

KANATA

A gathering place in honour of Canada's Indigenous Peoples

SOUL SEARCHING

The quest to find one's place in the world never really ends, but the journey itself is enriching in so many ways

by **Rosalie Favell**, Winnipeg

I have always loved photographs, and I was very influenced by the photos of my family. As I started to study photography, I continued to point the camera at my family. I began to discover more about my Métis heritage. When I first learned photography, it wasn't enough that I knew how to take pictures and make prints. I wanted the works to

mean something more to me. At the same time, I decided I needed to look at who I was, and the colour of my skin was an issue. I had grown up not knowing my cultural heritage; I was not connected to it and I needed answers.

My quest to find my place in the world has taken me many places physically, intellectually and spiritually. My work comes from a culmina-

tion of searching for a way to comment on the worlds that I live in, investigating issues of personal and cultural identities. As a Métis woman, I am well versed in the difficulties of defining cultural identity. It is from this unique perspective that I map the territory that Aboriginal artists must navigate in imaging themselves.

Through my search-

ing, I discovered the history of the Métis people of the Red River, and the Canadian experience.

Over the years in my art practice, I have created many different bodies of work. In my earlier series, "Longing and Not Belonging," I explore the similarities between the family photo album and the ledger art of the plains warrior artist at the turn



PHOTO: MAREE CLARKE

of the 19th century, which acted as a record of the exploits and history of the maker. This work also explores the realization of the heroes in my life, strong women—my mother, my sisters, my aunts and my grandmothers. I placed images of these women with warrior women from popular culture that in turn highlighted their quiet heroism. In this work, I had turned to family snapshots in hopes that by revisiting my early years, I would discover visual evidence, clues, to explain the shaping of my identity, and to better situate myself as a contemporary Native woman.

The images from my series, "Plain(s) Warrior Artist," depict this continuing struggle to find my place in the world, only a shift has occurred—instead of looking outside for a hero, I became one. I had always been searching for a hero

From far left: Samples of Rosalie's "From an Early Age Revisited" series; Rosalie in the buffalo robe which was created as a group initiative.

and found one in the television character of Xena: Warrior Princess.

One of my adventures, "I Awoke to Find My Spirit Had Returned," speaks about the desire to go home while at the same time questioning where home is. This work was especially important in that I connected personal and cultural histories through the characters of Xena: Warrior Princess, Dorothy (from the classic story of the Wizard of Oz) and Louis Riel. The following quote from Riel is often referenced (including in my work): "My people will sleep for one hundred years and when they awake, it will be the artist that gives them their spirit back." Riel as prophet (or Wizard of Oz) tells us that everything we need is right inside of us, that all roads lead to home, and that being true to our people is the way to recovering our pride and self-respect.

In "The Collector" (2005), I insert myself into a painting by the American Victorian collector, Charles Wilson Peale. The original painting links



ABOUT THE ARTIST ROSALIE FAVELL

Rosalie is a photo-based artist, born in Winnipeg. Drawing inspiration from her family history and Métis (Cree/English) heritage, she uses a variety of sources, from family albums to popular culture, to present a complex self-portrait of her experiences as a contemporary Aboriginal woman. To date Rosalie's work has explored the relation of photography to issues of identity. A major body of recent work, *Facing the Camera* (2008-ongoing), documents Aboriginal artists in Canada and elsewhere. With 500 artists being featured so far, Rosalie has received enormous support from her fellow Aboriginal artists, photographing them in different cities to give as much representation of her community as possible. During her residency in Australia in 2016, she met renowned Aboriginal artists Maree Clarke and Leonard Tregonning. This key encounter inspired her to initiate a new project, *Wrapped in Culture*, which brought together ten Indigenous artists from Australia and Canada. Collaboratively the artists created a contemporary version of a possum skin cloak and a buffalo robe, drawing from culturally distinct yet similar artistic traditions that historically have sacred and practical uses. Starting this April, both creations will be exhibited at the Ottawa Art Gallery, and will then go on tour in Canada and Australia.

Over the course of her long career, Rosalie's work has appeared in exhibitions in Canada and the United States, as well as Edinburgh, Scotland; Paris, France; Taipei, Taiwan; and Melbourne, Australia. Numerous institutions have acquired her artwork including: National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa), Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography (Ottawa), Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian (Washington, D.C.), and Global Affairs Canada. She has received numerous grants, and won prestigious awards such as the Paul DeHuek/Norman Walford Career Achievement Award from the Ontario Arts Foundation, the Chalmers Fellowship, the Victor Martyn Lynch-Staunton Award and the Karsh Award. A graduate of Ryerson Polytechnic Institute, Rosalie holds a Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of New Mexico and a PhD (ABD) from Carleton University in Cultural Mediations. She is a member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts. In Ottawa Rosalie has taught at Carleton University, the University of Ottawa and Discovery University.

