

provenance

#3

FIRST AMERICANS

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Rotterdam

Lay-out: Sidestone Press, Leiden
Cover design: Buro Millennial, Leiden

ISBN 978-94-6426-148-6

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Introduction

Henrietta Lidchi

This volume of *Provenance* is primarily dedicated to some of the artworks, and words of present-day Indigenous artists featured in the temporary display *First Americans* which opened on 9 July 2020 at Museum Volkenkunde, Leiden, and is due to close in September 2023. *First Americans* (fig. 1) is a modest exhibition which occupies around 80 square metres across two gallery spaces adjacent to the permanent galleries featuring Indigenous Americas and the circumpolar regions to be found on the first floor of Museum Volkenkunde. The slip galleries where *First Americans* is on display were set aside in the original museum plan for the presentation of temporary exhibitions and contemporary work. In consequence they were the right spaces for an intervention in 2020, nearly twenty years after the development of the permanent displays.

The timing for *First Americans* was triggered by a city-wide commemoration of the arrival of the Pilgrims in North America planned for 2020. Leiden was preparing from 2017 onwards to commemorate the four-hundred-year span from the early colonisation of the eastern seaboard of North America in 1620 in recognition that



Figure 1. *First Americans* poster outside Museum Volkenkunde in 2022, showing *Julia* by Cara Romero. Photograph: Henrietta Lidchi.

these early colonists, known popularly as the Pilgrims, had initially sought refuge for a short period in Leiden, the Netherlands, prior to sailing for what is now Plymouth, New England. At first, *Leiden400* was conceived by the city as a year-long series of events that would draw visitors from the United Kingdom and the United States under the umbrella of a celebration and commemoration. Leiden adopted over time a four nations approach (UK, USA, Netherlands, Indigenous Nations) while leading strongly on the European-American experience. Museum Volkenkunde as part of the

larger constellation of institutions that make up National Museum of World Cultures (NMVW) has an institutional mandate to present histories as contested understandings alongside contemporary cultures, and their artforms, from all over the world. NMVW therefore took the invitation to participate as an offer to develop a slightly different approach to the four-hundred-year commemoration. *First Americans* was developed with an orientation towards contemporary perspectives on the past, the diversity of experience in the present, and hopes for the future. The exhibition sought to bring into play selected pieces from the historic collections, primarily those linked to Algonquian, Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe nations, with contemporary work around ideas of histories, resilience, community and the future. In general, however, the aim was to widen the portrayal of Indigenous North America beyond a representation of encounters in 1620. Since the representational tensions between a city-wide celebration versus commemoration were there from the start, the early ideas for the exhibition were shared at a preliminary phase with colleagues in the field.

An early conversation in Minneapolis with Joe Horse-Capture (A'aniih) yielded an email exchange on both the topics of restitution and the draft exhibition proposal. I was, at the time, drafting and consulting

on the document that was to become *Return of Cultural Objects: Principles and Process* (published March 2019) while developing an exhibition proposal that was being processed through museum decision-making groups. Horse-Capture wrote in an email in on 30 June 2018:

I looked over the exhibition proposal and do have a few thoughts. My feelings won't be a surprise in light of the conversation we had about it when you were in Minnesota. Although I understand the need to have your audience acknowledge the pilgrim anniversary, it would be important to me to ensure the audience focuses more on Native culture than the pilgrims. Yes, in the long term the encounter was devastating for Native people, yes bad things happened, yes, yes, yes.

However, my area of interest is Native people's resiliency and the celebration of their culture. Some historical context is important, but the main theme is Native people and the beauty of their ways, how they have changed for the better, and the future. And it's a great opportunity ... for them to present their story. There is beauty in all of it.

Horse-Capture later added (4 July 2018):

I wonder what the exhibition would look like if they [the pilgrims] were only mentioned in passing and

the project dealt with more how Native culture has changed in the past 400 years and Native people's perspectives on the future.

As the exhibition evolved, these conversations were lastingly influential. The Pilgrims would be cited (only as a label for the Steven Paul-Judd animated video *First Contact*, (fig. 2) but would not be the focus of the exhibition. Indeed, pre-contact Indigenous cultures would be shown more prominently, to emphasize Indigenous presence before and after 1620.

First Americans would aim to connect to a Dutch audience and Dutch history, looking at inherited images and understandings, but equally popular conceptions of injustice, which for Indigenous Americas includes the Fourth Russell Tribunal held on 'Indian Rights' in Rotterdam in 1980. The exhibition would use broad themes of temporality, continuity, futurism (first gallery), resilience, resistance, community, and sovereignty (second gallery). There was a consciousness that this was an opportunity to put on display key artworks from the historic collections that were rarely seen. For example, the ball-headed club collected, most probably, through Reverend Hermanus Bloem who lived in Wiltwyck on the Hudson River, New York in the 1660s, and entered into the collection through the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities. The historic collections would be used

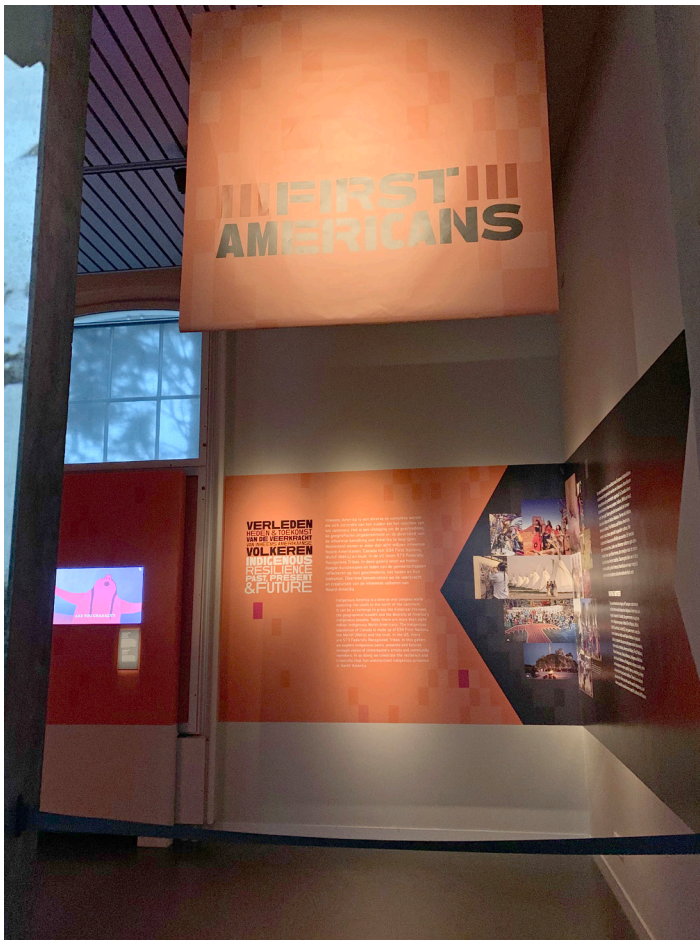


Figure 2. *First Americans* introduction/ entrance to first gallery with *First Contact*. Photograph: Henrietta Lidchi.

together with contemporary work to establish a dialogue across time, with the contemporary work providing the impetus for the inclusion of historic pieces (as with Cara Romero's work, fig. 3).

First Americans was envisaged as a counter-point to the more historical exhibitions that would open in Leiden during 2020. Works held by the museum, made by unknown artists, are shown alongside, painting, print, photographic, textiles, jewellery,

fashion pieces by living artists which are interpreted in part through the artists, own words. In this manner *First Americans* aims to showcase the vibrancy and resilience of Indigenous communities in North America while presenting a historiography, and art history, of Indigenous experience and Indigenous art. The aim was to attend to contemporary voices and interpretation, including artworks whose clear intention was to communicate an Indigenous

Figure 3. Entrance to second gallery showing historic pieces linked to the photographs by Cara Romero.



perspective. As part of the development of the exhibition, contemporary work was acquired systematically, with travel opportunities to the USA and the UK affording moments to speak about the exhibition, to acquire new work, and to enter into discussions. Content decisions were made in collaboration with another curator who supported the exhibition, Liesbeth Ouwehand whose field is photography, as well as with other members of the exhibition team. As the design

matured, artists were consulted as to how their work would be positioned in the show and within the overarching context of the *Leiden400* events beyond the museum, to ensure that there would be no lingering discomfort (the last consultation happening in March 2020 at the Heard Museum Indian Fair and Guild Market in Phoenix). Some pieces were loaned from individuals, or Dutch institutions, to establish that a healthy proportion of the budget would go to

living Indigenous artists and not to institutional loan fees and courier costs. All of the contemporary works were acquired, commissioned or loaned to reflect on historical, or representational questions and specifically to reflect Indigenous voices and perspectives in order to widen the perception of visitors coming into the exhibition.

Joe Horse-Capture visited as Senior Fellow to the Research Center for Material Culture between November 2019 and early February 2020 acting as co-curator/consultant. Two artists-in-residence/fellows came to Leiden to work in, and with, the museum at the Research Center for Material Culture/ Museum Volkenkunde. Yatika Starr Fields stayed a little over a week in September 2019 to paint a mural *Accommodating strength, Our land, Our hearts*. This has embedded itself in the city landscape; a popular spot for photographs and to be seen on canal boat rides and on the popular walking trip – Singelloop – around the city of Leiden. Jacob Meders worked for a month in February 2020, developing a set of five woodblock prints *Trading Views #1-5* in response to the Theodor de Bry (1528-1598) works held in the Special Collections of the University Library in Leiden. These residencies book-ended the process of evolution in which the exhibition emerged as a fully formed idea and a designed exhibition. In this manner, the

exhibition was workshopped through discussion. Although, it is aimed at a Dutch (European) audience, it seeks to reflect Indigenous views on history, the present and the future. During this time, the design language was set down opting for colours drawn from the work of Cara Romero (whose work was also used as the poster), a punchy orange and a bright pink, combined with black and grey. The graphic design has a directional quality and is inspired by wampum beads on wampum belts, which it renders in pixilated form referring to the multiple uses and meanings of wampum in intercultural contexts. Due to the pandemic the exhibition was opened early July 2020, rather than May as was originally intended.

In total around eighty works can be seen, many part of contemporary art series. Named living artists featured in the exhibition include Sonny Assu, (Ligwilda'xw of the Kwakwaka'wakw); Nathan Begaye (Navajo/Hopi); Jamison Chas Banks (Seneca-Cayuga-Cherokee); Yatika Starr Fields (Osage/Cherokee/Muscogee-Creek); Leah Mata Fragua (Northern Chumash); Jason Garcia-Okuu Pin (Santa Clara Pueblo); Steven Paul Judd (Kiowa-Choctaw); Greg Lewis (Acoma Pueblo); Jacob Meders (Mechoopda/Maidu), Shelley Niro (Kanien'kehá:ka [Mohawk]); Jamie Okuma (Luiseño/Shoshone-Bannock); Virgil Ortiz (Cochiti Pueblo); Elizabeth James-Perry (Wampanoag Tribe of

Gay Head-Aquinnah); Cara Romero (Chemehuevi); Diego Romero (Cochiti Pueblo); Melinda Schwakhofer (Mvskoke); Skawennati (Kanien'kehá:ka [Mohawk]); Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie (Taskigi/Diné). Historic work by Fred Kabotie (Naaqavo'ma, 1900-1986), Hopi Pueblo; Tomas Vigil (1889-1960), Tesuque Pueblo and Awa Tsireh (Alfonso Roybal, 1898-1955), San Ildefonso Pueblo. Work loaned includes video work by *In Progress*: Katrina Ducheneaux, Selena Rushman, Eliza Kingbird, Metahna Steeprook, Keira Matthews, Rozalina Hunt, Alyssia White (Anishinaabe students from the Bug O Nay Ge Shig School) and a lacrosse stick used by Nina Polk (Lakota/Navajo). A *Water is Life* banner produced during a workshop in California led by Christi Belcourt (Mischif (Métis)) is also shown.

The exhibition has proved successful over time, enduring beyond original closure dates and frequented by many school groups who sense the difference in tone between the temporary exhibition and the permanent displays. *First Americans*, in terms of presentation and content, was immeasurably improved by the conversations that happened during its development. As part of the lead up to the exhibition, multiple emails were written, and several artist interviews

were conducted. As a consequence, *Provenance #3* features a number of these conversations, transcribed to provide a fuller account of the artists and the artwork than the exhibition can provide. It also includes a short essay on a historic collection by Sarah Russ, a member of Haida Nation, who worked as an MA intern in Museum Volkenkunde in 2022, focusing on the collection of William H. Oldman. She has elsewhere written a review of *First Americans* (to appear in the 2022 edition of *Museum Worlds*).

In *Provenance #1* I noted that an attentiveness to the provenance of collections means a consistent attention to the documentation and contextualising of collections, that this must importantly include attending to contemporary work. *Provenance #3* attempts this by providing a context for an understanding of materiality, making and meaning of artworks collected and held by museums, in the past and in the present, as well as for the future.

Interview between Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie and Henrietta Lidchi

Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie and Henrietta Lidchi

Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie (b. 1954) was born into the Bear Clan of the Taskigi Nation and for the Tsi'naajinii Clan of the Diné (or Navajo) Nation. Currently a Professor Native American Studies at the University of California, Davis and the Director of the C.N. Gorman Museum, her major artistic contribution has been in the field of photography. Both as an art and documentary photographer, Tsinhnahjinnie has been influential in deploying the term 'photographic sovereignty' to describe and argue for particular kinds of representational practice to signal the historic and contemporary resistance, resilience, and sovereignty of Indigenous North Americans. The interview, which considers Tsinhnahjinnie's career, took place in Leiden, at Museum Volkenkunde on 30 October 2017 while Tsinhnahjinnie was participating at the conference on *Reckoning with Colonial History* at the Research Center for Material Culture.



Figure 4. *We'wha #2*, 2019, photographic artwork by Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie (Taskigi/Diné) created from the albumen portrait of We'wha (1848-1896), a Zuni two spirit person or *alhamana*, made by John K Hillers 1886. Platinum Lambda Print. © Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, 7183-1.

The National Museum of World Cultures acquired two significant works by Tsinhnahjinnie in 2019 and 2020. *We'Wha #2* (fig. 4) was created from the albumen portrait by the photographer John K. Hillers 1886 of We'wha (1848-1896), a Zuni two-spirit or *alhamana* artist and recognised repository of traditional knowledge. This was the third iteration of a portrait originally conceived as a poster for the Two-Spirit Honour Project at the Native Wellness Research Center,

University of Washington as well as a Two Spirit Gathering in Sandstone Minnesota (2008) (a copy was donated by Tsinhnahjinnie, 7183-2). The second iteration, *We'wha the Beloved*, was created by Tsinhnahjinnie at the end of 2008/2009 for an artist gathering at UC Davis. *We'wha #2* was created in response to the enquiry by NMVW in regard to the exhibition *What a Genderful World* (Tropenmuseum 2019-2021, Wereldmuseum 2021-2022).



Figure 5. *Hoke-tee*, *Portraits Against Amnesia* series, Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie (Taskigi/ Diné) 2002. Digital Platinum Lamda print, © Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, 7201-1.

'going to the moon trying to claim it, but when he gets there, there is a little Indigenous baby floating around on her space scooter'.

Lidchi: When you are asked to describe yourself, how do you answer that question?

