



NATIVE ART NOW!

**Developments in Contemporary
Native American Art Since 1992**

Edited by Veronica Passalacqua and Kate Morris
Compiled by James H. Nottage

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Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art
Indianapolis

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Meryl McMaster (Plains Cree/Blackfoot)
Anima ("In-Between Worlds" series, detail), 2012
Digital chromogenic print; image: 36 x 36 inches
Collection of the Eiteljorg Museum of American
Indians and Western Art
Courtesy of the artist

Frontispiece: Plate 1

Nicholas Galanin (Tlingit/Aleut, born 1979)
I Think It Goes Like This?, 2012
Appropriated Indonesian totem pole, deconstructed,
wood, paint; exhibition area: 100 square feet
Collection of the Eiteljorg Museum of American
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Multi-media installation; dimensions vary
From exhibit *Witnesses: Art and Canada's Indian Residential Schools* (September 6–December 1, 2013)

Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, The University of British Columbia
Photo: Michael R. Barrick

CHAPTER 10

ADJACENCIES AND DISTANCES: Indigenous Installation Art in Canada

Lee-Ann Martin (Mohawk)

For nearly three decades, Indigenous artists in Canada have produced innovative installations that address diverse issues within social, historical, and political frameworks. The term “installation art” has been used increasingly since the 1960s to denote temporary, site-specific artworks designed to surround or interact with the viewer and/or extant architecture in a given exhibition space.¹

In Canada, as elsewhere, the decade of the 1990s was a fertile period for innovation in installation art; this was also a time when artists critically engaged with colonial dominance became increasingly recognized by mainstream institutions.² During this time, several Canadian Indigenous artists viewed installation practices as an opportunity to eschew stereotypical labels of “pan-Indian” art and reject the popular essentialist notions associated with their cultural identities. Having achieved limited inclusion in regional and national art institutions by the early 1990s, many Indigenous artists explored ideas of institutional space as a social construct in provocative immersive environments. At the heart of these works are the inherent tensions between the self-defined boundaries of artistic and cultural expression and the



incursive hierarchies that transgress these spaces.

At its best, installation art expands the viewer's experience beyond the limitations of the two-dimensional. To achieve dramatic three-dimensional constructions, artists often employ real objects rather than representations that make the works ontologically puzzling as the viewers/participants struggle to renegotiate their relationship to this new environment.³ The act of physical engagement, such as walking into and/or around the work, activates the viewer and shifts one's positionality from passive viewer to participant.

Claire Bishop suggests that the key characteristic that defines installation art is the literal presence of the viewer within the space.⁴ However, Aboriginal artists often challenge Bishop's definition by strategically placing viewers at a critical distance from the "internal dialogue" of their works. Whether sculptural and minimalist or performative and theater-like, the artworks discussed in this essay reveal the artists' strategies in determining the viewer's position. Borrowing from Bhabha,⁵ selected installations by three Aboriginal artists—Rebecca Belmore (Anishinaabe, b. 1960), Joane Cardinal-Schubert (Kainai, 1942–2009) and Faye HeavyShield (Kainai-Blood, b. 1953)—reveal

the "uneven conditions of adjacencies and distances" in these works.

Consider the contrast between two installations by Joane Cardinal-Schubert from an ongoing series, "Preservation of a Species," which prompt opposite degrees of viewer engagement/participation. This series began in 1977, soon after Cardinal-Schubert experienced a very negative reaction upon viewing the unbundling of a medicine bundle in the collection of the Glenbow Museum, Calgary, Alberta. This horrific episode inspired the series, which is largely made from disposable objects painted a monotone black to emphasize this "dark time in our history."⁶

Preservation of a Species: The Lesson, 1993 (Plate 137) addresses the deleterious effects of residential schools on generations of Aboriginal people. Here, Cardinal-Schubert invites viewers to become participants. Black painted temporary walls configure a makeshift classroom with several rows of black desks. Messages written in white chalk on the walls/blackboards became interactive components as First Nations people participated by speaking and writing about their own experiences in residential schools.⁷ The chair legs are tethered together with rope, a form of hobbling in



one sense and, in another, forcibly linking disparate histories.⁸ The schoolroom environment allowed space for residential school survivors to reassert their voices under a new educational paradigm.⁹ At the same time, non-Aboriginal viewers participated as witnesses to this history and to these actions. Cardinal-Schubert's installation environments suggest the possibility of performance, participation, and the presence of the human body, yet remain independent and conceptually engaging entities.

In contrast, *Preservation of a Species: DECONSTRUCTIVISTS (This is the house that Joe Built)*, 1989 (Plate 138), is intended primarily for non-Aboriginal audiences. Here, Cardinal-Schubert revealed aspects of her family's history, including that of her father, Joseph, and her brother, Douglas, together

with selected historical and contemporary realities of Aboriginal people within Canada. The artist states, "There is a choice being offered to the viewers as to how they wish to look at Native people."¹⁰ Configured as a construction site, the installation forces the viewer into uncomfortable positions to read the text through tiny peepholes, some tinted with red glass, further obscuring a clear view. Cardinal-Schubert says, "I have created this construction site especially for the 'deconstructivists' (viewers). It is difficult to see all the facts in just one look. It is an uncomfortable and unsettling experience. Good! Now you know how I have felt for most of my life."¹¹

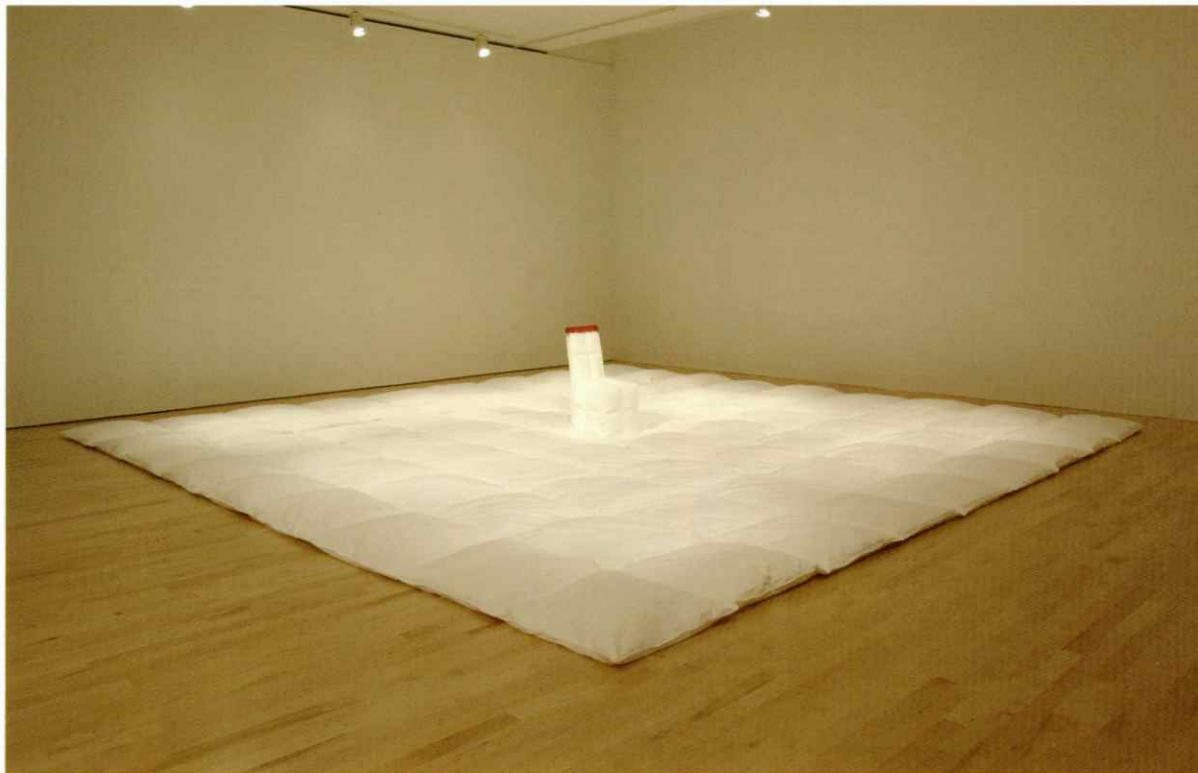
Cardinal-Schubert intended to involve the viewer as one of the "contemporary artifacts" in this installation.¹² While engagement is central to the

Left: Plate 138
Joane Cardinal-Schubert (Kanai, 1942–2009)
Preservation of a Species: DECONSTRUCTIVISTS (This is the House that Joe Built), 1990
Multi-media installation; dimensions vary

Canadian Museum of History, S93-14314
Image courtesy of the museum

Right: Plate 139
Rebecca Belmore (Anishnaabe, b. 1980)
blood on the snow, 2002
Installation of fabric, feathers, chair, acrylic paint; 240 5/32 x 240 5/32 x 42 1/8 inches

Collection of the Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
Photo: Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia



meaning of this installation, visitors are distanced from entering by the construction barrier Cardinal-Schubert placed around it. This distancing is thus the perceptual realization that they can never really enter the world that the (Indigenous) artist reveals. In recontextualizing found elements into spaces such as the construction site and the classroom, Cardinal-Schubert suggests that these commonplace and everyday spaces are embedded with the history of racial oppression and, indeed, play a central role in this process. In presenting these considered examinations of the history of unequal power relationships and their effects upon Aboriginal peoples, Cardinal-Schubert not only disrupts the ongoing dominant paradigm, but also communicates beyond it.

The barren whiteness of Rebecca Belmore's installation *blood on the snow*, 2002 (Plate 139) evokes the pristine indifference of a blanket of snow defiled by the blood of the dispossessed. The quilted and bloodied chair, physically distanced from the viewer, is emblematic of untold violations against Aboriginal women throughout time and space. Like Cardinal-Schubert, Belmore's installation forces the viewer into an uncomfortable position of detachment

and imposed indifference. The cool and ordered expanse of white guilt/quilt is minimalist, almost clinical; it conceals the truth that violence against Aboriginal women continues as regularly as the snow blankets the earth. The traces of blood that flow from the top of the chair become metaphors for the red of ancestors' blood upon whiteness: blood memories of pain upon a blanket of white lies.

In early 2002, in the downtown eastside of Vancouver, British Columbia, the grim disappearances of nearly seventy women, many of them Aboriginal, over the past twenty years became public. In their refusal to respond to repeated requests by concerned citizens for an official investigation into the possibility of a serial killer, authorities showed a deadly combination of discrimination and indifference. A belated police investigation launched in 2001 led to the identification of many women's bodies on a pig farm and, subsequently, fifteen charges of murder. In a scathing report released in October 2004, titled "Stolen Sisters," Amnesty International accused police and governments in Canada of turning a blind eye to the disproportionate level of violence against Indigenous women.

