



first ~~peoples~~ person's point of view



## Three Women Curators

Cynthia Lickers, Artistic Director, *imagineNATIVE* Media Arts Festival

*Today we will see images telling stories from the first person's point of view. Stories that waited far too long to be told.*

There are storytellers and there are story sharers. This program is about the women who choose to share. As founder and Programme Director of *imagineNATIVE Media Arts Festival*, I have been sharing the stories of others for the past four years. While audiences enjoy watching the programmes, I found they didn't understand there is a creative process when putting together a program for a festival or evening screening. Many assume that the works are selected randomly. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Within the last four years I've seen a tremendous amount of new works being created by Aboriginal women. This shift may be a reflection of the world around us. Some say a shift forward, I say a shift backwards. Traditionally Aboriginal cultures were guided by the knowledge of its women. *imagineNATIVE* is honoured that three highly respected women have agreed to share their thoughts around programming this year's festival. We asked each to keep a journal to document their ideas and processes as they arrived at their selections. This catalogue is a summary of their journals.







## Now Is The Time...

Curated by Shelly Niro

One of the most graphic images Native North Americans have is the one of the massacre of Wounded Knee. This horrible historical event occurred in 1890. A site where 350 Sioux men, women and children were slaughtered by US army troops. Most of the North American Native population are not Sioux but shudder and are saddened by these events. This is only one example of this kind of occurrence.

Like most of the Native population, we did not know the facts about such events until the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. History books were written to benefit European settlers and so it is from their perspective we've been taught.

Over one hundred years have passed since Wounded Knee. Over five hundred years have passed since the arrival of men in black robes. Over a millennium of time has passed since indigenous populations have lived here, organizing business routes, political sanctions, territories and working out strategies for man and nature to thrive and survive.

I am in a position where I can see a shift. The shift occurred when my parents became the grandparents. They no longer lived in the world of self-preservation. They no longer had to work at the day-to-day struggle of providing for children and looking after the elders in the community. They became elders. With their new roles, they could now reflect on past events, people they knew and recite their own histories. It was an oral history lesson. As each elderly member in the communities passed away so did the stored histories, and knowledge of the fading times.

I grew up on Six Nations Indian Reservation with no running water, and in the winter the hydro would not come on for days. The roads were dusty in the summer and muddy in the spring. The houses were scattered. Telephones were a necessary luxury and rusty, clanking cars were an absolute must.







Living on an Indian reservation, the television became our true link to the world. Here we could experience contemporary music, thoughts, fashion and see movies. We accepted the fact that Indians were not playing the part of Indians in the shows we watched. We encouraged the US armies, as they would knock whooping, wild Indians off of their horses with guns. With no challenge or conscience. We delighted in seeing white people with brown paint on their skin, posing as one of us.

To me it suddenly seemed we could not accept these false portrayals or their fake stories any longer. We got tired of it all. We challenged them to make the stories right and to tell our stories the way we see them. But this kind of storytelling doesn't bring in the big dollars from the dominant culture. So we had to tell the stories ourselves.

We are committed to telling our parents' and grandparents' stories. They have been subjugated to an existence without being allowed a voice. They are the ones who were taken from their homes and punished for their heritage. They are the ones who couldn't get hired for jobs white society had created for their own.

Some of the stories have hopeless endings of lost promises and no dreams to begin with. However, contemporary people with Native heritage are committed to pursue and take up the challenge to tell these remarkable, important stories. As a tour-de-force, we are learning to handle the (film camera) equipment, how to address issues and make them palpable for the future generations. We have become each other's critics. We want to teach, learn, entertain and absorb as much information as we possibly can. Much like the Ghost Dancers from the Wounded Knee era, we feel as if we are impenetrable. Oral history has become an important tool. Together we are fearless and powerful.

*Yazzie Bahe* is narrated by Andrew Van Tsinhnahjinnie. This is a video made by his daughter Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie, the renowned multi-media artist. The elder Tsinhnahjinnie senior becomes







everyone's dad. As I watched him with his guitar and as he sang "Sweet Sue" my mind played tricks on me. If I closed my eyes I could hear my own father's voice, even the way he played his guitar, more for rhythm than for harmony. In his own tired voice he tells the story of how he and his friend ran away from residential school at least twelve times.

Andrew Van Tsinhnahjinnie(AVT) was nine years old. With his friend he spends several days hiding from the authorities, getting handouts from farmers and eventually bribing a man with a watch for the man's silence. In the story, they suffer hunger, body heat loss and they are shrouded in fear. After a week they were captured like animals. They are shackled together like criminals to be taken back to the school. He has done this before but this is his last time, he suffers too much humiliation as he and the two other boys have to carry around logs for two weeks all the while wearing women's dresses.

Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie uses old family Super 8 films and superimposes her father's voice over the images. The figures in the film appear as ghosts. These images are from around 1975 and the car in the film acts like a character as well. It appears that a mother, grandmother and a younger man, possibly a son, are nonchalantly on a picnic doing nothing of great importance. I don't think anything ritualistic is happening but a lot of attention is paid to the son as he rolls up a blanket. Was a ceremony taking place or is it a newly made Navajo rug being taken to the market, I don't know. I can only see people evoking a sense of familiarity as AVT's words describe another familiar scene from his escape-from-residential-school story, one we can all relate to, the one our parents and grandparents experienced in the pre-post-modern world. This one is of assimilation, racism, poverty, from traditional to corporeal institutions. North American society was dominated by Judeo/Christian standards. Anything that wasn't understood was crushed, killed and destroyed.

The landscape captured in the film becomes one of the great characters in this video. Continuous shots were taken from a moving source, probably the car. The viewer moves non-stop with the narration. We travel as AVT did. We become his companion, his cousin, a buddy,







We go back to a time in history when the recorders of circumstances saw events through a distorted lens. They wanted to believe the displacement of indigenous peoples from their land was a good deed, one done for the betterment of mankind because western civilization was at a point of population/political/religious/economical explosion. Natural resources were discovered and the removal of the people from their land was seen to be necessary.

AVT's story is only one of many accounts of young children being treated like criminals. He is also a witness and lives to tell his story so the future generations can hear it.