Tsinhnahjinnie: You are getting the updated version, because it always changes, because information is always revealing itself. Having family members speak to me, specially on my mother's side, who continually update who I am and that is important because, of course, both my mother and father's nations are matrilineal. Though I grew up on the Navajo Reservation and everybody knows I am my father's daughter, my mother's people are my people. And they were always very proud to have a different tribe in the family.

So how do you identify yourself professionally and personally?

Professionally: an educator, an artist but it is hard to prioritise them because they are always shifting wherever I go. I could be an artist and an educator. I could be aunty or a community member, so it is always shifting. So, you cannot really put it into a 1, 2, 3 type

Tsinhnahjinnie noted that her relationship with the original image had changed in the interim. She wanted *We'wha* to appear less worldly and more spiritual. In *We'wha #2* *We'wha*'s facial features and skin are softened, her cheeks are whirled, and her hair has more movement.

Tsinhnahjinnie's second work was purchased for the exhibition *First Americans*. *Hoke-tee* (fig. 5) was part of the series *Portraits Against Amnesia*, which recontextualises historic images that have circulated as picture postcards. In *Hoke-tee* Tsinhnahjinnie places the small girl on the moon to show that her residence precedes space exploration noting that the man

[order] of hierarchy. But basically, someone who does artwork, who is an artist, who teaches at a university, who just tries to make sense of all the visuals that come across.

You were born in Phoenix, Arizona? And you spent the first ten years of your life there?

Correct.

And your father, the artist Andrew van Tsihnahjinnie (1916-2020), worked in Scottsdale with figures like Lloyd Kiva New and your mother also worked for Lloyd Kiva New.

Right. My mother, aunt and my grandmother had moved from Oklahoma to the Phoenix area where a large Muskogee/Seminole Community had congregated. This was before Relocation, and of course jobs were a priority. My mother saw an advertisement in the Phoenix newspaper for a seamstress, a finisher, and she was a really good seamstress. My mother called the number in the paper, and they asked her to come in for an interview, so she and my grandmother caught a bus and went across town where she was interviewed by the Cherokee artist and designer Lloyd Kiva New. She always called him Lloyd. She was a perfectionist about sewing. One day at work, she happened to see my father and declared in her mind that she was going to marry him. Later, Lloyd needed hostesses for his

fashion shows, and he asked my mother to help with hosting.

What do you remember about that time living in Phoenix, Arizona?

I was hot. It was really hot. Dad would work a lot. He would travel a lot with Lloyd. Friends and family would visit. My father was a caretaker for about 700 acres. The land was owned by the Stillman family. They were an industrialist family and that was out towards Pinnacle Peak and it had a ranch house and an arts and crafts house. So, he had his studio in the arts and craft house ... it was all self-contained, out in the desert. It had a well, electricity and everything, beautiful, on the side of a hill. So, family would come visit. My father's friends would come visit and stay: Pablita Velarde (Santa Clara), Fred Beaver (Muscogee Creek-Seminole), Adee Dodge (Navajo), Harrison Begay (Navajo), just a whole bunch of them. Some would stay for a little bit, some of them would just come visit, so it was like a parade of Native American art history. I would watch them paint. Some of them would stay and paint and then sell their paintings.

Not only my father's friends, but then my mother's relatives would come up and they established an Indian ball court, the Creeks and Seminoles would come up together and play Indian ball. And I think they had a stomp dance up there. So, it was really active.

Then you moved to Rough Rock in Arizona on the Navajo Reservation when you were 10.

Yeah, about the mid 1960s: '65, '66. My father was asked to return to Rough Rock because the pilot school, Rough Rock Demonstration School, was being established and artists were needed to help create the curriculum. Lately, I have been contemplating about that, how it was pretty amazing to watch the development of a bilingual, bicultural, school from the ground up. Seeing how a community situates Navajo teachers, how you put in a community board, publishing, creating a Navajo history book.

And your father wanted to do it?

Well, they especially wanted him to come back because of course he is from Rough Rock so he was one of the main people to be asked to participate. My mother was up for it. She played a whole different part because she was not Navajo. She had a role as an outsider within the community. She was the family outsider who could complete tasks that could not be done by Navajo people. They would come to her. So, she was very important in that way: being the necessary outsider. And then later, getting her degree in teaching and teaching at Rough Rock, counselling students. Parents who did not speak English would come to her for counselling for their children, a translator would be provided and they

would consult. They knew her energy and her intent. They knew that their child would listen to her. She was the necessary outsider.

What did she teach?

Home economics.

Was your father teaching?

He was still an illustrator and then it was probably late 1980s he became a teacher at the [Rough Rock] High School. One time I went to one of his classes. It was a quiet class. Students would arrive, get their paints and brushes, and just start painting.

Did he teach you?

When I was little, he would give me lessons in perspective. So, when I was eight, I could do three point perspective; horizon-line points, and all.

And then you went to Institute of American Indian Arts [IAIA or IA] in the mid 1970s? But you went to Chinle High School before that.

I went to Rough Rock middle school, and then transferred to Chinle High School, I had a year off between high school and IAIA. During that year I volunteered at Arcosanti near Cordes Junction, AZ. I was interested in architecture, so Paolo Soleri's 'Urban Project,' was an interesting place to volunteer. You could stay there as long as you worked. And then IAIA started up.

The Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe started up in 1962, so by that time it was about 10 years in? What was it like?

People had been talking about it in my father's artists' circle. And so, I was like: you know, I might check it out. But before attending IAIA, I attended a quarter at Navajo Community College [NCC] when it was at Tsaile [on the Navajo Reservation] and there again, I saw flyers for IAIA, so I applied. I had essentially had other ideas for studies. I had been avoiding a career in art, because it seemed too easy, and of course I had a silly idea that one had to suffer in order to succeed.

You did not find expressing yourself artistically difficult as a kid and as a teenager?

No, that is why I thought there was not very much value in it, because you know you always heard about people suffering for their art, to do great things.

What was it like moving from Rough Rock to Santa Fe?

It was just, you know, extending my little stomping-ground area.

And the people you went with?

There were just some really nice people like Joe Dale Nevaquaya (Yuchi), Michelle Emerson (Kiowa), Carrie Estey (White Earth Anishinaabe), Donna Sanipass (Aroostook Band of Micmacs) and others. People who stayed in the

arts and those who did not stay in the arts, I went to school with Sherwyn B. Zephier (Yankton), he worked for a bit at the little Red School House in Minnesota, Minneapolis, a really fine artist and a spiritual person. He joined the ancestors in 2017. It provided a network in different places so when I would go to Minnesota or Oklahoma or New York, you know I had friends.

Did it influence the way you did things like the Visual Sovereignty workshops later?

The intertribal network was very inspirational: to create a network more on a global scale with Indigenous people so there could be that structure for support when one travels. It can be a bit unsettling if you do not know anyone. You might miss the important things. You might become just another tourist. Whereas if a network is in place travel becomes intimate, with cultural exchange, involving land and people. You might not know where the good chili is. The Good chili.

So, if I understand correctly, IA provided a broad foundation course.

It was all materials and techniques, and everything was provided which was awesome, but in retrospect what I really wish there was more of was research, and content. Because you are given all these tools but if you are going to create artwork about culture you need a foundation. It was expected that you had cultural knowledge of

stories, of things and events. But as a young person, there was still need of information.

When were you taken out of your family context where you could have learned those stories?

Well, I did learn some of the things at Rough Rock. But the thing is, you know, there are cultural boundaries. What do you share from your father's people? And that is recognising who has authority to share. Rough Rock Demonstration School published a book about the Kinaaldáa [Diné young woman's coming of age ceremony]. I did not go through my Kinaaldáa because my mother would have had to instruct me, and my mother is Seminole/Taskigi. My father could not instruct me, that would not be appropriate. I now have knowledge of the ways of the Kinaaldáa, but, of course I had to acquire the knowledge through participation of relatives' Kinaaldáa.

And then from IAIA, you went to Oakland?

Yeah Oakland, California. I mean I knew I was going to be going somewhere, but it really did not matter where. I was unaware of the Relocation programmes, the history of Relocation or even the history of California Natives, or things like that. There were about eight or twelve of us that attended California College of Arts and Crafts (CCAC, now California College of the Arts) in Oakland. Shonto Begay (Navajo),

back then he was Wilson Begay, was there too. Three of us graduated out of all who started, mainly because the cultural shock of living in Oakland. As I had mentioned before I had read the biography of Malcolm X, so in a way it prepared me. I had read about Angela Davis, the Black Panther movement, I believe the readings helped.

You said initially you thought of going to go to the Art Institute of Chicago?

I asked the counsellor at IAIA, Robert N. Hartcourt, what about the Chicago Art Institute? But he just outright refused, because of one of the IAIA students who transferred to the Art Institute of Chicago had been murdered. He never sent anyone there again because he felt personally responsible. I don't think he ever got over that. He was a very compassionate mentor.

What was the difference in tuition between IA and Oakland. Did you have good mentorship?

I did have good mentorship. There was this curator, Robert Ewing. He taught a couple of classes at IA and we connected and communicated well. He was a young gay man back then. He was much very like an older brother. And when I was heading off to Oakland he took me aside and gave me an older brother caution about the city, and warned me about certain things, a 'watch out'. Just really caring. Unfortunately, I did not keep in

contact with him, but he really made a difference. And of course, Robert Hartcourt being very protective. My family drove me to California and my dad was all excited because he had attended CCAC, and he showed me all the places to drink coffee. Where to eat. Where he stayed when he was there.

You graduated in 1982, what was the course structure like at California College?

Of course, you had a general education credit to meet. I really just took all kinds of classes, different media, and in doing that, had an introduction to each of the instructors' perspective. There was Hal Fischer. Hal Fischer was doing photographs on codes within the gay community, really interesting work. S.E. Ciricleo who was one of my main photography teachers, she was known for her mapping project 'Neighborhood,' and product photography. When she got out of art school, the only work she could find was forensic photography. It was interesting to meet these artists and understand their path. There was another photographer I really liked, I only had one class with him, he did images for *Life* magazine and then he passed away the next year. There were some whose classes I did not go to because I heard stories about them. I had a tribal scholarship. So, I left debt free. Then I stayed in Oakland, because I started working with the Indian Center.

You wanted to work with the artist community?

Yes, and there was a multinational/ intertribal community, and I really liked working with intertribal communities.

What was it like living in Oakland?

It was exciting, one of the things working with the San Francisco American Indian Center (SFAIC) was you kept in contact with the community. I did not realise when I was photographing events, I was creating an archive of the community. And some of those moments were pretty important. Like when the community would go protest the Gasquet-Orleans road, a road that would cut through sacred high country in Northern California or documenting the Gay American Indian movement. I would photograph the activities at the San Francisco American Indian Center. Gladys Ellenwood (Nez Perce) and her family would attend the Wednesday bead workshops at the SFAIC, at one of the workshops she said: 'I need a photograph of my family.' I said: 'OK. We'll do it next Wednesday.' She brought the whole family. I could only afford black and white, and she said 'that's fine' and so I had everything set, the following Wednesday and it is a very powerful portrait of Native family living in San Francisco in the 1980s. Gladys has since joined the ancestors, as have a couple of her sons and her daughter. Gladys' granddaughter Nizhoni, whom I have known since a

baby, did not have a portrait of the family. I gave her the image of her grandmother, her dad, uncles and aunt. Quite a few community members come to me for images of their family. I am a holder of images in that way. I have photographed people like Morning Star Gali (Pit River). I started photographing her when she was a little. Now she is a very strong activist, a very present activist. And then her little girl just looks like her when she was little.

So, you were unconsciously creating an archive?

It is kind of trippy when I looked back upon it. When the SFAIC dissolved, I was worried about the archive. One of my friends who worked at SFAIC made sure that what images were available were returned to me. When she handed them to me, they were stamped with my copyright.

At the time you were working at the Intertribal Friendship House (IFH), that had been sponsored by Quakers, one of the first relocation centers in the Bay Area. Yeah, kind of co-sponsored, because you know Relocation only gave you a one-way ticket, three months of rent, stipend and that was it. Addresses to apply to, and of course it would be like service work or something like that and then you were on your own. So of course, the communities came together. And since 1953, Intertribal Friendship House has kept a photo-

archive. A beautiful photo-archive. People would contribute to it, or other people who would work at IFH would take photographs and there would be newsletters. And newsletters would stop and then start back up. At the moment, IFH is in a really strong space, under the Direction of Carol Wapepah (Leech Lake Ojibwe). A lot of activities are happening for the youth, elders and general community. In the 1980s, early 1990s, a medicine man, Robert Stead from South Dakota, would hold healing ceremonies at IFH, and the community would come. At times fifty people to two hundred people would attend. IFH is so integral to the Bay Area Native community, from social activism to ceremonies.

And so, what did you mostly do there?

Made sure the doors were open, so to speak. Help organise events, prepare for the Wednesday night dinners. Mediate conflicts. Develop a t-shirt business. Coordinate rafting trips and art projects for the youth. I was very involved with community orientated activities.

And you also worked at the San Francisco Indian Center?

First the San Francisco American Indian Center (1982-1985) and then Intertribal Friendship House (1985- 1988). I also taught as a lecturer at California College of Arts & Crafts in the early 1990s. I was also involved with American Indian

Contemporary Arts as a 'working' board member, curating exhibitions, helping with graphics, highlighting contemporary Indian artists. A wealth of American Indian artists exhibited at AICA, at first local artist such as Frank La Peña (Nomtipom-Wintu), Harry Fonseca (Nisenan Maidu/Native Hawaiian/Portuguese), Jean LaMarr (Paiute/Pit River) and L. Frank (Frank Manriquez) (Tongva-Ajachmem), California Native artists and local intertribal artists living in the Bay Area, and of course later a national reach. AICA was a small non-profit organisation founded by Janeen Antoine (Sicangu Lakota), volunteer work was essential for operating.

Was photography emerging as a significant medium at that time?

When was it that the Native Indian/ Inuit Photographer's Association was established (NIIPA, 1985-1992)? I first engaged when there was a gathering in Ottawa and connections continued from there on. I am trying to remember if that is the first time I met Jolene Rickard (Tuscarora). It was exciting knowing that other Indigenous photographers were working actively in their territories.

You said you first got introduced to photography when Henri Cartier-Bresson was in Rough Rock, is that right?

Yes, Rough Rock was 'hot' from the mid '60's to about late 70's, being that Rough Rock Demonstration School

was the pilot school for bilingual/ bicultural education, a significant change within Native American Indian education, so there were a lot of visitors from Indigenous communities, near and far. Educators, politicians, community educators from First Nations, Māori educators from Aotearoa, politicians of the day; Ted Kennedy, Robert Mondale, etc. would fly in and land on the little dirt landing strip and of course the media would be present documenting. Visits were documented in Congressional records. Amongst the steady stream of visitors was Henri Cartier-Bresson. I was informed by the visiting peace corps volunteers that he was a well-known photographer, a humanist photographer. I researched his work at the Chinle High School library, which I was attending at the time. Not only did I find his work but the work of South African photographer, Ernest Cole, whose 1967 book *House of Bondage* was nothing short of an epiphany. It was a template to photograph the political situation of the racial tensions on and off the Navajo reservation, especially the border towns. These two photographers had a huge impact on the direction of my image making.

