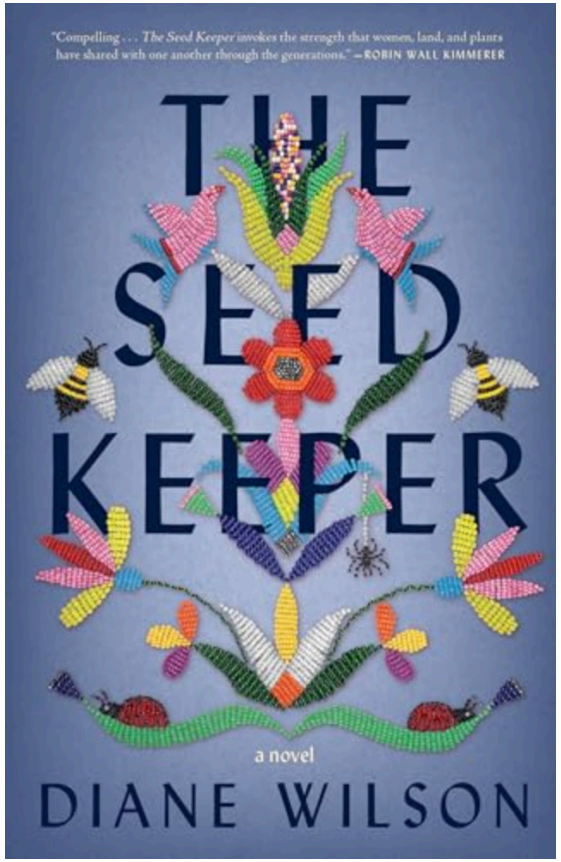

THE SEED KEEPER Book Tour, Jan 2024

written by Diane Wilson and published in 2021, is the fictional tale of a Dakhóta woman's journey to rediscover and reconnect with her family, culture, and history. Wilson is a Dakhóta writer who is a descendant of the Mdewakanton subtribe. The novel's protagonist is Rosalie Iron Wing, who enters the foster care system at age 12. The narrative depicts Rosalie's struggles to survive and understand her place in a society that would rather erase all knowledge of the Dakhóta genocide than understand her people's existence. Though told primarily from Rosalie's perspective, the story also includes the perspectives of her great great-grandmother, her great-aunt, and her best friend, each of whom reveals the effects of either the 1862 US-Dakota War, the removal of Indigenous children from their families,or modern farming practices on the water and land. The Seed Keeper won the 2022 Minnesota Book Award in Fiction.

Heh (Hello) ...

Welcome to the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. Before we begin, I would like to speak to a few guidelines to remember as we walk through the galleries. First, no food or drink is allowed in the galleries nor smoking (of course!) I would ask that you "respect the space," taking care to stand about 1 foot (or as indicated by artlines drawn on the floor) from the art. I'd like to ask if there are any of you who require an elevator rather than walking up stairs. Finally I'd like to say I am pleased that you have chosen to visit us. Our museum has over 90,000 works of art from diverse cultures and societies worldwide.

This tour will open one's eyes with art that relates to Native people, their lives and lifeways, The Seed Keeper starts with Darlene Kills Deer's recounting of when Rosalie Iron Wing, her great-niece, returned to her family decades after social services took her away and put her in foster care. Darlene's tale sets the stage not only for loss and broken families but the importance of prayer, plants, dreaming, and seeds—all of which Darlene uses to call her long-lost great-niece home and which Rosalie uses to reconnect with her family and heritage. The novel's narrative is nonlinear, jumping through time and occasionally shifting perspectives. Revelations about past events are often given either in characters telling stories, recalling memories, or through flashbacks.