Belmore was living in Vancouver at this

Plate 140
Faye HeavyShield (Kainai-Blood, b. 1953)
aapaskaiyaawa, 2002
Acrylic on canvas, monofilament, beads; 70 x144 x72
inches

Collection of the MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina, Saskatchewan
Photo: Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff, Alberta

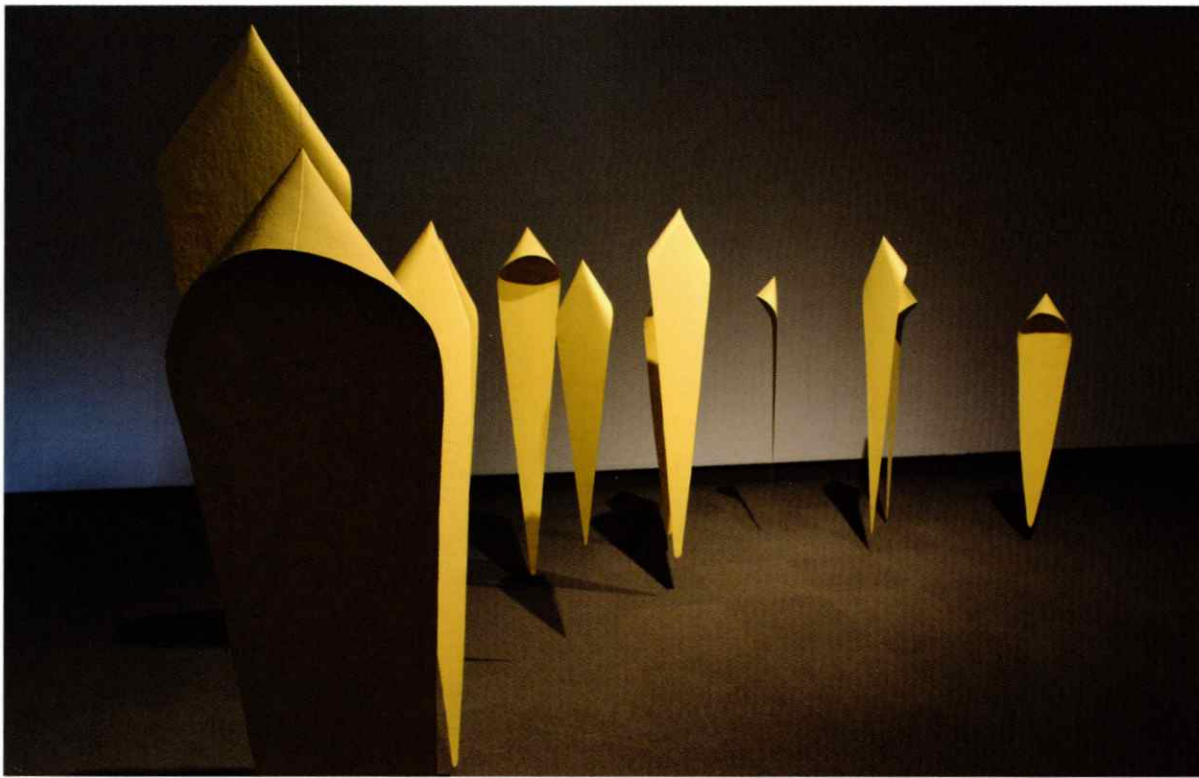
time; *blood on the snow* was her immediate response to this latest chapter in the horrific history of violence against Aboriginal people. In this powerful monument to the despair and futility of senseless deaths, Belmore also memorializes the massacre at Wounded Knee Creek, South Dakota, in December 1890, when the United States cavalry slaughtered 300 unarmed Lakota people, mostly women and children. Their frozen bodies lay for four days under a blanket of snow before being thrown into mass graves.

Frequently site-specific and based upon immediate circumstance, Belmore's mixed-media installations often challenge traditional European notions of sculpture. At times, she creates performative installations in which, devoid of her presence, she leaves behind the objects employed in a performance. At other times, as in *blood on the snow*, the installation becomes an environment suggesting the possibility of performance and the human body, yet is independent from it.

For her monumental work, *Fountain*, created for the 51st Venice Biennale in 2005, Belmore achieved a masterful new performance-based video installation. Renowned Canadian filmmaker Noam Gonick filmed Belmore's performance on a chilly

February day at Iona Beach, south of Vancouver, where the city's sewage is released into the ocean. Since no live audience other than the video crew witnessed her performance, the video was not simply documentation. Rather, the intent was to integrate the video performance into the installation of the fully operational fountain for the Venice Biennale. Since the Renaissance in Europe and elsewhere, elaborate fountains have functioned as potent symbols of power and identity. With this installation, Belmore seeks to shatter long-held myths embedded in our common colonial history so that her *Fountain* can become a symbolic oasis in the arid environment of colonial relationships.

The video begins with a panoramic view along a stretch of sandy beach that is strewn with timber rescued by the water from the logging industry's greed. Suddenly, brilliant fire bursts skyward from the beach and, in the water, Belmore struggles with a full bucket of water. Her bucket bears the weight of historical circumstance in which the oceans carried Europeans to the Americas and witnessed the shockwaves of their arrival for centuries to come. The turbulence subsides; Belmore then hauls the bucket onto the beach



and strides with great resolve toward the camera. She heaves its contents, transformed from water into blood that pours down the large video screen. The bloodied screen thus melds with the real flowing water on its surface to become a powerful metaphor for the impact of colonialism within Indigenous histories. Through the bloodied surface, Belmore confronts the viewer with the sombre, resilient expression of someone ready to move forward, with nothing to fear and, sadly, nothing more to lose. Here, as throughout Belmore's practice, she flings responsibility for the cycles of bloodshed in the Americas back to their European sources.

As a member of the Kainai (Blood) Nation in the foothills of southern Alberta, Faye HeavyShield conveys references to blood that are both literal and metaphorical. HeavyShield's practice involves laborious, repetitive actions that produce thoughtful and elegant architectural installations. Her deceptively spare sculptural elements carry with them the power of understatement and engagement. Her works also reward close attention with layers of meaning, both familiar and mysterious.

The grouping of twelve figures in the installation, *aapaskaiyaawa (They are Dancing)*, 2002

(Plate 140) is inspired by HeavyShield's personal memories of family and community. Twelve life-size conical figures suspended in space suggest the multiple ambiguities of the dance between Earth and sky, permanence and fragility, past and future. Scant layers of paint on the canvas ensure lightness and mobility, the same properties that made for easy transport of the tepee that the forms resemble. *aapaskaiyaawa* masterfully intertwines personal memories with thoughtful considerations of the artist's relationships to family, home, history, and the land. HeavyShield's persuasive minimalism cleverly unites references to the human body with architectural and natural forms. From a distance, the figures resemble the gentle swaying motion and colors of the prairie grasses on the rolling landscape of southern Alberta. The color of the grasses and the calm of the prairies inspire HeavyShield's preference for monochromatic simplicity. This bleached palette provides a sort of grounding—a stillpoint. The muted colors of her environment are expressed in forms with shifting sources of inspiration: bones both human and animal, tepee and poles, the character and texture of the land, the wind gently moving the prairie grasses.

The proximity of viewers to the figures prompts them to gently sway, as if in a dance, from the movement of the air currents. While HeavyShield metaphorically leaves the circle of dance open for additional participants, she physically distances any participation by the close adjacencies of each dancer.

Recently, HeavyShield has shifted focus from her relationship with the land to the vital importance of rivers to both the land and its inhabitants. Both of HeavyShield's childhood homes in southern Alberta were near rivers: the Oldman River and the Belly River. The devastating impact of population growth, pollution, drought, and the scarcity of good potable water inspires much of her work as a reminder that our rivers and other water systems are in need of our critical attention. In *slivers*, 2010, HeavyShield celebrates the intrinsic value of rivers as agents of well-being and respect. In August 2010, she visited Winnipeg, Manitoba, to travel on the Red and Assiniboine Rivers that converge within the city at a popular location known as The Forks. She learned about the histories of these waterways and photographed the surface from various locations. Upon returning home, she created a series of folded paper arrowheads from the digital images of the rivers. HeavyShield then wove these elements together into a horizontal grid suspended from the ceiling. Like the figures in *aapaskaiyaawa*, the subtle movement of the woven grid creates a gentle rippling effect, reminiscent of the flow of water, but observed only from a distance.

The multiple components of HeavyShield's sculptural installations reaffirm the unwieldy nature of life. At the same time, she rejects the privileged position of the viewers' immersive experience in favor of an indefinite number of perceptual experiences and tangential points of view.

Complex associations with the body characterize much installation art by Aboriginal artists in Canada. This practice is not surprising, given that the body is the site where race discourse frequently plays out because it is the site where race is presumed to reside.¹³ In *Fountain*, Belmore's own body reveals the complex mix of power relationships, history, and identity. Frequently, the artists employ objects such as empty chairs and suspended figures that attest either to the body's absence or its presence; these metaphorical signs provide links to a larger social history of people and events. Rebecca Belmore, Joane Cardinal-Schubert, and Faye HeavyShield thus enact a deterritorialization and reterritorialization of these signs that guarantee the narratives and histories of their own representation.¹⁴

¹ Jennifer A. González, *Subject to Display: Reframing Race in Contemporary Installation Art* (Cambridge, MA: MITechnology Press, 2008), 7.

² Gonzalez, *Subject to Display*, 18.

³ Thanks to Marcia Crosby and David Garneau for their comments, August 16, 2012.

⁴ Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 6.

⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, "Double Vision," *Artforum* (January 1992): 88.

⁶ Kathryn Burns and Joane Cardinal-Schubert, *Two Decades* (Calgary, AB: The Muttart Public Art Gallery, Calgary, 1997), 41.

⁷ *DIG: An Installation by Dr. Joane Cardinal-Schubert RCA* (Calgary, AB: Masters Gallery Ltd., 2009).

⁸ Pamela McCallum, *Alberta Views* (Fall 1999): 18.

⁹ Burns and Cardinal-Schubert, *Two Decades*, 41.

¹⁰ Lee-Ann Martin and Gerald McMaster, *INDIGENA: Contemporary Native Perspectives* (Vancouver/Toronto and Hull: Douglas & McIntyre and the Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1992), 133.

¹¹ Lee-Ann Martin and Gerald McMaster, *INDIGENA*, 133.

¹² Burns and Cardinal-Schubert, *Two Decades*, 37.

¹³ González, *Subject to Display*, 4.

¹⁴ González, *Subject to Display*, 10.

Plate 141
Will Wilson (Diné, b. 1969)
Auto Immune Response #5 (detail), 2005
Digital inkjet print; 36 3/4 x 111 1/2 inches

Collection of the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians
and Western Art



INTRODUCTION TO PHOTOGRAPHY, FILM, AND PERFORMANCE

Veronica Passalacqua

Within the wide range of artistic practices in contemporary Native American art, the media most recently recognized are photography, film, and performance. Photography by Native American artists emerged in exhibitions in the late 1980s and early 1990s, creating discourse about its place within the canon of Native American art. Considering the lengthy history of imaging Native people since the earliest days of photographic technologies, this development comes rather late. The complexities of Native American photography are further compounded by the roles that the early images created by non-Native photographers played in creating visual and pervasive stereotypes of Indigenous peoples. To better appreciate contemporary works, recognition and awareness of the past are essential.

Alongside painting and printmaking, photographic images were some of the earliest representational likenesses of Native people and communities. Early images attempted to reflect Native people in the “real,” and thus were perceived as more authentic than other artistic forms of rendering. Whether real or fictionalized, the constructed image has the undeniable presence of a living person in photographs, film, and performance, fueling an impression of authenticity. Exploitation and leverage of these perceptions were employed as vehicles for propaganda and support of national policies that included assimilation, enslavement, and siege of Native lands.¹

Silent filmic representations of Indigenous



peoples in the early 1920s gave life to these stereotypes with motion and visual context beyond the photographic studio and into Native lands. Situating such stories in the Northwest Coast and Arctic was particularly popular, as Edward S. Curtis's melodrama *Land of the Headhunters*, 1914, and Robert J. Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*, 1922, attest. Franz Boas, in 1930, began recording in Northwest Coast communities with a motion picture camera and wax cylinder for sound, resulting in the film *The Kwakiutl of British Columbia*, 1930, and essentially launching a new field of visual anthropology.²

If we consider photography a still-life of the "real" and film as portraying the real in motion (even in fictional ways), performance is able to take this notion even further by the participation of physical presence witnessed by audiences and viewers. Expositions and World's Fairs included Native Americans in the context of recreated villages, such as in the 1893 Chicago World's Fair.³ Fictionalized performances were rendered in theatrical shows such as Buffalo Bill's Wild West show, which in 1883 began touring throughout the United States and Europe, continuing well into the twentieth century.⁴

Based on the public popularity of all these media, even when knowingly fictionalized, it is clear that non-Native audiences had an interest and curiosity about the American Indian. Stuart Hall articulates the impact of such viewing: "within racialized

forms of 'looking,' profound differences of history, culture and experience have often been reduced to a handful of stereotypical features, which are 'read' as if they represent a truth of nature, somehow indelibly inscribed on the body. They are assumed to be 'real' because they can be seen—difference, visible to the naked eye."⁵

These historical works have been explored at length by many others, but my interest in bringing them together is to not only consider them as a form of visual representation, but also as the manipulation of viewers' perceptions of authenticity, the real, and the strategies employed by Native peoples, both then and now, to mediate and utilize these contexts. In historical works, the agency of the sitters, actors, participants, and performers in these non-Native visual creations is widely discussed. Paula Fleming and Judith Luskey, for example, recount several stories and the contexts of those imaged in the early photography of tribal delegations to Washington, DC, and in communities as part of the governmental field surveys.⁶ In relationship to the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, David Beck describes how Native people "began very quickly to understand the value of what they were selling. They understood the market economy better than they have been given credit for doing."⁷ Through archival research from numerous Native sources, Beck and Rosalyn LaPier demonstrate that Native Americans in Chicago in the 1890s "were not passive victims in this



marketing endeavor and at times worked hard to use their high visibility at these events to shape American perceptions of them.” They note that Native Americans also used the Chicago World’s Fair as an opportunity “to push back against inauthentic portrayals and to represent themselves.”⁸

More recently, these historical representations have been re-appropriated into a contemporary context. Aaron Glass has been widely touring and discussing *In the Land of the Head Hunters* since 2008, restoring the film and accompanying it with live performances of the score and traditional dance.⁹

Award-winning vocalist Tanya Taqaq has recently created and is touring a performance piece in response to *Nanook of the North*. In both instances, the films are immersed in live sound, and, importantly, viewers are guided through a reinterpretation informed and steeped in Indigenous knowledge.

