

# Native America

“I was thinking about young Native artists, and what would be inspirational and important for them as a road map. The people included here have all played an important part in forging pathways, in opening up space in the art world for new ways of seeing and thinking.”

—Wendy Red Star (p. 21)

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A woman is the central figure, standing against a plain white background. She is dressed in traditional Native American clothing, including a wide-brimmed straw hat with a colorful, patterned band. Her top is a long-sleeved, vertically striped tunic with a vibrant, multi-colored geometric pattern on the chest and a long, fringed sash hanging from her waist. She wears dark, wide-leg trousers and simple, dark-colored sandals. She holds a large, curved wooden knife across her chest with both hands. The lighting is bright and even, casting a soft shadow on the ground beneath her.

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# Introduction

Wendy Red Star is an Apsáalooke (Crow) artist who uses photographs to tell stories. She often makes work incorporating textiles, family images, and photographs from museum archives. Red Star uses context, humor, beauty, and community knowledge to expand on and reinterpret the meanings of photographs.

As the guest editor of *Aperture* magazine's "Native America" issue, Red Star worked with the magazine's editors to curate the featured artists and their work. Ask your students to have a look at the magazine and then consider the following: *Which artists would you include in an issue of a magazine about what's important to you? Why? What would you ask them? Which of their artworks would you include?*

It is important to Red Star that readers remember that Native American experiences can't be generalized, and are very specific to individual communities. She asks, "What does 'Native America' even mean? The only thing we share is the oppression of the U.S. government. It means a shared oppression under colonial structure. Each of these artists is very specific. Everything is very nuanced and complex."

"I went to high school in this town called Hardin," Red Star continues. "The student body was white rancher kids, Crow kids, mixed kids. Our teachers chose not to say anything about Crow." ("Crow" is what colonizers misunderstood "Apsáalooke" to mean.) She says her work is "an education for myself. It's putting the knowledge back into Apsáalooke hands, piecing together these pieces that have been left out. It's very empowering and it's also so sad. As Native American students, we were considered a lost cause." She believes that if she had received this knowledge in high school, she would have felt much stronger. "I would've had heroes. I would've had self-esteem. I'm building heroes for myself."

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# About This Learning Guide

This resource accompanies *Aperture* magazine's "Native America" issue, and it is intended for use by educators to provide themes, topics, and analysis of selected works to spark in-depth discussions, administer visual literacy, and lend additional contextual information. It is our goal as educators to extend the dialogue and provide a space for audiences of all ages to connect directly with the work, exchange ideas, and make meaningful interpretations.

Also included in this resource are talking points, education strategies, and classroom activities.

Before you begin this guide, we encourage you to read the articles from the magazine about each of the featured artists included here. Offer your students some time to examine the work and carefully investigate the magazine, if you have a copy. Encourage students to look closely, so that they may share their thoughts and ideas about the artwork. Then, guide them through a dialogue based on their inquiries, perceptions, and thoughts.

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# Topics for Discussion

**Documentation**

**Creator**

**Objectivity**

**Insider vs. outsider**

**Humor and play**

**Presentation and performance**

**Reworking the archive**

**Representation**

**Cultural appropriation**

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# Key Vocabulary

**Archive:** A historical collection of primary source documents (photographs, writings, papers, records).

**Apsáalooke:** Indigenous nation now based largely in southern Montana, sometimes called the Crow Nation by English speakers. The name translates to “Children of the large-beaked bird.”

