

Minneapolis Institute of Art

In Our Hands

Native Photography, 1890 to Now

Teacher's Guide

Grades K-12



Mia

Teacher's Guide

For Teachers and Students Grades K-12

In Our Hands: Native Photography, 1890 to Now

October 22, 2023–January 14, 2024

This guide is designed to facilitate conversations in the classroom before a museum tour or between chaperones and students on self-guided visits. It introduces the special exhibition's main themes in preparation for a visit to Mia, and it contains images and discussion prompts. Discussions begin with close looking and description, with more complex questions to follow. We recommend you review the content and plan your lessons, discussions, or tours in alignment with your particular students.

Looking to visit the exhibition with your students? [Simply request a free guided school tour here](#). To register your group of ten or more students for a self-guided experience, please call or email our Visitor Experience staff prior to your visit at 612.870.3000 or visit@artsmia.org.

We look forward to seeing you at Mia soon!

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In Our Hands: Native Photography, 1890 to Now is organized by the Minneapolis Institute of Art.

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Cover: Brian Adams (Iñupiaq, born 1985), *Marie Rexford of Kaktovik, Alaska preparing Maktak for the Village's Thanksgiving Day feast* (detail), 2015, from the series *I am Inuit* Chromogenic print. Courtesy the artist © Brian Adams

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In Our Hands: Native Photography, 1890 to Now

This exhibition is rooted in Native photographic knowledge and practice. The wide-ranging photographs illustrate the intersecting histories of photography and diverse Indigenous cultures, from the Rio Grande to the Arctic Circle, from the late nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries. It celebrates the legacy of First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and Native American photographers and their consequential impact on the medium of photography.

The exhibition invites viewers to ask themselves questions and challenge the ways many of us have learned about Native Americans.

From what sources did you develop your earliest perception or understanding of what Native Americans looked like? To the best of your knowledge, who created the images of Native Americans you grew up seeing and may even continue to promote as accurate today? Who decides what images of Native people to include in classroom textbooks? Many people have rarely or never critically interrogated where our ideas about Native Americans come from.

From the beginning of the history of photography, it was largely white men who assumed the privileged position of photographers of Native people. Photography of Indigenous individuals and communities across North America occurred simultaneously with massive government projects to support colonizing territories for European and Euro-American settlement. To varying degrees,

these photographers contrived settings, dress, props, and lighting to present the often-stereotypical images of Native people they wanted to perpetuate. These images still influence many peoples' perceptions today.

Jaida Grey Eagle, a Native photographer and co-curator of the exhibition "In Our Hands: Native Photography, 1890 to Now," calls attention to the importance of Native photographers taking control of how Native people are represented. She states, "Photographic artists utilized and inverted the reifying power of photography to rematriate the narratives and photographic political practices that had functioned so effectively against Indigenous peoples in the past."

Grey Eagle stresses the importance for all photographers to know the cumulative timetable of Indigenous photographers presented in this exhibition and to confront the history of representation of Native people by others. The artworks in the exhibition illustrate how Native photography confronted and continues to confront complex political histories from the past and present.

The artworks included in this teacher's guide invite you and your students to explore and understand the three major themes around which the exhibition is organized: Always Present, Always Leaders, and A World of Relations. The quotes throughout the guide are drawn from the exhibition catalog and labels.

Exhibition Themes

Always Leaders

Always Present

A World of Relations

Theme 1

Always Leaders

Native people—artists, community members, elders, matriarchs, and other knowledge keepers—have always been leaders in matters of environmental and social justice, understanding and championing the inalienable rights of land, water, air, and all living beings. Native nations uphold sustainable political, cultural, and economic systems through democratic principles and consensus building. As ethical and philosophical leaders, Native people honor individual rights of self-expression and identity. Since the nineteenth century, Native photographers have embraced the camera to manifest these values and create a more just and inclusive world.



B. A. (Benjamin Alfred) Haldane
 Tsimshian 1874–1941
Benjamin A. Haldane self-portrait in studio in Metlakatla,
 c. 1919–1920
 11 x 14 in. (28 x 35.5 cm)
 Image courtesy of Ketchikan Museums:
 Photograph by Benjamin A. Haldane
 89.2.14.21

At the heart of B.A. (Benjamin Alfred) Haldane's photography practice was his tremendous love for his people, strong relationships with neighboring tribes, and unwavering resistance to the colonial regime they lived under.