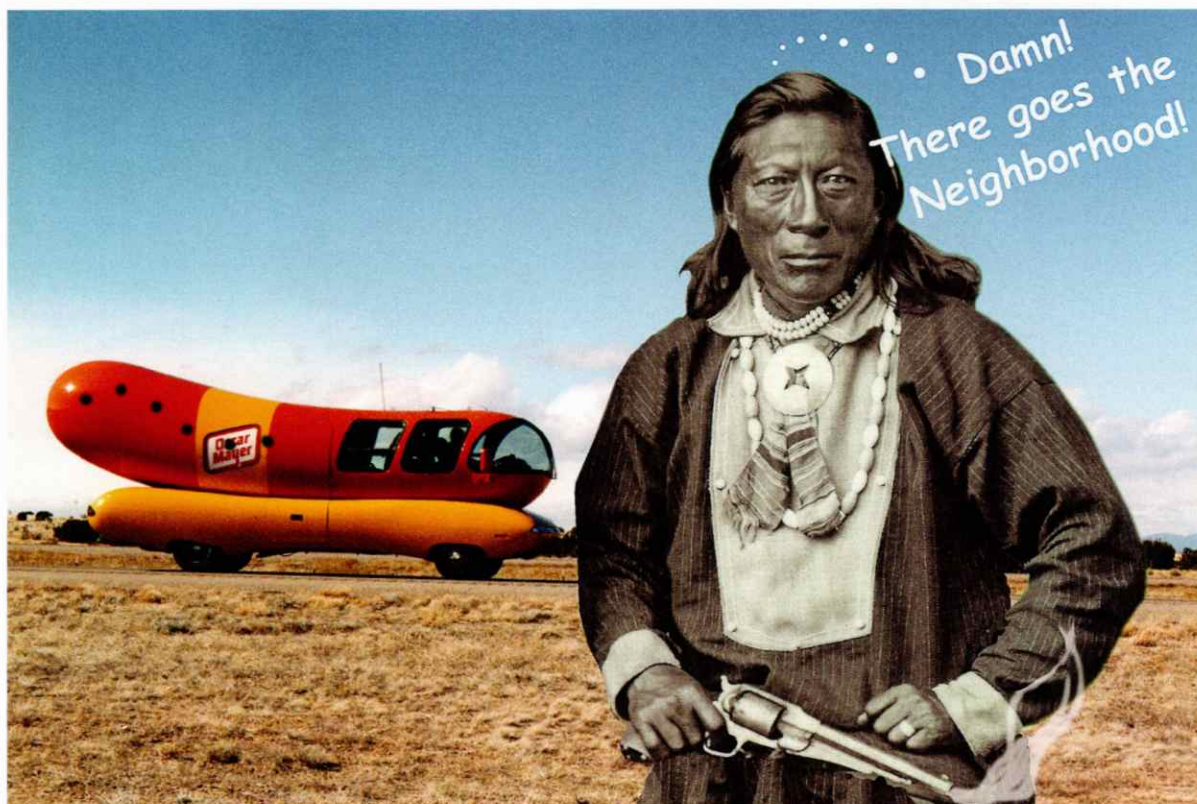
In the context of non-Native productions, Native American photographers from as early as 1890 included Benjamin A. Haldane (Tsimshian, 1874–1941), Jennie Ross Cobb (Aniyunwiya, 1881–1959), Richard Throssel (Cree/Metis/Scottish, 1882–1933), and countless students emerging from the Carlisle

Left: Plate 142
Jennie Ross Cobb (Cherokee, 1881–1959)
*Graduating Class of 1902, Cherokee Female Seminary,
Tahlequah, Oklahoma, 1902*
Photograph

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society

Left: Plate 143
Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie (Duskegee/Diné, b. 1954)
Damn! There goes the Neighborhood, 1998
Platinum lambda print; unset dimensions

Image courtesy of the artist



Indian School with a photographic education. These Native photographers created images from within their communities in alignment with the development of photographic technologies and simultaneous to the photographs created by non-Native ethnologists, surveyors, and government agencies.

Although their work was over a century old, it was not until the late 1990s, with the emergence and growing recognition of contemporary Native American photography, that their work became known through research efforts by Native American artists, authors, and curators. Recognition through exhibitions and publications of their work formed a solid historical base for Native American photography and an axis of dimension and engagement for contemporary artists and viewers.

Differing from non-Native productions, at the core of the media of photography, film, and performance is self-defined and determined representation to photograph, tell stories, and document

live expression according to how the artist, director, community, or collaborators envision and interpret. Within Indigenous communities, the understanding of self-representation is complexly intertwined with cultural rights of ownership, alongside responsibility, engagement of the past, providing a perspective of the present, and visioning the future.

The concept of visual sovereignty furthers this idea within artistic forms. Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie defined visual sovereignty as "the landscape that exists within the intellectual spherical confederacies of the global Aboriginal/Indigenous consciousness. It is a landscape full of Aboriginal/Indigenous thought, pain, beads, beauty, petroglyphs, weaving, technology, and actions, all without apology. It is an Aboriginal/Indigenous landscape with gradient azure skies of endless imaginings, cerulean clear oceans deep with coral-lined rip currents carrying Indigenous thoughts coast to coast, currents that effortlessly devour settler notions



of art. It is a landscape where young Indigenous artists create visions of continuance and senior artists breathe a sigh of relief.”¹⁰

Within Native American photography, contemporary artists work in genres of documentary, social reportage, photo-journalism, landscape, and digital collage. Photography is incorporated into mixed media works of printmaking, painting, weaving, and other forms. However, I am most interested in the constructed photographic portrait and its strength as an example of visual sovereignty and self-representation. Contemporary portraiture is being negotiated and transformed in radical ways, responding and furthering the complexities in the historical forms of representation.

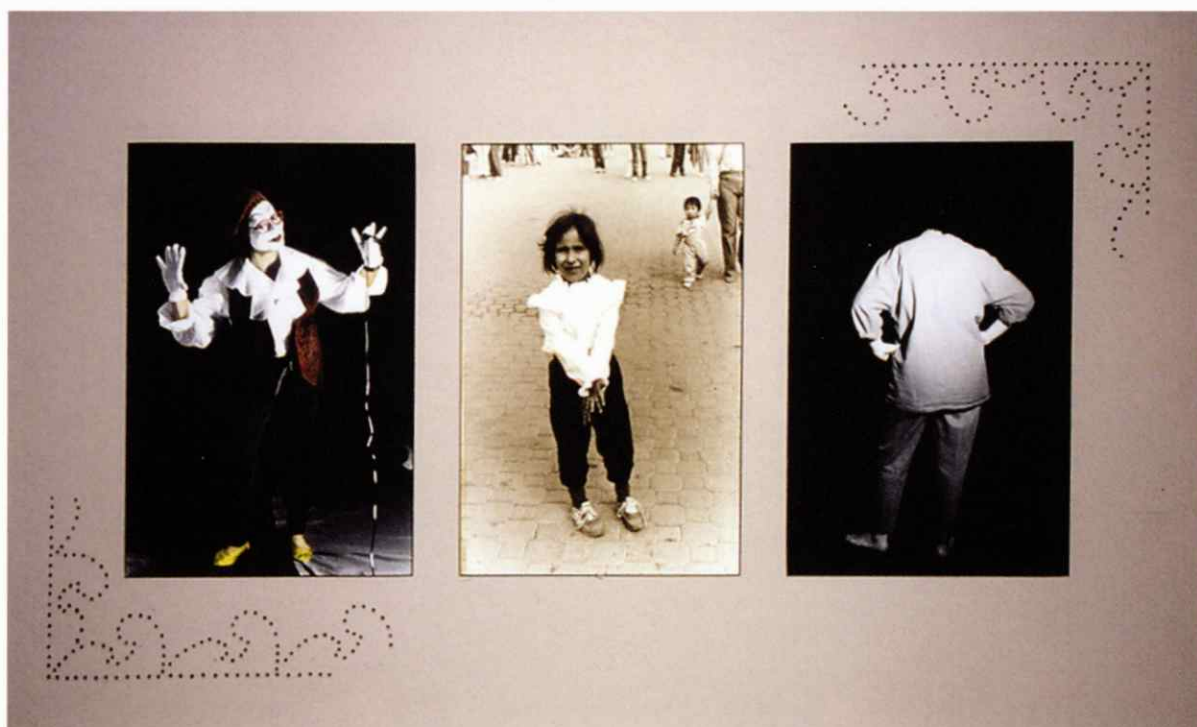
Contemporary Portraiture

The wide range of genres employed by Native American photographers reflects not only individual artistic interests and technological shifts, but also a media engaged with evolving and dynamic discourses in photography, Native American studies, and socio-political contexts. Portraiture has always been central to photography, but the constructed portrait, deliberately

composed and purposefully situated, has re-emerged in contemporary Native American and Indigenous photography in meaningful ways.

While traditional portraits are composed with the sitters posed for a certain effect, these images are intended to create a likeness, with the ability to look into the soul, to exist as a visual and lasting memory. Those portraits most cherished within families possess a special importance, so it is not surprising that family members are often incorporated as central figures in contemporary photography, even when the pieces are intended for public exhibition and imbued with socio-political commentary. Shelley Niro (Mohawk, b. 1954) has created several series of photographic works since the 1990s that include her mother, sisters, and daughters as the protagonists.

Niro likes to include family members because she continuously shares ideas, emotions, and thoughts with her family, examining political incidents and contexts in a symbiotic visual relationship. The life and experiences of her mother or how her family is affected by specific events are translated through a filter of family views, images, and perspectives.



In *The Rebel*, 1991 (Plate 144), Niro has posed her mother lying across the trunk of their family car, an AMC Rebel, in such a way as to immediately recall provocative and glamorous automobile advertising. The car, however, because of Niro's hand-tinting, is almost a monochrome nondescript blue except for the vivid red tail lights. Niro's personal interest in female imagery in advertising media has led her to purposefully pose her mother in such a way as to market her own concepts of femininity and beauty. Throughout much of her photographic work, Niro places family in a variety of roles, some in fictionalized personas as activated subjects and others as a form of memorialized beauty, all conveying a sense of endearment.

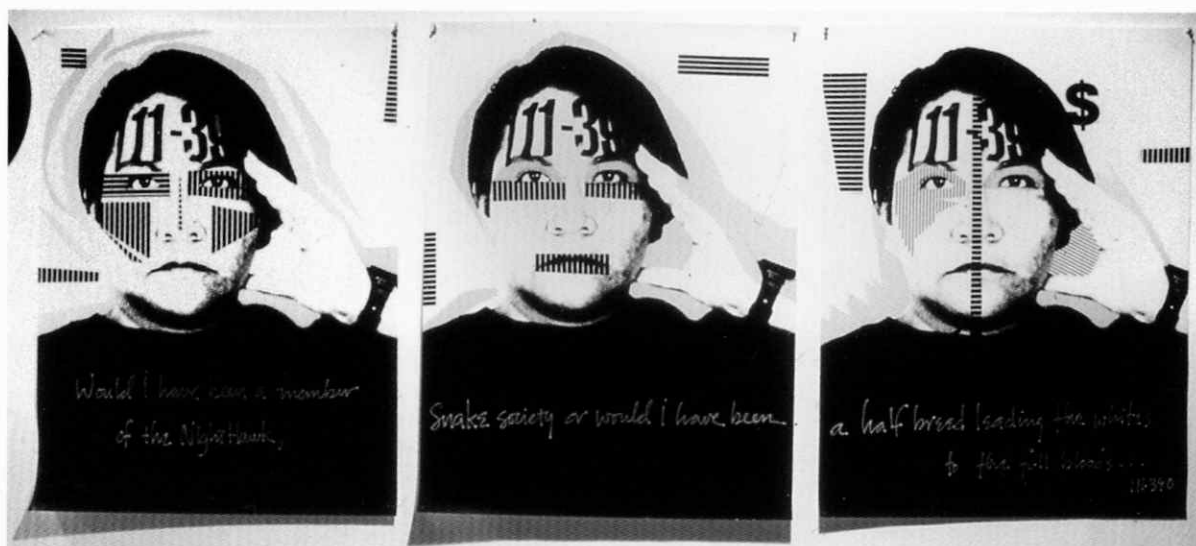
Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie (Duskegee/Diné, b.