The production of this video is straightforward. There are no special effects, no fancy camera work. Hulleah pays homage to this generation of older Indian people who have passed through certain channels that my generation has been saved from going through. Her dedication is authentic and lets the narrator speak for himself.

*What Was Taken, What Was Sold* is an experimental video produced by Nora Noranjo Morse. The filmmaker makes us look at the objectification of the image of the Indian by non-native users of these images in portraits and ethnographic and tourist films.

We see examples of an Indian man and women being posed, looked at, turned, placed in such a way their personality or what they might have to contribute to set-up of the photo becomes non-existent. At this time in history – the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century - the Indian was a conquered nation. What was left of the Indian population was used by the dominant culture, consumed by the need to know every inch of the Indian psyche, the parts not conquered yet.

Most of these people were in a state of crisis at this time. Many lived on government rations, as they were not allowed to leave the reservations for gainful employment. As in Hulleah Tsihanahjinnie's video, the native viewer will recognize the place occupied by the participants. The poseur has no position of power.







The celebrated poseur knows what is being consumed: it is their own inherent beauty and their ability to create beautiful objects for the masses - skills which also contribute to the welfare of the family and the community. In the end, this rationale will keep culture and communities alive. Even though the mass-produced object becomes the readily accepted item within the dominant society, Indian society knows where it stands.

They know that beautiful objects are more accepted than things that can't be understood so easily. Therefore the makers of objects of beauty are more accepted than the values that underlie the objects. But the makers of objects know that the ultimate goal is straightforward: it is survival.

Norajo-Morse allows the grace and dignity to be directed towards post-Indian war survivors but asks the children and grandchildren of these survivors not to be comfortable with the acceptance of certain objects. Intelligently, Noranjo-Morse makes direct statements addressing our authentic use of materials: don't make culture a commercially based proposition, one based on money, one where the purchaser re-enforces what they think North American Indian culture should be.

Tourists come to North America by the millions every year to see wild Indians. Governments give out grants to multi-cultural groups to help to keep the colour and ethnicity alive and well. To an extent we are willing to acknowledge our existence through this course of action. But we are now in a position to renegotiate. We know this will affect our multi-layered cultures and societies.

These items became the icons of North America Indigenous peoples. People have studied, debated and re-examined the foundations of what materials and myths mean. The war bonnet became a pan-Indian symbol, one adopted by every tribe, nations within the perimeters of North America. As communications opened up we began to create the sense of uniqueness, distinctiveness and to realize our own beauty within our cultural pools.







Wampum, tobacco, property, mother earth, to name a few, have been used extensively as jokes or sources where the dominant society could poke fun and ridicule. These have been reclaimed and are starting to be put into the proper perspective as far as the Native Indigenous lexicon goes.

A line Noranjo-Morse uses a song from the Disney animated film *Peter Pan*, "What Makes a Red Man Red?"

We took a lot for granted for many years. We have believed the statistics. We thought by wearing war bonnets, saying "UGH!" displaying beads and feathers we could step into the role with no thought and no thought for the future. It was a constant dress rehearsal. But the very people who posed, who made the cheap tourist souvenirs, were also the ones who kept the perspective on the horizon.

We still make the past, we still pose, we still sing those songs but we have also learned that to exist we have to remain visible and to keep the important things hidden. We have learned to be subversive and to speak a language with symbols and codes.

Using a double-edged sword, we have learned to live a dual existence, one in the modern cosmopolitan world and the other seeking the spiritual and subtle gifts of life.

*Just Want To Know Why* is a strong piece of self-expression by Dana Claxton. This production describes a journey of inquisition where she asks the eternal question, "Why do things happen the way they do". Her Great Grandmother, who walked with Sitting Bull into Canada trying to escape the Indian Wars, dies of starvation. Her Grandmother dies at a young age of 37 from an overdose.







What Was Taken What Was Sold - Nora Noranjo-Morse





The background music at first falls on our ears like a gentle rain. An image of an Indian head is repeated to make it monotonous. This is an accepted image, one we have come to live with on a day-to-day basis. It has become a part of our everyday language and is seen as a pan-Indian symbol of the Good Indian.

The hypnotic trance of the music combined with the flashing images lulls us into a state of unconsciousness. Dana's voice describes the condition in which the important female role models in her life perished. At first it is without emotion. Her voice sounds like she is practicing to hear the facts as they are being told. Like the image of the Indian head, these facts too have become the norm. These are conditions, statistics that have become the status quo of Native Canadian/American life.

Shaking herself out of the trance, she screams, demanding an answer she will not get, "I JUST WHAT TO KNOW WHY". Claxton not only is screaming for the women in her life but for all of the injustices of Native American /Canadian/Aboriginal/Indigenous/First Nations People affected by colonialism throughout the world have experienced.

This brings to mind in recent years the Lubicon kids, Davis Inlet, and the men left to die in freezing cold on the outskirts of Saskatoon on one deep, dark, winter night. All of such incidents are too numerous to list.

Claxton's hysterical plea jars the viewers to ask their own questions. Apart from the statistics, news reports and product from the media machine, her questioning brings to light that the ones left in the shadows are human beings, even as they are systemically eliminated.

[2510037091, 2002](#) is a visual poem created by Steve Loft. The short video compresses the history of Native Indian people living in Canada. They have to comply with the standard issuing of numbers in order to be counted as one of the Indians with status. This is done to keep track







of government monies distributed amongst those who were entitled to heritage and birthrights when chiefs of Native nations signed treaties with the Canadian government.

With treaty signing, came provisions such as health care, eye-care, dental care and general welfare for the bands of Indians who gave up land entitlement, resources and minerals. Without this number, the non-status Indian receives nothing. And there were numerous Native people who did not sign treaties that would have entitled them to the riches promised by Canadian governments. They have remained on the fringes of society, and still don't have their distinctiveness acknowledged. But these non-status Indians continue to share in the racism and stigmatization Native people confront on a daily basis. This is hard reality.

Before outside governments were formed, when men's dreams were a source of inspiration, reality had a different purpose. Loft captures the tattooing of his Indian status number onto his own arm and includes text from Dee Brown describing the visions of the world of Crazy Horse as "wild and crazy" and his subsequent taking of the name Crazy Horse.