**Colonialism:** When a powerful group of people conquers and intentionally oppresses another group.

**Depict:** To represent something, usually in a visual way.

**Genocide:** When a large group of people who are part of a specific ethnic group or culture are intentionally killed.

**Indigenous:** People and cultures originating in a particular place—not a colonial group.

**Oppression:** Intentional, long-lasting systems of unjust treatment and control.

**Performative:** Something related to performance.

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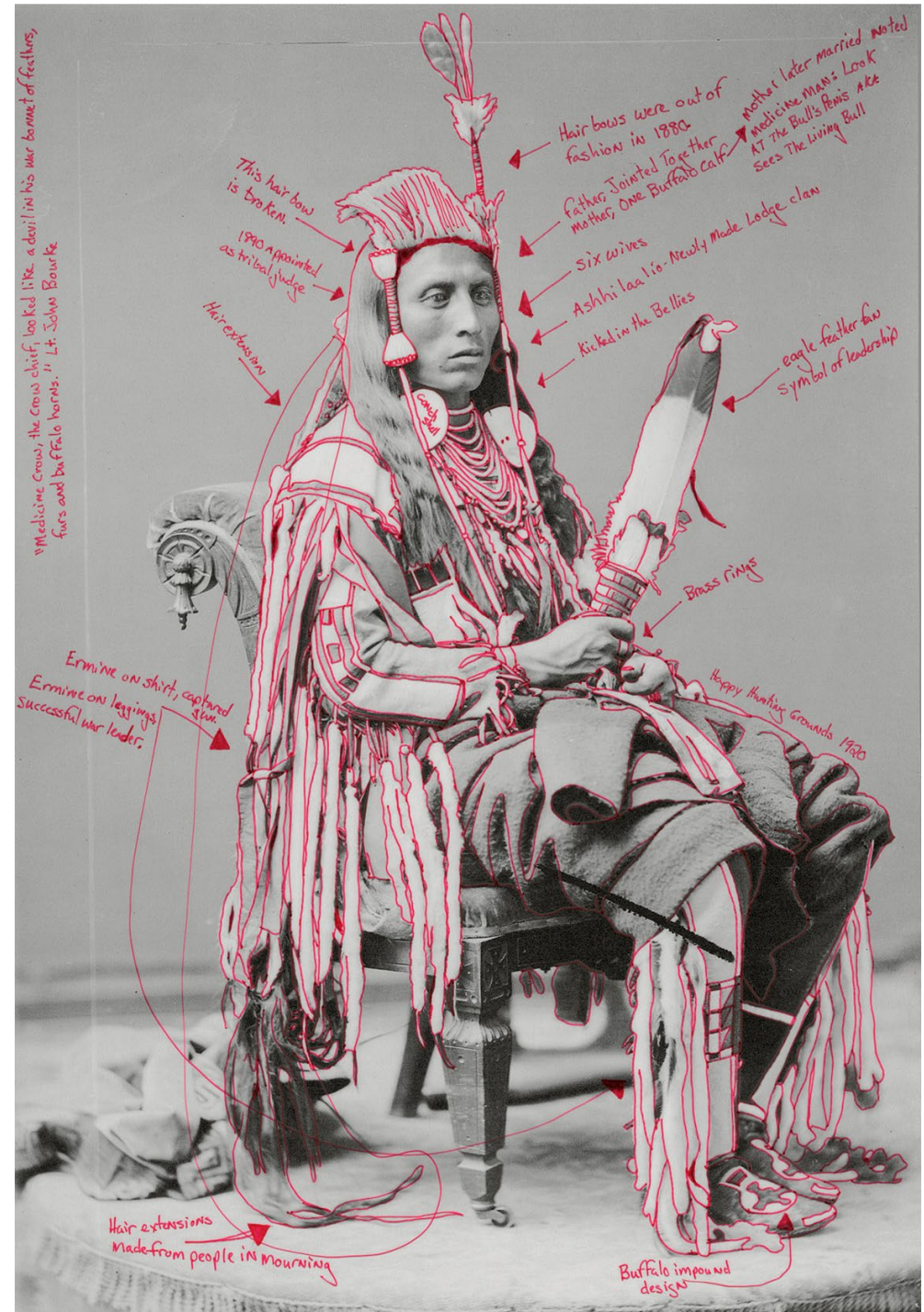
# Wendy Red Star

Wendy Red Star is an Apsáalooke (Crow) artist born in Montana and now based in Portland, Oregon, who uses sculptural and installation elements in addition to photography to center the Indigenous experience and to address misconceptions around Native identity.

“I remember seeing a wall of photographs depicting family members from past to present. I was particularly interested in the images of my dad as a young man. There is a great picture of him in Lodge Grass, Montana, holding a golden eagle by the wings and my brother, Tory, then a toddler, standing next to him. I became aware that photography was more than a tool to document—it could also tell powerful stories.”