1954) utilizes historical and contemporary portraiture throughout much of her photographic artwork. One of her early political installations, *Nobody's Pet Indian*, 1993 (Plate 146), is comprised of several portraits featuring Indigenous artists, activists, friends, and family. These large 30 by 40 inch black and white portraits are each surrounded by their own words or Tsinhnahjinnie's "imposed identification labels."¹¹ These include Shelley Niro as *Canadian Native 354*, her brother Yasso Tsinhnahjinnie as *Diné 007-A*, and her father as *Certified Native Specimen*. In its fullest form, the installation occupies a large space, as it did in 1993 at the San Francisco Art Institute. It also includes the triptych self-portrait *Creative Native*, 1994, in which the artist's face is covered with bar codes and her forehead is emblazoned with her Indian status number, 111-390. The

Left: Plate 144
Shelley Niro (Bay of Quinte Mohawk, b. 1954)
The Rebel, 1987.
Hand-tinted black and white photograph; 6 1/2 x 9 29/64 inches

Collection of the artist
Courtesy of the artist

Right: Plate 145
Shelley Niro (Bay of Quinte Mohawk, b. 1954)
This Land is Mime Land, ca. 1992
Gelatin silver print; 22 x 37 inches
Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Gift of Sandra Jackson, Bramalea, Ontario, 1995, accession number EX-95-130
Image courtesy of the artist



installation utilizes portraiture to pointedly confront the 1990 Indian Arts and Crafts Act signed into legislation by President George H. W. Bush. Public Law 101-644 continues to affect Native American artists and communities nationwide.

Interpreting or reading a photograph frequently involves close examination of the entire visual field, nuances in the sitter's expression, details of what he or she is wearing, and the context that surrounds him or her to the edge of the frame that contains the image. It is interesting to consider the impact on the viewing experience when the place or location is removed from view, when subjects are in a non-descript white studio or devoid of any background at all.

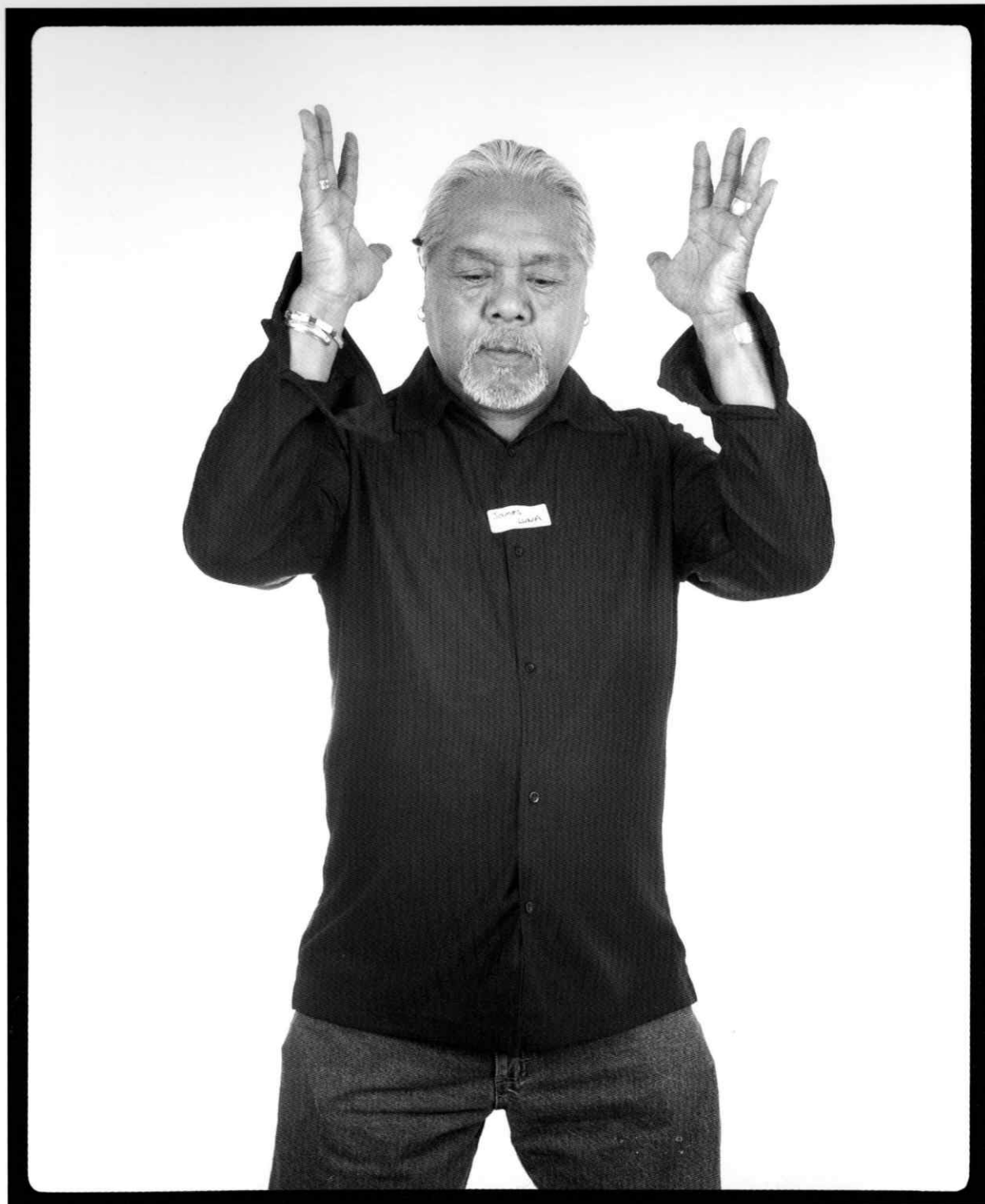
Upon first view of Dana Claxton's (Hunkpapa Lakota, b. 1959), five large-scale portraits that comprise *The Mustang Suite*, 2008, the stark white studio with glossy white floors is dramatically contrasted with the rich and vivid red in the attire of her sitters. A similar studio construct is employed in the series "On to the Red Road," 2007. La Flamme discusses the powerful symbolism and Indigenous significance of the color red, which is considered sacred by the Lakota.¹²

Posed and dressed by the artist, the works in both series are intentionally constructed, considered "actors" in the artist's creative vision and political dialogue. Furthermore, by placing her subjects in the

white-box studio, Claxton is simultaneously forcing the viewer to focus on her central content and liberating her subjects from a linear timeline, in effect creating a fluid and unidentified place that could be anywhere and everywhere. She writes that *The Mustang Suite* "is about presence—an Aboriginal presence in history and an Aboriginal presence into the future. I attempted to collapse the traditional and contemporary to indicate that Aboriginal people have the best of both worlds. We don't have to choose to live in one or the other, we can combine both."¹³

Perceptions of the "white-box" exhibition space are widely discussed in museology and art history and are relevant to several exhibitions of Native American art since the 1940s, where within these types of viewing environments there was an attempt to guide the viewer to focus upon the aesthetics of a piece, separated from its originating context. In the hands of Native artists, the portraits created in these environments reflect a purposeful construction that is clearly contemporary. The lack of background stands in defiance and contrast to the enduring stereotypes of historical portraits by non-Native photographers.

Devoid of all background entirely, the works of Rosalie Favell (Metis, b.1958) in the ongoing (since 2008) series "Facing the Camera" convey a sense of the contemporary authentic, supported by a



Left: Plate 146
 Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie (Duskegee/Diné, b. 1954)
Nobody's Pet Indian, 1990
 Digital print; 20 x 30 inches

Image courtesy of the artist

Right: Plate 147
 Rosalie Favell (Métis/Cree, b. 1958)
Facing the Camera: James Luna, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 2011
 Digital print; 17 x 22 inches

Collection of the artist
 Courtesy of the artist





Preceding Left Top: Plate 148
Dana Claxton (Hunkpapa Lakota, b. 1959)
Mustang Suite: Momma Has a Pony... (*Girl Named History and Sets Her Free*), 2008
Light-jet c-print; 48 x 60 inches
Courtesy of the artist

Preceding Left Bottom: Plate 149
Dana Claxton (Hunkpapa Lakota, b. 1959)
Mustang Suite: Daddy's Got a New Ride, 2008
Light-jet c-print; 48 x 60 inches
Courtesy of the artist

Preceding Right Top: Plate 150
Dana Claxton (Hunkpapa Lakota, b. 1959)
Mustang Suite: Baby Boyz Gotta Indian Pony, 2008
Light-jet c-print; 48 x 60 inches
Courtesy of the artist

Preceding Right Bottom: Plate 151
Dana Claxton (Hunkpapa Lakota, b. 1959)
Mustang Suite: Baby Girlz Gotta Mustang, 2008
Light-jet c-print; 48 x 60 inches
Courtesy of the artist

familiarity and willing collaboration with those she photographs. Working in black and white against a seemingly invisible white background, she photographs Native American and Indigenous artists, curators, writers, academics, and community advocates with casual and informal expression. Barry Ace observes that “for those who are familiar with the sitters in the portraits, it is an opportunity to see friends, relatives, acquaintances, colleagues, and peers in an unguarded, relaxed and optimistic state.”¹⁴ The structural elements of the series emerge through the tonalities of utilizing black and white, the brilliant white background, the consistency of a three-quarter subject, and the space-defining black border framing.

Comprised of hundreds of portraits, collectively the series extends beyond the individual portrait to become “a performance space, where identity is worked and reworked, represented, and perhaps hidden. I use the portrait convention to acknowledge the agency of the individual in bringing together in a conscious and unconscious way, the numerous cultural and personal factors through which the sense of self is expressed.”¹⁵

The performativity of the photographic portraits that Favell addresses is applicable to the work of each of these accomplished artists. The visuality of

constructing personas and identity is put into movement as each of these artists is also recognized for her work in film and video. When in the form of self-portraiture by these artists and many others, the photograph becomes both representational and documentary of performance. Through photography, film, and performance, contemporary artists are able to construct realities, visual interpretations of people, context, time, and commentary.

¹ The use of early photography of Native Americans for propaganda is exemplified through the multiple governmental surveys and popular dissemination of photographs from the Indian Wars from the 1860s, and later for assimilation policies within residential boarding schools by the 1880s. Paula Richardson Fleming and Judith Lynn Luskey, *The North American Indian in Early Photographs* (New York: Dorset Press, 1986); Rosalyn R. LaPier and David R. M. Beck, *City Indian: Native Activism in Chicago, 1893–1934* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 32.

² Jay Ruby, “Franz Boas and Early Camera Study of Behavior,” *Kinesis Report* (New York: Institute for Nonverbal Communication Research, 1980), 7.

³ Curtis Hinsley, “The World as Marketplace: Commodification of the Exotic at the World’s Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893” in *Exhibiting Cultures*, eds. Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).

⁴ Colin Taylor, “Wo’wapi Wašte, Acting the Part: Image Makers of the North American Indian,” in *Native Nations: Journeys in American Photography*, ed. Jane Alison (London: Barbican Art Gallery, 1998), 211.

⁵ Stuart Hall, *Difference* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2001), 4.

⁶ For general references, see Fleming and Luskey, *The North American Indian in Early Photographs*.

⁷ David Beck in Emily Sanders, “The 1893 Chicago World’s Fair and American Indian Agency,” *Cultural Survival*, Feb. 11, 2015, 1, <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/news/1893-chicago-worlds-fair-and-american-indian-agency>.

⁸ LaPier and Beck, *City Indian*, 32.

⁹ *In the Land of the Head Hunters*, film premiere and Gwa’wina traditional dance presentation, Getty Center, June 5, 2015.

¹⁰ Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie, “Visual Sovereignty: A Continuous Aboriginal/Indigenous Landscape” in *Diversity and Dialogue*, ed. James H. Nottage (Indianapolis: Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art and Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 15.

¹¹ Theresa Harlan, “Cultural Constructions: Rethinking Past and the New Realities” in *Camerawork: A Journal of Photographic Arts* 21, no. 1 (1994): 20.

¹² Michelle La Flamme, “Dana Claxton: Reframing the Sacred and Indigenizing the White Cube,” in *Diversity and Dialogue*, 52.

¹³ Amber Berson, “Dana Claxton, The Mustang Suite and Hybrid Humor,” *Artial: Art & Social Colloquium* (2010), <https://www.amberbereson.com/academic-writing>.

¹⁴ Barry Ace, “Revealed, The Portraits of Rosalie Favell” in *Facing the Camera: Rosalie Favell* (Winnipeg, MB: Urban Shaman, 2012), 5.