He was a proud Tsimshian from the Laxgyibuu (wolf clan) of the Ginadoyks (people of the swift water tribe). At 13 years old he participated in the mass movement of 823 Tsimshian people who established the community of Metlakatla, Alaska, in their quest for government-sanctioned land rights.

Haldane taught himself photography and around 1890, at age 16, began his career as a photographer. He took individual and family portraits in Metlakatla. Nine years later, he opened a Victorian-style portrait studio with props and backdrops. In 1903, a visitor

to Metlakatla noted Haldane's strong work ethic and dedication to his practice. He also mentioned that Haldane was not only an excellent photographer, but also the leader of the village band and the pipe organ player in church.

In this self-portrait made around 1900, Haldane shows himself both as a photographer and musician, and declares his Tsimshian identity. He shows himself flanked by his photography equipment on his left, including a large camera, a lantern, and a Kodak Brownie camera on the floor. To his right are items relating to his teaching and music including a megaphone, a gramophone and an open case of cylindrical records. He leans on a model totem pole with his Lax Gibou (Wolf Clan) [Laxgyibu] crest represented by the bottom figure, a detail that would be meaningful to Tsimshian viewers who recognized

it. It is a symbol of his generation's commitment to their cultural resurgence.

Haldane produced a diverse body of photographs over his 40-year career, ranging from formal portraits of Indigenous people, families, bands, choirs, and sports teams to images of historical events in their communities throughout southeast Alaska and northern British Columbia, including cultural ceremonies that at the time were outlawed by the Potlatch Ban in Canada.

Discussion Questions

Look closely at this self-portrait made by Tsimshian photographer B.A. Haldane about 100 years ago. Make a list or inventory of the items he has included in the portrait. What do you see on the far left of the photograph? What do you see on the right? What does the object he is leaning on look like to you? What does Haldane tell you about himself with all these things?

Now, look at the way B.A. Haldane shows himself. What words would you use to describe him? What about his appearance makes you think so? Why do you suppose he presents himself this way?

When you take pictures of yourself today, what do you want people to think about you? Compare and contrast your own selfies (modern-day self-portraits) to Haldane's. In what ways are they alike? In what ways are they different? What, if anything, do you want viewers of your selfies to know about your cultural identity? Why is this important to you?

From his teen years on, B.A. Haldane committed his life activities to preserving Tsimshian culture. Through his photographs, he could document and share formal portraits of Indigenous people, families, bands, choirs, and sports teams as well as images of historical events including cultural ceremonies that at the time were outlawed in Canada. Imagine that you have an assignment to document five important aspects of your community, including people and cultural practices. What would you document? Why? Share your ideas with classmates to gain a greater understanding of what is important to each other's identities.



Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie
Diné (Navajo) / Seminole / Muscogee (Creek), born 1954
We'wha, The Beloved, 2012
11 1/4 x 9 in. (28.6 x 22.9 cm)
Courtesy the Artist
© 2023 Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie

Many of Hulleah Tsihnahnjinnie's works include archival images layered with other materials through collage. The artist's photographic work *We'wha, The Beloved* is an example of her digital collage technique. On her creative process, Tsihnahnjinnie writes:

"There exists a deep passion within my being to gather dreams and visions. Visions that have survived the vulgarities of war, flowing through thick rivers of ancestral blood, currents of thoughts that have transmitted through lowered voices surrounded by protective night skies. Dreams, visions, and thoughts that are safely wrapped in stubborn Indigenous persistence prepared for a long journey. When constructing dreams and visions, I find that collages work well. The cutting, pasting, and choosing is followed by another favorite of digital construction, ultimately rendering the vision seamlessly."

In *We'wha, The Beloved*, digital collage allows for the seamless layering the artist describes. She blends and blurs images between each of the layers. At the center of this work is the photographic portrait of We'wha, from between 1884–1897, by John K. Hillers, an American government photographer.

