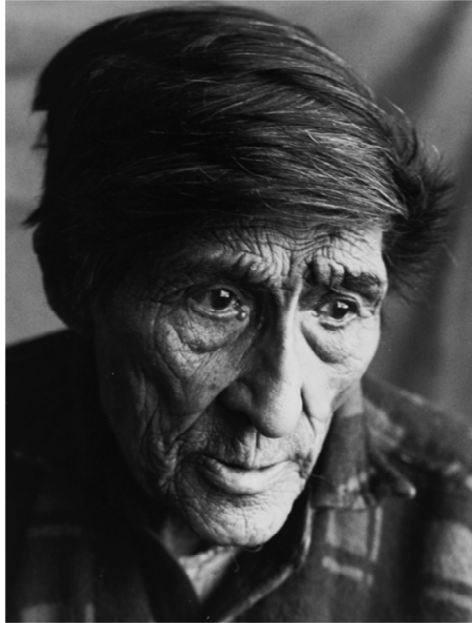


17

Arthur Amiotte, (Wanbli Hócoka Washté or Good Eagle Center) is a photographer and collagist. Inspired by Dakota artist, Oscar Howe, he used his Lakota background and culture to portray both historical and modern Native people and events. His creative as a white is an expression of the Lakó^l wicóh'an washtélaka - the love of the Lakota traditions. Lakota rituals and visionary experiences during traditional ceremonies impact his work. Early on he realized that contemporary was ignoring the entire reservation period which, frankly, was a dynamic time; there were Native people who were moving to land allotments, others who were sent to boarding schools. As new technologies such as photography was becoming more known, *"It seemed to me that it was more honest to deal with all this in my art, rather than to create a fake hide painting."* He took the visual concept of "who we are" to another level in his inimitably pointed and sharp-witted manner. These collages reveal the discrepancy between tradition and modernism in Lakota culture. They also explore the

experiences of Lakota people in Europe during the days of the Wild West Show era. This particular collage's focus is on the historical event of Wounded Kneww. Important to note that Arthur's great-grandfather was Standing Bear who lost his wife and baby girl during this massacre. By combining his family's oral history, colored drawings and newspaper clippings he tells the story of their truth.

Contrast this complex collage with a photographic one created by **Jolene Rickard**. Using photography to focus on the complication of sovereignty as a political, theoretical and activist vision, she dives deep into investigating and showcasing anti-colonial thoughts via artistic approaches and place-based imagery. Combining the hemispheric entanglement she seeks to illustrate the difference perspectives and to recognize an Indigenous relationship to time and place; this requires a significant shift in what modernity means from a Western philosophic perspective. She is defiant in her stance in supporting the infrastructure to raise the visibility of Native art. Her photography pushes the envelope as to the perceptions and misconceptions were and are. Here photography incorporates and manipulates light, texture and spirituality to reach backward and also, forward. *"Sly in their beauty, these object beings serve as emissaries from the past."*



Left:
Murray McKenzie
Cree, 1927-2007
Daniel Spence, Lonesome Trapper,
age 102, 1984
from *Native Studies* series
Gelatin silver print
Courtesy of Indigenous Art Collection,
Crown-Indigenous Relations
and Northern Affairs
Canada 306226



Right:
Tom Jones
Ho-Chunk, born 1964
Pendalton Price, 2016
Digital photograph with beadwork
Minneapolis Institute of Art,
Gift of funds from Lorraine R Hart 2021.88.1
© Tom Jones 2016

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18

One of the noteworthy Indigenous photographers who was a founding board member of NIIPA was **Murray McKenzie**. Scots-Métis/Cree, he was a bridge, a link to that older generation of photographers who were doing community photojournalism, and social documentary work. He was, in many ways, a “grandfather” photographer who has allowed today’s generation of Native photographers a reference to their way of seeing. His work was focused on capturing Indigenous people, celebrating their proud, honest manner and their authentic selves. His portraits of Aboriginal First Nations people displayed a beautiful compassion of his subjects. He found his passion when introduced to photography though for some time worked as a commercial fisherman, a radio announcer, a trapper, and a janitor before covering the stories of First Nations communities for the Winnipeg Free Press as their most published photographer. He recognized the value in capturing their lives on film before many others thought to do so. His thoughts ...

“there were plenty of negative opinions out there about us; it's time to show another side.”