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natural history and museum practices that included collecting Aboriginal peoples' artifacts. In order to disrupt this colonial view, I insert aspects of my cultural heritage into the work. Images taken from my family album appear as a way to emphasize personal acts of collecting, such as occurs in family albums, my own family history and my search for my Métis roots. The work is also a statement about Aboriginal peoples claiming the right to exhibit their own culture and history.

The series I call "Facing the Camera" is the start of a large document of Aboriginal artists. The impetus for the series derived from my realization that a document had not been made of individuals who make up the Aboriginal arts community. I have liked taking portraits of people, and

that coupled with the opportunity of going to The Banff Centre in 2008 and seeing all these artists together as a group, made me want to embark upon this documentary project. I have continued to photograph artists in different cities in an attempt to give as much representation to my community as possible. I now have photographed close to 500 Indigenous artists, and the project is ongoing.

"Wrapped in Culture" is a powerful reclamation project, grounded in community engagement. The goal of this project was to encourage an intercultural sharing of material history to produce a work reflective of Indigenous traditions, cultures and communities, both past and present. I invited Australian and Canadian Aboriginal artists to Ottawa to work



I awoke to find my spirit had returned

Above: "I Awoke to Find My Spirit Had Returned" brings to mind a famous quote by Louis Riel. Below: In her "Facing the Camera" series, Rosalie shines the spotlight on Indigenous artists.

collectively to create a traditional buffalo robe (Canada) and possum skin cloak (Australia). The inspiration for this project was the work of Maree Clarke and three other Australian Aboriginal women artists who revived a traditional practice

through the creation of possum skin cloaks. Similarly, the buffalo robe was significant and sacred to many Indigenous peoples in Canada, particularly the Blackfoot.

The possum skin cloak and buffalo robe will be exhibited at the Ottawa Art Gallery as of this April, and will later go on tour in Canada and Australia.

"From an Early Age Revisited" (1994, 2016) is a body of work that draws upon photographs I made in 1994.

At the time, I became increasingly aware of the colour of my skin. I began to examine my background through snapshots that my parents, primarily my mother, had taken in the early 1960s of the family. I looked at my family album, hoping it would reveal clues about my identity.

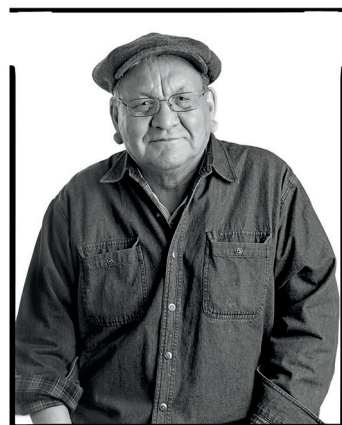
I have been a photographer for more than 40 years; it has been my passion. With the recent changes in technology, the disappearance of the darkroom and the machinations that one goes through to produce a final print, I turned to painting. I was hopeful that I could continue to work creatively in this medium and explore my Métis heritage. I started with painting from photographs from my family's archive of snapshots. These were taken by my parents, siblings and friends. Most of the images have me in

them, and by revisiting these photographs of the past, I can again explore how identity is created and recreated through many different contexts, events and communities. I am able to infuse the static photograph with memories, real and desired, and create images in the manner I have always worked—as an amalgam of fact and fiction.

Through painting, I challenge my engagement with my subject matter. I deepen my inquiries into its significance through an extended creative process that also contests the instantaneity of the photograph. Most importantly, the process of reworking images complements how I have always treated my subject matter, especially ideas of identity, which I see as rooted in histories and traditions, but also adaptable and in flux. ■



ALEX NAHWEGAHABOW, OTTAWA, ON 2015



ALEX JANVIER, BANFF, AB 2008



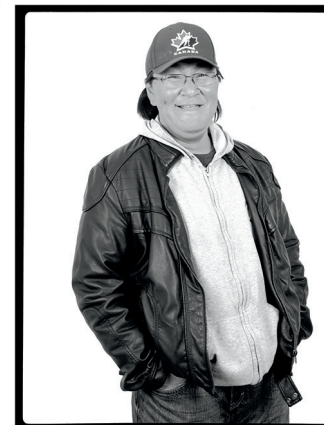
DAPHNE ODJIG, OTTAWA, ON 2009



THOMSON HIGHWAY, WINNIPEG, MB 2017



SHELLEY NIRO, BRANTFORD, ON 2009



TIM PITSIULAK, OTTAWA, ON 2013