We'wha (1849–1896) was known as a two-spirit person, spiritual leader, and cultural ambassador for the Zuni nation. When Tsihnahnjinnie acquired the historical cabinet card depicting We'wha, she created her own portrait to honor the spiritual leader. Purple irises, regalia, basketry, and a halo-like form surround We'wha's strong face, necklace and broad shoulders. Two red dragonflies emphasize We'wha's warrior ability to travel with agility.

In this image, Tsihnahnjinnie rematriates the imagery of colonial history into a new narrative infused with Indigenous knowledge, experiences, and perspective.

Discussion Questions

Look closely at this digital collage by Hulleah Tsihnahnjinnie. What do you see? Describe some of the details you are seeing. What do you wonder about?



John Hillers (German, 1843–1925), *We-wha*, 1884– 1897.
Albumen silver print, (Bureau of American Ethnology Collection)

How do you feel when you look at the photographic collage? What about it makes you feel that way?

What do you think Hulleah Tsihnahnjinnie wanted to tell you and people who will see this picture in the future about We'wha? What about the image makes you think so?

We'wha was a powerful two-spirit person, spiritual leader, and cultural ambassador for the Zuni nation. How has the artist shown these aspects of We'wha that are not represented by the photograph made by the German-born photographer John Hillers? How does she reinforce that We'wha is a leader? What other differences do you see between the two portraits?

One theme of this portion of the exhibition addresses how, as ethical and philosophical leaders, Native people honor individual rights of self-expression and identity. How does Hulleah Tsihnahnjinnie's photographic collage manifest these values and create a more just and inclusive world?



Ungelbah Davila
Diné (Navajo), born 1987
Roxanne, Rose & Cedar,
from *Indigenous Artist and Leader* series
Inkjet print
24 x 36 in. (61 x 91.4 cm)
Courtesy of the artist
© 2022 Ungelbah Davila-Shivers

This work by Ungelbah Davila, a Diné (Navajo) photographer, is part of a series on Indigenous artists and leaders. Davila felt honored to take this photograph because of the way it beautifully represented the generations of artists in the Southwest. The subject of three women working with clay illustrates the important legacy of women passing down aspects of their knowledge and work—from great-grandmother, to grandmother, to mother, to daughter, to granddaughter.

Davila wrote about the women she featured in this photograph:

Roxanne [Swentzell] and Rose [Simpson] come from a family of Pueblo potters. They consider themselves potters, sculptors

actually. They are taking a generational art form and then making it their own in such a profound and contemporary way. It is so personal to them as women, and as artists. And then seeing this manifest a little bit with Cedar [Rose's daughter and Roxanne's granddaughter], it's really exciting to think what she's going to be creating in the future. Notice the hands in the photograph, because with this kind of art, it always comes back to the hands. Creating through the hands.

As illustrated by this and other photographs, Davila is very inspired by women. She explained:

I love photographing women, all women. Each one of them is a goddess. They're so beautiful. And they're so creative. When I'm working with a model or a subject, that moment happens where they reveal their truth to me, and it's such a powerful moment and such a privilege. That's when these beautiful photos happen because there's no facade.