—Wendy Red Star, from the introduction to *Aperture* magazine’s “Native America” issue (p. 21)

Wendy Red Star, *Peelatchiwaaxpáash / Medicine Crow (Raven)*, 2014, from the series *1880 Crow Peace Delegation*. Original photograph by Charles Milton Bell, 1880, from the National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution



## Classroom Discussion

**Naming the Archives** An archive is a collection of images or documents. It can help us understand what happened in the past and what people documenting the past thought and felt. Ask students: *What could it mean to name or not name someone in a photograph's caption? Why do you think it is important to Wendy Red Star that she identify the people in these photographs and include their names in the captions? How is her knowledge different from the photographer's point of view?*

**Annotated Images** Ask your students to research their own family archives, and follow up with questions such as: *What photographs exist of your family? How far back do they exist? Who took them? Are they captioned? Who do you think wrote the captions? In what contexts do you find them? How does your family share their stories?*

## Classroom Activity

This project can also be done digitally using [canva.com](https://www.canva.com)

Quilting has been a significant part of Native American cultures on the Northern Plains for over a hundred years. Introduced by churches and the federal government as a way to assimilate Indigenous women to white values and traditions, quilting was instead used by Native women as a way to maintain their more equal gender roles, sustain traditions, and spend time together. Wendy Red Star's work references Apsáalooke star quilts, which are given as gifts at significant moments, like funerals, healing ceremonies, and baptisms.

Wendy Red Star, *The Maniacs, We're Not the Best But We're Better Than the Rest*, 2011, from the series *Family Portraits*. Archival ink on cotton broadcloth

Remaining cognizant that not all students live with biological relatives, offer the alternative of researching images of their ancestors as students define them.

Ask: *How do you usually encounter images of your ancestors, whether part of your family lineages or not? How are they captioned? What do you think the photographs meant to the people in them? What are they telling you, their descendant, through this image? What is the photographer saying to you? Are these meanings different?*

Ask students to choose their favorite photograph of their family or ancestors, and to share them with the class. To help guide the conversation, ask students: *How do you feel when seeing this image? What are the five W's (who, what, when, where, why) of the photograph? Does it seem formal or casual? What does this tell you about what was important to the photographer and to the people in the photographs?*

**Patchwork Narratives (Quilting)** Cut out eight 45-degree parallelograms from colorful paper. Be sure they are all exactly the same size, and select colors that represent your family, culture, and/or ancestors. Fit them together to make a star shape (like the light-blue star at the center of Red Star's piece you see to the right). Use a glue stick to attach them to a piece of paper. Next, print four copies of your favorite ancestor image, sized to fit into the corners of the star you have made. Arrange these with the star as you like. When you have the layout you like, trim as necessary and glue these onto the paper, forming a paper quilt.



# Horace Poolaw

Horace Poolaw (1906–1984) was a Kiowa photographer whose work redefined Native American representation. Photographing his friends and family, Poolaw’s images give viewers an insider’s perspective of the Kiowa community. His photographs are “frequently understood as a document of the community’s passage into midcentury American life,” and they celebrate his subjects’ place in society during this time.

“The element of performance in Poolaw’s photographs allowed his subjects to have some control over their own images. They could show themselves as they felt they were or as they wanted to be seen. This is true of his field portraits of dancers wearing full regalia in ceremonies, or of couples donning their Western Sunday best. There are multiple photographs of his brother Bruce hamming it up in cowboy costumes and warbonnets, knowingly playing on the stereotypes he and Princess Watahwaso [a performer and Poolaw’s future sister-in-law] had learned to perform for white audiences who expected their own idea of Native authenticity.”

