

Native America

This resource is adapted from a guide created by *Aperture* Magazine to support their Fall 2020 issue and traveling exhibition titled *Native America: In Translation*, curated by Wendy Red Star. This guide supports the exhibition on view at the MoCP from June 26 – May 12, 2024.

You may learn more about educational programs at the Museum of Contemporary Photography at Columbia College Chicago [here](#). To schedule a virtual tour of the exhibition or print viewing with your class, please visit [here](#).

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**NATIVE
AMERICA**

Introduction and About the Curator

Native America: In Translation, curated by Wendy Red Star, considers the wide-ranging work of photographers and lens-based artists who pose challenging questions about land rights, identity and heritage, and histories of colonialism.

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.

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."

On putting together the exhibition and magazine issue, Red Star states: "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."

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.

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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The MoCP is supported by Columbia College Chicago, MoCP Advisory Board, the Museum Council, individuals, and private and corporate foundations. The 2023-2024 exhibition season is sponsored in part by The Comer Foundation, DCASE CityArts Program, Phillip and Edith Leonian Foundation, the Pritzker Traubert Foundation, the Efroymsen Family Fund, the Henry Nias Foundation, and the Illinois Arts Council Agency. This project is partially supported by a CityArts grant from the City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events.

Topics for Discussion

Documentation

Creator

Objectivity

Insider vs. outsider

Humor and play

Presentation and performance

Reworking the archive

Representation

Cultural appropriation

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.

Exhibition Highlight

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"

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



Questions for Looking and Discussion

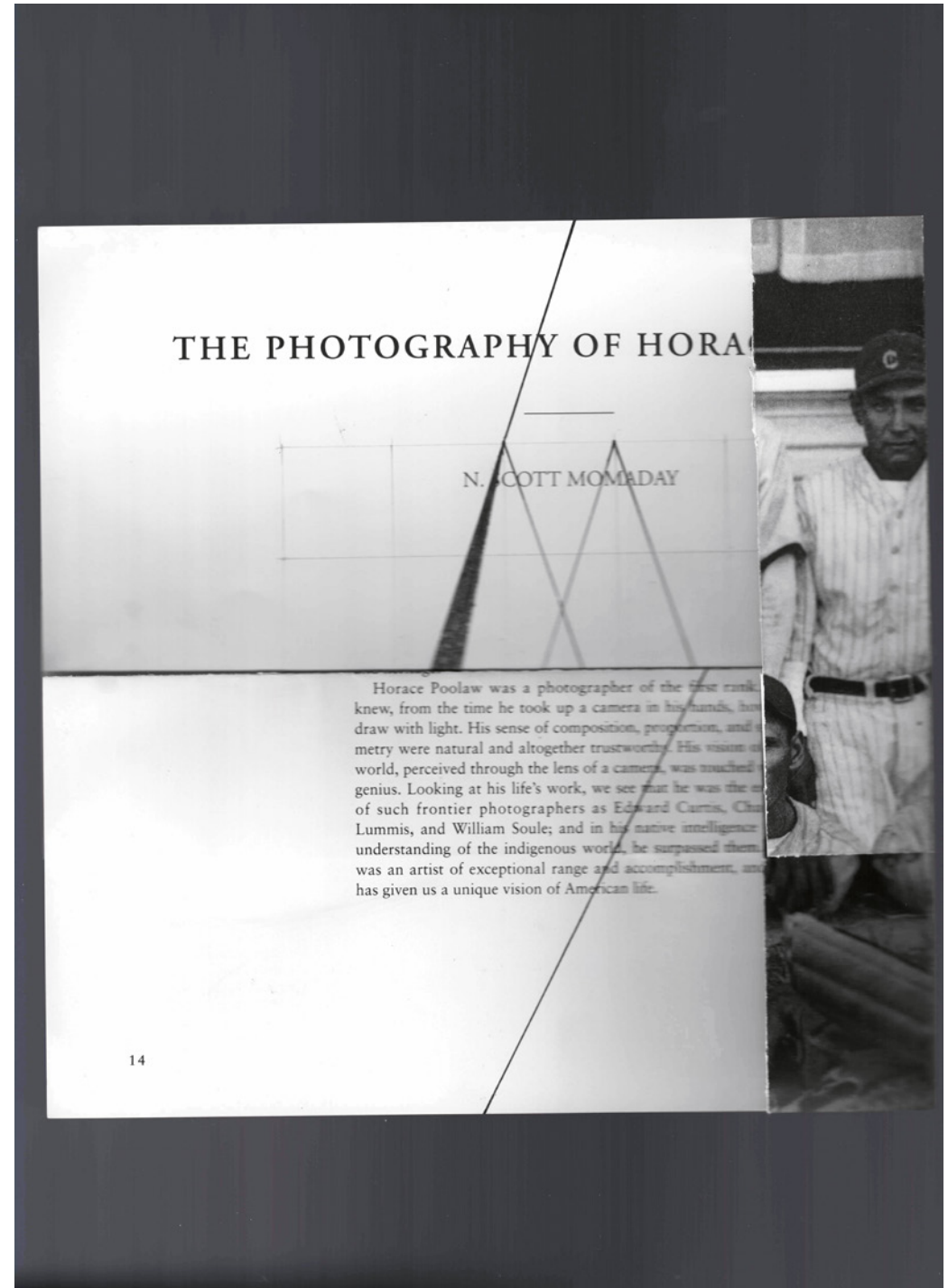
Why do you think Linklater wanted to make this work for this issue of the magazine and exhibition? What do you think is the significance of using pages from a 1995 issue of the same magazine? Through folding and scanning the pages, what does Linklater share, and what does he hold back? Why might he want 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*