¹⁵ Rosalie Favell, “Artist’s Statement” in *Facing the Camera*, 2.

CHAPTER 11

SETTING THE PHOTOGRAPHS ASIDE: Native North American Photography since 1990 Lara M. Evans (Cherokee)

What does it take to consider the photographic medium as art at this moment? How has this changed since 1990? In a position between not being young and not (quite) being old, my experiences of photographs are intertwined with the commonly shared experience of viewing family photographs in a physical album, as well as on the Internet via platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. I also have the visceral memory of the smell of darkroom chemicals. I rolled brown jugs of chemicals along the floor while I watched our tube television, under strict instructions from my father to keep the jug moving. I sat in the garage darkroom, agitating trays, watching the images appear, and trying to keep an eye on the glowing sweep of the second hand around the face of the analog clock. Now I resize photographs digitally, keeping an eye on the number of pixels and balancing that against what I will do with the image. Will I project it twelve feet high through a digital projector? Or will I send it to a screen on a phone somewhere? Photography is common and accessible in ways that seemed unimaginable in 1990. At that point, the Internet barely existed; it was not widely available until the mid-1990s. The technology of photographic production and circulation has changed dramatically in this intervening time.

The divide between conversations about art photography and Native American photography is vast. In fact, the phrase "Native American photography" is easily misunderstood as referring to photographers of

Native Americans, rather than photography by Native photographers. If a person is searching for works by photographers who are Native American or First Nations, search engines and databases produce results that prioritize non-Native photographers whose subject is Native peoples. The sheer volume of historical photographs of Native peoples online and in print vastly overwhelms the availability of photographs by Native photographers.

Relationships between Native peoples and cameras have been fraught with tension and imbalance from the very beginning of photography. Photographs were used as an economic, ideological, and political tool against Native populations. Photographs documented physical (racialized) differences and were used to demonstrate the inferiority of colonized peoples.¹

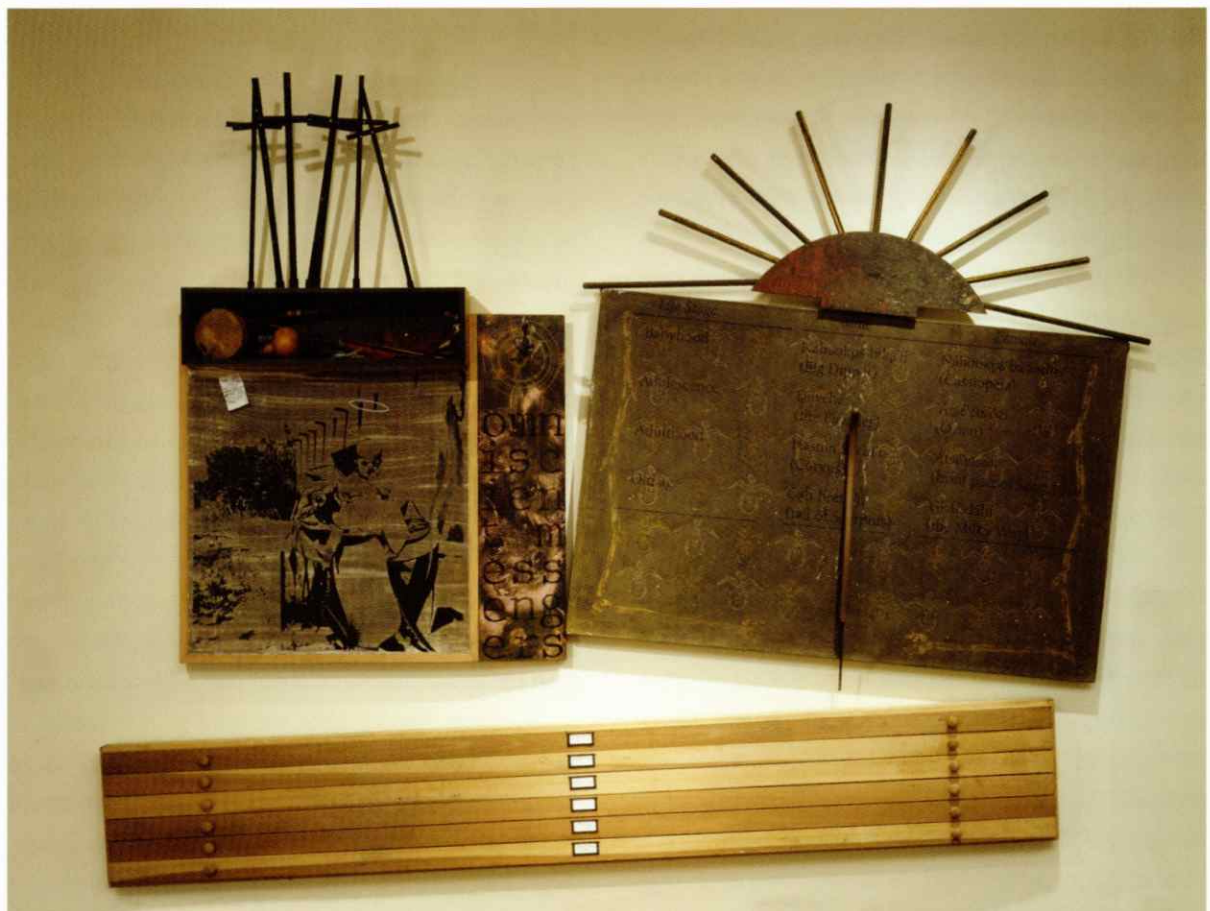
Alternately, photographs were used to demonstrate the effectiveness of assimilationist policies.² Such photographs were contextualized as evidence of the need for intervention and of the success of that intervention by framing them as “before” and “after” pictures. Native photographers and scholars have worked to produce photographic understandings that operate in new territories and critique old roles. Some of this important work has been in the recent examination of early Native photographers such as B. A. Haldane (Tsimshian, 1874–1941),³ Jennie Ross Cobb (Cherokee, 1881–1959), George Johnston (Inland Tlingit, 1894–1972), Louis Shotridge (Tlingit, 1882–1937), Parker McKenzie (Kiowa, 1897–

1999),⁴ Horace Poolaw (Kiowa, 1906–1984),⁵ and Lee Marmon (Laguna Pueblo, b. 1925).⁶

Making Special

Anthropologist Ellen Dissanayake’s 1995 book *Homo Aestheticus*⁷ describes art as a way of “making special,” that is, setting something apart from ordinariness, signaling the deliberate presence of complex contexts and functions. Photographs proliferate and compete for our attention at every turn. We drown in photographic advertisements. We peruse the thousands upon thousands of photographs taken by friends, family, and ourselves. We engage in “making special” by choosing which images to post online, by assigning them contexts and priorities. We “make special” by editing, printing, and physically framing photographs to display in our homes and offices. Many of us still assemble physical photographs into albums and view them in small groupings accompanied by an oral narrative about our personal and family histories. Photographs are used as one means of marking milestones in our lives, with the act of taking the photograph itself being part of the mainstream ritual: graduations, weddings, family reunions, birthdays. The means of “making special” entails at least three steps in the photographic realm: 1) taking the photograph, 2) editing/selecting the photograph, and 3) presenting the photograph.

Artists who work in photographic media



Left top: Plate 152

Carl Beam (Ojibwe, 1943–2005)

The North American Iceberg, 1985

Acrylic, photo-serigraph, and graphite on Plexiglas; 84 3/32 x 147 9/32 inches

Collection of the National Gallery of Canada (no. 29515)

Image courtesy of the artist

Left bottom: Plate 153

Lorenzo Clayton (Navajo, b. 1950)

Come Across II-Rainbowed Smoke, 1996

Mixed media; 87 x 130 x 7 inches

Collection of the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art

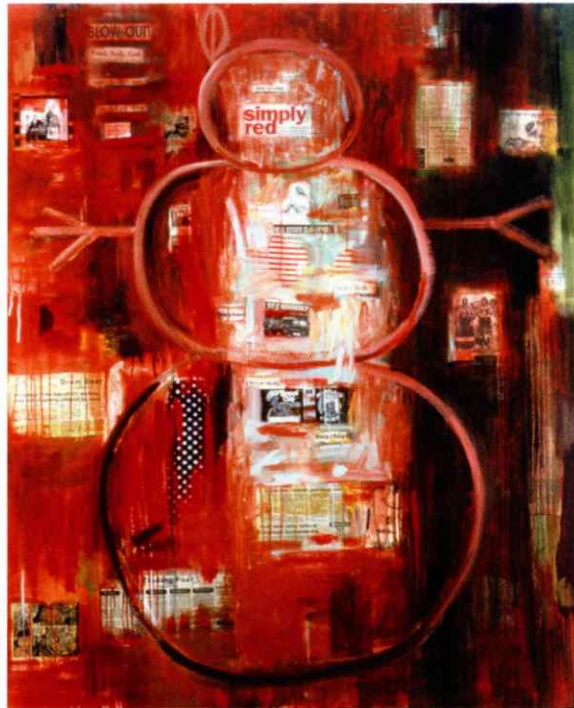
Right: Plate 154

Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (Salish/Kootenai, born 1940)

I See Red: Snowman, 1992

Mixed media and oil on canvas; 66 x 50 inches

Image courtesy of the artist



make a certain claim of both skill and intent that makes their work special and moves it into a category different from casual/amateur photographs, special occasion professional portraiture, or commercial (advertising) photography. Artists make deliberate choices about equipment and processes, editing, and printing. In the presentation stage, galleries and museums set certain photographs aside and make them “special” by framing them in relationship to authoritative institutional practices. Exhibition catalogues and art criticism in print and online are also means of “making special.” Exhibitions are temporary, but published materials reinforce the “making special” of the photograph over the long term.

What does this have to do with Native photographers, specifically the works in this book? The history of Native American photography has, until recently, been a history of photographing Native Americans, rather than a history of photography by Native Americans. Early photography’s success at the “making special” of photographs depicting Native peoples has had such impact that all photographic work of Native Americans or by Native Americans is seen in relationship to, or in reaction against, that early history.

Artists themselves have been partly responsible for the re-examination of old photographs. By

incorporating old photographs, in whole or in part, into their works, Native artists have engaged in a critical relationship with the history of photography. Carl Beam’s (M’Chigeeng, 1943–2005) painting *The North American Iceberg*, 1985 (Plate 152) combined photoserigraph reproductions of historic photographs with his own profile and frontal photographic portraits under layers of paint applied to the reverse side of a twelve-foot-wide expanse of plexiglass. Jaune Quick-to-See Smith’s (Salish-Kootenai, b. 1940) 1992 painting *I See Red: Snowman* (Plate 154) also incorporated historic photographs. Lorenzo Clayton (Navajo, b. 1950) used some of his own family photographs from the 1940s for his mixed media series “Come Across I” and “Come Across II” in 1996 (Plate 153 and Plate 107, page 169). This particular aspect is an ongoing practice, a technique used successfully by many Native artists. Why do so many incorporate old photographs into their work? Part of the answer is that the photographic history of Native Americans is a heavy burden. Cherokee artist Shan Goshorn (Eastern Band of Cherokee, b. 1957) has said, “I don’t really consider myself a photographer. I happen to think of myself as an artist who uses a camera as a tool, much like I use paint or metal or glass. But even as a young teenager, I was aware of the unique importance of

photography to Indian people.”⁸

Beam, Quick-to-See Smith, Clayton, and Goshorn, along with many other artists, use photographic images as a material, but not the only material. Many Native photographers also use old photographs, including family photographs and found photographs, as if they are a raw material component. New photographic works, new paintings, and new art installations re-contextualize the weighty photographic history, and it is, literally, a heavy weight. W. Richard West (Southern Cheyenne, b. 1943) notes in the foreword to *Spirit Capture: Photographs from the National Museum of the American Indian* that the museum holds some ninety thousand photographs in its archives.⁹ The decade of the 1990s saw several publications contribute simultaneously to the analysis of historic photographs and the work of current Native photographers. In fits and starts, academic attention shifted from an analysis of Edward S. Curtis’ (1868–1952) methods or judgment of the authenticity of the sitters, their garments, and their Indianness to narratives from descendants of the photographic subjects and commentary by Native artists and Native scholars. Three photographic journals published special issues focused on Native photography in the early 1990s.¹⁰ Each issue included essays on historic photographs as well as work by contemporary artists working in photography. Many of the essays were written by Native authors. Lucy Lippard’s edited volume *Partial Recall: With Essays on Photographs of Native Americans* also privileged Native voices about photography.