More important is how the following themes work together to weave the story: ***Relationships with the Land*** One of the main themes of this novel is also one of the main points of conflict: *people's relationship with the land they are on*. Beyond the issue of ownership—ranging from colonization to Mangenta's restrictive contracts and patents—the novel delves into how the characters view themselves with regard to the land. ***The Importance of Names*** Today, there is an effort in many parts of the United States to remove offensive place names or return the original Indigenous names to locations. *This novel highlights the importance of names, how they designate people and places, and how they can be altered or weaponized*. Once again, the author forefronts important ideas in the first chapter by having Rosalie recall lectures from her father. He provides the Dakhóta phrase from which the name "Minnesota" originated—Mní Sota Makhóčhe—and corrects the appellation given to their people by the settlers: "Some called us the great Sioux nation, but we are Dakhóta, our name for ourselves, which means friendly". ***Protecting What Is Loved*** When Marie Blackbird and her mother sew seeds into the hems of their skirts, they are doing so *to protect the things and people they value and love: their family, their people, their heritage, and their cultural future*. It is an unequivocally positive motivation with good results,as later generations use these seeds to reconnect with their roots.

Let's begin ...

Nakícizin | Protect, 2019
Dyani White Hawk, Sicángu Lakota
Color Screenprint with metallic foil
Highpoint Editions, Minneapolis
Highpoint Edtions Archive,
The Friends of Bruce B. Dayton Acquisiton Fund and
The Christina N. and Swan J. Turnblad Memoral Fund
2020.85.136.4

Inspired by Plains style women's dentalium dresses, the set speaks to the ways in which Native women collectively care for our communities. Through acts of creation, nurturing, leadership, love, and protection carried out in infinite forms, our grandmothers, aunties, sisters, cousins, nieces, and friends collectively care for our communities. As a suite, these works speak to the importance of kinship roles and tribal structures that emphasize the necessity of extended family, tribal, and communal ties as meaningful and significant relationships necessary for the rearing of healthy and happy individuals and communities."

- Dyani White Hawk

As a woman of Sičangu Lakota and European American (German) ancestry, she was raised within Native and urban American communities. She strives to create honest, inclusive works that draw from the breadth of her life experiences, Native and non-Native, urban, academic, and cultural education systems. This allows her to start from center, deepening her understanding of the intricacies of self and culture, correlations between personal and national history, and Indigenous and mainstream art histories.

Her painting and sculptural works reflect these cross-cultural experiences through the combination of influences from modern abstract painting and abstract Lakota art forms. Some are executed strictly in paint on canvas while others incorporate materials such as beads, porcupine quillwork, and buckskin, weaving aesthetics and concepts from multiple yet intertwined histories.

Takes Care of Them is a suite of four screenprints published by Highpoint Editions: *Wówahokuŋkiya | Lead; Wókağe | Create; Nakíčižiŋ | Protect; and Wačháŋtognaka | Nurture*. The work was inspired by the practice of four veterans being asked to stand and face each of the four cardinal directions during the wabléniča ceremony, a ritual welcoming adoptees and formerly fostered individuals back into the tribal community. In many Native cultures, veterans are revered as modern-day warriors, including women who serve to lead and protect their community, but who also act as creators and nurturers. White Hawk wanted to recognize all the women in her life who embodied these qualities and taught her to be a good member of a family and community.

Her recent work in performance, video, and photography focuses on issues of Indigenous language, women's rights, and the necessity of nurturing cross-cultural relationships to encourage conversations that challenge the lack of representation of Native arts, people and voices in our national consciousness while highlighting the truth and necessity of equality and intersectionality.

Survival: Tribe/Community , 1996
Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, Salish, Nehiiyawak and Aqui-Dika
Color Lithograph on Chine colle
The Patricia and Peter Frechette Endowment Fund and
The James and Maureen Duffey Endowment for Prints and Drawings
2008.66.4

"I am defined by my will to survive, not by intelligence or cunning or money or good looks. The Creator didn't see her way clear to give me those things, instead she gave me a strong will."
- Jaune Quick-to-See Smith

JAUNE QUICK-TO-SEE SMITH combines her Native aesthetic with abstraction found in Western art. She adeptly mixes text and imagery to inject subtle hints or overt references to subjects she wants her viewers to consider. The lithographs in Smith's four-part Survival series are named for Native social models that have given Indigenous people resilience, allowing them to survive the severe disruption brought about by colonialism. Note: the other subjects in the series are Wisdom/Knowledge, Nature/Medicine, and Humor.

