

What Was Always Yours and Never Lost

Sky Hopinka

It's a lonely thought that outside of the safe harbors of reservations, towns, circles of friends, and remembrances of what was and could be, are whole other worlds that at the same time are familiar yet foreign. We don't just walk in two worlds—it's never that easy—we dip in and out of so many. Our accents change, our dialects shift, our bodies become larger or smaller, our voices become meeker, louder, and our jokes become softer and more benign—teasing in a way that can be harsh, mean, and morbid. It can be lonely, but there's a freedom in being alone. Within that freedom is a way to find others who have already said what you've said, have thought the ideas you've thought, and are doing things you didn't know could be done. It's a relief and a beginning.

This project at Yale Union began in such a way. Presented with so much space and support, my first thought walking in that main room was that this would be a great place for a powwow. This is where I want my friends to be. Thinking of how powwows began historically and then how that relates to what it means to have one in a gallery was a line of thought I didn't have a clear answer to, but was eager to see where it would go. That became the first part of this exhibition. The video installations, which make up the second part of the exhibition, began in a similar way, with conversations between Hope Svenson and me about how film and videos could occupy this space in a way that speaks to and adds to the powwow; each with contemporary stances on what it means to claim space, and to be seen on one's own terms.

The powwow is an event that began grounded in ceremony, that has ceremonial elements, but is also a space

where those elements have changed and adapted over time. The first powwows were based on war dances and recollections of battle, and after the Indian Wars they became opportunities to draw tourists to reservations to generate income and to assert a continued presence in a country quickly trying to erase us.

Over the last one hundred and thirty odd years they've transformed and evolved and fallen in and out of favor. New dances were added, new songs were made, and new traditions practiced. They have a complicated history, but a history that ultimately arrives at a present where that past has created a dissonance of dance arenas around the U.S. and Canada that have become locations of ceremony, of tourism, of competition, of tradition, of performance, of privacy and of so much more. They are complex spaces, that no one person or entity can define and say what they are and what they aren't. That's what is beautiful about them, no matter how big or small. When I was organizing my first powwow with friends in 2007, I asked my mom, what if no one comes? And she told me that all you need to have a good powwow is a drum and a dancer, pointing to the individual people that create the whole. Powwows are entities that change and adapt with the people participating—no two are alike—and everyone has their own history and tradition they're bringing to the drums, to the dance floor, and to the audience.

The Yale Union Powwow happened on April 13, 2019, and it was realized, it was attended, and the dancers danced and the drum groups Indian Nation and Bad Soul sang. Fred Hill MC'd all day long and it was a powwow. I'm still left with questions of what it means to have one in a gallery, and what are the expectations from an Indigenous audience and participants, and how do those differ and align with the expectations of a non-Indigenous, non-powwow audience. This is all Indian land, and that's often forgotten, or not acknowledged, and often Natives aren't seen in spaces that we

never left. One of my favorite things about powwows is that they can happen anywhere—gymnasiums, fairgrounds, rodeos, public parks, high schools and colleges, reservations and cities—and for one day Yale Union was a powwow, it was ours, and we were seen.

The second part of the exhibition, the films and videos, offer another way of approaching presence that is complementary to an event such as the powwow. Here you have a number of films from a number of makers that come from different backgrounds, different countries, different homelands, and different nations. Each making works that traverse a wide range of topics dealing directly and indirectly with indigeneity—assertions of identity and presence in the face of and regardless of colonial history and outdated traditions of anthropology and ethnography. For me, they fit together so well because of how different they are, and how they will occupy the space at Yale Union will give me and you a new way to experience them.

I'd rather not describe the films, I'd rather have you watch them. Write the artists for screeners if you can't see the program, and show their work and begin a conversation with them. All of the filmmakers in this program I love and respect, and they have all challenged and transformed the way that I look at the world and how I exist in it. They've been generous and kind, they've made me laugh and let me cry. They make space for poetry, for beauty, for movement between cosmological and visceral worlds, sometimes blurring the lines between both. The powwow people and the filmmakers; they claim what was always theirs, and celebrate what was never lost. —SH

LIST OF WORKS, IN ORDER FROM NORTH TO SOUTH:

Adam Khalil, Zack Khalil, and Jackson Polys

The Violence of a Civilization Without Secrets,
2017, 9:43 min, HD

Thirza Cuthand

Reclamation, 2018, 13:11 min, HD

James Luna

The History of the Luiseño People, 1993,
27:47 min, video

Sky Hopinka

First Annual, 2019, 14:18 min, HD

Caroline Monnet

Mobilize, 2015, 3:33 min, 16mm/HD

Gephyrophobia, 2012, 2:21 min, 16mm/HD

Colectivo Los Ingrávidos

Faces in the Crowd, 2019, video installation

CENTER DISPLAY

1. *Luvina*, 2019, 3:08 min
2. *Transmission/Perception*, 2016, 2:18 min
3. *Triptych B*, 2016, 17:31 min
4. *Sicario*, 2015, 7:43 min

WEST DISPLAY

1. *Altars/Shrines*, 2019, 3:28 min
2. *Piramide erosionada/Eroded pyramid*, 2019, 8:49 min
3. *Coyolxauhqui*, 2017, 9:46 min
4. *El trabajo de nuestros compañeros/The job of the missing fellows*, 2014, 12:20 min

EAST DISPLAY

1. *¿Has visto?/Have you seen?*, 2017, 6:55 min
2. *Anábasis/Anabasis*, 2019, 5:39 min
3. *Sangre seca/Dry blood*, 2017, 9:18 min
4. *Paralaje/Paralax*, 2019, 5:00 min
5. *Memorial/Memorial*, 2019, 9:44 min

VIDEO PROJECTION

THE SUN QUARTET

1. *Sun Stone*, 2017, 8:24 min
2. *San Juan River*, 2017, 12:50 min
3. *Conflagration*, 2017, 16:22 min
4. *November 2/Far from Ayotzinapa*, 2018, 22:32 min

On September 26, 2014, forty-three students from the Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers' College were disappeared in Iguala, Guerrero, Mexico by local police and the Mexican Army. Every year the students take several buses to travel to Mexico City to commemorate the anniversary of the 1968 Tlatelolco Massacre.

Faces in the Crowd is an audiovisual composition in multiple movements, political composition in natural resistance, kinematic composition in body mutations: a sun stone where youth blooms in protest, a river overflowing the streets, an ancestry that arises from the surface of the objects, the burning plain rising in the city, the burn of a nation that traces the celluloid, the clamor of the people who, after the night of September 26, 2014, shook Mexico. The disappearance of forty-three students of Ayotzinapa opened a massive breach in the Mexican political body, a new branch of the resistance arose. *Faces in the Crowd* is a cinematographic composition of this event. A perceptive experience of the current Mexican war. These images are an expiring breath in danger of extinction. These images are what get extinguished, consumed: a drop, a pure intensity which only appears when falling. These audiovisual crowds consist, in the presence of the image, as an affected body, harassed by the unique threads of entropy. A face exhausted and reanimated by the continuous sound trance that traverses the battlefield. Faces for an eye that would not need to see.

Until We Find You: The Disappeared of Ayotzinapa!

Thank you to all the dancers, all the drummers,
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Jason Stacona, Ed Goodell, Bad Soul, Indian Nation,
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YALE UNION

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