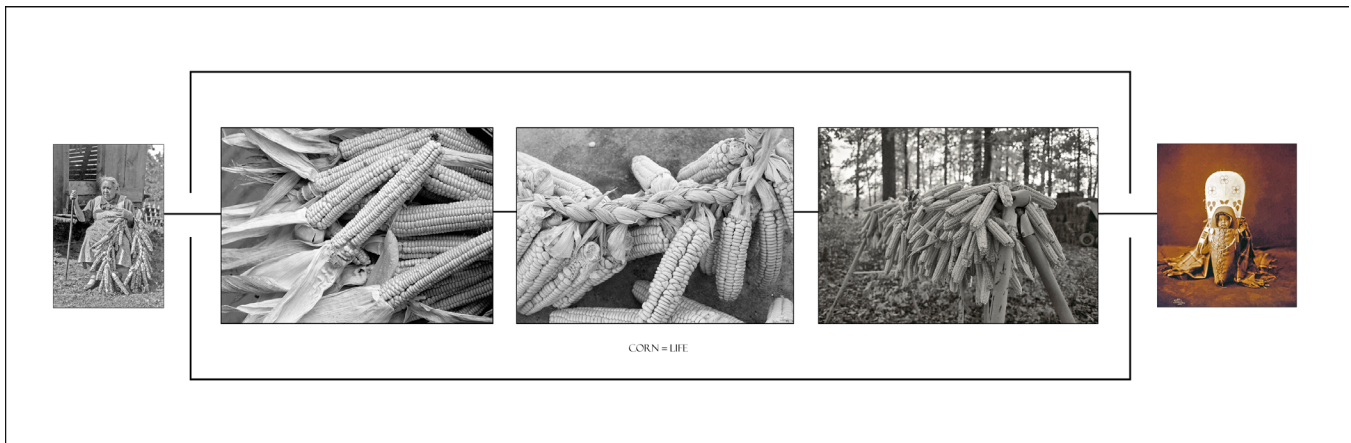
Discussion Questions

Look closely at this photograph by Ungelbah Davila. What's going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that?

Davila stated that she loves photographing women and that each of them is a goddess, beautiful, and creative. How does this photograph illustrate this sentiment?

What do you feel when you look at this image of three generations of women working with clay? Why do you suppose it was important to the photographer to show this tradition? What traditions, if any, are passed down through generations in your family or community?

One section of the exhibition focuses on the interdependent elements of land, sky, water, the cosmos, and all living beings. In this worldview, all living beings are treated as family. How do you see this idea made visible in Davila's photograph? What, if any, examples of this kind of respect for and interconnectedness of all living beings do you witness in your community? In what ways would your community benefit from adhering to a worldview that valued interconnectedness?



Jeffrey M. Thomas
 Urban-Iroquois / Onondaga, born 1956
Corn = Life, 2021
 Archival pigment print
 46 x 108 in. (116.8 x 274.3 cm)
 Courtesy of the artist
 © Jeffrey M. Thomas

For Urban-Iroquois / Onondaga photographer Jeffrey Thomas, the act of weaving leaves of corn into a braid is a symbol of the indigenous teaching that all living things are interconnected. Corn is central to the three larger images, which were taken at the farm of the artist's step-grandfather, Bert General.

The image on the far left was taken in 1949 by Canadian anthropologist Marius Barbeau, who traveled from Ottawa to the Six Nations of the Grand River to buy corn where Thomas's family lived. The final image is of a baby in a cradleboard, photographed by Edward S. Curtis about 1899. This reference to the past is an important part of Thomas's work.

Braided corn also symbolizes the connection between Native people and their non-Native allies. Thomas says, "What has happened to the earth now endangers everyone living on this planet. How do we restore honor and respect for the environment that we share with all living things?"

Discussion Questions

Look closely at the central images in this work by Jeffrey Thomas. What do you see? What do they remind you of? What do you feel when you spend time looking at these images? What do you wonder about?

Now look closely at the small image to the left taken about 80 years ago by an anthropologist who traveled to buy corn in the area in which Thomas's family lived. What do you notice about this photograph? Now also look at the even older image of the baby by Edward Curtis, a white photographer who "documented" Native people over 100 years ago. Describe what you see. What do the historic photographs add to your experience of the main images of corn. How do you feel they are connected? Consider the title *Corn=Life*.

Jeffrey Thomas once said: "When I began working with a camera in 1980, there was no photo-based conversation about the urban Indigenous experience. I was born and raised in Buffalo, New York, and as my elder always said, talk about what you know. Since I had no existing Indigenous-made paradigm in photography, my quest was to develop one." What role models or examples, if any, exist for expressing aspects of your culture that are important to your identity? What ideas would you add to these existing models? How might you break out of existing models and create something brand new?



Ryan RedCorn
Osage, born 1979
Celena White, ᎠᎵᎠᎵᎠ ᎠᎵᎠᎵᎠ (Osage Cook), 2018
Sublimated fabric print
72 x 120 in. (182.9 x 304.8 cm)
Courtesy of the artist
© Ryan RedCorn

Ryan RedCorn (Osage) is a writer, filmmaker, actor, and photographer whose work often uses aspects of Indigenous humor to create commentary on the various issues facing Native communities. He is a founder of the Native American comedy troupe the 1491s and a writer for the hit television show *Reservation Dogs*. His photography explores his community through images that honor their identity and vitality.