Survival focuses on Rabbit. Much has been made of the importance of this small animal as a trickster. Lighthearted and prone to occasional inappropriate behavior, Rabbit stands boldly on its two hind legs and with its front limbs akimbo, Her rabbit cuts a defiant figure, its determination radiating outward in red through a series of quickly drawn strokes of a lithographic crayon. The rabbit is superimposed on four identical Latin cross church floorplans, symbols of the European Christocentric world view that was used to justify Manifest Destiny's systematic persecution of indigenous populations. In this print, the rabbit is a potent figure of resistance, grit, and resilience, themes that Smith addresses in the rest of the portfolio.

This theme of grit, resilience and resistance is reflected in Rosalie's family survival - of staying alive during the times of war, of maintaining one's traditions and stories, to keeping one's relationship to the land, to her keeping the skills her father taught her and to keeping one's Native spirit alive when all seems lost.

Waterfall, 1993
Truman Lowe, Ho Chunk
Ash Wood
The Patricia and Peter Frechette
Endowment of Art Acquisition
2023.5.2A-C

“Some individuals understand a certain material so well that it doesn’t matter what they make with it -- you know their hand is in it. Once their hand has touched the material, it becomes art.”
- Truman Lowe

TRUMAN LOWE is a Ho Chunk sculptor and installation artist noted for his poetic ability to transform wood into water. He traces the origins and evolution of his practice from the traditional splint-plait baskets that hee learned how to make at an early age from his parents to his large-scale installations.This lyrical sculpture unearths the power of water manifest in the riverbed, water surface, and vessel.

In Waterfall, large thin supple strands of ash pour down from a fixed state, *creating a sense of movement and tranquility*. Throughout his career, Truman Lowe would gather ash saplings and willow reeds from his homelands to create calm contemplative sculptures about water. Growing up along the banks of Black River Wisconsin and raised in a vibrant artistic Ho-Chunk family of splint-ash basket makers, Lowe was immersed in a Woodlands community living within and in relation to the land. *Water, a universal and elemental source of all life, becomes an endless stream of metaphor and creativity for him*.

Lowe says he learned about simple geometry from Brancusi and about scale from Henry Moore. Studying Michelangelo’s life and work showed him that he could make a living as an artist. Formally, Lowe’s work can be connected to Julio Gonzalez and David Smith,sculptor/constructors who drew in space. By drawing with sapling and, tying his lines together his sculptures typically function in two dimensions and many hang on the wall.

With rivers representing the flow of live and the connections to her people and her family, Rosalie finds peace and a quiet sustenance when being by the river. Fo her, it is an escape and a relief to “sink into” its cleansing.

Seed Jar
c. 1250-1499
Mississippian
Earthenware clay
and pigments
The Ethel Morrison
Van Derlip Fund
90.2.6

SEED JAR (seen in case by Waterfall) The shapes of many Mississippian-period ceramic bottles appear to imitate containers fashioned from gourds. Certain of these vessels suggest that some gourd containers may have had ritual associations with mortuary practices and, (perhaps), even the brewing of medicines. The vessels formed, the firing approaches and their primary function became evident by the remains within the jars and also, where they were found.

Seed jars speak to the necessity and importance of saving and preserving seeds for the next year as well as those to come. The storing of grain meant the culture and the lifeways of the people would continue. This meant the traditions would continue and the stories would be told. Simply shaped they were also used for ceremonial purposes as well as for daily use. Seeds represent tradional knowledge, identities, songs and the protection of Mother Earth. And so the gathering and preservation of seeds is paramount.