In the 70's on the Navajo reservation, television and radio communications was limited, one had to position the outdoor antenna towards Albuquerque, for evening transmission when the signals were strong. There was no

reception during the day. As for radio, you could tune into KOMA after sunset, a radio station based in Oklahoma City. You could listen to the popular songs. Media sources were limited, as for print one could access the library for magazines, the usual *National Geographic*, *Life*, *Time* magazine. And of course, *Life* magazine in the 1960s, the war was going on. So, you had images of the Mai Lai massacre, the Civil Rights Movement, assassinations, and other cultural movements.

Imagine the limited media sources and then you combine that with seeing images from the *House of Bondage*. The power of photography, the power of the image was, and is, immense. And then Cartier-Bresson comes around, one begins to understand the power of photography. So, it was an affirmation, an affirmation about imagery. Rough Rock creating its own imagery, its own history, because there were a few photographs of the Navajo Chiefs, Nabááh Jilt'aa (Manuelito), Hástiin Dághá (Barboncito) or of *Hwéeldi* (the Long Walk to Bosque Redondo) and creating a visual history. So that is very affirming, and the power of imagery was confirmed. And at the same time, you can have your own voice as to how that imagery is presented.

So you started to channel your own artistic production towards photography? My parents asked what I would like for a High School graduation gift, I

responded 'A camera.' So we went to Gallup, and Dad traded a couple of paintings for a 35mm Nikon, film, camera strap and, of course, paints and brushes. Mullarky (Mullarky Camera Shop) was (is) a photographers' supply and gallery shop. Dad had a long-standing business relationship with the owners. So, I picked out my camera, a lens and film. There are a couple of receipts I have in my archives: a Mullarky receipt which documents the purchase of paintbrushes, casein colours, three rolls of tri-ex and developing chemicals. I want to enlarge it, make art out of it, because it is a portrait of my father and I.

So, were you making a living as a photographer when you were in San Francisco and Oakland?

It happened when I was filling out tax returns. I had to put down my occupation, and then it hit me, I was a photographer, officially. That was in the mid-1980s. And ever since then I've put written 'photographer,' as occupation, and as of 2004 adding Professor, haha. Yeah, that was also turning point.

But you valued the community aspects of your work in San Francisco?

Because all the people you would meet. There would be so many different people. I remember there was this elderly couple, they were Muskogee, he was a minister he spoke Muskogee, he was fluent, and he always wanted me

to come to church service, to learn the hymns, which I should have. But I was too busy being in San Francisco. They were so sweet, and I have photographs of them, and they were in their 80s. So, there were a lot of opportunities, also a lot of regrets about opportunities missed! But I had to get over that quick, because it was like the 'decisive moment,' which always seemed to be elusive, my 'moment' was always the moment after, or the moment before, hardly ever the apex of Cartier-Bresson's moment. Early on I decided to embrace my moments, make them mine, my timing is: the moment before or the moment after.

When you were in High School, Alcatraz was going on, and the American Indian Movement was prominent. What was your relationship with that moment?

During those times, I had read Vine Deloria Jr's *Custer Died for Your Sins*. He wrote in a very accessible way, the colonisation and responses to colonisation on Indian Lands, Indian minds. I really appreciated his analysis. Thinking this could also be a template for images, I imagined being involved with the movement as a photographer. However, I sensed early on that it was not safe space for a two-spirit woman, which would be confirmed later by hearing friends' experiences. I guess there was also a bit of caution that was given to me by my mother,

considering, my mother and my aunt moved to Arizona from Oklahoma, a move that was influenced by gender oppression amongst economic issues. My grandmother, aunt and mother were searching for a safe space.

You noted that in Oakland and San Francisco you were able to come together with a number of different artists, that you were part of a multi-cultural art movement in San Francisco.

There was a coming together, but there was never cohesiveness, because everyone had their own agenda. The Chicanos, would claim the land as Atzlán, and I would say this is not Atzlán, this is California Native territory. Or recognising the racism that we have in our tribes that is directed towards the African-American community. So, these things were never really addressed, they were kind of skirting around so that there could be this tentative unity. These are serious issues. And when I would bring them up, everybody would be quiet and then I would go onto the next topic.

You stayed in the Bay Area, and did not go back to Rough Rock.

I did go home to visit, it was just that time went quickly when you are having fun. My family would come to California and visit. My brothers would come and stay for a little bit. It would be fun. You know everybody was healthy. My father

and mother were raising the younger bunch, and I didn't want to add to the stress, so I held my own.

You are the oldest?

Yes, eldest of seven. There was one point where I went back for a couple of years, and I was a substitute teacher on call at Rough Rock. Some of the teachers were really frustrated, because they were not able to engage the students, mainly the non-Native teachers. Even though Rough Rock started out as this ideal, bilingual, bicultural educational utopia, substandard teachers would be hired. My mother was a beloved instructor, by students, parents and colleagues. She wasn't Navajo, but she was Indian, which meant that she could relate on a different level and was valued because she had the ability to contribute to the community.

Talk a little bit, if you would, about why community work is so important, or has been so important, even though you have been very prominent in art photography and in the arguing for political engagement around archival photographs and contemporary photography.

For me personally if there is no community involvement then it is hollow, especially since the community is my audience. The language, content, of my work is specifically oriented for an Indigenous/Native American audience, those who understand the history

of colonisation from an Indigenous perspective, i.e. treaties, occupation of a predatory society. Supporting and inspiring Indigenous activists is extremely important, just as important as informing a greater audience on historical and contemporary issues, be it transgressions by corporations on environment, treaty rights violations or to bringing attention to issues such as Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW). The Artists, Photographers, Videographers, Image-makers are very important in creating the visuals to communicate our concerns on these issues.

You noted that there was a significant moment when you realised you could sustain yourself as an artist and photographer. How did you wish to combine this with your community work, and documentary work?

I was filling out a tax income form, and it was the first time I wrote in pen that I was a photographer. That was a moment I have not forgotten. It was a written commitment; it was as if I was announcing to the Federal and State government my subversive intent. As for existing within the community as an artist and documenter, the realisation was when community members would ask me to take a family portrait, or to design a poster, and at times the portraits would become art. Creating art for the community was accepting responsibility of creating inspiration.

Memoirs of an Aboriginal Savant, *was that the moment when you applied a particular kind of historical consciousness to your work? You mentioned before that you wish you had been taught to do research.* *Memoirs of an Aboriginal Savant* was first exhibited at the C.N. Gorman museum, at the University of California Davis. Utilising computers pre-dated the exhibition, I started using the computer in the 1980's mainly for graphics, but for *Memoirs of an Aboriginal Savant* [MAS], I wanted to create a memoir that reflected my journey as a person. I gathered blank pages from old books, pages that looked aged and would run them through the printer. It felt empowering creating something new that looked old. The series would eventually be purchased for the Hood Museum at Dartmouth College. It was the first digital series, before that, in silver print, old school darkroom style, *Mattie Goes Travelling*, and the *Metropolitan Indian Series*, and others, as for digital series, MAS was the beginning.

In the 1990s you were part of an emerging critical conversation about photography and sovereignty.

In the '90's Native photographers were emerging strong and NIIPA had a conference. We started networking, gone was the feeling that we were working in a vacuum. Many from Canada and the United States. Conversations started up

about photographing from the inside, representing our own communities as we understood them. Controlling our image, which of course was in line with the thoughts of sovereignty: photographic sovereignty, visual sovereignty. We were eager to visualise our own people and communities.

And then the Barbican Show, Native Nations was staged in 1998.

The Barbican exhibit, *Native Nations*, came at a crucial time. Contemporary Native American photographers were being represented in London, when the museums and galleries in the United States/Canada did not openly receive our work or take our work seriously. I believe it to be a pivotal point in exposure, in that a solid publication came out of the exhibition which included writings on photography by Native Photographers, and once again the photographers were able to convene and exchange ideas, reconnect, and recharge.

Around that time, you were in the academic system again, and you are writing about visual affirmation, and later about visual sovereignty, with your most quoted essay, coming out in the early 2000s.

The 1000-word piece (*When is a Picture Worth 1,000 words*) was about personal experience, sharing the stories I had been gifted, from Wilma Mankiller (Cherokee) in Oklahoma, Jolene

Figure 6. Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie in her office in Davis, 2019 while working on *We'wha* #2. Photograph: Henrietta Lidchi.



Rickard's father in New York. I was travelling and listening. Because for a while I was travelling and not listening. The stories that were shared were incredibly memorable, when they were shared, one would try to remember everything, not just the stories, but the time of day, the birds, the crickets, the passing cars...

Today you teach at a prominent university. How does being professor or being in the

academic system influence your sense of what you want to put your energy into? First, I had to grow into it. I had to be comfortable with being a Professor (fig. 6). I was comfortable with being an artist and a photographer, but being a Professor is different. I had to become comfortable with the students and with my colleagues, and of course the usual politics of being an academic. Being comfortable with being a mentor, and a social status totally unfamiliar. I wanted to make a difference with the students,

Figure 7. L. Frank Manriquez at Standing Rock by Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie (Taskigi/Diné). © Hulleah J Tsinhnahjinnie.



have them comfortable with visuals and being able to support their thesis with imagery.

And your approach to photography appears to have changed course a little, with more emphasis on witnessing. You are documenting protests such as Idle No More, and No DAPL. How has your practice evolved?

Everybody and their brother is a photographer now, a good but scary thing. So, the question is: how does

one image do something so that it means something different? That has a different impact. How does one interpret a situation that has been interpreted by 1500 other visual people. And it can be that you have these many individual points of view, though some people are standing in the same circle photographing the same thing.

It is about the relationship. Who you have a relationship with, who you are following around, who is in your circle. Like going to Standing Rock and

my circle L. Frank Manriquez. Because I was fretting around about how am I going to do this? Then I realised: L. Frank is right there, there you go (fig. 7). I followed her around, and kind of watched over her because her health is fragile, and she is a year or maybe less, eight months older, than me, so she is my elder! So, I made sure that when certain ceremonies were called in the Pavilion I would go run and find her and make sure that she was there for that. And sometimes I was able to take photographs of it happening and sometimes they would say: no photographs. You know there were a lot of famous movie stars, there were a lot of famous people there, some very beautiful images were taken.

While I was there, there were times with my before and after timing. And I have learned to work around that. Some of my favourite images are the college students helping to make the beds because the hotel staff were so tired because they had been there for three days when the snowstorm came in. You know things like that. So, it makes you find preciousness in other places, places that are not the

norm. Because perhaps the decisive moment for everybody else is right when someone is handing someone the eagle feather or something like that. My decisive moment will be down the hallway somewhere, taking a picture of Gary Farmer (Cayuga/Haudenosaunee) sleeping on a sofa. Or just happening to look out of the window and seeing all those cars coming back from the camp. Because if you think of all of those non-Native photographers who have photographed America and the mundane, the mundane of their communities, of families and of whiteness or things like that. Maybe I am the mundane photographer of the Native community?

Interview between Elizabeth James Perry and Henrietta Lidchi

Elizabeth James Perry and Henrietta Lidchi

Elizabeth James-Perry (b.1973) is an enrolled citizen of the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head-Aquinnah, located by the richly coloured clay cliffs of Noepe (Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts). A researcher and exhibit consultant, Perry trained as a marine biologist and works as an interpreter of Indigenous history and Wampanoag culture. The owner of *Original Wampum Art*, Perry is known for her work reflecting early Algonquian art and material culture, creating in particular traditional style and contemporary artwork and regalia out of wampum beads and quahog shell.

The interview was held in Washington D.C. on the 25 October 2019, as Elizabeth James Perry (fig. 8) was handing over *Out of the Ocean* (fig. 10, 11) an artwork made of wampum beads purchased for the exhibition *First Americans* at the Museum Volkenkunde, Leiden. *Out of the Ocean* was to be featured alongside other works including wampum beads from the existing collection of the National Museum of World Cultures. This includes an eighteenth century Haudenosaunee wampum

belt (RV-364-1), a nineteenth century wampum string (WM-17978) collected by Herman F.C. ten Kate (1858-1931) during his visit to the Tuscarora Indian Reservation in Niagara Falls as a consequence of a visit with Caroline Parker (Seneca, but living on the Tuscarora Indian Reservation at the time, c.1882) who gifted the item to him. Together they represent three hundred years of wampum work. In 2021, a further work by James-Perry called *Island Meetings: Wampum Alliance Collar* (fig. 9) was purchased for display in the semi-permanent exhibition in the Tropenmuseum, *Onze Koloniale Erfenis* to reflect on the early history of relations between Indigenous communities and the Dutch in the seventeenth century. This piece is an alliance collar, reflecting those created on the eastern seaboard, but valued all over the northeast into the Great Lakes and Canada which were often described as 'Friendship Collars' by early Jesuit missionaries and explorers. According to James-Perry they were worn by important tribal individuals, and to honour strong political relationships between Native Nations and later, with European trading partners and nations. The now-rare semi-circular form of the dual purple and white wampum was woven with hundreds of quahog shell beads in a generous drape with smoked deerskin ties.



Figure 8. Elizabeth James-Perry at home 2019. Photograph: Henrietta Lidchi.

Lidchi: Describe if you would a little about the thinking behind Out of the Ocean.

James-Perry: As an Indigenous community on an island, we have an incredibly strong bond to the ocean. We consider the ocean the source of life and quahogs¹ come out of the ocean, so they embody some of that wholesomeness and they continue to feed us. You can find shell mounds

1 The Northern quahog (*Mercenaria mercenaria*) is a hard-shell clam, a valued source of sustenance and raw material for the Indigenous peoples of the Atlantic coast of North America. The Northern quahogs take three years to reach maturity and typically live eight years but have been known to live up to 100 years.



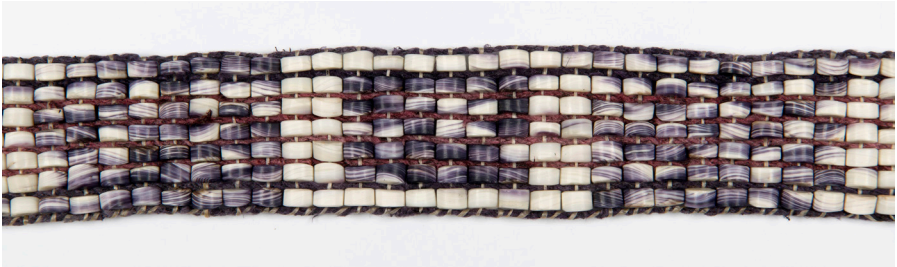
that are enormous. Honouring that connection is very important. Continuing to honour that connection is very important. We need to care about the ocean, as Native people we want to encourage all to care for the ocean.

The ocean has always been a huge source of inspiration for my design work, even when I am not talking about it. Some of my earliest big pieces, my first large bias collar was very much just conceived very much on the idea of the reflectivity of the stars and the ocean and the deep, deep purple, and the bright light and it is very important. I think about the mindfulness and the positionality and the reflective quality of the ocean reflecting the stars and the moon. Often, when I am working with wampum I am often thinking of the connection between the ocean and the sky more strongly.

Figure 9. *Island Meetings: Wampum Alliance Collar*, Elizabeth James-Perry (Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head -Aquinnah), 2021. Quahog, deer hide, copper, cotton © Elizabeth James-Perry, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, 7252-1.