We are witnesses to Loft's graphic declaration, "Within the meaning of the Indian Act" he is now a certified Indian. But this act isn't to be seen as an act of submission, it is the opposite. Loft's performance is another hard reality. He is no longer a hidden member of society, one that shares in the wealth of Canadian taxpayers, or one who is absorbing the status as it were a status symbol. It's an act of rebellion. Permanently marking his upper arm with black ink, inscribing the numbers from his status card, as if it were a branding, he becomes property. He humanizes what these numbers have de-humanized. His Indian Act becomes a violent one as the viewer can see it: hairs, flesh, needles and pigment. His sacrifice is a harsh reminder of a time, not so long ago in our own memories, of another group of people who had numbers systematically tattooed on their arms as well.







*Ravenheart*, is from the Vancouver-based Raven Heart Collective, Terry Haines, Lynn Hill and Aaron Rice. *Ravenheart* is a combination of myth, mystery, fable and suspense. The collective has based their storytelling on cultural sources. In it they used the character of Raven. Raven is used extensively in stories and myths from the West Coast regions. He is a trickster, one who has to be dealt with cautiously. In this video, the heart becomes a symbol. It is the most precious object. All life depends on it.

Through the  
Passage of time  
Peoples' hearts have  
been abandoned,  
blackened, broken,  
cheated, lost  
and stolen.

Some of these aching  
hearts have attracted  
a mysterious visitor.

His obsession with  
hearts and other  
objects of interest  
have lead him into  
another person's life.





Raven is fascinated  
by a heart not  
of ill-fate, but of pure  
innocence - one he  
can't resist

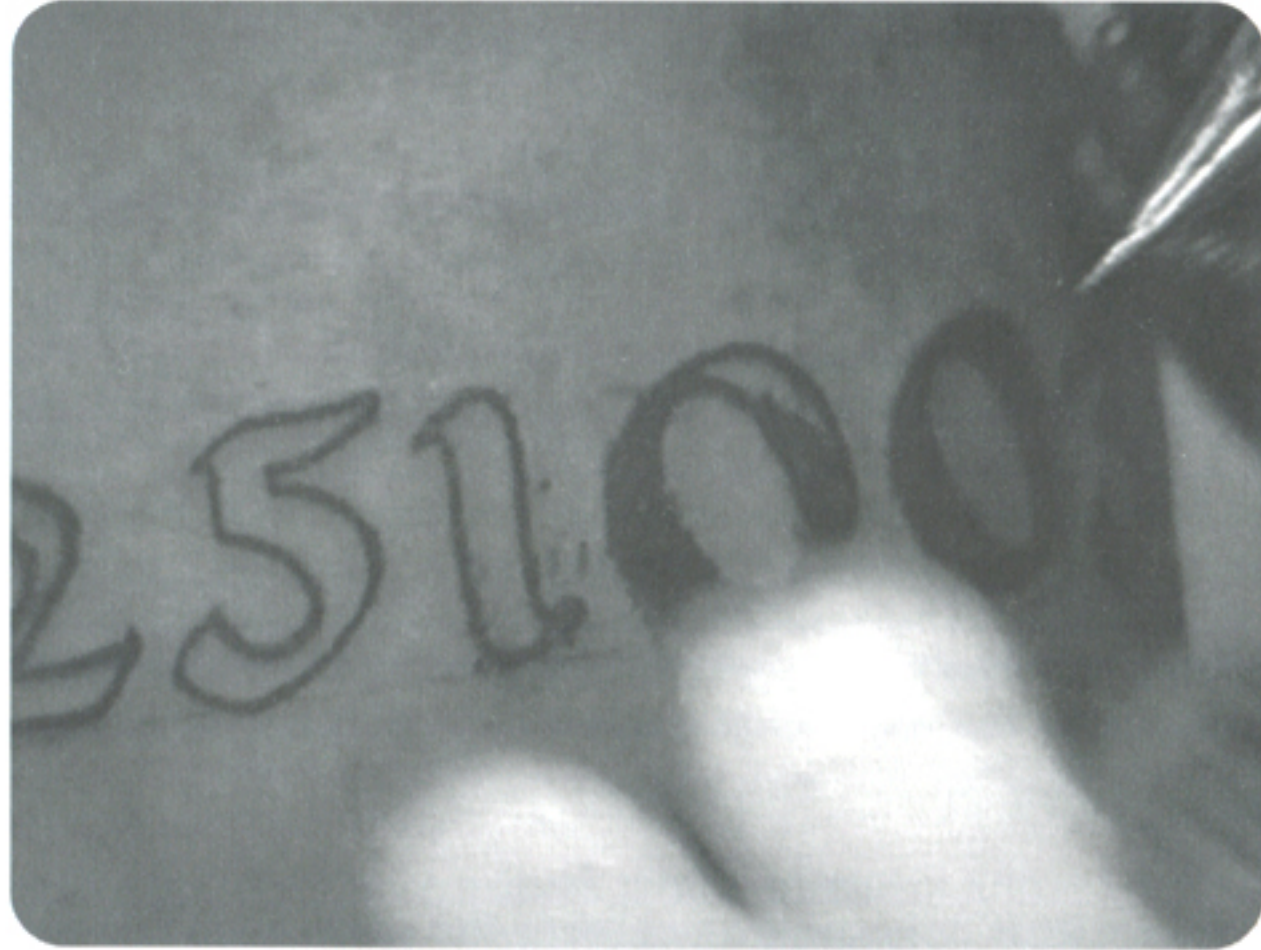
Raven Heart Collective, 2002

To declare oneself a First Nations Artist becomes an act of resistance. With this title there is great responsibility. The artist is a medium whose body becomes the message carrier for voices not given the opportunity to be heard. The resistance happens when they materialize thoughts, notions and dreams. Collectively, they allow their spirits to participate in the world of invention, knowing they are contributing to the expansion of their own indigenous language of natural symbols and visions.

Grief. This word is used extensively throughout any Native community. It comes from every individual. Life is short and we pass onto our own children the same questions our parents and grandparents asked. Claxton screams, "I just want to know why". Loft illustrates, "Why must this continue?" Noranjo-Morse shows "What was taken, what was sold" and Tsihnahjinnie lets us hear the straight simple facts.