—Rebecca Bengal, from the essay “To Walk in Both Worlds” (p. 40)

Horace Poolaw, Horace Poolaw (Kiowa), aerial photographer, and Gus Palmer (Kiowa), side gunner, inside a B-17 Flying Fortress. MacDill Field, Tampa, Florida, ca. 1944



## Classroom Discussion

Show students some of Poolaw's photographs. Ask students: *How do you usually see Native Americans depicted? How do Poolaw's images fit into or defy those images? What ideas do white audiences have about Native authenticity? How does Poolaw play with or upend these expectations? Why is this important?*

## Classroom Activity

In this assignment, ask students to write about the family archive photo they selected in the last activity (or a different family or ancestral photograph) in relation to Poolaw's work. Examples of archival images include sports photos, snapshots celebrating special moments, official photographs (mug shots, driver's license photos, school ID cards), senior portraits, wedding photos, yearbook pictures, portraits of ancestors, images from the Library of Congress, etc. As a writing assignment, ask: *What does this photograph mean in the context of your family or in political history?*



Horace Poolaw, Wedding reception of Bruce Dean Poolaw (Kiowa) and Mary Ellen Satoe (Kiowa). Carnegie, Oklahoma, ca. early 1960s

# Duane Linklater

For *Aperture* magazine's "Native America" issue, Duane Linklater (an Omaskêko Ininiwak artist based in North Bay, Ontario, Canada) created an original piece titled *Other Workers Will Follow* (2020), inspired by the Spring 1995 issue of *Aperture* magazine, "Strong Hearts: Native American Visions and Voices." The work's base consists of scanned pages from the issue; and from there, Linklater drew, wrote, and folded the pages to give them new life, using folding to conceal and hold back some of the meaning of his work.

"He began to draw, write, fold, and scan, his lines a continuation of the formal ways of working long used by Indigenous artisans to map out beadwork and quillwork while delimiting the scale and pace of his own practice."

—Eungie Joo, from the essay "Duane Linklater: *Other Workers Will Follow*" (p. 44)

Duane Linklater, from the series *Other Workers Will Follow*, 2020, for *Aperture*



## Classroom Discussion

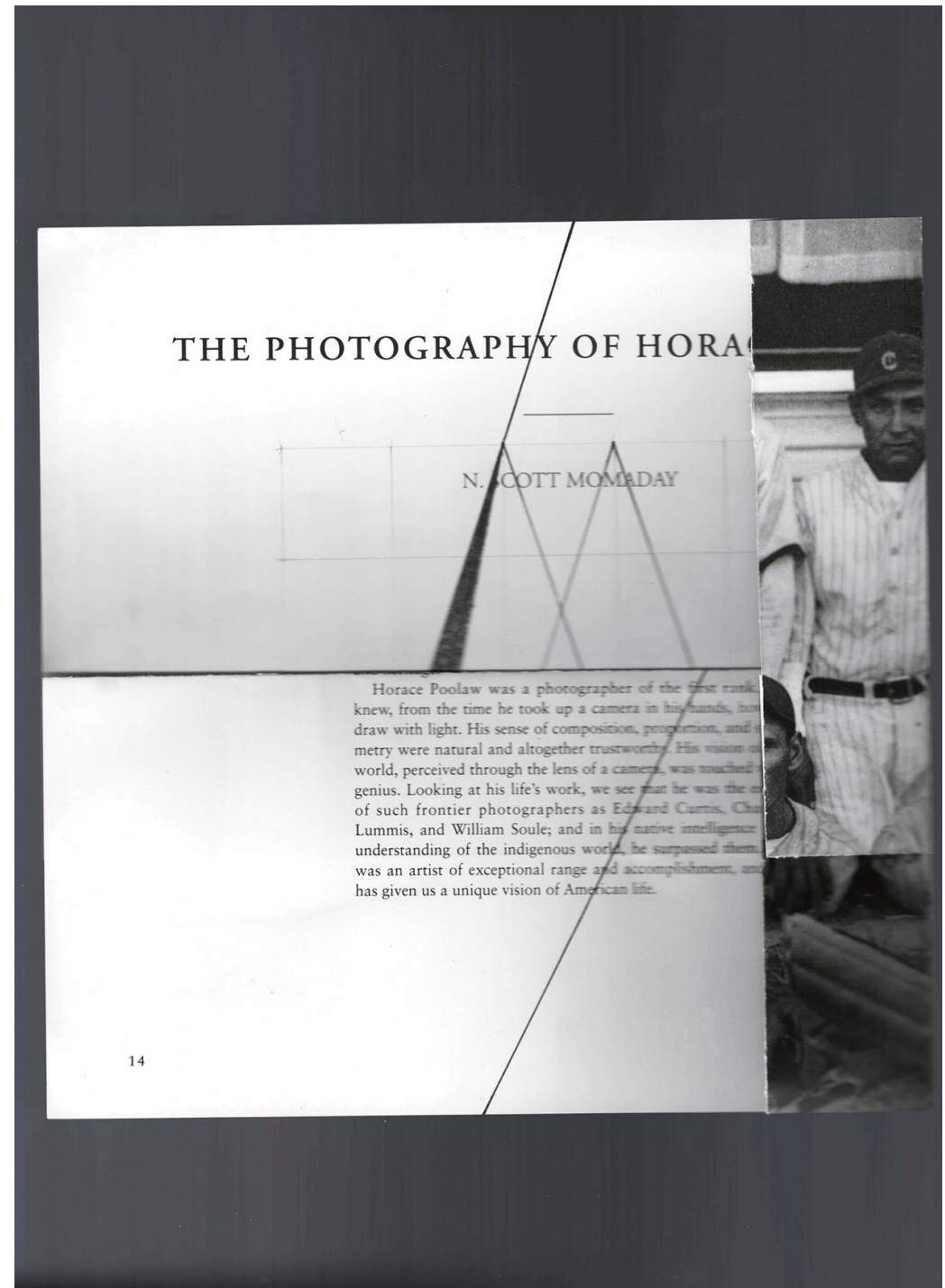
Show students some of Linklater's work from the issue and ask: *Why do you think Linklater wanted to make this work for this issue of the magazine? What do you think is the significance of using pages from a 1995 issue of the same magazine? Through folding and scanning the pages, what does Linklater share, and what does he hold back? Why might he want to hold back personal and cultural information, as well as meaning?*