Questions about Native American photography have shifted over the past two decades. In 2000, Mick Gidley, professor of American literature at Leeds University, framed the issue thusly: “The implicit issue is, of course, whether, or how far, it is possible even for Indians to evade the pervasive and deeply-etched stereotypes that the history of photography bears witness to. Is it possible for anyone to create ‘authentic’ Indian photographs? Most important of all, may we say that the resulting examples of self-representation speak of anything specifically Native American in their content or structure? Do they have anything special to say about Indian cultural identity?” Gidley also asked, “Should photographs made by Indians themselves have any kind of privileged status?”¹¹ Gidley’s essay does not actually answer these questions, at least not explicitly. I will point out here that these questions have not generated sustained interest from Native photographers and Native scholars. These particular questions also have very little utility for Native communities. Indeed, who would be entitled to answer such questions? These questions are missing some important clauses: privileged status compared to what? They have something special to say about Indian cultural identity to whom? Gidley’s questions also elicit “yes” or “no” answers, whereas many artists raise much more complex questions through their work.

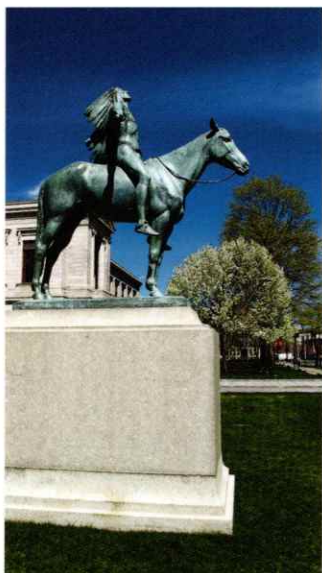
Gidley’s first question assumes evasion is the appropriate way to deal with pervasive stereotypes.

Evasion is the use of trickery, deceit, cunning, or illegal means to avoid a duty or responsibility. Five years before Gidley's essay was published, several authors in *Strong Hearts: Visions and Voices* described the camera as a weapon. In this metaphor, artists are not using the camera to evade stereotypes, but to target particular views and viewpoints. Comanche art critic Paul Chaat Smith described the photographers in *Strong Hearts* as engaged in shooting their way out of history.¹² Curator Theresa Harlan (Santo Domingo Pueblo, b. 1960) quoted Hopi filmmaker Victor Masayesva, Jr. (b. 1951), and curator/photographer Richard Hill, Jr. (Tuscarora, birth year unknown) each separately describing the camera as a weapon.¹³ A long, slow trajectory of change has been gathering speed since 1990. From the language of authenticity, identity, and evasion, there has been a steady shift to emphasis on agency and Indigenous authority, frequently expressed in terms of visual sovereignty. Using the term "visual sovereignty" strategically draws a relationship between the sovereignty of tribal nations and the important role of artists socially, politically, economically, and intellectually. Claiming the photographs of previous generations and incorporating them into critical artworks exercises sovereignty over visual records. Gidley's questions have been, fortunately, eclipsed by the content of the artwork.

As stated, one aspect of the exercise of visual sovereignty has been the reclaiming of older photographs, including photographs from archives, but also family portraits and everyday snapshots.

Rosalie Favell (Cree-Métis, b. 1958), for example, combined black-and-white family photographs, a black-and-white photograph of a buffalo herd, and a color photograph of herself and her sister on a horse against a starscape background. The words "my sister and I travelled between worlds navigating by our grandmothers" outline the children and horse in red script. The composition offers multiple indications of the worlds being navigated, including metaphysical and social realms. What is more, this photograph has something to offer every viewer, Native or not. How do any of us "navigate"? The artist proposes a means for us to move through life: by considering our grandmothers. The family photographs are positioned within this work as a means of knowing one's grandmothers and thus knowing something about who we, collectively, have been, but even more significantly, how we might deliberately navigate our present and future, physically, emotionally, spiritually.

Photographic montage, collaged, digitally or darkroom-manipulated, is a mode many photographers find useful for incorporating family and/or historic photographs into their own work. Hulleah Tsinnahjinnie's (Duskegee/Diné, b. 1954) *Damn! There goes the Neighborhood*, 1998 (Plate 143, page 227) uses humor, irony, and juxtaposition of commercial and historical images to make a critical statement about colonialism. A hauntingly nuanced piece using similar methods is *Hoke-tee*, 2003 (Plate 156) which combines a studio portrait of a child with a moonwalk photograph.



"...While primarily a photographer, I do not see or think photographically; hence the story of Indian life will not be told in microscopic detail, but rather will be presented as a broad and luminous picture." Edward S. Curtis

"Two young children were taken to studios for their portraits and while Boy-in-the-moon sits atop a studio crescent moon in a room full of bright stars, Hoke-tee hovers vividly above the surface of the moon." In another humorous appraisal of colonialism, Tsinhnahjinnie envisions "man going to the moon trying to claim it, but when he gets there, there is a little aboriginal baby floating around on her little space scooter. So colonismo spaceman picks up his bags and takes off because it is just too much!"¹⁴ *Hoke-tee* resonates because it puts into relationship a commercial studio photograph of a supposedly assimilated Indigenous child with an iconic image of human progress, a walk on the moon. *Hoke-tee* leaves room for wild imaginings. Thinking of the space-suited figure bravely exploring an alien, sterile landscape made me think of the possibility that the child is also bravely exploring an alien landscape. The child faces us, but the adult is walking away, bulky with everything he needs at the moment. The

formally dressed child who once stood on a device in a photographer's studio just might have everything she needs with her. After all, the moon did not assimilate Neil Armstrong.

Artists who work in photography have used several approaches to engage critically with this backlog of historical photographs. In 1994, Jeffrey Thomas (Iroquois, birth year unknown), began an ongoing project in response to photographs by Edward S. Curtis. Thomas's series, titled "Conversations with Edward S. Curtis" (Plate 155) combines a pair (or in some cases, a trio) of photographs by Curtis and by Thomas, along with quotations from Curtis' writings. In 2011, Sherry Farrell-Racette described this series as "the most significant artistic exploration of Curtis' work to date."¹⁵ Thomas did not set out to replicate Curtis' work. Rather, he arranges a critical conversation between images. Curtis' photographs are ubiquitous within popular culture, creating something of a feedback loop, such as the compositional practices, preference for bronze

Left: Plate 155
Jeffrey Thomas (Iroquois/Onondaga, b. 1956)
Conversations with Edward S. Curtis: Acts of Commemoration,
2009/2012
Pigment print on archival paper; 25 x 43 inches

Collection of the artist
Image courtesy of the artist

Right: Plate 156
Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie (Duskegee/Diné, b. 1954)
Hoke-tee, 2003
Digital Platinum lambda Print; 30 x 20 inches

Collection of the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians
and Western Art



Top: Plate 157
Larry McNeil (Tlingit/Nisga'a, b. 1955)
Fly by Night Mythology: Tonto's TV Script Revision, 2006
Epson inkjet with UltraChrome K3 pigmented inks on
Somerset archival inkjet paper; 24 x 35 inches

Collection of the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians
and Western Art

Bottom: Plate 158
Zig Jackson (Mandan/Hidatsa/Arikara, b. 1957)
*Indian Photographing Tourist Photographing Indian: Camera
in Face, Taos, New Mexico*, 1992
Gelatin silver print; 14 1/4 x 19 1/2 inches

Image courtesy the Andrew Smith Gallery

and sepia tones, grand masculine gestures, desolation, and reduced scale. Thomas arranges a critical interrogation of Curtis' writing, photographic practices, and their current consequences.

Jolene Rickard (Tuscarora, b. 1956), Larry McNeil (Tlingit, b. 1955), and Thomas have also used juxtapositions of other photographs as part of their work. Rickard's *Cew Ete Haw I Tih: The Bird that Carries Language Back to Another*, 1992 uses double exposures of an old black-and-white photograph of her female relatives selling beadwork *tchotchkes* overlaid with color photographs of the beadwork. Making and selling this type of beadwork for a tourist trade, indeed, using the term "*tchotchke*," minimized the artistry, innovation, and symbolic content created by these women. Rickard's title reanimates the mythological symbolism of the object, shifting focus from the "new" material onto the traditional narratives and symbolism present in the sculpturally beaded objects. Larry McNeil's digital print *Tonto's TV Script Revision*, 2006 (Plate 157) contains an extensive narrative, described by the artist in the book *Visual Currencies: Reflections on Native Photography*. In brief, Tonto brings military officer and brutal boarding school administrator Richard Pratt to justice for "crimes against humanity."¹⁶ Meanwhile, Edward Curtis, dressed in faux-Indian costume, is held at gunpoint by the Lone Ranger. McNeil literally rewrites and recasts the old 1950s television show, this time with Native sovereignty in mind. Tonto is in the lead role, as

indicated by the placement of figures, their actions, and the prominent title on the script in the Lone Ranger's hand. Framed photographs incorporated into the set refer to historical images and McNeil's previous work. McNeil includes himself as the photographer (there is a prominent self-portrait of the photographer in the lower right), although the composition indicates he is not photographing the scene at hand; rather, he is photographing the viewer's witnessing of the scene. McNeil presents himself within a frame, holding a camera with the flash lit (in action), directly facing us, rather than directing the camera at the action within the staged scene. McNeil invokes the presence of the photographer, reminding the viewer of the identity of the photographer and claiming responsibility for the photograph's content, narrative, and artistry.

This invoking or evoking of the photographer takes place in a number of ways in different photographers' work and often comments about the authority and responsibilities of a photographer. Mandan and Hidatsa photographer Zig Jackson (Three Affiliated Tribes, b. 1957) used the title of his 1991 series "Indian Photographing Tourist Photographing Indian" (Plate 158) to center himself as the critical interrogator of photographic practices at powwows. Jackson used his camera to record the intrusive behavior of non-Native powwow photographers. He documented the documenters, but the title of the series clearly identifies Jackson as the photographer, the primary maker. The Library of







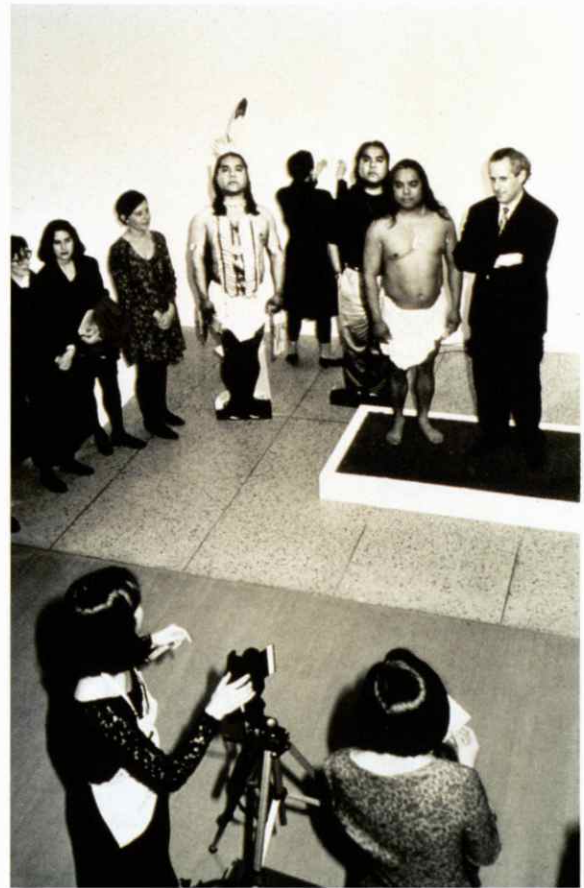
Preceding: Plate 159
 Wendy Red Star (Crow, b. 1981)
Four Seasons, 2006
 Colored print (set of 4); 30 x 28 inches (each)

Collection of the artist
 Image courtesy the artist

Left: Plate 160
 James Luna (Pooyoukitchum (Luiseño), b. 1950)
Take a Picture with a Real Indian, 1991
 Live performance-installation with photographs, Whitney
 Museum of American Art, New York City, New York

Image courtesy of the artist
 Photographer unknown

Right: Plate 161
 Shelley Niro (Bay of Quinte Mohawk, b. 1954)
Mohawks in Beehives, 1991
 Hand tinted photograph; 8 x 10 inches
 Collection of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada
 Image courtesy of the artist



Congress acquired works from this series in 2005, noting in a press release that this was their first acquisition of a group of contemporary photographs by a Native American photographer, although their prints and photographs division includes nearly 18,000 images of Native peoples.¹⁷ While Gilbert's viewpoint might frame this set of conditions as part of an argument about "privileged status" for Native photographers, framing these observations within the spectrum of visual sovereignty reveals a degree of ethical responsibility in artistic practice. The photographer is an author, a creator of a scenario, perhaps a re-creator of a set of observations and conditions, not necessarily a "capturer," nor a hunter, unless the "prey" is the realm of the ideological.