An artist, curator, writer and educator, **Tom Jones** places the spotlight squarely as commentary on the identity, experience, and perception of who and what Native communities are today. He has worked the past 25 years creating an on-going photographic series on his tribe, the Ho-Chunk Nation with his current work *Strong Unrelenting Spirits* showcasing vibrant portraits of tribal members, many of which incorporates beadwork directly onto the photographs. Jones' artwork is a commentary on American Indian identity, experience and perception. He examines how American Indian culture is represented through popular culture and raises questions about these depictions of identity by non-natives and Natives alike. *“All my work deals with Native American issues,”* says Jones, who teaches photography at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. *“For me, it's Indian first, and the art comes second. The majority of what I talk about is the beauty and resilience of Ho Chunk people and that we are still here. That's another thread throughout my work. It's all about educating others and making us visible to them.”*



Left:
Meryl McMaster
Nêhiyaw (Plains Cree) / English / Dutch, born 1988
On The Edge of This Immensity, 2019
Digital chromogenic print
Courtesy of the artist
© Meryl McMaster

Below:
Virgil Ortiz
Cochiti Pueblo, born 1969
Tahu, and her Army of Blind Archers, 2013 Inkjet print
Courtesy of the artist
© Virgil Ortiz, 2013



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19

Meryl McMaster is a Canadian artist with nêhiyaw (Plains Cree), Métis, British and Dutch ancestry. Her lens-based practice incorporates the production of hand crafted materials and performance forming a synergy that transports the viewer out of the ordinary and into a space of contemplation and introspection. She explores the self in relation to land, lineage, history, culture and the more-than-human world and questions how our sense of self is constructed through land, lineage, history, and culture. This distinct approach to photographic portraiture and self-portraiture incorporates the spontaneity of photography, the manual production of objects or sculptural garments that she creates in her studio and performance. The work forms a mosaic that illustrates a journey of self-discovery as she explores the tensions complicating our understanding of personal identity and expanding our understandings of inherited historical narratives.

A multidisciplinary artist, **Virgil Ortiz** is most noted for his traditional and contemporary clay works; he has followed in the footsteps of a long line of traditional Cochiti Pueblo potters. That said, his photographic work comes a place of natural and ceremonial spaces. A true expression of identity and celebration of Pueblo culture and history. The imagery and narratives emphasize the importance of Futurism in Native Cultures; he is using Sci-Fi related themes to pass on tribal oral history to younger audiences and to revive their Native language. This approach to photographic art creates awareness about how cultural knowledge and tribal philosophies are connected to the universe, science, and the future.



Joseph J. Allen
Sicangu Lakota Oyate, born 1964
Free the Land, 2005
Chromogenic Print
courtesy of Maryam Marne Zafar

Minneapolis Institute of Art

20

In closing ... we stop to take in the beauty of **Joseph Allen's** mesmerizing image of a beautifully decorated tipi glowing against the night sky with the skyline of Minneapolis in the background. It speaks to the truth that "We are still here." He photographed this image on a crystal clear, bitter cold night in December 1992 outside the Minneapolis Institute of Art. The tipi had been installed during the "*Visions of Our People: A Pictorial History of Indian Life*" exhibition; it was subsequently published on the cover of the January 1993 issue of *The Circle*, a local Native newspaper as part of their Year in Review photo essay. He lives on the White Earth Ojibwe Reservation in Northern Minnesota. He is Director of the Gizhiigin Arts, an arts incubator program in Mahnomon, MN. "*I want the photos to be of the site but not a literal interpretation of the site. I wanted spiritual ethereal imagery that related to my life as a Dakota person, a sense of loss, not knowing things.*"

NOW. IN OUR HANDS.

Time has moved on. Photography that was needed (and wanted!) is now in the hands of Native photographers. Whether as pure documentation or artistic, these images show perspectives that are created “in our hands” and those making them realize the importance of this visual truth.

“As creative beings, we can extend our imaginations to explore, decipher, and invent

our visual languages to include other Indigenous voices working in this space of time.

It is exciting to know this is happening.” - Shelly Niro



Shelley Niro
Bay of Quinte Mohawk,
Six Nations Turtle clan, born 1954
Abnormally Aboriginal, 2013
Courtesy of the artist
© Shelley Niro

Minneapolis Institute of Art

21

The beauty of this special exhibition is that Native photography is now “by us, for us, with us.” The time for others to portray who we are is past and these Native creatives are taking back and reclaiming the stories of Native communities, Native families and also, themselves. The postcard prettiness, the vanishing Indian, the emptiness apparent in photographs taken by non Natives – that time is gone and been replaced by documentary images based on authenticity and the true stories told. An expansive and diverse group, these images direct their gaze at the many Native nations in their regalia and also, as just plain everyday people. One sees much humor and also, serious point-of-views revealing the many difficult social and political times experienced. What I see is empowerment by these creatives. They know what they do is of importance and gravitas, and by documenting life’s events small and great, these photographers are witness to the Native circle of life.

There is much to view. There is much to reflect on. Our time today was to show you a few highlights that showcase Native photography

in its varied ways. If you are able, take time to go through the galleries and explore what was not spoken to and is just as important to know of.

Yuch-aan (I thank you!)

Waneeshee

“May the way be beautiful for you.” (Lenape, her father’s father’s language)

Thank you and I hope this tour was a good one.