## Classroom Activity

Beading, quilting, quillwork (using porcupine quills), weaving, and basket-making are traditional activities in some Indigenous communities. For this assignment, ask students to think of a traditional art, craft, or skill in their community, culture, or family. Some examples are sashiko, embroidery, knitting, braiding challah, folding origami, and papel picado.

Ask students to make an artwork inspired by Linklater's method of using images and text overlaid with the traditional skill each student chooses. Students can either use a photocopier, like Linklater did, or cut and paste images and text on top of one another. Indigenous artists sometimes feel pressured to explain and illustrate their cultures, but in this work, Linklater maintains boundaries and privacy. Encourage students to share some meaning and to also hold some back if they'd like.

Duane Linklater, from the series *Other Workers Will Follow*, 2020, for *Aperture*



# Martine Gutierrez

“No one was going to put me on the cover of a Paris fashion magazine, so I thought, I’m gonna make my own.”

—Martine Gutierrez (p. 54)

In Martine Gutierrez’s 2018 project *Indigenous Woman*, she created a 124-page fashion publication, playing the roles of photographer, stylist, creative director, editor in chief, and featured model. Throughout its pages, Gutierrez, who is trans, transforms herself into a revolving roster of identities—in some spreads, wearing go-go boots; and in others, appearing in Indigenous textiles.

“Gutierrez was drawn to this aspect of magazines, and how they offered an opportunity to subvert white, Western standards of beauty: ‘What better way to do that than in a format we all understand?’ [. . .] She appears in Indigenous textiles—some belonging to her Mayan grandmother—against a stark white background, with jewelry, bananas, or the ubiquitous handmade *muñecas*, a type of doll peddled in markets throughout Mexico and Central America. In each case, makeup, props, and costumes become part of the masquerade that Gutierrez employs as a challenge to stable notions of gender and cultural markers, resulting in a foregrounding of the performative aspects of identity.”