Mazes Seed Pot, 2014
Franklin Peters, Haaku (Acoma Pueblo)
Clay, Pigments
Gift of Loren G. Lipson, M.D., 2016.5.8

MAZES SEED POT (as seen in the Americas gallery) Traditionally used to store seeds with the small top opening allowing for lilttle sun, rain or moisture to remain, this pot shows designs associated with rainfall falling upon the cornfields. Corn is a food source that symbolized power yet also is considered a sacred plant. As a main staple in Native diets as elder, Duane “Chili” Yazzie, Diné comments, *“We come from four worlds. This is the fourth world, and we are four peoples. The blacks take care of the water, the blue ones the air, the white ones the fire, and we, the dark ones, take care of the earth. Corn is a must to live. The first woman was given corn, a symbol of fertility. As the first people, we feel the pain of Mother Earth.”* It is not an isolated crop; mixed with beans and squash, it represents the three sisters for it shares its nutrients and they each protect each other.

Seeds are the most important concept in The Seed Keeper. They represent life,survival, culture, and evidence of the past, as well as hope for the future. The “seed keeper” is the person tasked with preserving the lineage and legacy and knowing the conditions to help the plants, and thus the people, flourish. As Rosalie learns, seeds contain the promise of new life and the nutrients that will help the seedling grow until it can start creating food and energy on its own. Just as human children start as embryos, the seeds are children that need care in order to grow. They are “asleep” until the conditions are right for them to “awaken”.

“We are in sacred times ...“We are in a spiritual battle for this earth. We need a revolution of people who are willing to follow the pipe, not have one. The earth needs us and the future generations have us and we are out of time for the waters.”

- Christi Belcourt

It’s a Delicate Balance, 2021
Christi Belcourt, Metis
Acrylic on canvas
Gift of Funds from Andy and Meg Ubel
in Honor of Mia’s Docent Class of 2015
2021.30

Examples of the endangered, threatened or now extinct plant, trees and animal life seen are: dwarf Lake Iris, Karner blue butterfly, cerulean warbler, narrow-leaved Milkweed, Henslow’s sparrow, regal Fritillary (butterfly), chestnut-collared Longspur, ground nesting songbird

CHRISTI BELCOURT For most Indigenous communities, all life— plants, animals, insects,microbes— are kin, and to be treated with respect and care. Most of the living beings that Belcourt depicts here are currently threatened, endangered, or at the edge of extinction in Mia’s backyard, the Upper Midwest. Each of these species is critical for the balance of our ecosystem, interconnected to all of life, including humanity. It is an urgent “call to action” to acknowledge our connectedness to nature and that we are, indeed, all related. Today we are inundated with messages and information regarding the harm and destruction of the earth”. Environmental tragedies, invasive plants, our inattention to chemicals seeping into the land. “Even a wounded world is feeding us. Until we can grieve for our planet we can not love it – grieving is a sign of spiritual health … it is not enough to weep for our lost landscapes; we have to put our hands in the earth to make ourselves whole again.” For the author, restoration is a powerful antidote to despair. Christi Belcourt’s painting powerfully displays the results of our toxic relationship that has been with the plants, wildlife, waterways, the air … and speaks to the renewal of the land. Each of these species seen are critical for the balance within our world.

This speaks to how Marie Blackbird, and then, Rosalie, Gaby, Darlene, and Ida recognize the importance of preserving the seeds, remembering the stories, understanding our relationships to the land and water, and why it is important to survive and give of ourselves what is necessity to bridge the past so that future generations will thrive. Rosalie’s determination to have her son, Tommy, understand why it is important to learn the ways of seeds as his father and grandfather did with the farm – and then her return to her original garden to encourage new growth and a path towards her Native culture – speaks to the necessity to “take back” who she was so that she can be whole.

"I feel a reverence for the land and the lake. You come back to your own environment and how you grew up. Maybe you are drawn to the people too- those you grew up with. A certain relationship to those people and a relationship to the land, rocks, and trees. This may have influenced my art to a certain degree."

- George Morrison

Lake Superior Landscape, 1981
George Morrison, Grand Portage Anishnaabe
Acrylic on canvas
The Jane and James Emison Endowment for Native American Art, 2015.1

GEORGE MORRISON's Lake Superior Landscape painting conveys all of the qualities of George Morrison's work – the use of strong colors, textures, and the persistent horizon line. The abstract elements within the piece harmonize with stacked squares, suggestive of Morrison's wood collages. Lake Superior changes frequently depending on when you lookat it – Caribbean blues, ominous grays, white-caps, and sparkly silvers. The world changes as well and when Morrison looked he painted this moody lake and all of the colors he would see and feel.