In his Osage Cook series, RedCorn amplified the important role of women like Celena White, depicted in this photograph, whose knowledge, care, and generosity is vital to the ongoing social and cultural practices of the Osage Nation. Here Celena White, a cook, appears as a powerful person wearing layers and layers of fabric, and standing in profile, a portrait pose favored by leaders for centuries.

RedCorn bases his images on how his sitters (the people he photographs) decide they want to be seen. The individual decides what they want to become in the picture. After RedCorn takes many photographs, he and the individual decide together which image they like best. For RedCorn it is a collaboration in which they both know where the picture is going, its context, and what will be included in the image.

As RedCorn explains: “My collaborative approach for these portraits respects the person, the space, the voice, and the time the photo is being taken. Through this lens, these women’s voices and values emerge. These values have always been central to the Osage community. They carry with them respect, generosity, fairness, adaptation, prayer, and humor. ... These women don’t dress this way on a daily basis, but it’s their representation, their choices. The representation of self is an Osage value. And the fact that those ideas survive and thrive is its own hero story.”

With his approach to image-making, RedCorn can provide a broader scope or view of the complexity and diversity of Indigenous people that makes them more human. He believes the more people see you as human, the more they will treat you with respect.

Discussion Questions

Look closely at this photograph by Ryan RedCorn. Describe the person in as much detail as possible. What do the details in this portrait suggest to you about this person’s job, status, or role in their community?

How does learning that Celena White is a cook change the way you see the photograph? Why do you suppose the photographer Ryan RedCorn left it up to White and other Osage cooks to decide how they wanted to be represented? How do White’s voice and values emerge from the decisions she made about how she would appear in her portrait?

RedCorn uses aspects of Indigenous humor to create commentary on the various issues facing Native communities. Where do you see humor in this portrait?

Collaboration is at the center of RedCorn’s approach to making portraits. He draws on his own creative expertise to help the people he photographs realize their visions. What expertise do you bring to creative collaborations? How do you support others in making their ideas come to life, and how might they help you express your ideas?

Theme 2

Always Present

Native people are active in every facet of North American life. This section of the exhibition, “Always Present,” illuminates the ways in which Native photographers have maintained an active presence in the field and affirms what Native scholars call “visual sovereignty”—the right of Indigenous people to determine how they will be represented. The photographs presented here celebrate the abundant visual and material creativity of First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and Native American people across time and place. Each work highlights the social, political, intellectual, and artistic engagements of Native communities and demonstrates the resilience, tenacity, and vision inherent to Native photography.



Brian Adams
Iñupiaq, born 1985
*Marie Rexford of Kaktovik, Alaska preparing Maktak for the Village's
Thanksgiving Day feast, 2015*
from the I am Inuit series
Chromogenic print (medium format film)
17 x 17 in. (43.18 x 43.18 cm)
Courtesy the artist
© Brian Adams

Brian Adams, an Iñupiaq editorial and commercial photographer born, living, and working in Anchorage, Alaska, focuses his work on documenting the region through recording personal stories and creating environmental portraits. He visited twenty Iñupiat, Yup'ik, and Cup'ik communities over two years to gather stories and make images for his I am Inuit series. His goal was “promoting understanding, dismantling stereotypes as well as misperceptions, and connecting the world with Alaskan Inuits and the Arctic through common humanity.”

This portrait of Marie Rexford is one of Adams's favorites from the series. He made this portrait of Rexford as she prepared the skin and blubber (maktak) of a bowhead whale for a village Thanksgiving Day feast in Kaktovik, Alaska. Cubes of bright pink and black maktak spread across the icy ground and around Rexford. Maktak is the traditional sustenance of the Iñupiaq, who are among the only people in the world who may hunt whales legally.