As our time passes we've also educated ourselves. Unlike our parents, we have great opportunities. We have access to cameras and editing rooms. We no longer are the object of another culture's voyeurism, without the ability to negotiate. We can make our own stories for education and entertainment and for posterity.





2510047901 - Steve Loft





It is appropriate for Raven Heart to use a commercially based love song made famous by Eurythmics from the '80s, "Sweet Dreams". Marilyn Manson's appropriation of this song makes it even more twisted and dark. If you listen to love songs long enough you will understand how colonialism works.

Sad pleas from victims of heartbreak agonizing over something lost, broken, stolen keeps the target of this remorse in a state of weakness and absolute denial of their own strength. Often the songs create within the listener a feeling of not being able to participate as a whole human being. The narrator in songs often describes his/her own many flaws and wallows in self-ridicule and thoughts of worthlessness.

As we participate in this masochistic style, not ever feeling good enough or worthy enough for love, we give into the dominant society's need to control even the basic life affirming actions of expressing love for another.

*Ravenheart* is an attempt to cover the effects of the last five hundred years, plus. We wear our grief on our sleeves. Our emotions are raw. Slowly we are coming out of the darkness we have been subjected to for the last five centuries. And like the main character we can track down the culprit (s) and reclaim what was once ours.

In closing, the *imagiNative* Festival is a tool of power. We did not record histories in written language. Our images were not photographed by one of our own. Edward Poitras, Metis from Saskatchewan, made a piece of artwork in 1990. I saw it in Canadian Art, the December issue.

Poignantly it consisted of two panels. The first panel was in black with white text and it read "Wounded Knee, 1890". The second panel also in black said "Merry Christmas, 1990". It was simple, straight shooting but the message was not missed. I believe we make work as a way to remember those who have passed before. It is them we acknowledge with respect and love.





## Program

### Now Is The Time...

*Curated by Shelly Niro*

*Yazzie Bahe*, Halleah Tsihnaajinnie, Navajo-Dine, 18:00, 2002.

*What Was Taken, What Was Sold*, Nora Noranjo-Morse, Tewa-Pueblo, 11:00, 1994.

*I Just Want To Know Why*, Dana Claxton, Lakota, 6:20, 1994.

*2510047901*, Steve Loft, Mohawk/Jewish 2:00, 2002.

*Ravenheart*, Raven Heart Collective: Terry Haines, Suswap; Lynn Hill, Cayuga; Aaron Rice, Mohawk, 10:00, 2002.

#### \*Addendum

*The Hunt*, Tamara Bell, Haida, 10:00, 1997.

*I've Been Binged By My Baby*, Nora Noranjo-Morse, Tewa Pueblo, 3:00, 1996.

\* The last two productions are included here to provide a light side to the story. They are made for pleasure.



## Creating a New Container... With a Passed-On Voice

Shawna Shandiin Sunrise  
Navajo (Dineh)/Santo Domingo

As I have traveled from my community to other native communities, things that I have taken for granted in beauty, song, tradition are sometimes not understood when I try to describe where I come from and how I developed my creative process.

As long as I can remember I always watched and listened to how my parents would greet others. It would always start with, "Where are you from?"

In Navajo, when introducing ourselves to a group of people we first say our name, where we are from, and the clans of both our parents. This is done to not only introduce yourself but to reconnect yourself to your community, to your people.

When I was asked to co-curate a program for *imagineNATIVE*, I felt it should be the process of an introduction to where I come from, to where I plan to be in the future. So before I begin to show my work, here is a group of images, stories, voices that I grew up seeing, listening, and understanding and that have strengthened a creative process that was a gift from the beginning.







## Program

### *Video of a Prayer...As a Gift*

A video of a prayer done in New Mexico for the imagineNATIVE community.  
A gift by Bill A. Sunrise from the Pueblo of Santo Domingo.

Dir. Shawna S. Sunrise  
2002, 2:00

### *Old Westerns*

A series of clips taken from the genre of Hollywood western movies during the '40s and '50s. Each clip is a section that captures the use of Navajo social songs that were used as "War songs" by various directors during that time in Hollywood.

Various Directors  
1940-1950, 3:00

### *Navajo Coyote Stories: Coyote and Skunk*

The story of Coyote told in Navajo as he tries to outsmart the animals in the community. This is from a collection of teaching videos that were made in the '70s illustrated by Navajo artist Don Mose. Each story has a lesson about how to behave and how not to behave in the community through the use of the Navajo language.

Director/Illustrator Don Mose  
1972, 8:30

### *Tortillas with Fried Red Chile*

Spoken Word - Simon Ortiz

A series of images from the southwest accompanied by poet Simon Ortiz from Acoma Pueblo reading about images from the same location. Each paints a picture through separate views of storytelling that, when combined, creates a new flavour.

Dir. Shawna S. Sunrise  
2002, 8:00





### *THROUGH NAVAJO EYES (1966) - Silent*

These three films are a part of a series of seven films about the Pine Springs community living on the Navajo reservation in 1966. Cultural anthropologist John Adair and Sol Worth, a scholar in communications, visited the Navajo reservation with the idea of showing community members how to use 16mm cameras and have them capture a portion of their lives in the community. These films are the product of that experiment, often referred to as the first Navajo Experimental films ever created. Each has a pattern that was not taught by the anthropologists; each springs directly from the creative process present in the Navajo language, history and culture.

*Producers: Sol Worth/John Adair*

#### *Navajo Weaver*

The process of creating a Navajo rug through the eyes of a mother/daughter team.

*Dir. Susie Benally/Alta Kahn*

20:00

#### *Old Antelope Lake*

The many uses of a community lake seen through the eyes of a community member.

*Dir. Mike Anderson*

15:00

#### *Intrepid Shadows*

An experimental view of deities that exist in the world of the Navajo people through the eyes of a community observer.

*Dir. Alfred Clah*

15:00





### *Navajo Coyote Stories: Coyote and Lizard*

The story of Coyote told in Navajo as he tries to outsmart the animals in the community. This is from a collection of teaching videos that were made in the '70s illustrated by Navajo artist Don Mose. Each story has a lesson about how to and how not to behave in the community through the use of the Navajo language.