So, I was thinking about positionality. So, I centred the square figure and then flanked it (fig. 10). I was also thinking about reflections on the water, and the sun and the moon coming up over the ocean. It is really important as part of our identity as Wampanoag people as People of the First Light. We have always had, I believe, ceremonies that involved greeting the sun first thing in the morning because it is the original smudge. Giving thanks and swimming in the sun's first rays and the ocean, or in ponds, it is that Eastern Indigenous view [of the people on the eastern seabord] that is so important.

Figure 10. *Out of the Ocean*, Elizabeth James-Perry (Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head -Aquinnah), 2019, showing size and striation of shells. Quahog shell, milkweed, cotton. © Elizabeth James-Perry, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, 7202-1 (detail).



Tell me little more about its composition. It has six rows of white and about eight rows and the white square figure in the centre. It appears perfectly symmetrical. I was looking at early belts. Some of the pieces are bold and visually striking. I have nothing against the belts that come along later that are commemorative and say '1762' or '18 whatever'. They are interesting and important as well. But as a visual person, as an artist, they do not necessarily speak to me the same way. They are incorporating other cultures' ideas, other cultures' priorities in communications. So even different senses of time than these belts would sort of relate to in terms of our culture and our way of relating. So, when I came to putting together the belt for your museum, one of the things that struck me when I was working for my tribal community, [is that] we did a lot

of work on identifying sacred stone landscapes. It is interesting. You go to these sites and there are aspects to them that are stone calendars so they line up with the Perseus New Year shower at the time of the Green Corn festival. Some of them are very north/south aligned sites. There are stone rows. There's also a stone turtle just hacked out of a massive boulder, accurately capturing the gesture of a snapping turtle about to go into the water. The orientation of all of these figures is very important, but they are very subtle. They blend beautifully into the landscape, and they are extremely enduring in New England, which a lot of things aren't because our soil breaks down everything, due to the phosphate. Everything goes except for the stones. So out of the ancient things that could survive in New England mostly what you will find are the features that are

of stone or incorporate stone. Less so shell. Though some shell is found in ancient sites.

You spoke earlier about the white and the purpose, and their role as colours. Could you tell me a little more about this?

As Wampanoag people, I cannot speak for any other nation, there is a seriousness to purple. One of the easiest ways to describe it is just by saying if you were going to make an outfit for a young woman, or child, you would not necessarily put a ton of purple in it because they are a new person. They are forming and in many ways there is a great innocence about them. And they are growing, so you would have proportionately a lot of white with nice, little, purple elements. A community leader or a medicine person or a medicine woman – sure. A lot of purple. Like beautiful wampum collars, wampum belts or bandelier or even crowns and the gauntlet cuffs on both men and women, not just men. Because you are mature. Because you have responsibilities. It is being identified and even honoured through your wampum. It has a certain seriousness and then using the white, has a really strong diplomatic association.

There are also four purple warps on the outside and four pink/red warps on the inside.

The dark/light duality in wampum is very important, and they have different

[connotations]. The lighter, brighter, enlightenment [has a] wholesome kind of connotation. The purple is more serious aspects of life, responsibility, age, perspective and mysterious things, medicine, things like that. And then with the warps I wanted to have some red, because in a lot of Native societies, including Wampanoag, red is your connection to the earth, it is your connection; it is blood, life. And then I wanted the dark/light, so I took the purple/red as my dark/light in the warp as well. The purple is logwood. Logwood is absolutely a trade item (from Mexico, Dominica) and is sustainably harvested. It comes from a company on the west coast. It is a purchased natural dye. I love the purple. The pink is madder root. Madder root has a worldwide distribution so the local madder root in New England would be bedstraw or Galium, and then Rubia is what probably, what a lot of people think about.

There are some in NMAI's [National Museum of the American Indian, Washington D.C.] storage facility, made with slippery elm inner bark. Only some of them were dyed red, they may have used ochre, they could have used madder roots. You know ochre would have its own spiritual traditional meaning as well, but it was just a nice touch. Sometimes the background is that muted, really lovely, brain-tanned deerskin. Good brain-tanned is gorgeous. It does not compete absolutely, but I love the colour play,

when it does have some red warps. It has always appealed to me. I really, really like it.

I think sometimes I like it when women are considered as part of the creation of the beads themselves as well as the weaving part. There are many records of Wampanoag women weaving wampum including right in the middle of King Phillip's War [the armed conflict between Indigenous nations of New England, early colonists and their allies, 1675-1678], a group of women with wampum beads, putting together a belt, singing special songs. It is a special thing, it was not just some jewellery. And it continues to be special even under duress when we were facing the proposition of potentially losing our homelands forever. Going into exile, dying or being enslaved.

When you have included purple to think about the seriousness of this piece, what were you referring to?

So, for me, growing up on island community, or near island community, I should say, I grew up on Dartmouth predominantly, but lived on the island near Acquinna. Looking at how life has changed. I think as an islander you have a particular chance to see, you have a way of relating to resources in such a way that you notice. Just to think about all the degradation of the resources, all the erosion, all the storms, and watching it literally wash away: watching a Cape Cod house just

wash into the ocean. I think the kinds of changes that were captured over very long term in our beliefs and stories and seeing them happen very quickly. It is a lot to process, and I think of how the ocean environment is changing and the availability of materials is changing. When I worked for my tribe's natural resources, twenty years ago in the 1990s, we tried to buoy the population of soft-shell clams off island with no success. Already the habitat was not ideal, and people used to have tons of it. Oysters are beginning to feel the degradation of that more acidic water. The water is more acidic outside of the Elizabeth Islands, around Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket.

Quahogs are huge and they are thickly armoured. They are rugged. But I have to wonder, knowing the vulnerability of ocean life to drastic changes in temperature in the mineral and chemical composition of the ocean, what is going to happen? Is wampum going to be something that my grandchildren would be able to just make and relate to as opposed to talk about.

Is it a controlled species, is one just able to gather them?

You can, tons of people eat them, tons of non-Native people eat them. A lot of people eat quahogs, or 'stuffies' as they are called. It is certainly popular, it is certainly healthy for you. It is a good source of iodine. But the other thing is,

near New Bedford there is an incredible amount of pollution. There are quahogs, but it would never be safe to dig those and handle those because of the pollution. So, there are closed areas.

With the fishing, certainly, populations go down, but with the acidic water with the reproductive cycle of the really vulnerable larval stages, with the very, very thin shells, they get to the point where they are a miniature stage of the adults. Quahog seeds, if you buy them to seed a pond, they are tiny, tiny, miniature of quahogs, they are adorable, but to me, much more vulnerable.

Do you harvest your own quahogs or do you purchase them?

I do both. I live right in Dartmouth. We dig quahogs all the time, and then being a Native person, I also have Indigenous harvesting and fishing rights. So, I can legally go to the ocean at Gay Head and dig a bushel a day as subsistence for my family. So, I will go there and stock up. I will get several bushels and... take them mainland side, process them, you know we make chowder or things like that. I will give meat to friends and family who want to make chowder. Then I basically sort. I will hoard the nice old shells. Some of the shells they are so massive and so thick, the texture almost changes too with that great age. The clams are slow growing, and they have this different vibe. They are ancient. I don't know

how to explain that it just has quality about it. There is something about the accumulated experience of all those years of ocean life. There is a sense of it that is something quite familiar to me. Like whales are very long lived they are also very important to us and considered wisdom keepers. They can live more than one 100 years in good conditions. And the outside of the shell is much like a tree. All those new layers of calcium create rings, the growing edge of the shell. So, you can look at the edge of the growth lines and get a rough age to a certain degree. As they get older, the lines become so compressed and they fold, so you lose definition.

They are pretty striking to me. The texture, the weight and even the temperature of quahogs, because shell can get quite cool and moist like stone. They are different properties and reactivities. I like the purple and white contrast and, obviously historically, it is really important in the wampum belt and artistically now it is so important too.

The process of making the wampum belt involves a couple of different things, harvesting a lot of shell and really sorting them carefully. Because you can harvest a lot of shell but not all of it has purple all the way through. Sometimes it will only be purple on the top, so it is very deceptive. You cut through a beautiful thick shell, and it is all white. If I cannot do my pattern,

I have to keep sorting. Some of them are not very thick, and so when you are weaving as an artist you kind of compensate for the thickness. There is a nice natural variability in terms of the type of purple even sometimes the type of white from ivory to really bright pure white, to more of a grey to more of a lavender. Clams harvested from the ocean are pretty thick and heavy. It is possible to make really, really large beads, even bigger than the ones that I have here.

How do you make the beads?

You make beads a few different ways (fig. 10). Regardless of whether you cut them round or cut them square, you can crop the edges, you can be super-basic and get a tile cutter. It works on shell. And then if you want to do it old school, fine sand, sandstone, water. The water keeps down the dust, the heat and the fracturing. It also sands it faster. This is an unusual shell in that it is very rugged and it will dull your tools very quickly. But that hardness, that weight, means that it is also pretty indestructible.

I use a combination of electric tools and I do hand sanding, at the end on the beads. But it is a lot of processing. So I will use a Dremel to take off the back of the shell. But to the degree that I am comfortable with. I do not want to take a beautiful thick shell and thin it down to nothing. I prefer more nimble tools, so you can cut and carve,

do some inscription work and things like that. I like the sculptural. I am not a manufacturer. I want these belts to be special. I do not want to take them for granted. I do not want to whip out wampum bias collars, because they are too meaningful. I think, where is the human aspect of it? Where is the contact? Where is the art? Sometimes I will preserve the natural contours on the top of the shell.

I tolerate that variability because I like that variability. I think it adds interest and it is real. You can see where it comes from, who made it, how they are processing it. I try to have respect and little bit of variety. They feel alive to me and they feel lively and there feels like there is an interplay between the dark parts of the belt and the light part of the belt.

If I remember properly, you make a number of different sized beads, and those in Out of the Ocean are some of the largest?

Out of the Ocean has almost three hundred beads. Those are the large, actually. These are some of the biggest. You could historically have quite large belts with beads bigger than this.

There is a beauty to the big thick old shells barring some impurity or borer snails. Borer snails come from the outside, create holes and ruin the integrity of the shell. You will try to make a bead, but they will separate in layers and crack. It is depressing.

If you get a large shell, it has to have the thickness and weight. You can tell by picking up: whether it is thick or whether it grew fast. And the other one that you do not really want to use is the one that has been genetically modified to be a thin shell, purely white, clam. They are very pretty, purely white quahog. They were modified because fishermen did not want to haul the weight of the bulls [the big quahog shells] because it is back breaking. Another modification causes some of shells to be more striped. When I first did wampum there were actually a lot more that were deep purple and like reddish purple. The island has lot of the reddish purple and you can find these all around in Massachusetts in Rhode Island, in New York as well. Those became less common, and then really heavily striped ones became more common. That was again genetic modification.

On a big shell, the thickest part is that rim, at the bottom, where the muscle is. This is where you get the concentration of the purple colour. The thickness extends nearly to the edge. The purple has something to do with argon. There is interesting relationship between the clams, the nutrients, the temperature, maybe other things, that create that deep purple.

So, in terms of having a piece that I would want to hand down to my descendants, this is very much it, where it does have a certain strong presence

and a certain weight to it that is quite distinctly quahog. A conch or welk belt of that size would not have the same weight even though it would have the same size (fig. 11).

How is the belt woven?

Wampanoags do not usually traditionally make a loom to weave wampum. Traditional weavers usually start pretty young, I started weaving when I was eight and so I do not really depend on having frames and lots of apparatus to hold my material I can pretty much manage the tension.

For a seven-row belt, I knew I needed eight warps and I then I balanced the numbers. It is like on a bead loom, so you go through all your seven beads and at the corner I flip it and then I go back. So, you are securing it by going under and over the warps, through the beads again. Then I go a second time because I like to control the rows and make sure that everything is sitting nicely. I don't want any gaps. I don't want them to start crowning in on each other, at the end. These are really big beads too. There can be a distortion factor. There is a nice little extra stitch that did not need to be done, but it is actually a lovely way of maintaining tension, making sure that it is not so tightly woven that it is going to start stretching and wearing and loosening up.

I drill the beads myself obviously, but the nice thing about drilling them

myself is that I can use whatever cordage to string that I want to. So, I am not restricted to beading thread. Here I use some beading thread, but I could have used milkweed, I have done milkweed for the warp and the weft in the past too. Or heavier cordage that I have hand spun. If you have a large diameter, then you have the possibility for drilling wider without compromising the strength of the beads.

I laid out the pattern beforehand. When you are stringing these beads, you are going back and forth twice so you do not want to put a strain on the beads because they could eventually fracture and break. The finer beads are more prompt to that because you do not have the wall thickness. So, there is pressure but the milkweed warps or the deer skin or elk skin, provides cushioning. They both organise your pattern and support it. So, if you were wearing it, it would wear well.

Then the milkweed fibre, I grow the milkweed plants in my yard. There is a couple of different species. There are common milkweed. I grow swamp milkweed. There are beautiful flowers and on them, butterflies, and Native artists wait until the off season to harvest the stalks, so you are not interfering with the Indigenous insects that depend on the plant for their life. But they are fairly common in New England that was one of the most traditional and most common hand spun fibres for weaving belts, weaving

bags, weaving clothing, ... sash belts and finger woven belts and things as well.

The milkweed family is recognisable because if you break off a bit there is a milky sap. That is where that name comes from. In the family there is the taller straight form that is good for fibres because you can get great long fibres in the wintertime. The milk is good for treating skin ailments, the root is a medicine for babies. The pods are actually edible, so that when they are young you can just put them into a soup like a vegetable, and then the flowers before they open, some people like to deep fry them. The inner bark from the stem does have a little of that silken property but it is long and it is strong. It is quite soft and it takes the dyes beautifully. I have gotten a gorgeous natural black milkweed, and my colours have been consistently strong. I used madder root during my first experiments with milkweed. The colour is still a beautiful salmon. With logwood I have gotten a beautiful black.

Sometimes with a plant fibre, regardless of what it is, you have to do multiple dye baths to get the strength you want. Sometimes you have to add an additional mordent to it. So for us the mordents is traditionally sumac. Sumac leaves are really high in tannic acid, and super abundant in New England, they are everywhere. Berries of course are very high in tannic acid, but they are a red dye in their own right, a nice earthy colour. They have

Figure 11. *Out of the Ocean*, Elizabeth James-Perry (Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head-Aquinnah), 2019 Quahog shell, milkweed, cotton, © Elizabeth James-Perry, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, 7202-1.



so much tannic acid you do not have to mordent that dye it's mordent itself. You have to be mindful of those things.

I think you said before each bead takes around an hour?

That is right. There is no way to cheat it because you have to reckon with the raw material. You have to get the shell. You have to open it, you have to get the meat out, cook it, or freeze it whatever. Then you have to clean the shell. I am not an artist that likes stinky piles of shell. So, my shells are super clean. I will be really selective. You know it is just a feel – I can feel the edge. And the weight. The heft of it. Once in a while you will get a massive shell that is uniformly so nice and thick. That does not happen very often. I feel like when I first started doing wampum, it happened more often. Now not.

Do you have to prepare to make a belt or work with wampum?