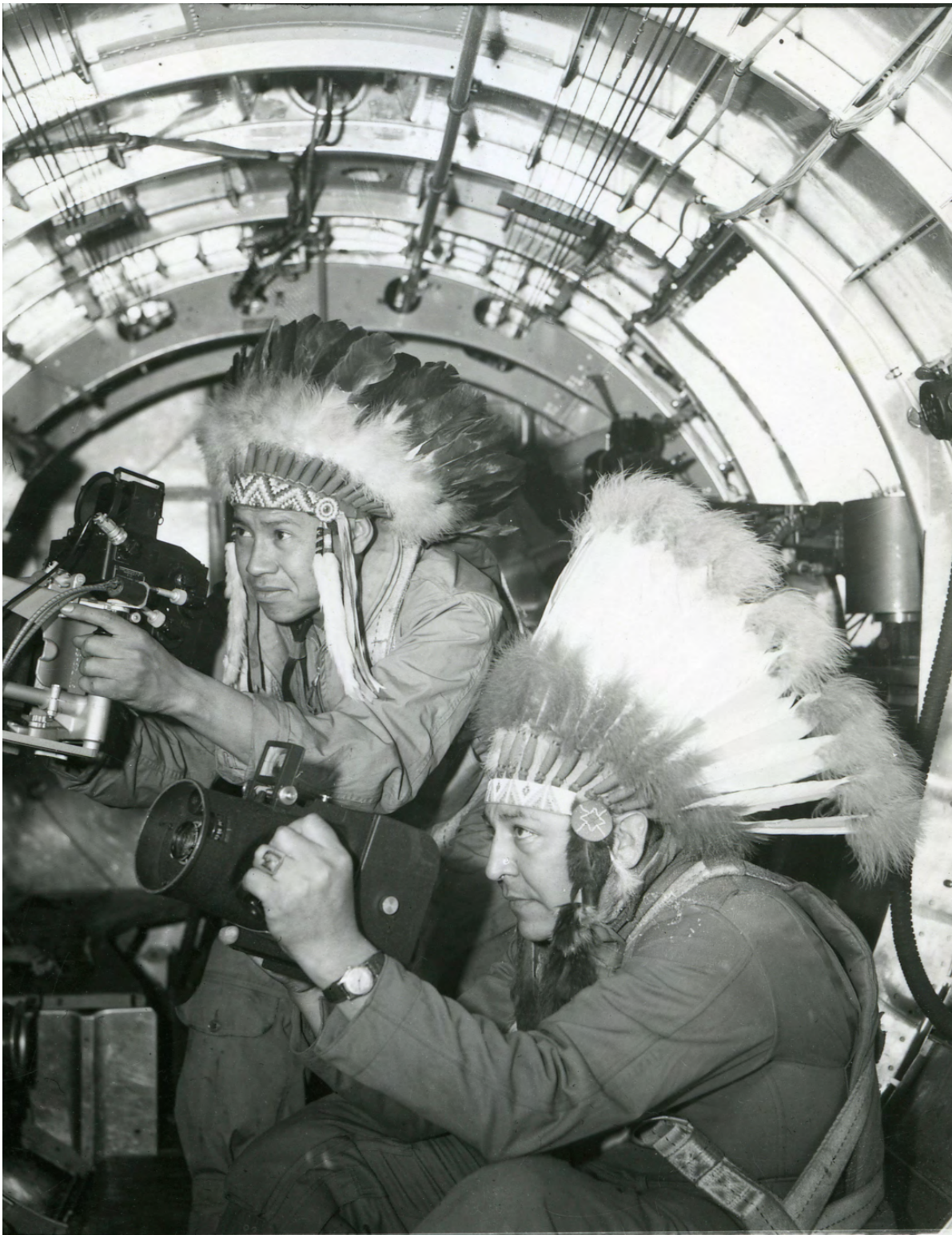
Speaking with the *New York Times* about this image, Rexford explained, “We are allowed three, our quota. We had lost one, so we had asked one of the villages if it was okay to have one of their whales, and we are thankful to Kivalina for giving up one of their whales.” Adams's photograph goes beyond a mere portrait of an individual as it is also a portrait of Iñupiaq community, generosity, and reciprocity.

Discussion Questions

Look closely at this portrait of Maria Rexford of Kaktovik, Alaska, preparing whale meat for a community feast. What do you see? What do you feel when you look at this portrait? Through which of your senses are you experiencing the photograph? What do you wonder about when you look at this?