The Photographer in a Scenario

Like many non-Native photographers, many Native photographers use themselves as photographic subjects. Jackson, McNeil, Will Wilson (Diné, b. 1969), Wendy Red Star (Crow, b. 1981), Favell, Erica Lord (Iñupiaq/Athabaskan, b. 1978), and Terrance

Houle (Blood, b. 1975) are notable for their self-portraiture, and this is particularly apparent when the artist is performing a role. A scene is staged, quite literally, in Wendy Red Star's work. She constructs sets from photographic cutouts arranged in space like theater set design. Red Star's "Four Seasons," 2006 (Plate 159) series uses a shallowly staged space, similar to a life-sized diorama. The artist wears the same set of regalia in each photograph, with the sets changing to represent each season. While the physical space is shallow, these photographs at first seem to depict a deep pictorial space that appears to be a dramatic nineteenth-century landscape decorated in the foreground by a selection of animals and a seated "Indian princess." Each is an idyllic scene, a garden of Eden where the animals stay within arm's reach. The woman's seated pose is decorative, passive. Initially, the image is consistent with tropes associating Indians, and particularly Indian women, with the natural world. Polly Nordstrand's (Hopi) description of Wendy Red Star's staged photographs is memorable: "What at first seems to be a sparkling potpourri, disintegrates into



a hodgepodge of fakery.”¹⁸ Indeed, the fawn’s nose and haunches are held on with sticky tape. The deep backgrounds are printed photographic rectangles that are taped together, seams showing. Looking closely, the props fail at verisimilitude. The artist’s gaze, in three-quarter profile, is challengingly frank. In the final photograph in the series, *Winter*, 2006, her face is directed at the camera. She holds a large snowball with a relaxed arm, but fingers positioned for throwing it like a baseball. The romantic appeal is revealed as fake, however; the artist poses a subtle threat.

If the artist is performing a role, as in the example Wendy Red Star’s photographic work, the lines between a photographic artwork and a performance artwork (or documentation of a performance) can begin to blur. Some works, such as *Take a Picture with a Real Indian*, 1992, 2001, and 2010 (Plate 160), by James Luna (Pooyoukitchum (Luiseño), b. 1950), blur the lines between art categories. During Luna’s performance, he invited audience members to have their photograph taken with a “real Indian.” He changed clothing three times

during the performance, offering the audience the choice of having a photograph taken with a “real Indian” in a loincloth, pseudo-regalia, or a sharp suit, or refusing to participate altogether. *Take a Picture with a Real Indian* also exists as an installation work. Life-size photographic cutouts of the artist in the three outfits he used in the performance function as an installation piece independent of the performance. Photographs of artists engaged in performative acts could benefit from being considered photographic artworks, not merely documentation.

Photographic scenarios such as Shelley Niro’s (Bay of Quinte Mohawk, b. 1954) “Mohawks in Beehives” series, 1991 (Plate 161) and Jackson’s “Indian Man in San Francisco” series, 1993 (Plate 162) set a scene with the artist and/or collaborators playing roles in constructing a photographic narrative specifically for the camera. More recently, examples of performative scenarios include series by Terrance Houle, Erica Lord, Lori Blondeau (Cree/Saulteaux/Métis, b. 1964), Adrian Stimson (Siksika Nation, b. 1964), Dana Claxton (Hunkpapa Lakota, b. 1959), Rebecca Belmore



(Anishinaabe, b. 1960), Will Wilson, KC Adams (Métis, b. 1971) and Anna Tsouhlarakis (Creek/Diné/Greek, b. 1977). Each of these artists has produced multiple series of photographic works using performative scenarios. Terrance Houle went grocery shopping in powwow regalia for his "Urban Indian" series from 2004 and arranged for multiple pinhole cameras to capture the same moment of his performance at Calgary Stampede. Erica Lord used tanning beds to inscribe text onto her skin for *Tanning Project* 2006 and re-staged James Luna's performance *Artifact Piece* as *The Artifact Piece, Revisited*, 2008. Dana Claxton and Adrian Stimson employed the conventions of vaudeville performance and Old West studio photography with their 2006 "Belle Savage and Buffalo Boy" series. KC Adams's 2009 "Cyborg Hybrids" series stages a white-on-white fashion spread fu-

ture with color eliminated, but racial and cultural signifiers are still present as embellished surfaces, in white text on white t-shirts, or white beads encasing technological implements. A particularly powerful example of scenario work by Rebecca Belmore is the 2008 photograph *Fringe*.

Some of these scenarios include extensive editing and introduction of other elements after the scenario occurs. Anna Tsouhlarakis' 2011 series "Aesthetically Speaking" (Plate 163) introduces a symbolic aesthetic discourse via digitally inserted thought and speech balloons. Early scenario works primarily explored photographic scenarios to subvert or counter stereotypical ideas about who Native people are, past and present, as represented through photographic records. Niro, Jackson, and Luna used humor and irony

Left: Plate 162
Zig Jackson (Mandan/Hidatsa/Arikara, b. 1957)
Indian Man in San Francisco: Indian on Mission Bus, 1994
Gelatin silver print; 15 15/16 x 19 7/8 inches

Collection of Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, Lawrence
Image courtesy of the artist

Right: Plate 163
Anna Tsouhlarakis (Navajo/Greek/Creek, b. 1977)
Aesthetically Speaking I, 2011
Inkjet print; 20 x 30 inches

Collection of the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art

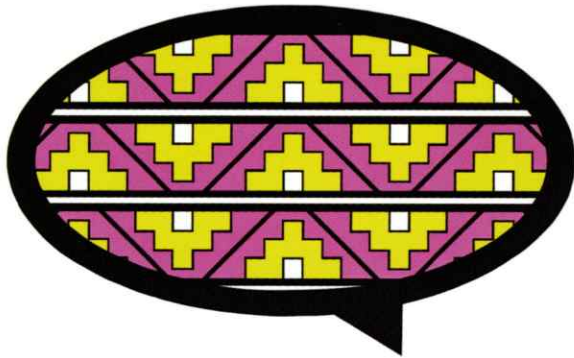




Plate 164

Tom Jones (Ho-Chunk, b. 1964)

Identity Genocide: Fernando Hazic Ontiveros, 1/8 Winnebago

+ 1/8 Ho-Chunk = 1/4 Ho-Chunk = 0 Percent Indian, 2012

Digital photograph with etch glass; 25 x 20 inches

Collection of Sherry Leedy Contemporary Art

Image courtesy of the artist

to create a new critical viewpoint using photography. Their work in the 1980s and 1990s inspired artists to use scenario-based photographs to examine conceptions of hybridity, gender ambiguity, family structures, environmental and health issues, relationships with technology, linguistics, and modes of communication.

Portraits and Documentary Photography

When Native photographers work in a documentary or portraiture mode, they operate first within the generally established pictorial history of the genre. In addition, they are responding to the specific problems between those modes and Native communities. On the surface, many of Ho-chunk photographer Tom Jones' (b. 1964) portraits appear to be straightforward. Made within his community in the 1990s, his black-and-white photographs of tribal members in their everyday environments are not romantic, nor can they be described as poverty voyeurism. Family and clan relationships are apparent through body language and ordinary material objects. Jones has also done series of portraits of veterans, kitsch objects on commercial properties, and most recently, a 2012 series titled "Identity Genocide" (Plate 164) that consists of full-color portraits of each sitter against a white, featureless background. The photographs are framed in shadowboxes with text etched into the glass surface. Directional gallery lighting casts a crisp shadow over the subject or subjects. Some photographs in the series identify people who are Ho-chunk

but not legally enrollable due to blood quantum rules. Others identify sitters as having been adopted into the tribe even though they have no "blood" connections. Each is accompanied with wall text that details why the sitter is unenrollable or came to be a tribal member in cases of adoption. The portraits themselves are nice, attractive portraits. The expressions and postures of the sitters appear relaxed, even happy. These facial expressions are not illustrative of the text, which creates a sense of tension. The legal definitions overlie the person, yet each person appears whole and self-possessed.

Any assertion that Native photographers who are creating work that is documentary or that could be labeled portraiture are creating works that are strictly conventional or entirely a reaction to previous photographic practices is too simplistic. Between 2008 and 2013, at least three Native photographers embarked on sweeping portrait photography projects. Rosalie Favell began her series "Facing the Camera" in 2008 (Plate 165), Will Wilson began "CIPX" in early 2012, and Matika Wilbur (Swinomish/Tulalip, b. 1984) began "Project 562" in late 2012. Each project has unique methods and quite different results. Favell and Wilson's projects are ongoing, but Wilbur has a set goal of photographing someone representing each tribe, with a completion date in 2015. Matika Wilbur's series is called "Project 562" because of her goal of visiting all 562 federally recognized tribes in the United States to produce a book with photographs representing each

Plate 165
Rosalie Favell (Métis, b. 1958)
Facing the Camera: Shan Goshorn, Santa Fe, New Mexico,
2012
Digital print; 17 x 22 inches
Collection of the artist
Image courtesy of the artist

tribe. The artist successfully completed a Kickstarter campaign and obtained additional support for the project from the Seattle Art Museum, the Burke Museum of Natural History, and the Tacoma Art Museum.

The end results of these three projects might be misinterpreted as simply documentary in nature; however, each emphasizes community endeavors and building and maintaining of relationships. Curator Kathleen Ash-Milby described Favell's project as it stood at the time of its exhibition at the National Museum of the American Indian George Gustav Heye Center.

With the recent series, *Facing the Camera*, she has turned her lens towards her friends and colleagues in the arts community. Like many Native photographers in Canada, Favell has begun an ambitious project which uses this geographically and culturally diverse, but intimate group, as the subject of her most recent work. The portraits in and of themselves may not seem that remarkable at first. Instead of using complex digital montages like her earlier work, these simple black and white images, shot with film on a 6 x 7 format camera, are rather straightforward portraits. The subjects are relaxed and friendly, with no one dressed in their finest regalia, but shown simply and purposefully. Quietly radical, this work is a portrait of an arts community with no

pretense. This art tribe is not limited to Canada, but includes international Indigenous artists as well.¹⁹

In her own statement from the exhibition, Favell explained:

Facing the Camera is a document series on aboriginal artists, rooted in my desire to image my community. The work goes back to the beginnings of my career. When I first learned photography, I wanted to look at who I was; the color of my skin, as it was different from my mother's skin, was an important part of this investigation. In *Facing the Camera*, I have not tried to pose people. The images are meant to have an edge to them as people find some way of dealing with the camera. To be visualized is a way in which one acknowledges the construction of a positive or empowered representation that includes engaging with, at some level, the numerous social and cultural factors, both good and bad, Aboriginal and Western, that have affected an understanding of self. This idea of "self" is not necessarily linked to individualism. Rather, it can be seen as connected to communal needs and values, a sense of place and traditions, as well as personal and extended history. The challenge is to know your own part