Dir. Don Mose  
1972, 7:12

### *Gathering Up Again: Fiesta in Santa Fe*

A story of three communities that come together during a festival which turns out to be a reflection of differences in culture.

Co-Dir. Diane Reyna  
1992, 10:00 Clip- (Total 45:00)

### *Notes on the Process of the Program* **VIDEO OF A PRAYER...AS A GIFT**

When I was first visualizing the format of my program, I initially thought of a program as a story/performance to introduce where I come from. This was something I grew up with, performing alongside my family expressing our native arts, dance, song, and pride. At a very young age I was with my parents, sisters, uncles, aunties, traveling to other tribal fairs, celebrations, pow-wows, feast days. It is something that my parents made sure we were a part of on a daily basis. In order to develop my sense of community and my responsibilities in the community, we learned how to greet one another, how to listen to each other, and most importantly to be good to one another.





With this in mind I recalled all the community functions I attended and knew that the first thing I wanted to begin my program with was a prayer. As I grow older, for me it is the prayer that is like glue for all the communities. It is the prayer that can give us the ability to see one another in an honest way, a giving way, and a loving way. My parents would always say, "First pray for yourself because you need to be strong to help other people, then pray for the rest of the world." This is something that I live by and hope others will as well.

Naturally I thought, "I wish my dad could open this for us with a prayer!"

Knowing that this was pretty much a "not a chance" effort to get them to Toronto, I thought, "Why not ask my dad to create a prayer for the occasion as a gift from one community to another", in the form of a video.

In my thinking there are no boundaries in creating but when I told others of my idea, they brought out what they heard: that documenting a prayer may not fly well with others in the community.

It is well known throughout native communities that when a prayer begins at a social event, the M.C. or whoever is conducting the event asks the people in attendance to turn off all tape recorders, video cameras, etc. So I approached others in my community from a different angle, asking them to consider:

- In the past our native communities have had our lives invaded by the outside through the use of unauthorized documentation. In other words, "we invited them but didn't know they had tape recorders and cameras stashed in their bags."
- Therefore, most native communities say NO to any type of documentation.
- This is understandable but the question arises, "What if we use the tape recorders, cameras, etc. in the right way with respect and knowledge to give."





- So when the plan is made to record a prayer on purpose, with permission, as a gift from one community to another, it is just that and nothing more.
- This way it is not stolen or recorded without knowledge of this recording, but done in a good way with all the knowledge and purpose.

Again, in the community where I'm from, I grew up watching tribal officials take and sometimes destroy, all kinds of cameras and especially the film. This was and is still the right of the community when you come onto tribal lands.

So, I came to this decision not on my own but by asking many people in my community how they felt about this and if it was right or not.

One person - a young Navajo male whom I respect greatly and could someday be a force in the future of the Nation - thought it was an interesting idea only if the intention was pure.

This type of process is something that I take very seriously because I could just say, "I want to show this or do that", but I must stop and think how my actions will effect my community first. I believe we are all faced with these types of decisions. Decisions are personal and depend on what we learned up until now.

### Notes on the old western clips: ORIGINAL "EXTRAS"

As much as we native people see the old western movies as the ultimate "wrong, very wrong" misrepresentations of who we are in history, there is something to be valued from these films.

I chose to show clips from the old westerns in order to highlight an aspect of these films that has been overlooked.





I found it is not in the watching of the films but in the listening to them.

Why listen? Most of these westerns were made around the '40s and '50s in the southwest region of the Navajo Nation. The main people used as *Extras* were mostly from the Navajo Nation.

My uncle told me a story about how John Ford was shooting a film out southwest of Gallup, NM. They assembled about 30 Navajo men on horseback (that were actually Comanche in the script), told the Navajo men to ride up over the ridge and stop. At that time, this one 'general' was to shoot his gun at them and just one of the Navajo men was to fall off his horse. So they went back behind the ridge and John Ford said, "ACTION!" and they rode up to the ridge, the designated 'general' shot his gun and all of the Navajo fell off their horses. I always think of that story when I see an old western, I think about what they were thinking and laugh.

But, again like in that original script, the Navajo people were cast as Comanche not Navajo. It was common during that time that the Navajo people went in one door of costuming as a Navajo and came out the other end a Comanche or Lakota (Sioux) warrior.

When the director would call on the *Extras* to sing a "war party song" or a "getting ready for a battle song", most likely you would hear the voices of the Navajos singing a Navajo social song not a "battle song."

Growing up, I was always wondering why my father would watch these westerns, and then when the "INDIANS" would start singing he would laugh. This is something that I thought of then. But now, when I think of the singing in the old westerns, it takes on a whole new role in my history.

Without knowing it, they have become a documentation of an old style of Navajo social songs from that time period.





At that time, recording of Navajo singing was rare but it was achieved on film disguised as a "battle song". Because it was an unplanned soundtrack, these songs weren't created for the picture. The people were just called on to sing a song, just as long as it was "INDIAN".

Without knowing it, Hollywood may have done a bit of good through their recording of the "real" native voices, a portion of the old westerns that wasn't in the original script or the score.

Just in the original *Extras!*

### Notes On The Navajo Coyote Stories (English Subtitles) "SEE WHAT HAPPENS...DON'T BE LIKE COYOTE"

I chose to place these films as the in-between lessons, as a constant reminder of how things happen for a reason and here is an example: who? Yes, Coyote.

When I was little I heard all these stories about him and how not to be like him. But it wasn't until I became older that I realized how true to life many of these stories have become.

These films are part of the first native-produced cartoons from the '70s that are told in the Navajo language with English subtitles. These films are shown at the Navajo Nation Museum to the community, especially the children, during the wintertime because that is the only season these stories can be told.

What makes these Coyote stories different from the other tribal Coyote stories that are from outside of the southwest is the Navajo humor used when telling a story. The Navajo language is a language that has a natural way of being funny. When you describe a person in Navajo - as opposed to the same description in English- there are details of comparison to behavior, physical likeness or even words used that have a close sound to another word that extend the





Navajo Coyote Stories: Coyote and Lizard





descriptive humor of the individual or the scene that is taking place.