Photographer Brian Adams admired Marie Rexford for her strength. How has he represented her strength in this photograph?

How do you think this photograph affirms what Native scholars call “visual sovereignty”—the right of Indigenous people to determine how they will be represented? What details in the photograph support your response?



Horace Poolaw

Kiowa, 1906–1984

Horace Poolaw aerial photographer, and Gus Palmer (Kiowa), side gunner inside a B-17 Flying Fortress, Tampa, Fla., c. 1944
photographic print

12 x 9.5 in. (30.5 x 24.1 cm) (image) 20 1/8 x 16 1/8 x 3/4 in.

(51.1 x 41 x 1.9 cm)

Courtesy of the Poolaw Family and the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma, Chickasha, Horace Poolaw Collection, (45UFL13)

© 2023 Estate of Horace Poolaw

Horace Poolaw (1906-1984) was a Kiowa photographer who actively recorded the modern daily life of Native people in twentieth-century Oklahoma. In contrast to the images by White photographers seeking to document a “vanishing race,” Poolaw’s photographs provide a unique vantage point of the complexities of a community that was made up of multiple tribes living within Oklahoma. He actively made the point of being an insider by creating a rubber stamp that read, “A Poolaw Photo, Pictures by an Indian, Horace M. Poolaw, Anadarko, Okla.”

Poolaw photographed the Kiowa community from the 1920s to the 1960s, when modernization was impacting old ways of life. During the early 1940s, he was the arts and crafts supervisor for the Civilian Conservation Corps-Indian Division housed within the US Interior Department. In 1943, he was recruited and trained by the U.S. Army Air Forces to teach aerial photography in Tampa, Florida, during World War II. He was one of nearly 44,000 Native Americans who served in the U.S. military during the war.

While in Florida, training bomber crews to document enemy targets using aerial photography, he connected with fellow Kiowa soldier Gus Palmer, Sr., who appears in some of Poolaw’s self-portraits, like this one. In this carefully staged photograph, they wear U.S. flight uniforms and feathered headdresses, a kind once worn by Kiowa warriors. Poolaw is in the foreground of the image, holding a camera, and Palmer stands behind him.

The portrait portrays an image of Native men as fully modern, while also alluding to the Kiowa warrior traditions of the past. It is also a tribute to the personal military service of his family and self. At the same time, Poolaw and his friend poke fun at stereotypes.

Through his own service in the military and afterward, Poolaw photographed veterans’ homecomings, honor dances, Kiowa military societies, and even funerals. Veterans, who were central to community life represent the legacy of Kiowa military commitment. As his eyesight declined in the 1970s, Poolaw stopped photographing.

Discussion Questions

Look closely at this picture taken by Kiowa photographer Horace Poolaw. Describe what you see. What appears to be going on? What do you see that makes you say that? What do you wonder about as you look at this photograph?

The image depicts the photographer who worked as an aerial photographer for the U.S. Army during the 1940s in World War II. He shows himself with his friend, both wearing war headdresses. How does this photograph make you feel? What about it makes you feel that way?

Why do you suppose Poolaw might have chosen to show himself and his friend in these warrior headdresses inside of an airplane using modern photographic equipment? How does he portray them as leaders? In what ways does this image also play into stereotypical depictions of Native Americans?

In what ways does this staged image of the artist and his friend turn a stereotype into a celebration of Kiowa warriors? In what ways could you use elements of your family’s cultural history in an artwork to encourage people to rethink stereotypes they might have?

Theme 3

A World of Relations

Native people understand the living world holistically, choosing to act with deep respect for all forms of life and their interconnectedness. Land, water, the cosmos, and all living beings are relatives, to be treated as family. These networked, overlapping, and interdependent elements find visual form in the works in this section, which focuses a lens on the dynamics of the living world. “A World of Relations” invites viewers to consider the philosophical, cultural, and emotional connections among each photographer’s work.



Rosalie Favell
Metis, born 1958
Holding Her Ground, 2021 from Family Legacy series
Inkjet print
20 x 30 in. (50.8 x 76.2 cm)
Minneapolis Institute of Art, Gift of funds from Nancy and Rolf Engh
2022.42
© Rosalie Favell

Rosalie Favell's work draws on her familiarity with and love for family photo albums from a time when pictures of her relatives were lovingly pasted onto pages. Favell, a Metis photographer, finds herself revisiting these images from a pre-digital era as a source for her work.