—Nadiyah Rivera Fella, from the essay “Martine Gutierrez: Indigenous Woman” (p. 54)

Martine Gutierrez, *Queer Rage, Imagine Life-Size, and I’m Tyra*, 2018



## Classroom Discussion

While showing students some of Gutierrez's work, ask: *What do Gutierrez's costumes, poses, and backgrounds remind you of? How do they tell us we're looking at a fashion magazine? What do you expect to see in a fashion magazine? How do they challenge that? How does she use performance to recreate, comment on, challenge, participate in, and rework fashion magazines?*

## Classroom Activity

Have students create their own images based on Gutierrez's work, using cameras or their cell phones. Ask: *Which aspects of yourself do you see in fashion (beauty, sense of style, insecurity, race, age, gender, ethnicity, culture, interests, glamour, etc.) and which ones are absent? How could you represent yourself in a fashion spread? Which looks, accessories, settings, cultural references, or gender signifiers will you include? Ask students to find clothing, accessories, backdrops, and props that represent who they are, and to make pictures that they would want to see in a fashion magazine.*

When finished, have the students present their work. Ask them to explain why they chose this way to represent themselves. How does their work challenge mainstream ideas of fashion and beauty?

Martine Gutierrez, *Queer Rage, Dear Diary, No Signal*  
During VH1's *Fiercest Divas*, 2018



# Tommy Pico

“Mom texts me a pic of preschool me on my old bed with all my stuffed animals at attention. [...] Mom texts me a pic of her and Grandma at the table playing guitar. These aren’t what I asked for but I can’t ask for more. I think of little me after bedtime, sitting in my sleep shirt in the doorframe, listening to Mama and Grandma making music in the other room. I’d fall asleep like this, comforted, and Mama would lift me back to bed by herself. I wash my hands. I Zoom my therapist. I do cry. It helps. It helps. It helps.”

—Tommy Pico, from the essay “Quarantine Album” (p. 62)

Tommy Pico’s “Quarantine Album” is a rhythmic, first-person account of the artist’s daily life over several months in quarantine during the COVID-19 pandemic. A personal story that almost everyone can relate to, the piece takes readers through Pico’s daily routine, his ups and downs, and a thread of text messages with his mother. He also includes archival photographs of himself and his family.

Pico is the author of four books of poetry, including *IRL* (2016), *Nature Poem* (2017), *Junk* (2018), and *Feed* (2019). Originally from the Viejas Indian Reservation of the Kumeyaay Nation, he lives between Los Angeles and Brooklyn.

## Classroom Discussion

Ask students to look at the photographs before reading the caption below. Ask: *What do you see? What hints or clues do these images give you about the people in them?* Now ask students to read the captions. You can ask questions including: *Who wrote these captions? What kinds of*

*information do they give you? What is their tone? How do the captions change what you thought or reinforce your interpretations? Find family photographs from your own life, ones that evoke strong emotions and memories. Add captions that add context or write a short story about the images, helping us understand them from a personal perspective.*

Tommy Pico, clockwise from top right: Papa in his Wild Bunch jacket. The Wild Bunch was the all-female softball team he used to coach in the '70s. Every rez in San Diego County had a team, 1976; Mom and Grandma in the living room playing guitars, 1982; Me in bed with all my stuffed animals. My mom worked at a thrift store on the rez, so I had quite the haul, 1988; Me and Papa and my rez dog Gus. Ever the wordsmith and manipulator, I told my parents I “craved” a bike. They were so floored that *crave* was in my vocabulary, they bought me the bike, 1988; School picture day! It could be anywhere from kindergarten to second grade. Yes, those teeth are silver. Yes, I had a candy problem, 1989?



FAMILY DAYS 63

# Kimowan Metchewais

“I think North America is a crime scene. I hate to say it, but what happened to the land and people here was/is a crime. People today don’t see that. They understand it, they know it, but it doesn’t seem to mean that much to them. To me, it means a lot, in many ways.”

—Kimowan Metchewais (p. 66)

Kimowan Metchewais (1963–2011) was a Cree artist whose multidisciplinary approach speaks about colonial memory and explores the ground on which contemporary Native art and communities might stand. Through the use of Polaroids, installation, and photo-collage, he questions fixed representation and authenticity, asking: “What makes Indian people Indian?”