I wanted to expose this viewing audience to this level of storytelling in its original tongue and bring these stories alive because they come with all the humor and teaching that I first learned as a child. They are teaching tools on how to behave in your community. Especially when you hear, "Don't be like Coyote or else you'll be marked like he was."

### Notes On Spoken Word/Images Of Home TORTILLAS WITH FRIED CHILE

Next is a look at the images from where I come from in the Southwest of the U.S. with a collaboration of words from the well know poet, storyteller, Simon Ortiz, from Acoma Pueblo.

I describe the Tortillas as the images and the Fried Chile as words from Simon Ortiz because, when consuming something, it is good to combine flavors from the same area in order to get the real taste.

Since I've been creating images I have realized that things that I believe are not necessarily the way everyone else see things, even if they are from the same area. To have many voices representing a community is what I strive to see for the future in art, writing, music, filmmaking.

I came to ask Simon Ortiz to be a part of this program back in April 2002. I heard that he was to speak at the University of New Mexico bookstore. I went there to listen to him and found out that he was an instructor at the University of Toronto. I thought instantly of asking him to collaborate with him on a portion of my program. I approached him and he thought it would be a great way of exposing the Native community to his work and being part of the festival that he had heard so much about.





I believe that we as native people have so many stories that have bonded our communities as mental films when they are told to us. To visualize is the nature of storytelling, oral history and traditional songs.

### Notes On "Through Navajo Eyes" THE DISTANCE TRAVELED...CONTINUE THE MOVEMENT

There are several levels to my program but this is one that I learned going away from home studying film at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) - something that wasn't in my original curriculum at first but I made it a part of during the development of my creative process.

This is when I began pulling together films to find a way to present them without one overshadowing the other but each adding to the design of how the whole will be seen as an entity. I say a whole as opposed to a section, so each one can speak to one another from their history.

This group of films came to mind first; then the others followed as a part of the process.

I came to know these sets of films shortly before I came to the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) in 1997. I was up in Taos, NM and a friend of my mother's heard that I had received a scholarship to attend this amazing art school and gave me this book titled, Through Navajo Eyes, knowing that I had planned to study film.

The book was about the observations of a cultural anthropologist, John Adair, and a scholar of communications, Sol Worth. They both came to the remote area of Pine Springs on the Navajo reservation in 1966. A group of Navajo people from the community were given technical instruction in how to use a 16mm camera, light meter, etc. and left to create a perspective on the communities within which they lived, seen "through Navajo eyes".





On my way by car to Chicago I looked over the book about these films and the Navajo people that created them. As I settled into Chicago, I became overwhelmed with schoolwork and the environment. The book given to me remained unopened as I began to learn and create in 16mm film.

It wasn't until after I had finished my first three "experimental" film pieces, that I spoke with my professor on the subject of these films. She informed me the films produced at Pine Springs were in the film archives at SAIC. I was floored to learn this and began to figure out how I could see these pieces and arrange a screening so others could see these films.

When I did some research on the films, I found out that these "sets" of films were purchased in the '70s by the SAIC film archives and had never been publicly screened. They were all new copies just waiting for someone like me to come along and bring them out to the people.

This was a definite "meant to happen" situation. Something that I believe has always occurred in my creative process, or at least a sign that I'm on the right track.

When I found out these films were here in this institution hundreds of miles away from where they came from, like me, I felt a link to them. It reminded me of a story that my mother told me. It was about how she was sent to the Smithsonian for research on a show that she was curating under the Museum of Arts and Culture, Santa Fe, NM. My mother was allowed to see some of the rugs, baskets, and dolls made by Navajos at the beginning of the last century. She recognized a doll that her great-grandmother made, she wanted to touch it and they wouldn't let her. All she could do was look at it in a glass case. So far away from where it was created, it was missing home.

The following semester, I arranged a screening at SAIC. By December, 1997, I still had not viewed the films. A screening opportunity found its way into the arts media in Chicago.





A popular guide to the arts/entertainment, The Reader, decided to run a review of the films. They sent a well-known film critic to pre-screen the films with me. Here I am with one of Chicago's most critical film reviewers viewing these films for the first time.

Each of these pieces has no sound. They depict a process of some kind that is taking place in the community. Whether they are about the technique of weaving, the duties of a medicine man, or the importance of a local lake that helps the community, they all have a common process.

What struck me while I viewed these films were the clear editing choices. In each film there were areas of durational actions that portrayed real-time events. Yet somehow each film concealed these elongated sections within the actual story-line of the work, never adding to the length experienced by the viewer.

Following the viewing of these films I thought about the three films that I completed and realized that they were similar in this process. I thought to myself "how can this be?" I then figured once again it was all "meant to happen".

An example of this process can be seen in the piece by Alta Kahn, weaver. She shows all the processes of preparing the wool: walking to gather the plants for the dyes, the hauling of water to wash the wool, the carding, the spinning. But when Alta shoots the weaving segments she chooses to cut it short.

When I was learning to weave, my mother would always say, "It is during the process of gathering the materials that the design is being woven in your head, when you begin to weave, the rug is completed, you just have to weave it". This creative process is apparent in the way the film was cut. Alta Clah, the weaver, the filmmaker, did just that with no doubts in the design.





All these films began as an *experiment* by a cultural anthropologist and a scholar of communications from outside the Navajo community. But to me they are the first “Experimental” films created by my people.

### Notes On Using New Tools For Old Stories GATHERING UP AGAIN: FIESTA IN SANTA FE BY DIANE REYNA-SAN JUAN/TAOS PUEBLO

When I attended the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, NM I was introduced to the world of Moving Images. Moving Images was the title of the class offered at IAIA taught by professor Diane Reyna.

This class was about the process of creating a documentary video. Diane Reyna had a history of working in the new media field at the local network station in Albuquerque, NM. She had since directed two documentaries, *Surviving Columbus* and *Bring in the Fiesta*. Diane taught us the method of filming a documentary from the treatment to paper editing. But, what she taught me was how I could use a tool like a camera to express who I am in my community.