Born and based in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Rosalie Favell's prime artistic medium has been photography since the 1980s. It was not until the early 1990s, however, that she began to explore her Indigenous identity as a Metis woman of Cree and English ancestry. Although she initially made straight photographs, she later focused on centering and reexamining archival images in photographic series, many of which featured her own family.

In *Holding Her Ground*, 2021, Favell, through digital photomontage superimposes a photograph of her paternal grandmother over a chromolithograph of Main Street in early twentieth-century Winnipeg. Standing larger than life before this urban industrial scene, her grandmother, known as Nanny, evokes the deep roots of her Cree ancestors who, long before colonization, lived in the land that became Winnipeg and the larger province of Manitoba in present-day Canada. The English Scottish Favell side of her family history arrived through work in the fur trade. The artist describes herself as "seventh generation of this mixed blood culture." The centralized place of Nanny in the photograph visualizes both the historical familial connections to the place and the ongoing Indigenous presence within it. Nanny serves

as a recurring figure in Favell's work not only as a connection to the artist's lineage, but also because she loved being photographed throughout her life.

Discussion Questions

Look closely at Rosalie Favell's photcollage. What do you see? What colors do you notice? What, if anything, does the picture remind you of? What about this picture makes it look like it might be from a long time ago? What do you wonder about when you look at this picture?

Nowadays, many people store family photos on phones or computers or even in "the cloud." But Rosalie Favell loved to look at old photo albums, contemplating over and over again the images of her relatives. She loved the way the thick, black pages of the album felt as she turned them. What about this picture of Favell's grandmother captures the feeling of this experience? In what ways do we change or manipulate photographs today? Why? How do these changes or manipulations impact the way people experience or feel about the pictures?

An important aspect of Favell's art is to show her family's connections to a particular place in the past, as well as the Indigenous presence in the same place today. In this picture, she illustrates the connection of her family to Winnipeg in Canada. If you were going to make a picture collage to show your family connection to a particular place, what would you include? Where is that place? What person or people might you include? Why? If possible, find out if you have photos of the people you would like to show. Look online or in books and magazines for images of the place you would show. As a class, take time to make collages and share your stories with each other.



Nadya Kwandibens
Animakee Wa Zhing #37
First Nation Anishinaabe
Tee Lyn Duke (née Copenace) Toronto, ON, March 2010
from the Concrete Indians series
36 x 24 in. (91.4 x 61 cm)
Courtesy the Artist / Red Works Photography
© 2010 Red Works Photography

Nadya Kwandibens is an Anishinaabe (Ojibwe) photographer from Ontario, Canada. She is an award-winning photographer and the founder of Red Works Photography, created to uplift and empower Indigenous people.

Kwandibens's photographic series Concrete Indians is a collaboration between the photographer and subjects she meets through an open-call format. In this photo, Tee Lyn Duke stands on a subway platform in Toronto, wearing her traditional jingle dress and other regalia. As the commuters move around her, appearing as blurred impressions, Duke stands still, moving only her fan. It is almost as though she transcends time.

Kwandibens talked about the motive behind her collaborative work: "I began thinking about photography as a means for others to express feelings of disconnection and/or to explore and reflect on what decolonization means and looks like." Her images of Indigenous people in traditional dress juxtaposed against Westernized public spaces, like this one of Tee Lyn Duke, are expressions of reclamation and resistance.

Discussion Questions

Look closely at this photograph. What's going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that?

What emotions do you feel when you look at this picture? What do you wonder about?

What do you think might motivate Anishinaabe (Ojibwe) photographer Nadya Kwandibens to invite other Native people to collaborate with her in the construction of her photographs?

Kwandibens shows Tee Lyn Duke standing on a busy subway platform in her traditional jingle dress. What message does this photograph send to you? What about it makes you say so? What makes the photograph activist? How might you show the world that your culture (define this in any way) is alive and thriving in spite of others trying to erase or downplay it? What elements of surprise could you include to make people look closely and think deeply about your message?