For most Natives, *the connection to the land and tribal community informs their worldview and animates the way they live*. As important as these traditional, long-standing connections may be to Indians, and contrary to some of the stereotypes about them, they also are connected to a global world with all its complexities. As revealed in the lives they lived and the art they made, many Native artists drew inspiration from the duality of their particular homeland and its deeply personal tribal roots, as well as their worldly experience. It is clear that Morrison had a deep connection to his tribal roots, based largely on his direct experiences on Lake Superior and the surrounding sights and sounds. *The significance of place is central to his work and daily life*. From a formal perspective, he gave painterly attention to particular places. Technically, there was much layering of paint thickly applied on the picture plane, often with the effect of the horizon point extended far into the distance. Morrison was a strong colorist, using complex mixtures of rich and saturated colors, the deep colors present in his home landscape.

The importance of water in Dahkota culture is noted with Rosalie's father's lesson about Dahkota origins and place names. The name of the land— now the state name— highlights water, meaning "water so clear you could see the clouds' reflection". Bdote, the place where two rivers join, is considered the "center of the earth". By starting Rosalie's story with this information, the author is centering water's importance. For Morrison, the water was a connection to the land where he was born. It connects his and his people's past and the present. These "horizon" paintings establish the "enigma of the horizon" and how it symbolizes the above, the below ... the horizon is visible from the short however we can not "go there." This is different from Rosalie's attraction to the rivers; she finds solace running to the banks of the Mississippi as she knows that if she follows the river, she will go "back home" and so, it represents a link to her past and a way to re-connect to her father and her traditions.

""I love the use of colors — it's so joyous and ironic and funny — it's wonderful. And every corner has a hilarious visual joke in it."."

- Jim Denomie

Attack on Fort Snelling Bar and Grill, 2007
Jim Denomie, Lac Courte Oreilles Band
Oil on Canvax
Weisman Art Museum, University of Minnesota,
The Frances M. Norbeck Fund

JIM DENOMIE Bright colors. Dark subjects. Jim Denomie's vivid paintings tell stories of colonialism, oil pipelines, violence. Stories the artist himself wasn't aware of until adulthood. So it goes for a Native American assimilated into white culture through the machinery that culture has designed to do so. Indian Urban Relocation. The generational trauma of Indian Boarding Schools. Popular culture. A public education system centered on white nationalism. Let's revisit in particular the historical context of the US-Dahkota War of 1862 as well as the cultural context of the Dahkota and their origin stories.

Learning his history and culture, and acquiring the artistic tools necessary to express what he was feeling visually, would come later for Denomie who was Ojibwe (Lac Courte Oreilles Band, 1955–2022). Denomie could be described as a colorist. His primary attractionwas to color and he noticed it everywhere–sunsets, birds, fish,frogs, minerals. He often told the story of how color theory was his most important, transformative class at university. Pinks, purples, fuchsia.His palate is deep and rich with nonrepresentational hues recalling the Fauves of the early 20 century. His colorful narrative landscapes are rife with character and personality and loaded with symbolism and humor. In larger works, his stories span the
history of Native American culture, punctuated with relevant contemporary pop imagery, bridging a generational and cultural gap with vivid color. Far and away, the stories Denomie focuses on—those of his native Ojibwe culture, cultural divides, and political disgraces—are what most compel the eye of the viewer to study his works. And these studies prove endlessly rewarding.

Spiritual, yes. Indigenous, yes. And incorporating Western art traditions. Denomie's paintings are laden with symbolism. *"I am trying to comment about issues from my point of view as I understand them. I am not trying to re-write history. I am not creating history. I am just bringing more of it to the surface and presenting it in an honest way that is more appealing and less alienating. Often, I use humor to diffuse a tense situation. Because of some of the historical events of this country's development, sometimes that humor can be sarcastic".*