I grew up learning to create at home with my mother, who taught me how to process wool and weave a rug. When I was in high school I never took any art classes. I thought that I wasn't artistic. I didn't look at my weaving as a form of art. It wasn't until I was older I realized how lucky I was to learn to create on this level. I also realized that I was a performer and choreographer since I was young. These things that many native children are taught at home are the most valuable educations they will ever learn.

It was through the guidance of Diane Reyna that she taught us how to look at our community and ourselves through a viewfinder. She not only gave us critical technical solutions but ethical ways of preserving our culture.





Reyna's film *Bring in the Fiesta* is a documentary that shows us the history of our past changing before our eyes. This is an important film to many in people in the southwest. As a Pueblo native, Diane's strength behind the camera is seen as issues evolve.

I will always be extremely grateful to Diane Reyna for all her knowledge and strength. She has displayed how the powerful medium of film can help a community and change the future.



Navajo Coyote Stories: Coyote and Lizard





# Duking it out in the Northwest Coast

Curated by Dana Claxton

Vancouver, April 2002

Curating film and video screenings, new media, installation or performance is always such a delight. Why? you ask. I love the research and viewing new and past works that engage the intellect and the spirit. I/we live in such a visual culture, mass media stimulates the mind, media art stimulates the mass the media, colour stimulates the mind, I like the colour red.

So, here I sit on my roof top deck, it's sunny, it's beautiful. I have a panoramic view of the Northshore Mountains. As I view this ancient homeland to the Salish Nation, I acknowledge that I am surrounded by 10 Salish Communities and grateful that I have been introduced to their community. Remember that I am a Lakota from Saskatchewan living in unceded territory of the Northwest Coast on Salish Land. It's like the Wild West out here, no treaties, lumberjacks and a province that just held a very slanted Referendum concerning aboriginal land claims. This is the context in which I begin to write and curate my program for *imagineNATIVE*, CAM, Cynthia, Vtape and a Toronto audience. Hi Cheri Mar.

Recently, I curated a program for Doxa, the Vancouver documentary festival. My program was about how images, both suspect and questionable, as well as self-created images of our people have been constructed and through this image making process what is real and what is imagined. I am always startled as to what stereotypes linger in the national Canadian consciousness and how false images of Indian people shape and inform our own self identities, as well as how Canadian national identity is influenced and shaped by the subjugation of Indian people.

I went to the Vancouver Public Library to view old NFB documentaries and saw *Indian Dialogue*,





a film produced in 1967. This work inspires my program for *imagineNATIVE* and so does Duke Redbird. I was telling Cynthia about my curatorial plans and she said Duke Redbird lives in Toronto. I have never met him. The dialogue in *Indian Dialogue* is uncanny, the conversation is one I just had 2 weeks ago sitting around talking with a group of friends. This work was produced 34 years ago, yet our attempts at obtaining cultural autonomy are still in progress. Should I think this odd? or predictable? How have Indian people advanced in terms of Self Government?

Lately, I have been thinking about the historical document and the archival image. I am going to visit the NFB website and see what they have to offer. (A few hours later) The NFB has an incredible archive and after viewing works by the NFB, the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, American Peter Burke and Makah Director Sandra Osawa, I have decided to show exclusively National Film Board of Canada works.

This is a journal and my thoughts shift and move around.

So there's this guy speaking in *Indian Dialogue*, Duke Redbird, young, handsome, articulate, direct, strong, relentless, gentle, dynamic and I am thinking, "Is this the artist Duke Redbird, the same whose artwork appeared in a Canadian newspaper, an image of a man in a canoe offering the pipe to a loon?" That work rocked my tipi. As a curator, certain artworks inspire entire shows and as a budding academic, the work could inspire an entire thesis or dissertation. The sacred image of the pipe and loon has gently lingered in my curatorial mind for years. Back to *Indian Dialogue*, a black and white 16mm film with a group of people talking about Indian issues in 1967. Wilfred Pelletier asks the question, "what do you think government means when they say: 'when are Indians ready to govern themselves?' " Duke Redbird comments at some point that we are seen as "in a becoming state, not a present state, not a being state." My goodness, I





thought, such an analytical thought for such a young man and then pondered how long Indian people will continue to be in the object position. Further, I pondered the aboriginal imperative: what makes us "us", what makes us Indians? Is it the connection to the sacred land? Is it our spiritual and cultural practices? I believe so. At the end of the doc, Duke Redbird says, "They are going to destroy themselves along with us. We owe it to them to teach them spirituality."

Another title from NFB is *Pow Wow at Duck Lake*, a kooky, kooky documentary that I also chose for this program. It's fragmented, yet concise, silly and serious at the same time. I don't mean silly in the sense that it was comedic. I doubt the director meant the work to be viewed as silly but it was to me because of the way the Clergy and Duke Redbird interacted. Yes, here was that same young man from *Indian Dialogue* again challenging the content of the documentary. It was so delightful to "discover" that the NFB were making docs about Indians in 1967 that attempted to give voice to the people. The narrative wandered around and I am not sure where it really goes or ends up. A young Harold Adams speaks strongly as he always has and asks the question, "Why are we not employed?" Again words that I hear today. Change is slow? Towards the end of this work, Duke dukes it out with the church. The churchman is impatient and not willing to really discuss issues that he may not agree with. I didn't like him. (But I do like the fact that the United Church in BC opposed the recent Referendum and even told the parish not to vote in such a hypocritical plebiscite).

I then watched a film from 1956, *No Longer Vanishing*, which opens with a fence and barbwire, a metaphor perhaps for the cultural distancing that the reserve system has helped establish. The voice-over authoritatively states, "The Indians - the Original Canadians". Another kooky work by the NFB, but absolutely delightful at the same time. It's a dramatic narrative with real live authentic Indians in 1956!! I found this work to be highly progressive considering the time in





Pow Wow at Duck Lake





which it was produced. The story is about Tom Prince, a young man who gets to WORK. The voice-over states that, "Indian have better then average reflexes, physical endurance and are good cowboys." This work seems to want to speak directly to Indians, instilling the idea that they can work too, and also to potential employers, implying that Indians could make good workers if given the opportunity. The voice-over also claims that Indians are shy and suspicious. Suspicious of what, I thought. The sound track is spooky and dramatic at the same time. I adore this work for everything that it is: problematic. In historical terms, this work displays archival references and signs of the times. It displays how Canada stereotyped and harmed a people and then attempted to make good through federally funded documentary projects. I believe the NFB is still attempting to do this - give voice to the 'other'. (You know what I heard the other day: that Jewish people are the original 'other' - tracked down and expelled from everywhere.) Anyway, the NFB has been attempting to give voice to the 'other' for quite sometime now. I love the NFB despite its bureaucratic behaviour, my only hope is that they will make a few engaging documentaries about British Columbia land claims - a real story needs to be told. OK....