I do, there is no one over me saying I have to, because our societies are a little bit different now, they are more spread out, with competing responsibility (fig. 11). For Wampanoag people making wampum is a little different, nobody approached us and said we would like for you to be wampum makers in our community and we are going to take care of you. And give you a deer. [Historically] that was a big part of it, you would have innate artistic ability, know the feel of it, have an understanding of the principles, an interest in learning more, a life-long dedication. So, it is not a little short-term hobby. But we are choosing to do that now, without anybody asking us to do it, and I consider it a privilege to do it, to be perfectly honest with you. And in my lifetime, I have seen the broader interest in wampum grow. Now there is just a little bit more respect, and admiration, and if you are lucky the

person has learned a little bit about the Native wampum in history keeping. I think for Algonquian people especially, it is a very social material. For Eastern Algonquians at least it is so strongly associated with creating bonds between nations, between honouring alliances, over the years, over the centuries, it is an enduring bond, so you would not take that material and reconfigure it.

Part of the context for us talking about this and doing this project does have to do with the commemorative work going on around 2020, and I think that there is a really very standard mass-produced version of history that is put out, that is not necessarily accurate. That it is difficult to draw meanings from and difficult to draw meaningful directives for action from. Whether it is international relations or it is concern for the environment, or how do you take care of your Native community now and ensure that we are still there. Hundreds of years from now,

thousands of years from now. It feels like it had potential that it did not meet. And here I am talking about the future as if it is the past. But it has been my sense up until now. And maybe that will change. Objectively speaking it is little fascinating (fig. 12).



Figure 12. Elizabeth James-Perry wearing *Island Meetings: Wampum Alliance Collar* in 2021. Photograph: Henrietta Lidchi.

Interview between Jacob Meders and Henrietta Lidchi

Jacob Meders and Henrietta Lidchi

Jacob Meders (b.1977) is a member of the Mechoopda Indian Tribe of Chico Rancheria, California and currently lives and works in Phoenix Arizona, an Associate Professor in New College of Interdisciplinary Arts & Sciences at Arizona State University, Glendale and owner of WarBird Press, a fine art printmaking studio that he operates as the Master Printmaker. Between 2-28 February 2020, Jacob Meders was artist in residence/fellow at the Museum Volkenkunde/Research Center for Material Culture, Leiden (National Museum of World Cultures). During this time, he created a series of woodblock prints whose theme was first encounters. These prints entitled *Trading Views #1-5* to be assembled together and for the exhibition *First Americans*. As part of the research, Meders visited the special collections at the University Library in Leiden, to look at original works by Flemish artist and engraver Theodor de Bry (1528-1598) and modelled the resulting work on an introductory book plate, with a focus on the central image. The timing of the residency was

propitious, leading to the final works being printed in the Hague only two weeks before the global lockdown due to COVID 19. This interview took place on 25 February 2020 in Museum Volkenkunde, Leiden, just prior to Meders returning to Phoenix.

Trading Views is a set of five woodblock prints (fig. 13-17). A large central print depicts Indigenous California, including a Maidu roundhouse, the acorn as a traditional food, and a basket to symbolise the contribution of women as well as two oak trees (fig. 13). It is flanked by four other prints, two midsized and two small. The midsized prints include figures that combine Europeans and Indigenous characteristics with references to works representing Virginia and Florida, so British and Spanish colonial representations. Here the upper torso and lower body have combined references, showing the entangled history of the Americas. The small prints have *putti*, cherubs, directing the viewer to the issue of conflict, to the violence and land grabbing that are part of early colonial history. *Trading Views #1-5* is consistent with a larger body of work that Meders has developed entitled *Divided Lines* which reflects on historical entanglements between Indigenous and European cultures as a means of expressing the current issues facing Indigenous communities today.

Lidchi: We discussed a commission a year ago in relationship to the commemoration that's happening currently in Leiden to do with 1620 and 2020 [see introduction]. At the time I was hopeful that you might be interested in responding with new work which considered the visual culture arising from European colonisation of the Americas. When you arrived, you visited the special collections in the University Library. Did your thinking change when you arrived and looked at the material?

Meders: If I remember, when we had that discussion about possibly coming out here and possibly doing this, we looked at a few bodies of work that were ideal regarding the colonial depictions of Indigenous people at different periods in time. Because there's different media: calotypes and photogravures that I have used in the past. The one we had the most conversations about was *Divided Lines*, woodcuts that were actually originally exhibited in the Museum of Contemporary Native Art (MoCNA) in Santa Fe, New Mexico. That was five wood blocks that were cut and printed on one sheet of paper but printed in a different order each time. That was the idea of questioning the documentation but also the story: how we look at these stories as visual stories from the past, not only from a strictly colonial point of view, but that they are consistently inconsistent and that they should be questioned. I think we still need to teach ourselves as human beings to think critically about the information



Figure 13. *Trading Views #1* central image. Jacob Meders (Mechoopda-Maidu), 2020. Paper, ink. © Jacob Meders, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, 7217-3a.

that's given to us. So these woodcuts touch upon that. I try to make the figures relate to past images but also to split their torsos to make them sort of homogenised, or assimilated, to both European and Indigenous aesthetics. So if the upper torso is Indigenous, the lower torso is European and vice versa (fig. 14, fig. 15). We're kind of playing with the context of how we relate to each other now. How most of us are of mixed descent and how we might view someone else who looks

different. If we are Indigenous we look at that as a European. We might view the upper torso of a European as 'other' but then as we spend enough time looking at that figure we start to realise that there are things that do not line up. These figures might start to morph a little bit as you spend time with them. That conversation started with those woodcuts, and I think we both gravitated toward the idea of me coming out here and continuing a conversation with that body of work

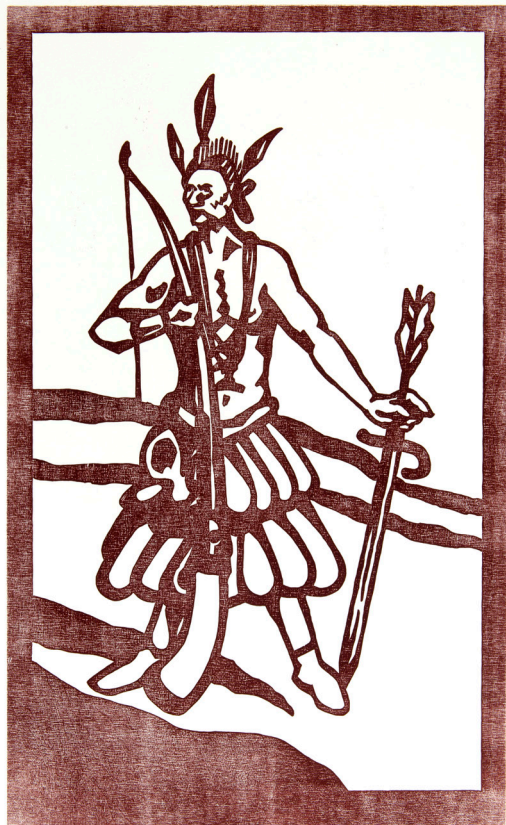


Figure 14. *Trading Views #2* mid-sized figure on right. Jacob Meders (Mechoopda-Maidu), 2020. Paper, ink. © Jacob Meders, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, 7217-3b.

in some manner. And we were not dead set on what it would be exactly, but we did kind of have a clear vision that it would come from that body of work. That it would probably be a continuation of that conversation.

The Divided Lines series that you did at MoCNA in Santa Fe uses black as the colour and here you've used a sort of rich red-y brown.

It might be a darker version. Some people refer to it as an ox blood. It is not quite a burnt sienna, but it's

got that warm, almost reddish-brown colour to it. To me it really speaks to an aesthetic of antiquity. It is warm and raw when it's printed with the wood grain. So, I really enjoy that once it is printed with that wood. But you know it is also red, it has a redness to it. Being Native, red is a very powerful colour we use. It is not a saturated red, but it still feels powerful to use. There is strength when I use red. In a lot of ways, I think it represents us as a people.

Figure 15. *Trading Views* #3, mid-sized figure on the left, Jacob Meders (Mechoopda-Maidu), 2020. Paper, ink. © Jacob Meders, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, 7217-3c.



One of the elements that we discussed in the past is how the medium for you follows the idea, so there is obviously a conscious choice in choosing woodblock printing for this.

Yes, I usually work where context dictates medium. As I do research, as I dive into the conversation I want to have, a vision starts to formulate from that. The medium switches a lot, as I do the research, the reading, as I start thinking about the conversation that I am trying to have with my audience. I start to see that there's a pattern to that

conversation. And that pattern starts to unveil as a way to have it. Not, 'I want to make prints, what am I going to make prints about?' More: 'This is what I want to talk about, how am I going to make it?' Printmaking happens to be a good choice for this, because the print was a medium that would enable a large part of the European public to see what these [16th and 17th century] explorers and these navigators were seeing. So, when you want to justify colonising these places, you need to produce images for people that justifies

that. And so, you have to depict other people in a way that the public says, 'We need to impose our will on them', 'We need to impose our way of being on them'. Quite often the term used is 'uncivilised'. Those were powerful images. When you look at a lot of these images, they are still very powerful. In some way they permeate. There is a ripple effect that keeps passing on from one generation to another generation. They show Indigenous people in a way that is still harmful. As a society we still hold on to these images. So here we are, 400 years later, and we still have ways of depicting other people in a way that is neither fair nor accurate. People cling to the idea of the 'other.' I knew that whatever I did, it had to be a print because of this historic way of disseminating information. The multiple was a very powerful tool at the time. It was probably one of the most powerful tools at the time. These ideas eventually moved into other mediums as well (Tv, social media) and artists, in a conceptual way, currently use these mediums as well, but I wanted to talk about the root.

I looked at quite beautiful etchings, here at the university, in their special collections. I have looked at the Theodor de Bry etchings before, but this is the first time I got to see them in real life, in my hand, which was exciting. I looked at other images and I saw really crude wood cuts. They are very much like mine in their heavy

contour lines. I thought these woodcuts were more accessible probably to the general public rather than say the beautiful etchings. I wanted to think about images that were drawing in the common man and the common woman at that time; those that were more accessible to the general public. The poor were illiterate, so they needed a visual image that could be self-explanatory. A story that could be explained just by looking at the picture. The woodcut made perfect sense.

The result is a very direct image for the viewer and what I find impressive, since I cannot conceive how to do it, is that translation from an etching to a woodcut. During these weeks you have spoken about translating the drawing through the use of line, can you talk little bit about that?

In the etchings there is more detail. In that detail there are techniques like crosshatching that build value. So, there is value, and value transitions light to dark that you can use quite easily in the woodcuts. Although they are two totally different processes, with totally different aesthetics and feels. I looked at the etchings. I made decisions about line weight and how thick or thin a line should be, based on the values that I was seeing in the etching. That is intuitive for me because I've been drawing my whole life and translating that into different print and printmaking techniques comes automatically. I just looked at the value

range and I make a call on how the line weight should be, the form and the movement of that, and the contrast that should be there.

We have five pieces that make up the whole composition: two single figures that are sort of the midsize prints, a very tall central one, and two small ones at the top. Do you want to tell us a little bit about the different roles of these prints in relationship with each other?

Sure. Liesbeth Ouwehand [former Curator of Photography at the Museum] was amazing and she accompanied me to the special collections. We were looking at the book of prints from de Bry, moving into different chapters so to speak. He was definitely depicting different regions of Indigenous people, North, South, Central America, as we might now call it. They had these title pages with a very European composition because there was a structure, almost an architectural structure to it. I kept seeing this kind of pattern in these title pages. At the time we talked about the space, and you sent me measurements and pictures of the space and then I came here, and I needed to look at it again. You try to map it out in your brain, and even my studio I would measure out the space, but my studio space is completely different to a gallery space, or a museum space. When I got there, I looked at it and then I could see a composition that one larger one in the

middle, two midsize on the right and left and then two smaller ones above those two midsize right and left. And so that's how I kind of came up with that. And it's also kind of serendipitous because it is at the beginning of *First Americans*. It is fitting that it would be this kind of title page and it deals with the end but it also deals with what the beginning is and the context of history and first contact. To me it makes sense to lay this out this way.

The middle piece has a roundhouse at the bottom from Northern California from where my people are from (fig. 13). There is this very stylistic smoke that comes up from the top of the roundhouse. I was not concerned with it being realistic, I just wanted it to capture a feeling. Because that roundhouse, is a ceremonial house, is a sacred place for dance and prayer. That smoke should not be so predictable or static. It should have a feeling to it, not just an aesthetic. A feeling that screams out: 'smoke'. Because what happens in there, as it comes out, is quite powerful and unique. To the left and to right of that roundhouse, rising up from the ground are two oaks. The oak tree is a very prominent part of our area and we are very connected to those oaks, in a lot of ways. Then at the top of those oaks to the side is a basket, which I wanted to represent our women. The other is the acorn, which speaks to sustainability because the acorn is a very specific food and medicine

Figure 16. *Trading Views #4, putti* top right. Jacob Meders (Mechoopda-Maidu), 2020. Paper, ink. © Jacob Meders, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, 7217-3d.

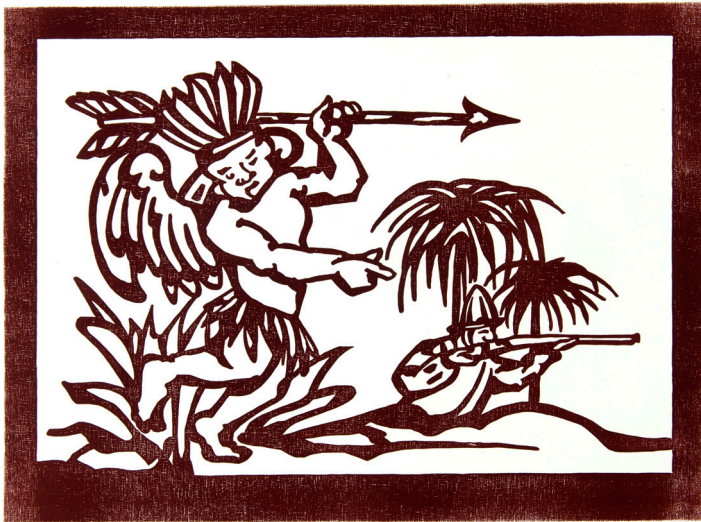


for our people. It's very much about sustainability. And it is not something that you have to grow and be an agricultural person to harness that power. It's understanding the power that's already there in the land and learning to respect it and listen from it and take care of it.

Then those two male figures are split European - Indigenous and that's a direct calling back to the original series (*Divided Lines*). Those images were taken from research at the University Library Special Collections. Above that are the *putti* (sg. *putto*) figures. Those *putti* are pointing to the two larger

figures. One *putto* is very European and pointing towards an Indigenous figure (fig. 16). The other *putto* is an Indigenous likeness and is pointing to a European figure (fig. 17). It's kind of speaking to the aggression and the history of the land. The *putti* being almost antagonists pointing out the other, being naughty. That's kind of the play: mixing current context and the historical play. Pretty much everything, those four prints, are directly from source material at the library here in Leiden. It was great. I spent three days where I could just look at images and

Figure 17. *Trading Views #5, putti* top left. Jacob Meders (Mechoopda-Maidu), 2020. Paper, ink. © Jacob Meders, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, 7217-3e.



then make a call about how I was going to incorporate them into a composition.

To me it is all part of *Divided Lines*. To me it gives me an opportunity to revisit that work and that conversation. It's just a continuation of that conversation, but with more knowledge and more influences.

The four figures that are around the central piece all have weapons seemingly aimed at the central print.