“‘Cold Lake is a kind of prayer,’ Metchewais said of the work [pictured on this page]. That prayer is to home, family, and memory. *Cold Lake* depicts multiple iterations of a scene of Metchewais and his brother Conrad wading below the long horizon line of the lake. It combines several snapshots taken by the artist’s mother from the lakeshore. The photographs are ‘a record of family love,’ binding Metchewais, his family members, and the lake and sky in kinship relations.”

—Christopher Green, from the essay “Kimowan Metchewais: A Kind of Prayer” (pp. 67–68)



## Classroom Discussion

Students can consider the following questions: *Why does Kimowan Metchewais say that “North America is a crime scene”? What might “colonial memory” be? What has been done to the land and the people here? Describe what you see in Cold Lake Fishing? Metchewais describes this photograph as “a record of family love”; what do you see in the image that reflects that statement?*

Kimowan Metchewais, *Cold Lake Fishing*, undated

# Krista Belle Stewart

“As Stewart observes, when Indigenous people contemplate *Indianer* life, they laugh. And then they feel anger. She is aiming for the complete package—not simply wonder, irony, and humor, but also a sense, understood but less often experienced, of Indigenous indignation.”

—Philip J. Deloria, from the essay “Krista Belle Stewart: Truth to Material” (p. 86)

In *Truth to Material*, Krista Belle Stewart, an Indigenous Syilx Nation artist based in Berlin, documents the *Indianer* subculture in Germany and its annual summer camps. Originated in the late nineteenth century, the *Indianer* subculture revolves around a fanatical affection for North American Native Americans. There is an uneasiness and tension in Stewart’s photographs of white individuals dressed in authentic and traditional-looking Native garments. As an Indigenous artist, “Stewart’s presence reminds them that there are moral quandaries surrounding history and appropriation yet to be considered.”

Krista Belle Stewart, *Coke Finger*, Grimma, Germany, 2007



## Classroom Discussion

Ask students: *What do you notice about the individuals in these images? What is the Indianer scene? Who is part of it, and who are they depicting? Why might this make Indigenous viewers feel indignation? In Stewart's exhibition of this work, she places the images on the floor—forcing viewers to step on top of the work. Why do you think Stewart chooses to do this? What type of reaction or feeling do you think she is trying to create in her installation?*



Krista Belle Stewart, *Truth to Material*, 2019. Installation at Nanaimo Art Gallery, British Columbia, Canada. Photograph by Sean Fenzl

# Guadalupe Maravilla

“Our ancestors were about creating mythologies, and I connected with that.”

—Guadalupe Maravilla (p. 126)

Through a mixture of sculpture, performance, and photography, Guadalupe Maravilla’s work *The Coyote* is a visual retelling of his epic migratory journey as a child through

Central America and Mexico and into the U.S. “In ancient Indigenous mythologies, the coyote is a sacred trickster that shifts between being a predator and a protector,” writes Carribeon Fragoza (p. 126). For Maravilla, the coyote is an intimate companion and often plays the protagonist in his sculpture and performances.

## Classroom Discussion

Read the following passage and have a class conversation about the artist.

“Born Irvin Morazan, he changed his name to Guadalupe Maravilla in 2016, using the feminine first name his mother had intended to give him at birth since he was born on an auspicious date, December 12, when Latin America’s holiest patroness, the Virgin of Guadalupe, is celebrated. Taking his undocumented father’s fake last name, Maravilla, roughly translating to *marvel* or *miracle*, the artist emerged with a new identity and an origin story worthy of its telling.”

—Carribeon Fragoza, from the essay “Guadalupe Maravilla: The Coyote” (p. 126)

Summarize why the artist chose the name “Guadalupe Maravilla.” *What does it mean? How does this new name relate to mythology? What does your name mean? What name could you choose for yourself instead and why? What is a story in your family that has the power of myth? It could be a story your older relatives tell, one you learned in a spiritual setting, something people repeat about milestones (birth, immigration, falling in love, death, confrontation, escape). What are some myths that guide you or that you know? What is the land that you call home? How could you photograph this myth and/or the land? Are they connected? What do you seek protection from? What would you make—what objects could protect you, symbolically?*

Guadalupe Maravilla, *Disease Thrower Performance*, 2020. Performance at Knockdown Center, Queens, New York