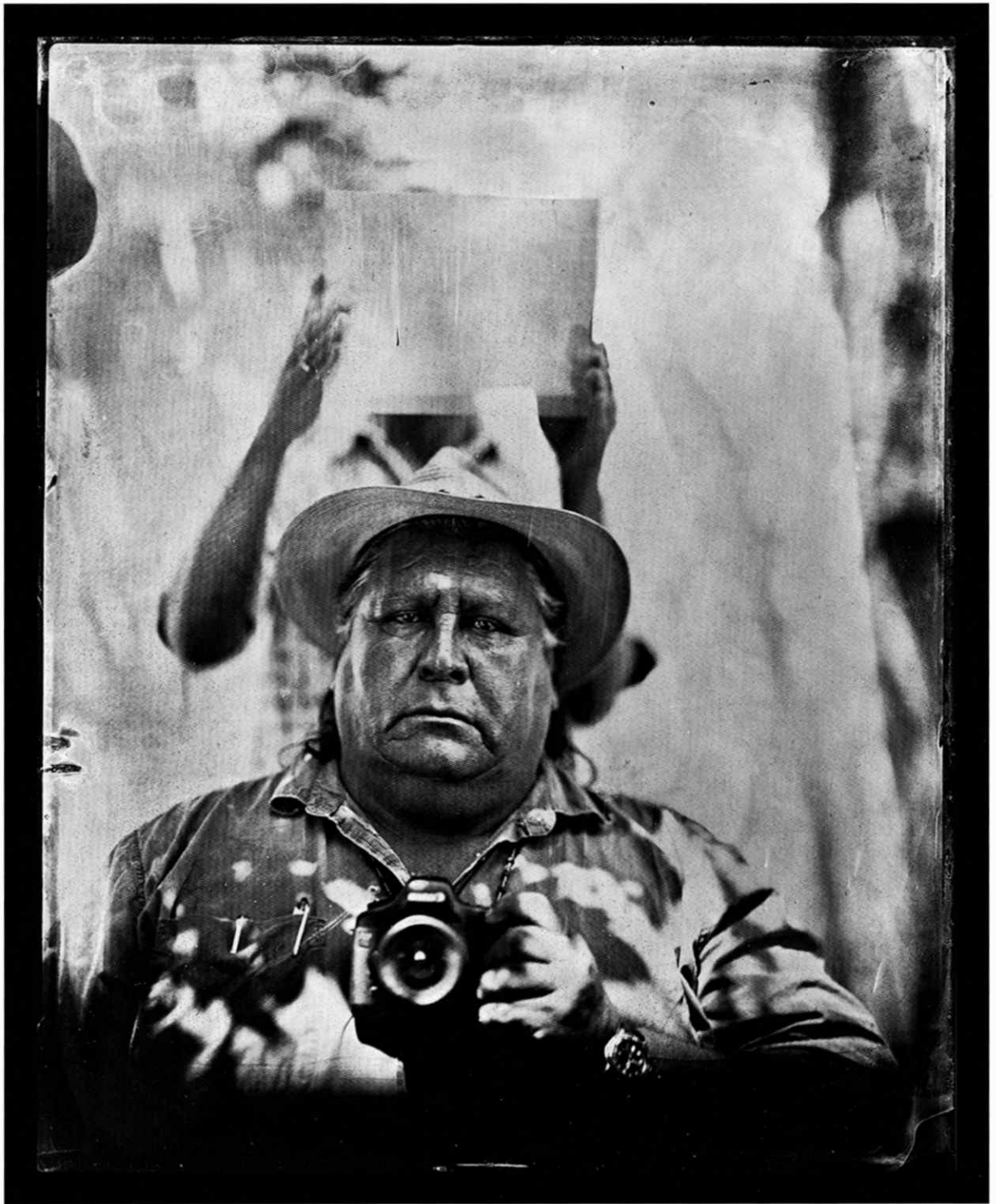


Plate 166

Will Wilson (Diné, b. 1969)

Critical Indigenous Photographic Exchange (CIPX): *Zig Jackson Taking a Picture of an Indian Taking a Picture of an Indian as Andrew Smith Protects His Soul from Theft, Santa Fe Indian Market*, 2013

Archival pigment print from wet plate collodion scan; 44 x 55 inches

Collection of the artist

Courtesy of the artist

in this, to know your own place in the picture.²⁰

The project expanded further in 2012, with Favell setting up in a studio space inside the Museum of Contemporary Native American Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico, during the annual Indian Art Market in August. Favell created a new series of portraits of Native artists and art professionals participating in the Santa Fe scene. I experienced the process myself and found that the project resulted in an interesting narrative component for participants. Studio sessions were centered around art events. A common thread was that participants had back-to-back art events to attend or were involved in setting up events, working, or volunteering; thus, they were dressed in practical clothes and perhaps not feeling "portrait ready." The photographs show the reality of the art scene as labor, not leisure. The portraits have a sense of immediacy and lack fussiness. Favell's portraits have simple white backgrounds—a similar technique to Tom Jones' "Identity Genocide" series, but with a different effect because Favell's series is in black and white. Taken as a whole, this project is not just a documentary project. It is a community art project that solidifies people's sense of the Native art scene as a community with intersections with other communities, Native and non-Native, all of them connected via art. Thus far, Favell has photographed over 275 participants.

Will Wilson calls his large photographic project "Critical Indigenous Photographic Exchange" (Plate 166) or "CIPX." Like Favell, Wilson provides

the photograph to the sitter. Wilson's demographic is a bit wider; he includes Indigenous artists and art professionals and leaders in tribal governance. Wilson is explicit in the ways in which his series responds to Edward Curtis' photographs. He writes,

I intend to resume the documentary mission of Curtis from the standpoint of a 21st century indigenous, trans-customary, cultural practitioner. I want to supplant Curtis' Settler gaze and the remarkable body of ethnographic material he compiled with a contemporary vision of Native North America. I propose to create a body of photographic inquiry that will stimulate a critical dialogue and reflection around the historical and contemporary "photographic exchange" as it pertains to Native Americans. My aim is to convene with and invite Indigenous artists, arts professionals, and representatives of tribal governance to engage in the performative ritual that is the studio portrait. This experience will be intensified and refined by the use of large format (8 x 10) wet plate collodion studio photography. This beautifully alchemic photographic process dramatically contributed to our collective understanding of Native American people and, in so doing, our American identity.²¹

The process for creating these tintype portraits is more laborious than sitting for a film or digital portrait. It is only necessary to hold still for a minute or so, but the preparation of the chemicals and their application to the metal plates and loading them into the camera takes a few minutes, as does the developing. Wilson provides backdrops and furniture and encourages sitters to bring props and accessories representing who they are as individuals. The artist encourages sitters to think ahead of time about how they would like to be photographed. The experience of having a portrait made in this manner is like being transported to the late 1800s, except that modernity is present in the form of Wilson's portable darkroom (a state of the art ice fishing tent) and the sitter's clothing and accessories that are visible in the final result: the watch, the pen, the digital camera in Zig Jackson's hand.

Wilson is not the only photographer relearning this old technology. With the difficulty of obtaining once-standard film and developing services, several art photographers are turning to older photographic processes, such as wet plate collodion. This photographic method produces unique images, that is, there is no negative to print from. Multiples can only be created by rephotographing the original plate. As objects, the photographs are wondrous because they are clearly both old and new. The mechanics of their production produce significant tactile features: the weight of the metal plate, the formerly liquid properties of the chemicals still apparent

in surface texture contrasting with the shiny newness of the sharply machined back of the plate. Wilson gives the original plate to the sitter after scanning the plate on a digital scanner. He edits the photographs digitally, too. The exhibition versions are not the actual metal plate images, but large format archival pigment prints. Wilson's goal is not an "authentic" Curtis technological romantic revival. Technology and materials are important, but so is the exchange and collaboration on both sides of the camera.

The experience of having my own photograph taken with the wet plate collodion process was very enlightening. It made me realize something about the process and my own reaction to early photographs of Native Americans. When I saw my plate completed, my first thought was how dark my skin appeared. I looked much darker than in real life. The collodion process is more sensitive to ultraviolet light. Reds appear black. For example, the warmer one's skin tone, the darker one looks. Viewing old photographs of people from my tribe, I assumed I was much lighter-skinned than my ancestors. Now I know that is not necessarily the case. My conceptions of what Native people looked like, based on these older photographic methods, were skewed. The resurgence of this photographic technique leads viewers to a better understanding of the impact of early photographic techniques on our understandings of race.

Archive and Imagination

Assume that photography is an art. Photographs can be archived, just as anything can be archived, but the photographs and photographers are not archivists. In *Scissors, Paper, Stone: Expressions of Memory in Contemporary Photographic Art*, Martha Langford analyzes Western cultural theorists' examination of linkages between photographs, memory, and loss. Her analysis includes consideration of a few First Nations photographers, including Jeffrey Thomas. She astutely observes, "To look at the self-representation of First Nations through the optic of photographic history summons both memory and imagination...."²² Langford continues the sentence, linking the imagination aspect specifically to imagining justice. I think the key to the long-term artistic strengths of the photographers discussed in this chapter, the reason their works are important, is that they present us with the option of envisioning rather abstract sociopolitical goals like justice, reparation, and acknowledgment of past injustices. KC Adams and Will Wilson present us with visual relationships between humans and technology. Rosalie Favell's wide-ranging oeuvre imagines relationships between art, people, gender, popular culture, the past, and the future. Erica Lord imagines possible relationships between self and other, hybridity, display, and embodiment. Zig Jackson imagines his own authority over the camera and its field of view. Hulleah Nsinahjinnie imagines the photographic past and

present in critical proximity to each other. Tom Jones imagines blood quantum as a shadowy overlay. If these artists were scientists, we could say their artworks are experiments that require us to ask questions each time we encounter them and to come to conclusions anew each time. The photographers discussed in this survey, like the other artists in this book, are intellectual heavy-hitters. New realities form through their photographic practices.

¹ For an introduction to colonial photography and re-interpretation of these images, see Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson, eds., *Photography's Other Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

² See Eric Margolis, "Looking at Discipline, Looking at Labour: Photographic Representations of Indian Boarding Schools," *Visual Studies* 19, no. 1 (2004): 72–96. See also Stephen W. Haycox, "Sheldon Jackson in Historical Perspective: Alaska Native Schools and Mission Contracts, 1885–1894," *The Pacific Historian* 28, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 18–28. Such photographs are replicated even today as part of charity ad campaigns, usually aimed at soliciting donations to assist populations at great distance from the donors.

³ Mique'l Icesis Askren, "Memories of Glass and Fire," in eds. Henrietta Lidchi and Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie, *Visual Currencies: Reflections on Native Photography* (Edinburgh: National Museums Scotland, 2009), 90–107.

⁴ For detailed analysis of the work of Cobb, Johnston, Shotridge, and McKenzie, see Nicole Dawn Strathman, "Through Native Lenses: American Indian Vernacular Photographies and Performances of Memories, 1890–1940" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, ProQuest, UMI Dissertations Publishing, 2013).

⁵ See *Great Plains Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (Spring 2011), a journal issue devoted to Horace Poolaw.

⁶ Lee Marmon, *The Pueblo Imagination: Landscape and Memory in the Photography of Lee Marmon* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003).

⁷ Ellen Dissanayake, *Homo Aestheticus* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995).

⁸ Shan Goshorn, in eds. Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie and

Veronica Passalacqua, *Our People, Our Land, Our Images: International Indigenous Photographers* (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2006), 28.

⁹ W. Richard West, "Foreword," in ed. Tim Johnson, *Spirit Capture: Photographs from the National Museum of the American Indian* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998), xiv.

¹⁰ Veronica Passalacqua's essay "Finding Sovereignty through Relocation," in *Visual Currencies: Reflections on Native Photography* identifies the following photographic journals: fall 1993 issue of *Exposure*; *Aperture* 139, summer 1995, "Strong Hearts: Visions and Voices"; and the winter 1993 issue of *VIEWS: The Journal of Photography New England*.

¹¹ Mick Gidley, "Reflecting Cultural Identity in Modern American Indian Photography," in *Mirror Writing, (Re) Constructions of Native American Identity* (Berlin: Galda and Wilch Verlag, 2000), 265–266.

¹² Paul Chaat Smith, "Ghost in the Machine," "Strong Hearts: Visions and Voices," *Aperture* (1995): 9.

¹³ Theresa Harlan, "Creating a Visual History," "Strong Hearts: Visions and Voices," *Aperture* (1995): 21.

¹⁴ Veronica Passalacqua, "Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie" in *Path Breakers: The Eiteljorg Fellowship for Native American Art* (Indianapolis and Seattle and London: Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art and University of Washington Press, 2003), 96.

¹⁵ Sherry Farrell-Racette, "Aboriginal Photography as Resistance," in eds. Carol Payne and Andrea Kunard, *The Cultural Work of Photography in Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queens's Press, 2011), 80.

¹⁶ Larry McNeil, "American Myths and Indigenous Photography," in *Visual Currencies*, 120–122.

¹⁷ Library of Congress, "Zig Jackson is First

Contemporary Native American Photographer Represented at the Library of Congress," May 11, 2005, <http://www.loc.gov/today/pr/2005/05-098.html>.

¹⁸ Polly Nordstrand, "Wendy Red Star: Beauty and the Blow-Up Beast," in ed. James H. Nottage, *Art Quantum: The Eiteljorg Fellowship for Native American Fine Art, 2009* (Indianapolis: Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, 2009), 81.

¹⁹ Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, "Rosalie Favell Faces the Camera," October 1, 2010, <http://blog.nmai.si.edu/main/2010/10/rosalie-favell-faces-the-camera.html>.

²⁰ Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, "Rosalie Favell," *Hide: Skin as Material and Metaphor*, <http://nmai.si.edu/exhibitions/hide/rosalie.html>.

²¹ Will Wilson, personal communication with author, March 13, 2013.

²² Martha Langford, *Scissors, Paper, Stone: Expressions of Memory in Contemporary Photographic Art* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2007), 288.

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