There is a tension there. If you look at the central piece, it's peaceful. I wanted to kind of speak to that peace that we strive for, but these outside forces that

so often keep us in conflict as human beings. Right now Indigenous people in North America, are really having these hard struggles with the governments about protecting land that is sacred. So much has been taken away from us yet so much more is wanted to be taken from us. And you know we have this responsibility as Indigenous people that's been very instilled in our DNA to protect the land because we're connected to it. And when we damage the land, when we hurt the land, we're really hurting ourselves and we're definitely hurting our future generations. And we're still dealing with

that. So that kind of external conflict, that kind of tension sits on the outside and quite frankly those figures on the outside are men on purpose. I wanted the basket to represent women because I just did not want to just put a woman in there. I wanted something else to represent the women. Our [California Indigenous] women make beautiful, amazing baskets that are so powerful. The power and knowledge that they harness to make those is what is important.

You hold a professorship in art practice and art history.

Yes, I teach in an interdisciplinary art performance program at Arizona State West Campus. I focus mostly on the studio practice of artists. I want to teach them how to use colour, I want them to use composition and drawing, I want them to be able to make things with their hands and its design and installation if they have to.

Your printwork draws heavily on the association of word and image, and you seem to be playing with peoples' recognition such that you reference the perpetuation of certain symbolic modes and motifs that have defined an understanding of Indigenous people, to play with them or to subvert them. Those prints are produced faster and in greater quantity. Your print Resist, Protect, Love, Repeat, has been widely shared in all sorts of media. How do you see the work you're doing

in Leiden in light of that more rapid and political work?

The letterpress work is really important and the reason is because it's the power of the multiple. The equipment I use is vintage newspaper equipment and it allows me to set type in to run massive amounts of prints. I look at that as a very accessible medium. For instance, these prints here, I'm doing an edition of five. I'm spending all this time designing, cutting wood, and in the end it's an edition of five and it is probably going to be in this museum, maybe one other museum (C. N. Gorman Museum, UC Davis), and so where is accessibility for the general public? Where is the accessibility for everybody I really want to speak to? Some people don't go to museums or can't access them or don't feel comfortable in museums or galleries. So those people, I want to speak to them as well with my work. Letterpress gives me that advantage to make very large amounts of work and to disseminate them to the general public and in more creative ways. I have half a dozen US newspaper vending machines, metal boxes that you put coins in to get a newspaper. I can put these large editions in those newspaper vending machines just about anywhere that the general public is at. I've put them at tribal office, in front of coffee shops, in museums and galleries and I put them a little bit anywhere. That print medium is about changing someone's perception, to



Figure 18. Jacob Meders presenting at Museum Volkenkunde, February 2020. Photograph: Henrietta Lidchi.

shift perception just a little bit. If I use those images of Indigenous people and their words and put that in a different context. If I can show them an image that's familiar to them, that they're comfortable with seeing and they've seen a lot of times. If I can put them in a context that actually makes them think a little differently, then I think it's a powerful way to have a conversation and a powerful way to make people think critically. It's a situational kind of game.

Are they aimed at everybody? Do you aim certain types of your work towards an Indigenous audience where you might have more recognition of the play that you're aiming for?

I think that's probably always going to change based on the very specific piece that I make. *Resist, Protect, Love, Repeat* was right after the 2016 election (fig. 18). I knew a lot of people were scared. I knew a lot of people were worried. I was sitting on the front porch drinking coffee. I was also thinking about the past, thinking about the fact

that as Indigenous people this is not anything new. That people like this have always existed in our lives, and it's in colonial terms, and our people have had to fight these things before. That word resist, you know, stuck in my head. And then I thought about how we've always had to protect each other and protect the things that are very valuable to us. And then the love that's needed to continue that fight, to continue that, to do that every day, to wake up. There's an immense amount of love that has to be instilled in yourself and your community and the things you care for, for you to get up every day and for your kids to continue that, for your grandkids, your great-great grandkids. To think about my ancestors, I start thinking about that list of people that have come before me and what they've had to resist, what they've had to protect, to love. That continuation and the will to do that every day, and pass that on to your next generation, that's you know repeat. Now you have to repeat this daily. It becomes a daily, yearly, generational thing. Like a muscle memory. The more you do it the more it becomes natural. It becomes instinctive. It becomes part of your DNA. So quite often as Indigenous people I think we do it as a muscle memory. We don't even realise that we're doing it. When that thought went through my head, when those words stuck in my head, I was like 'oh that would make a really good print to give out to people and

to share with people.' So, I finished my coffee, went into the back studio, set the type, and just printed a whole bunch of them out. I would say about ninety-eight percent were just free. They were given out. I think there's only maybe four or five that anybody's ever purchased out of that whole series, but it's funny because those four or five people basically pay for everybody else to get it for free. They paid for the ink, and they paid for the paper. And my time, although that is not an important thing I feel like I needed to be paid for. It was just 'okay, cool.' It just basically paid for itself. I think I ran a different edition of that same wording with a different image and that was for the Women's March in Phoenix a couple years ago. It was fitting for that march as well.

Do you think that's one of the benefits of printmaking? Is it more communal?

Absolutely because it's accessible. It's accessible in a way that a sculpture quite often cannot be or a painting. When there is a one-of-a-kind piece, only one person owns that piece. And only one person can share that piece. When there's a shitload of them, there's a lot of people that can share that. There's a lot of people that can see that. The idea that if I make this, and it's something to share, then why not print it. Why not make multiples and why not allow it to be distributed to the public in

that way? To me it was a natural sort of movement to do that as an artist.

Going to graduate school, I really wanted to focus on printmaking because the more I researched, the more I realised I kept going back to printed images. I was gathering a lot of my knowledge, quite literally, from printmaking processes, you know. The more different processes I knew in printmaking, the more valuable it would be with my conversations with my concepts. I just knew as an artist that I would go to that well, as far as medium, way more often than others. I knew that would be like an anchor.

If you look at the field Native art history, what do you think is happening in the field of Native art today that museums like ours should be collecting or understanding if we're trying to get beyond, let's say, the cannon that we have created previously for ourselves.

That's a tough question. I don't know if I have an answer for that. Because you know it's not like what I'm doing is so crazy original. The way I'm doing it is original, the way I'm seeing it is the way I see, and I am the one dictating the conversation through my visual way of doing it. We all have very unique ways of thinking and seeing and vocalising our thoughts as human beings. And this is my way. But in that context, I don't see myself as being unique, but I do see that not only North American Indigenous people, there's other

Indigenous people that are having these conversations that are very similar. So it is, to me, it's comforting to know that I'm not alone in these thoughts. It's comforting to see that other Indigenous people find it very important to make their life's work about this conversation.

How does being a member of community impact on your aesthetic choices and your specific voice within printmaking practice?

I try to tread very lightly on making my voice a Mechoopda voice. I'm just a member of the Mechoopda people. I can speak about our history as Mechoopda people. I can speak to my family lineage. I can speak to spending time with my family, my community. I like to go up there as often as I can. Usually once a year I like to use my art to give back and use my art to do a print workshop. Print for the youth, so they can sell t-shirts for their youth tribal events, you know excursions and things like that. I try to contribute as much as I can because I live in Phoenix. So, I have to go back, I have to keep that alive because I have a son now and he's connected to that community and he needs to know that community and his family. But even being in Phoenix, I'm part of that community, so I have to contribute to that community as well. So, I try to work with the community there in different aspects as much as possible because, you know, it's about reciprocal relationships. I think if you're

not consciously thinking about what you're giving to make your relationship reciprocal, then you are probably not doing a very good job as a human being. Because just by you walking around and breathing you are taking in some context or another. You have to be conscious of like how do you give back in some form or some way. You are part of the community. You are always kind of part of some kind of system that operates and that system, you know, it thrives on people being reciprocal with the environment, with each other.

Interview between Yatika Starr Fields and Henrietta Lidchi

Yatika Starr Fields and Henrietta Lidchi

Yatika Starr Fields (b. 1981) is an Osage/Cherokee/Muscogee-Creek painter and muralist. Fields attended the Art Institute, Boston from 2000 to 2004 becoming interested in Graffiti aesthetics, which continues to influence his large-scale projects and studio works. Between 7-14 September 2019, Fields was an artist-in-residence/fellow at the Museum Volkenkunde/Research Center for Material Culture, Leiden (National Museum of World Cultures). Fields is from Oklahoma and currently living and working in Tulsa in conjunction with the Tulsa Artist Fellowship. The mural followed several conversations regarding possibilities for work, and a visit by Fields in autumn 2018.

The resulting mural *Accommodating strength, Our land, Our hearts*, which can be seen at the back of the main Museum Volkenkunde building, was the first piece to be shown for the *First Americans* exhibition. Painted in public during the course of seven days, *Accommodating strength, Our land, Our hearts* (fig. 19) features five

Figure 19. Final mural, *Accommodating strength, Our land, Our hearts,* September 2019, Yatika Starr Fields (Osage/ Cherokee/Creek-Muskogee) © Yatika Starr Fields, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Photograph: Peter Hilz, 2019.



figures who emerge as if in dialogue with each other, entangled and adorned with sage, illuminated by the sun, and amidst items important to Indigenous culture, as well as a compass symbolic of European ideas of discovery and representing colonisation of the Americas. Depicted are shells, the materials of adornment and inter-Indigenous trade, porcupine quills the component of many Indigenous art forms, and textiles worn by Osage women showing ribbon

work, and worn at protests such as NoDAPL. This interview was recorded on 12 September 2019, as part of filming the finished piece, and extracts are featured in the exhibition.

Lidchi: Yatika, if you would introduce yourself.

Fields: My name is Yatika Starr Fields. I'm from Oklahoma, born and raised. I'm Osage, Cherokee and Creek and I'm currently living in Tulsa, Oklahoma, as a

Figure 20. Beginning the mural on 8 September 2019. © Yatika Starr Fields, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Photograph: Henrietta Lidchi, 2019.



part of the Tulsa artist fellowship. I'm an artist and I'm also a muralist.

Tell us a little bit about what painting murals means for you.

I am a painter and I work in all mediums. I'm trained in classical oil-painting, but when it comes to painting murals, for instance with this large-scale community-based piece, I will work with spray paint and exterior house paint. It offers maximum and full coverage in a small amount of time,

so it goes beyond the application of a brush. For instance, the mural that I have been creating here in Leiden offers the community a way and opportunity to be involved, to see the work come to fruition, and to see the process and the use of spray-cans and spray-paint first hand.

Could you talk a little bit about the composition and what you think characterizes your style as a painter when it comes to murals?



Figure 21. Yatika Starr Fields and mural 9 September 2019. © Yatika Starr Fields, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Photograph: Henrietta Lidchi, 2019.

With all my works, I start with colour compositions and placing colours throughout the piece. Then I connect all the points to where they create a subtle but yet harmonious composition. With this painting, I started by placing forms and colours throughout it where I felt they needed to be and then from there then I will work further.

Tell us about the stages of painting a mural.

It depends a little on the size of the project, even if they are mostly all largescale, I usually break the stages of painting a mural down into four components. I usually get these projects done within a week, to a week and a half, or even three days sometimes.

In the first stage (fig. 20) I just kind of create the composition with rollers, placing colours to where I feel like a composition is going to be needed and

Figure 22. Yatika Starr Fields and mural 12 September 2019. © Yatika Starr Fields, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Photograph: Henrietta Lidchi, 2019.



where they are going to be best used and utilized.

The second stage of creating a mural is layering more colours down and creating more rhythm (fig. 21). In this stage, the piece starts heading into the direction where, ultimately, the mural is going to end up.

The third component to a mural, to me, is placing objects and creating a storyline (fig. 22). At that point I've created the rhythm and dynamics of it,

but now the symbolism that I want to add comes into play, dictating what the piece is about.

The fourth stage of the mural is a culmination of combining all the elements from the first, second and third stage (fig. 23). Completing the fourth entails polishing the piece up, refining all the loose ends. The fourth stage done, I feel like that is kind of the end of the mural.

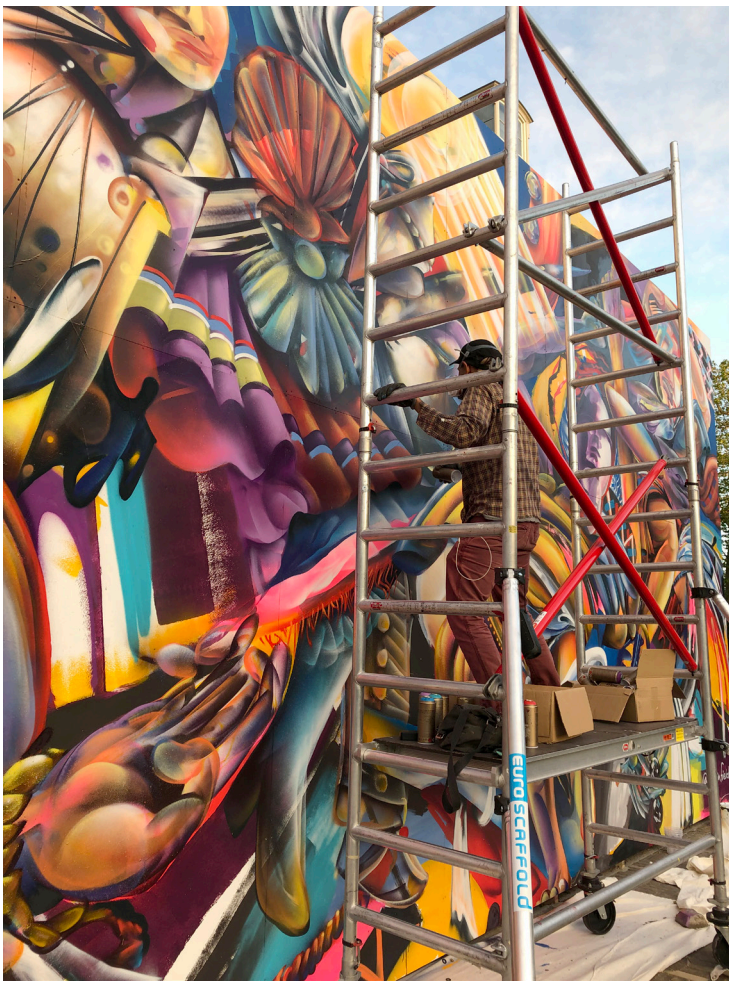


Figure 23. Yatika Starr Fields and mural 13 September 2019. © Yatika Starr Fields, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Photograph: Henrietta Lidchi, 2019.

Why do you paint murals?

I'm an artist. I'm a painter. I paint in all mediums: watercolours, oil paintings, sometimes acrylics. But when it comes to doing murals and using spray-paint, it offers a place for the public and the community to engage with my work. It offers the community a chance to explore art, to be a part of it, and that's something that studio work cannot do. As a painter I feel the best gift is to be able to share the work. When you can

share your work, art can really become a place for beautiful stories, exchanges and dialogues. Creating a mural, through public art, is a really feasible way to facilitate that.

We were discussing and the idea emerged from you that you would like to paint a mural, and at the time I was working on the exhibition First Americans, you were interested in responding to the idea of commemoration.