Exhibition Highlight

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

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”

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



Questions for Looking and Discussion

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



Exhibition Highlight

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

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”

Questions for Looking and Discussion

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



Exhibition Highlight

Guadalupe Maravilla

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

—Guadalupe Maravilla

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 (“Native America,” *Aperture*, September 8, 2020, 126). For Maravilla, the coyote is an intimate companion and often plays the protagonist in his sculpture and performances.

Questions for Looking and 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” (Ibid)

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



Additional Classroom Activities

In this piece by Wendy Red Star in the MoCP collection, the artist appropriates a photograph she found in the archives of the National Museum of the American Indian of her great-grandmother to reference the star quilt pattern. Quilts are commonly shared and given away in many Indigenous communities during ceremonial rites. However, quilting was taught to Native Americans by colonialist missionaries in the nineteenth century, and the blankets became replacements for traditional buffalo robes as the bison population diminished. Red Star's collage nods to the complexity of cultural heritage and traditions due to colonialism.

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.

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?*

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.

Who do you think wrote the captions? In what contexts do you find them? How does your family share their stories?

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?*



Wendy Red Star, *Her Dreams Are True (Julia Bad Boy)* 2021. Collection of the Museum of Contemporary Photograph (not in the exhibition)

Illinois Learning Standards Addressed in this Guide

Visual Arts Standards

VA:Re7.2.K-12

Perceive and analyze artistic work. Visual imagery influences understanding of, and responses to, the world.

VA:Re8.K-12

Construct meaningful interpretations of artistic work. People gain insights into meanings of artworks by engaging in the process of art criticism.

VA:Re9.K-12

Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work. People evaluate art based on various criteria.

VA:Cn11.K-12

Relate artistic ideas and works with social, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding. People develop ideas and understandings of society, culture, and history through their interactions with and analysis of art.

Media Arts Standards

MA:Re7.1.PK-12

Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work. Media artworks can be appreciated and interpreted through analyzing their components.

MA:Re8.1.PK-12

Anchor Standard 8: Construct meaningful interpretations of artistic work. Interpretation and appreciation require engagement with the content, form, and context of media artworks.

MA:Re9.1.PK-12

Anchor Standard 9: Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work. Skillful evaluation and critique are critical components of experiencing, appreciating, and producing media artworks.

Social Sciences Standards

SS.H.8.9-12.

Analyze key historical events and contributions of individuals through a variety of perspectives, including those of historically under-represented groups.

SS.H.11.9-12.

Analyze multiple and complex causes and effects of events in the past.