I watched other works, such as *The Indian Speaks* and *Dispatch from Wounded Knee*, both from the '70s. My curatorial plan was developing, I was going to show one work each from the '50s, '60s, '70s, '80s, '90s and into 2000s. I was going to link works together based on political conversations and content. As I watched more work, I realized how the conversations remained the same, the issues and concerns were the same: Indian autonomy - the lack of and the fear of. *Dispatch from Wounded Knee* was crude and rough, attempting to get the real story out from behind the barricades at Wounded Knee in 1973. The footage is amazing, the producer has hours of it. I need to see more. I chose not to show it in this program, but acknowledge its archival and historical importance. It ends with a bumper sticker that says, "Think Indian". Oh the Indian imperative again.





I get so busy sometimes doing this cultural work - which I love of course. Being an artist, curator, etc. Today, I answered 22 emails, talked to Glenn about the exhibition in Venice and the *Indian Acts*, Aboriginal Performance Art Conference. Had a meeting with a Cultural Theorist who wanted to know my thoughts on cultural relativism. Made my dad a father's day card, watched a few documentaries for Toronto gig and handled an artist friend's affairs while he is in Japan. Then spent a few hours on a TV project called ArtZone.

So, here I am pondering the works I have seen to date and waiting for a few other titles to arrive. The phrase "a chance to be heard" lingers in my mind from *Dispatch from Wounded Knee*. And again, Duke Redbird's voice at the end of *Pow Wow at Duke Lake* when he says, "So, as Indian people, are we being heard - not only by non-Indian people, but by our own people?" Then again the lawyer being interviewed in *Wounded Knee*, it was again like 21st century Indian talk: self government.

Friday Night 11:00pm News.

Matthew Coon Come and Nault both talk about the Indian Act. Independent of each other. Nault sounds shifty and also a bit like a hockey announcer who is giving details of the game. Nault claims the improvements to the Indian Act will improve Indian lives. Coon Come claims the Minister will have more control over Indians. So, the conversation continues and here I am the artist, curator, director, aboriginal art history instructor at the art college, one course and thesis away from being an Art Historian and I am pondering my curatorial intent, my commitment to social justice and my love for our people. I ponder why my art process - whether creating or curating - leads to the political. Or are words like 'politics' and 'political' substitutes for locating meaning within ideas of democracy. Why do I still not see democracy in this ancient homeland of all the tribal peoples of this sacred land? Where hides democracy?





I have just finished watching *The Longer Trail* with its sombre music. It begins with a voice-over and eventually leads to a full dramatic short. I thought my short dramas were kooky. The actor is a bit stiff, but pleasant to watch. I wonder how it was for people watching in 1956 to see a real Indian playing an Indian role. The actor sort of looks like Adam Beach sometimes - too cute! The character has TB and goes to the hospital for a while, gets better and then attempts to assimilate into non-Indian urban life. A good non-Indian man tries to help Joe Lonecloud out with housing and learns how people judge Indian people. Then he finds him a job and the Indian lives happily ever after employed in a brick factory. Urgh.

Calgary July 5th, 2002

My curatorial research begins take shape. I have decided I no longer want to select works from the different decades, but want to select three titles from the NFB. As well, I was asked to curate a program around 1 to 1.5 hours and since I was considering most works that were a half-hour in length, three titles worked well. But it was the three NFB titles that worked well together.

I begin the program with *The Longer Trail* followed by *Pow Wow at Duck Lake* and ending with *Indian Dialogue*. I have selected these works, all by non-Aboriginal directors, mostly because of the content - each work addresses themes of cultural autonomy, loss and identity in shifting classifications of self. The Working Indian, the TB Indian, The Articulate Indian. What intrigues me about all these titles is how the NFB was attempting to document real concerns of real Indian people. I am curious what was left out of the final cut. Wopila pila maya yello.





## Program

### Duking it out in the Northwest Coast

*Curated by Dana Claxton*

*The Longer Trail 30mins 1956*

*Pow Wow at Duck Lake 14:30 1967*

*Indian Dialogue 27:43 1967*

Pow Wow at Duck Lake







# Acknowledgments

With this programme Three Women Curators, a co-presentation with the imagineNATIVE Media Arts Festival, Vtape is again able to offer an important Aboriginal arts programme to audiences. We are proud of our partnership with CAM (Centre for Aboriginal Media) the co-presenters of imagineNATIVE Media Arts Festival, along with the Woodlands Cultural Centre. We see this partnership as crucial to the continuing development of Vtape as an organization with roots and connections in the communities co-existing throughout the Toronto area.

The writing, the curating and the thoughtful look at the work that is exhibited in this programme are all consistent with Vtape's view of media arts programming. We congratulate CAM, the imagineNATIVE Artistic Director Cynthia Lickers, the curators Shelly Niro, Dana Claxton and Shawna Sunshine and all of the artists whose works are being screened in these programmes, on a beautifully visioned series. We welcome this collaboration and look forward to the public screenings.

We thank our funders, The Canada Council for the Arts, The Toronto Arts Council and the Ontario Arts Council for their on-going encouragement. In particular, we acknowledge the assistance and support of the Canada Council's Annual Programming Assistance to Media Arts Organizations for specific support to this project.

Lisa Steele, Creative Director, Vtape, October 2002



Vtape



Le Conseil des Arts du Canada  
The Canada Council for the Arts



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL  
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO

torontodartscouncil  
An arm's length body of the City of Toronto

Catalogue Design by Jeremy Bailey

Printed by Maud Street Printing







**V tape**

401 Richmond St W. #452  
Toronto ON M5V 3A8  
[www.vtape.org](http://www.vtape.org)