I have been here for a week now, painting this mural here in Leiden. This painting is in direct discussion to the *Leiden400* year commemoration of Europeans coming over to the Americas. There will be an exhibition here at the Volkenkunde Museum with selected Native artists from the United States all featured works relevant to that particular engagement. This mural is a thought process; a story and an open dialogue from me to the public here in Leiden and the Netherlands, but also to Europe. It's an engagement through rhythm, it's an engagement through composition, and it's an engagement through colour. As I said before, if you can create a painting that tells a story through its composition and pallet, and offer it to the public, that's the best way, or at least one of the ways, to really get the community involved with an open discussion. That is what public art does and that's why I'm here.

Tell us a little bit about the composition of the work.

Before I started painting, I came here to really feel the essence of the atmosphere around the museum, in Leiden, and in the Netherlands more generally. I really wanted to situate myself here and be present, to feel the energy around the wall and this place, and then create from that. I wanted to create from the feelings that I get in front of this wall and then work with the

freedom of expressions within it, with and on it. Creating this composition, I knew I wanted to create something that was full of strength, movement and vibrancy. These are all components in my art.

The painting here now holds five figures and during its creation it kind of evolved in that way. I started putting down colours with the roller and the spray-paint and then slowly, through process and movement, a composition came into place, and these figures came into place. By using these figures that connect me to my heritage, to my culture and to the story I'm trying to tell, to the people that I'm a part of in the United States. The strength and resilience that has been a part of our community in those 400 years. This painting and these figures have strength. They are connected by bonds from our cultures and ceremonies, connected by the earth. The objects that I placed in there, in the process of creating a mural, have a relevance to our ceremonies. The figures in here are all connected by a bond that connects us all, sharing a story from the past to the present.

Could you talk in a little more detail about the different elements? You mentioned earlier something about the ribbon skirts, the porcupine quill and the shell and other elements. If you could talk about the figures and how you've drawn them and the different elements in the painting if

Figure 24. Detail of *Accommodating strength, Our land, Our hearts*. © Yatika Starr Fields, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Photograph: Peter Hilz, 2019.



you have something that you might want to say about them.

Within this mural here I've created a dynamic composition with different forms and bodies all speaking to the area that they are in but yet all connected by this common bond that I discussed already.

In the top left hand (fig. 24), we have a figure. It is a strong individual really showing the strength of the human body. I feel like people gravitate to that form first because it's so light and it's so bright. Then the eye kind of goes from there. That gravitational pull is a part

of this figure in particular, but that's something that every figure in here has. It is a show of strength. That is exactly what I wanted to show in this whole mural overall, but specifically speaking to this individual, he kind of holds that reign to let it go and to show it.

Going down, flowing down from the rope, you have another individual (fig. 24). I'm still working it out, but it connects to this individual who has really seen light, and that light is an energy source of our culture, the significance and the power within that. It's sharing, I think that is what the light

Figure 25. Detail showing two female figures. © Yatika Starr Fields, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Photograph: Peter Hilz, 2019.



stands for. It's a display of strength and resilience, of light, and it's giving life. That is what that is right there.

Following up you have a female figure with the red make-up (fig. 25). Red, for us, in the Osage tribe, is a very dominant facepaint colour. In the past, women would wear a red stripe coming down in the middle of their head, signifying the red path of life. So, I wanted to include that red line, to signify a woman. As she is coming down, she is adorned with a butterfly wing and as you come right next to it, you see the ribbon skirts. The skirts and clothing, for instance this ribbon skirt, pertain to a lot of Native tribes in the United States. In the ribbon skirts are the colours that a lot of women have been wearing in the last five years. The

colours are significant to a lot of their protests and things that have been going on in the United States, but they have also become more of a norm overall with the culture and the young Indian people today. They are not only worn in Oklahoma, but represent Native tribes as a whole. Like I said, what I'm trying to discuss within the mural, in the whole composition, is a whole people, a whole nation, and not just a particular tribe or a particular community.

Following down from that, under the light that's connecting it, you see a boot and a buckskin legging (fig. 26). In all of this painting, people are going to see different things. I painted these to signify a looseness, a gesture really, a gesture of walking. A lot of my painting become metaphors, not necessarily



Figure 26. Detail showing compass and shell, and legs with boot and buckskin legging. © Yatika Starr Fields, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Photograph: Peter Hilz, 2019.

exact objects but things for your eyes, to set a course and a direction. These elements are there to keep your eyes and your mind in motion. And that's exactly what the boot and legging are doing there, they are set in place to put your eyes and your thoughts in motion. They are connecting the past, namely our ceremonial objects and clothes that we made ourselves, to a boot that we have from the European influence. This boot connects to everything that has come over from trade. There is a similarity that I wanted to connect to with this mural, and that's the things

that we have evolved with, as a result of European contact. The things that we share, whether that's clothes or jewellery, and things that have changed since the Europeans came over to the Americas. This boot is in the mural to discuss that. Again, these aren't things that are meant to be thought upon so hard, but to put things in motion.

Right above that is a group of shells. I'm probably going to paint over it after this conversation (one shell was subsequently changed on the penultimate day of painting into the compass seen in, fig. 26) but it's in there

Figure 27. Detail showing the light shining down and shooting up, and showing figures entangled in regalia. © Yatika Starr Fields, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Photograph: Peter Hilz, 2019.



right now and those things are about objects of the past and present. Objects of trade, objects of the ocean: things that have a significance to both cultures as adornment, for trade and so forth. To me, these objects of the sea relate to the trade routes and exploration routes as well.

Following from that, connecting with the dynamic composition of the force of the hand and the light, is a porcupine quill. It's coming under the sun, connecting us, connecting this mural, to our culture and to working with elements of nature to adorn

ourselves. With the porcupine quills we can make jewellery or bags. We use it to decorate things for ourselves. That is showing who we are as a people and bringing that part of nature from North America into this mural.

Continuing on over with the dynamics of the composition, you have two figures that are receiving this light, this gift, that has been shooting up and they are catching it (fig. 27). And it is almost like a game that they are playing. When I think about this movement, I think a lot about the things that we have in ceremonies, specifically

in the Creek culture that I grew up in. I grew up in the Osage ways, but in the Creek culture. They have stickball as part of their ceremonies. Stickball is a game to mimic war, but it's a game to bring the tribe together, to dispute things, but also to connect the present to the past. It's a game men and women play, and it is very hands on. There is a lot of movement. And I could easily imagine a situation that could be like this; where two people are jumping up for the ball and they're in motion and they're entangled in their own regalia, in the clothes that they wear. So, this part is kind of imitating that situation that I can see taking place. And here again, it's not only representing that particular tribe, since a lot of tribes have games like that. That is part of the freedom of expression and the playfulness that we have as a people, as well. These are things that we've had since the 1500s, all the way up to the present in 2020.

And through all this you have an entanglement and wrapping of the rope, wrapping around the fabrics, the adornment and objects. That entanglement represents the thing that is connecting us all, whether that's in our traditions or in our regalia that we wear, respect and cherish. Letting it exist in in this open space, creating a new atmosphere for people, specifically in Leiden.

This interview is in part to put into the exhibition First Americans to interpret Accommodating Strength: Our Land, Our Hearts?

You know, I had a conversation before with some people walking by, I think they were from the Netherlands. We were discussing the current state of the United States and the Americas and it's not pretty by any means. But then we started thinking about other cultures that have had cultural disputes with those taking over their country and other situations where the Indigenous people were being exchanged. It's happened all over the world, and it continues to happen today; lands being taken, people being killed, genocides happening. We are discussing the 400 years commemoration of Europe coming to the Americas, or the attempted European colonization, and we know of other countries that have been ravaged and wars that have happened.

Of course, we would rather have it a different way. We would rather have our own lands back, the vast amounts of buffaloes still on the plains. I can still visualise what that would look like, possibly, but it is not so, and it only does you so much good to think about stuff like that. The important thing is to not fester into anger, you know that doesn't do any good. However, together with the people that I've grown up with and have met while travelling the United States and the many cultures I've

seen, I have been a part of many things that were organized to help alleviate the struggles of Native people in the Americas. I have seen some beautiful things. I have seen ceremonies. I have heard beautiful songs and drums, and heard beautiful new songs being created. We understand that it's not a pretty place sometimes for us as Indigenous people, but we also understand that we are a strong people and a strong nation regardless of what anyone else thinks. It is not for them but for us. It has always been for us,

not for anyone else; our culture, our medicine, our songs, our prayers. And in the end, as long as we have that and we're under the moon and the stars, and we see the sun and we hear the birds and all these beautiful things that connect us to mother earth, then we are going to be ok. Of course: just like for any human being there are hardships that come along with living in modern day life, but with that we can get through these ills and the woes that are often there, because we have a sacred place on this earth, always and forever.



Figure 28. Yatika Starr Fields on the 14 September 2019 on completion of *Accommodating strength, our land, our hearts*. © Yatika Starr Fields, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Photograph: Henrietta Lidchi, 2019.

First American Girls

Cara Romero and Henrietta Lidchi

Cara Romero (b. 1977) is a Chemehuevi fine art photographer, NGO director and community worker. Romero's early childhood was spent in the Chemehuevi Valley Indian Reservation, California, later moving to Houston and now living in Santa Fe. Romero attended the University of Houston, Texas, and studied cultural anthropology, a not entirely satisfactory experience that encouraged her towards photography as a professional career and the management of non-profit organisations. Romero's photographic work combines a knowledge of historic photographic techniques with a sensibility towards advertising and graphic design. Her work is specifically directed at questions of cultural appropriation and historic misrepresentation. *The First American Girls* portrait series is a reference to the commercial doll series *American Girls*. Each woman stands inside a full-sized painted box wearing traditional regalia. They stand confidently surrounded by cherished cultural accessories created by their community and inherited from their Ancestors. These portraits confirm the resilience of Indigenous traditions and the role of women as knowledge keepers. Romero's work was acquired in 2019, and Romero kindly



Figure 29. *Julia*, Cara Romero (Chemehuevi), 2018, inkjet print on paper. © Cara Romero, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, 7189-1.

allowed the National Museum of World Cultures to use the work 'Julia' for the advertising post for the *First Americans* exhibition.

Lidchi: During correspondence for the acquisition of *First American Girls* in 2019, Romero explained her purpose for the series.

Romero: In *First American Girls* series, I wanted to create dolls and/or action figures that reflect our culture, beauty and diversity as Native American women. One that pays attention to all the details, historical accuracies and accessories. Not just a 'pan-Indian' look. Not what you find in a truck stop.

Those dolls just never do us justice. It is definitely a goal of mine to create thoughtful content that makes people think of preconceived notions of Native America, that challenges perceptions, that creates multiple narratives, that all comes from a place of empowerment and celebration – a celebration of resistance. The images are about creating a positive, self-representation of Native women in pop culture settings that we never experienced growing up. Inventing a reality we wish for. It's a convergence of pop and traditional life ways. Similar to an action figure box in which the figurine bears the

Figure 30. *Naomi*,
Cara Romero
(Chemehuevi),
2018, inkjet print
on paper. © Cara
Romero, Nationaal
Museum van
Wereldculturen,
7189-2.



garments and accoutrements suited to her role, the dolls wear their respective haute couture with related accessories displayed around them. They convey a reverence for tradition with respect for modern day Indigenous women and identity. They also pay homage to the incredible art and love that go into making the regalia and traditional items modelled by the women. For each, I created a human-scale doll box, framing them in patterns that resonate with their respective cultural vernacular.

Julia Romero is my niece, and she is of Cochiti and San Ildefonso [New Mexico] ancestry (fig. 29). Julia

and I worked together to create this photograph that expresses our love of Cochiti and our Romero family. She was photographed with her grandmother's baskets and blue corn, her great, great uncle's drum, and she wanted the Cochiti beeweed/wild spinach design to adorn her doll box. Julia's box design reflects a reference to a historic wild spinach design, and is inspired by Virgil Ortiz and (of course) Diego Romero. Many thanks to Virgil and family for helping me get the design culturally and respectfully appropriate to all.

Naomi Whitehorse (fig. 30) is the daughter of Leah Mata Fragua. They

Figure 31. *Wakeah*, Cara Romero (Chemehuevi), 2016, inkjet print on paper.
© Cara Romero, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, 7189-3.



are from the northern most group of Chumash people, therefore called Northern Chumash [California]. They belong to the land of San Luis Obispo. Leah is a celebrated regalia and traditional arts keeper of California. Many people have little knowledge or exposure to California traditional arts. Leah, Naomi and I worked together to create this photograph that expresses our love of California pop and our deep desire to create critical visibility for the traditional arts and Indigenous people of California. This was one of my favourite photographs. Her doll box includes from bottom left going clockwise: a tule bundle, clapper stick, winnowing basket, mallard, clam shell, and abalone belt, basket hat, and three Bristol pinecones on the pedestal.

Wakeah Jhane (fig. 31) was the first taken in the series and is representative of a Kiowa/Comanche (Southern Plains) Pow Wow Doll. Plains Indians are the most commonly used tribes to represent all of Native American

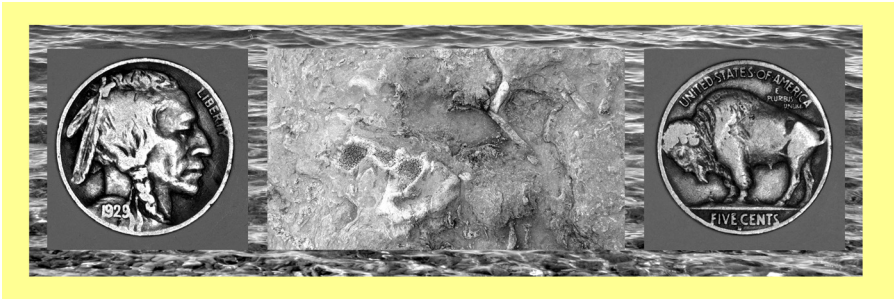
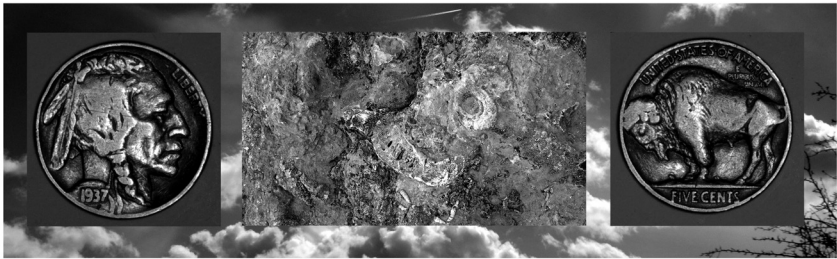
women, and yet, still mainstream representations miss the nuanced detail of what a Kiowa/Comanche woman truly looks like with all of her competition regalia and accessories. This one was about 'owning a stereotype' and truly allowing the viewer to enter into the visual architecture of this image and check pre-conceived notions of what a Plains woman's regalia looks like. Wakeah is wearing an authentic Traditional Southern Buckskin dress used to compete in pow wows. It took five family members over a year to make her regalia. I wanted to celebrate the love that a family puts into adorning our youth. Each of the doll boxes in the series are painted in an electric colour that screams, 'I am modern!'

History of the World#1 (South), #3 (North) #2 (East) #4 (West)

Shelley Niro and Henrietta Lidchi

Shelley Niro (b.1954) is a member of the Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk Nation), Turtle Clan, from Six Nations of the Grand River Territory, Ontario, Canada. Niro has worked in a variety of media spanning beadwork, photography and film. In *History of the World*#1-4 (fig. 32) acquired for the collection in 2020, Niro reflects on the question of colonial presence in Northeastern North America, and more generally in North America. The series includes four photographs with coloured borders from the four sacred directions which include images of fossils, coins and the land. The four works represent elements of landscape in the region where Shelley Niro comes from, and refers to earth, land, sky and water. In this series, Niro also uses images of the Indian Head nickel. The 'Indian Head' or 'Buffalo' nickel, still circulating as US currency but minted between 1913-1938, was part of a series commissioned by Roosevelt and designed by James Earl Fraser. In her work, Niro combines these images with those of water, air, and land near the Six Nations of the Grand River Reserve with fossils

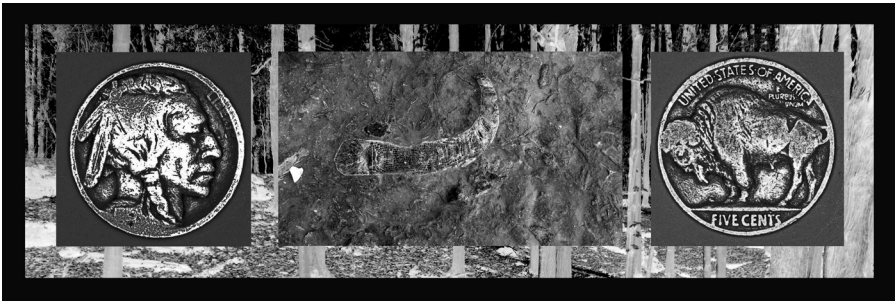
Figure 32. *History of the World #1 (South), History of the World #2 (East), History of the World #3 (North), History of the World #4 (West)*. Shelley Niro, Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk), 2017. Paper, synthetic ink, digital print, each 1500 mm x 700 mm. © Shelley Niro, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, 7208-1,7208-2,7208-3, 7208-4.



from Lake Erie. This calls attention to the role of the 'Indian' and the 'Buffalo' as American icons in a context where Indigenous populations and their territories continue to be under severe pressure. The photographs are framed in colours indicating the four directions.

These come from Lakota culture but have been adopted by many Indigenous Nations to represent nationalism and unity.

In reference to the work, Shelley Niro wrote:



History of the World is a simple statement:

The Indian Head nickel was made to pay honour to Indians who were vanishing during that period and to the Buffalo who had already vanished.

That combined with the earth, water, land and air images in the background also constitutes missing elements that once were.

And the colours are from the four directions. So, it's packed with references to North America and how she was emptied of her resources.

The Oldman Collection at the Wereldmuseum, Rotterdam

Sarah Russ

Introduction

Between 1949 and 1954, the Wereldmuseum, formerly the Museum voor Land- en Volkenkunde (henceforth referred to as the WMR) acquired over 600 cultural objects from the Philippines, Indigenous and Inuit nations in the Americas and Arctic, and Tibet. All these objects had been collected by William Ockleford Oldman (1879-1949), a prolific collector in the late 1800s and early 1900s. At his death in 1949, he had collected thousands of objects from around the world. These objects, however, have a blurred history as their provenance from before Oldman is almost impossible to trace.

What is known about the Oldman Collection is scattered around the world. For example, there are letters from the British Museum and Wereldmuseum archives,

which are unpublished, and ledgers at the Te Papa Museum in Aotearoa-New Zealand, which can be accessed online.¹ The goal of this paper is to compile the information available on the Oldman Collection and summarize some of what has been written so more in-depth research can be conducted in the future. More detailed information on William O. Oldman himself can be found in Hermione Waterfield and J.C.H. King's book *Provenance: Twelve Collectors of Ethnographic Art in England 1760-1990*. Waterfield and King's book will be utilized in this paper, as will unpublished letters, and documents. In addition, a case study of a particular item – a Chilkat blanket – from the Oldman Collection will be used as an example of what can be done when an object's provenance is incomplete.

William Ockleford Oldman's Collection and Major Sales

Oldman began buying objects as early as 1895 and within a few decades he was regarded as one of the most 'successful and well-known dealers of "exotic artefacts" in the history of tribal art dealers' (Waterfield and King 2006: 65). Oldman's tenacity for collecting

was impressive, as were his methods of book-keeping. Oldman kept ledgers of the purchase and sale of his objects beginning in 1902. His ledgers reveal meticulous records of when and from whom he bought objects, how much he paid, who he sold to, and how much he sold the objects for. Unfortunately, Oldman used a code system to record his sellers and buyers, and the ledgers lack a key to decipher the code; a key has yet to be found.

While Oldman's ledgers reveal an interest in cultures which spanned the globe, his main point of interest was the Pacific region. Oldman's collection had become so prolific and well-known that on the 25 July 1947, Oldman referenced an instance in which the British Museum (henceforth known as the BM) had called the collection one of 'national importance' in a newspaper article; a proclamation which would ensure the interest of various ethnographic museums and collectors. This is important context to have as on May 21, 1948, the Pacific objects from the Oldman Collection were sold for £44, 000 to the Government of New Zealand (Waterfield & King 2006: 75). The sale to the Government of New Zealand was the first of the large sales which would splinter the Oldman Collection across multiple museums and countries including Argentina, Egypt, the United States of America, Britain, and the Netherlands (Waterfield & King 2006: 72-73).

1 <https://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/object/253573>; <https://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/object/253572>; <https://transcription.si.edu/project/15027>; <https://transcription.si.edu/project/15030>; <https://transcription.si.edu/project/15033>

Only a year after the New Zealand sale, and the death of Oldman, Dorothy Oldman, Oldman's widow, sold parts of the collection to two major institutions: the WMR and the BM. Letters exchanged between the BM, the WMR, and Dorothy Oldman show that three significant sales took place: two in 1949 and one in 1954. In one of the 1949 sales, the WMR acquired 186 objects from the Philippines and Tibet for the total sum of £445. It was Dr. Christian Nootboom, the director of the WMR from 1949 to 1964, who pursued the collection and reached out to Dorothy Oldman personally after her husband's death (Stadsarchief Rotterdam 1949a). On 29 October 1949, Dr. Nootboom wrote to Mrs. Oldman that the Philippine collection was in good condition and that he was willing to pay the agreed upon £45 pounds for the seventeen objects which included an intricately decorated jacket and some carved spoons (Stadsarchief Rotterdam 1949a).

In addition, Nootboom informed Mrs. Oldman that he would be sending a representative, Dr. Peter Hendrik Pott who was the curator of the Tibet collection at the Museum Volkenkunde, Leiden, to assess the additional items from Tibet he was interested in (Stadsarchief Rotterdam 1949a).² Less

2 Referenced as the 'Keeper' of the Tibet Collection in the letter from 29 October 1949.

than a month later, Nootboom wrote to Mrs. Oldman informing her that the original asking price of £900 was too much to pay for the proposed Tibet collection as, after being assessed by Dr. Pott, it was determined that the collection was in poor condition (Stadsarchief Rotterdam 1949b). Instead, Nootboom offered Mrs. Oldman £400 pounds for the 169 objects. Mrs. Oldman agreed on the price and the Tibet and Philippine collections were shipped together by Evan Cook's Packers LTD in early 1950 to Rotterdam where they were deposited into the museum's care (Stadsarchief Rotterdam 1949c, 1949d, 1949e, 1950a, 1950b, 1950c, 1950d).

At the same time that the WMR was communicating with Mrs. Oldman, the BM was doing the same. The BM had an interest in a greater section of the Oldman Collection and seems to be in competition with other national museums within the United Kingdom. In particular, the BM wished to outbid Cyril Aldred, Keeper of Art and Ethnography at the Royal Scottish Museum (now National Museums Scotland) who was also interested in the Oldman Collection. In July of 1949, Adrian Digby, at the time the Deputy Keeper of the Department of Ethnology at the BM, wrote to Hermann Braunholtz, the Keeper of the Department of Ethnology at the BM, about purchasing the Oldman Collection (Stadsarchief Rotterdam 1949f). It can be assumed

that Braunholtz came to an agreement with Digby as three months later on the 13 October 1949, Braunholtz received a letter from A.H. Meldrum on behalf of the National Art-Collections Fund (NACF) stating that the BM would receive £3,000 to supplement the purchase of the Oldman Collection (British Museum 1949a).

It is worth noting that although Braunholtz and Digby were enthusiastic about the purchase, the BM had yet to make a comprehensive list of objects they actually wished to buy or to properly assess how expensive the sale might eventually be. The only reassurance that Meldrum received from Braunholtz about the sale was that the BM would purchase only 'the most important objects' from the Oldman Collection (British Museum 1949b). Further detail from the BM reveals that the £3,000 which the NACF provided would only cover the purchase of thirty objects and that these would be those of the finest quality (British Museum 2022). However, the BM purchased far more than just thirty objects. On 19 November 1949, Mrs. Oldman received a letter from Braunholtz stating that the Trustees of the British Museum wished to formally purchase a total of three thousand African, Indigenous American, and Inuit objects from the Oldman Collection for £15,000 (British Museum 2022). The sale was finalised and the objects entered the BM's permanent collection only for

a portion of the purchased collection to be sold in coming years.

Five years later in 1954, the BM had seemingly reviewed the objects in the Oldman Collection purchased in 1949 and resolved that it wished to sell items that it regarded as supplementary to its needs. In the words of Adrian Digby, who had succeeded Braunholtz as the Keeper of Ethnology, the BM wished to sell the 'residue' material to another institution (Stadsarchief Rotterdam 1954a). Letters between Digby and Victor Jansen, the curator of the American Department at the WMR, show that on 2 April 1954, a delegation from the WMR visited the BM to look at the objects which were for sale. Within that same month the WMR committee had decided in 'favour' of purchasing the collection (Stadsarchief Rotterdam 1954a, British Museum 1954a). On 10 May 1954, Digby wrote to Jansen that the Trustees of the British Museum had agreed to sell three hundred and forty-five Indigenous North American and Inuit items from the Oldman Collection for £450; the sale was settled on 23 May 1954 between Dr. Christian Nooteboom, the Director of the WMR, and Digby (Stadsarchief Rotterdam 1954a, 1954b; British Museum 1954b).

As Jansen was particularly involved with which objects the WMR would receive, he spent time writing to Digby to ensure each desired object was accounted for. We know that Jansen

had a particular interest in three objects from Indigenous Nations on the Northwest Coast of North America: a Chilkat blanket, a woven cedar bark matt, and a cedar bentwood box with a lid (Stadsarchief Rotterdam 1954a). These three objects were mentioned in a letter from 10 September 1954 and can still be found in the WMR's collection today as WM-34775 (bentwood box with lid), WM-34776 (well-worn Chilkat blanket), and WM-34777 (woven cedar mat).

What Can We Do Now?

As provenance of the objects prior to Oldman's ownership is scant, further provenance research needs to be conducted so the history of the Collection can be traced to its point of original collection. However, even without traditional provenance research, we can still expand our understanding of the objects from the Oldman Collection if we look to the objects themselves to tell a story.

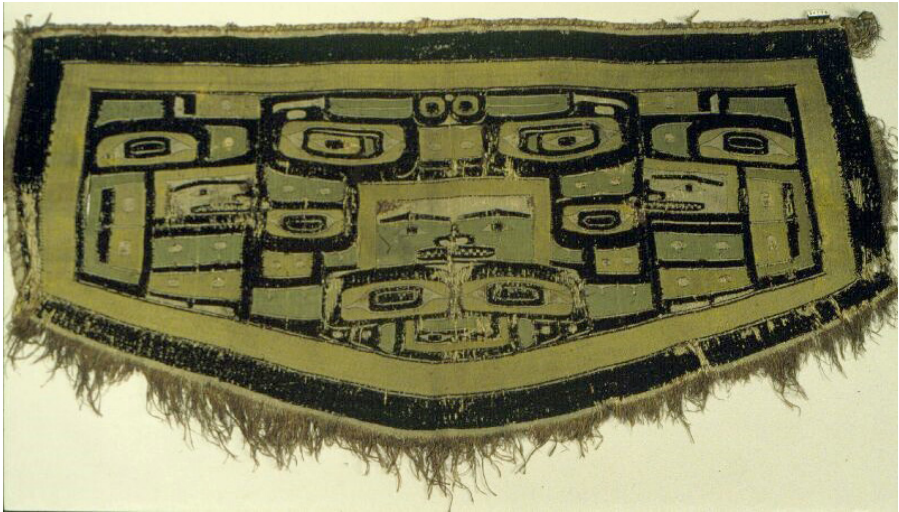
A key instance of an object speaking to these questions is the Chilkat blanket (fig. 33) from the Pacific Northwest Coast of North America which Victor Jansen was so enthused to purchase. Chilkat blankets are woven items of regalia worn by important members of society during religious, political, or social ceremonies. The Wereldmuseum's blanket is still in a relatively complete state given its age and composition of

natural fibers, which is rare as there are only a handful of historic Chilkat blankets in such condition today (Samuel 1990: 9).

There is no date attached to the blanket at the Wereldmuseum, so trying to uncover when the blanket was created or collected would be difficult without scientific analysis into the weaving and dyeing of the fibers. Such analysis could reveal a rough time frame as to the blanket's creation based on the chemical composition of the green hued weft yarn which is used to create part of the design of the Chilkat blanket. Scientific analysis would likely help determine whether the green fibres contain copper, as the presence of copper alludes to older dyeing practices most common prior to strong trade relations with European traders (Samuel 1990: 9; Ballard *et al.* 2019). If there was no copper present, then it can be assumed that the blanket was newer in make as the weft was dyed using blue trade cloth or another source of pigment which did not exist prior to European contact (Samuel 1990: 68-69). Analysis such as this would tell us whether the blanket was made pre- or post- established European trade as some color hues would not have been possible before contact.

We can also estimate where the blanket was made and, therefore, collected. We know that Chilkat weaving is practiced exclusively in the Pacific Northwest amongst coastal nations

Figure 33. Chilkat Blanket, Pacific Northwest Coast of North America, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, WM-34776.



such as the Tsimshian, Haida, and Tlingit, giving researchers a rough idea of the blanket's origin. Outsourcing to experts on Chilkat weaving and design could reveal even more about where the blankets came from, as the formline design used to create the images on the blankets would not be the same from nation to nation. Further assessment of the blanket could be done by experts in weaving who understand the intricacies of the woven design.

From this basic understanding of what was used to dye yarn and where the blanket was woven, a wealth of knowledge can be uncovered through further research and contact with community members who practice

Chilkat weaving today. While the provenance of an object may be lost, the object and its place in its original culture can be understood through these other forms of research. This shifts the historical importance to the object and the originating cultures and away from the object's collector.

Conclusion

The Wereldmuseum has well over 600 objects from the Oldman Collection and understanding the origins and stories of each of these objects will take years and immense effort to decipher. Because the paper

trail of information for the Collection ends with Oldman, traditional provenance research can only lead so far. However, knowing where to find letters and ledgers which reveal trace amounts of information is invaluable for future research. The sources described in this paper are only a starting point in regard to where provenance research can go.

However, until more documents reveal themselves, the WMR can continue to do research on the origins of the objects they possess. The objects, such as the Chilkat blanket, reveal information about the cultures they come from and processes by which they were created which is incredibly valuable for a museum which displays diverse cultures. As it is the purpose of ethnographic museums to showcase various cultures with respect and understanding, it stands that research on the Oldman objects themselves should be equally valued as the provenance which defines the objects from a museum perspective.

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