

Emergence from the Shadow: First Peoples' Photographic Perspectives

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As a guest curator for the exhibition *Emergence from the Shadow: First Peoples' Photographic Perspectives*, shown at the Canadian Museum of Civilization from 23 October 1999 to 2 January 2001, I wanted to challenge notions of Aboriginal peoples prevalent in popular culture as disseminated through decades of anthropological research.¹ Cigar-store icons, television, and the Hollywood Western – among other popular forms – have played major roles in creating and ingraining stereotypical images of the North American Indian. Emerging from the shadow cast by this popularized notion of Indian life, I organized the show along two perspectives to explore themes of community and continuity and how the past influences the present in both cultural and artistic terms. The works representing the first perspective, “Through the Anthropologist’s Camera,” were situated on one side of the gallery (Fig. 14.1) and comprised historical photographs by four anthropologists – Charles Marius Barbeau (1883–1969), Harlan Smith (1872–1940), Francis Knowles (1886–1953), and Frederick Wilkerson Waugh (1872–1924) – who studied First Peoples for the Geological Survey of Canada (GSC) during the early twentieth century. The works that expressed the second perspective, “Perspectives from the Urban Frontier,” were installed on the opposite side of the gallery, facing the historical photographs (Fig. 14.2). These were the photographs of contemporary Aboriginal artists Shelley Niro, Greg Staats, Mary Anne Barkhouse, Rosalie Favell, and Greg Hill, and an installation piece by Barry Ace. Each contemporary artist was paired with a historical photographic portrait positioned to face his or her particular section.



The photographs in “Through the Anthropologist’s Camera” were culled from thousands of fieldwork photographs in the archive of the Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC). The archive constitutes an astonishing record that represents a new genre that I call “fieldwork portraiture.” In my initial research into the CMC archive, I began to see a pattern in the approach anthropologists took to their subjects. Two categories of photographs emerged. The first included

the typical dispassionate studies of First Nations people and culture. The second consisted of more portrait-like photographs. This latter group intrigued me and inspired the exhibition.

In the fieldwork portraiture, the images appear to serve a purpose outside of the anthropological imperative; there are no feathers or beadwork-laced clothing, no ceremonies or tepees in sight. Fieldwork portraits simply and elegantly show the humanity of the people. While reading

Figure 14.1
Installation shot, *Emergence from the Shadow: First Peoples’ Photographic Perspectives*. Courtesy of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Gatineau, QC.



Figure 14.2
Installation shot, *Emergence from the Shadow: First Peoples' Photographic Perspectives*. Courtesy of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Gatineau, QC.

the anthropologists' field notes and correspondence, I began to see where these portraits may have originated. Unlike the stereotypical scenario of anthropologists coming into contact with a so-called primitive people, these anthropologists encountered a people who exerted control over what was taking place. The anthropologists had to meet the approval of the community members before they could begin their work. It thus appears reasonable to think that the portrait served as currency for gaining entry into the com-

munity. Demonstrating the control First Peoples often exerted over the photographic process, these images bear witness to the sitters' world and are left as a gift to the future.

In the second facet of the exhibition – “Perspectives from the Urban Frontier” – I showcased the work of six contemporary First Peoples artists. Their various photo-based works speak to self-determination, to the reality of today's urban First Peoples, and to the deep bond that exists between modern First Peoples and their

ancestors. Through a juxtaposition of historical photographs with photo-based works by today's First Peoples artists, I wanted to demonstrate the idea that time travels through us, creating links between past and present.

Theory and Research:

Seeking Aboriginal History in Photography

This exhibition, in effect, “emerged” from my own photographic practice. Over the years, many photographs I have taken in Ottawa have been of monuments and various Indian figures that are on the grounds of Parliament, the National Capital Commission (including Nepean Point), or the Department of Justice. I think about the impact that those depictions of Aboriginal people have on tourists and those who work and live here. This experience has been the basis of my investigation. I turned first to Library and Archives Canada as a source of material to start me thinking about who we as Aboriginal people look to as inspirational and important figures in our own history. Certainly history has suffered, and in the breakup of continuity that took place, I was curious about how one might regenerate an interest in Aboriginal history. Going through material at Library and Archives Canada and the Canadian Museum of Civilization archives, I came across an element waiting to be discovered, one that would affect us today as people and as artists. This was the reason I wanted to invite the six artists to be in this exhibition – to develop a dialogue around this idea. I found that so much of our history is voiceless in the sense that we find it by looking at photographs of monuments or at history books. We wonder where our history is – why isn't it here? Why are we portrayed in an unrecognizable way? These questions were important to me and, as I found out, important to the artists as well. I think we have a responsibility to our own communities to investigate these ideas, these issues, these questions, and ensure that this information goes back to the generations that come.

Emergence from the Shadow is based on a dialogue that exists between past and present. The use of historical photographs opened up a window, or a possibility, to

the present world. I presented the images many times to the artists to see whether or not they were comfortable working with them. In terms of the use of the space in the Museum of Civilization, I originally wanted to work with the idea of centrifugal force, of creating a space where there is movement taking place. I wanted people to come into the exhibition space and actually feel that they want to continue to move throughout the exhibition area. The idea of movement was also a way to break the dividing line between the past and the present and address the question of how to get people thinking about the ways history is connected to the present. What I was also interested in was not anthropology, but the communication of ideas and the expansion of the original documents. I felt that the photograph was a catalyst, a point of departure. From a curatorial point of view, working largely from negatives and contact prints, I had the opportunity to determine the final size of the exhibition photograph, to think about the information contained in it, and to decide what needed to be brought out and how to achieve that result effectively in a final image. I also wanted to look at the photograph not as a document that exists in stasis, but rather as one that has the capacity to expand. I think it is important to communicate the idea that history is an evolving and constantly changing entity, and that we have an impact on it as well. I was also thinking about future generations and what we want to leave for them.

An interesting aspect of the process was my discovery that to be a photographer I had to try to understand photographs and what both the anthropologists and the sitters were thinking when those photographs were taken so long ago, a line of inquiry that eventually led to my curating this exhibition. But what I realized at a certain point, given the history and the relations between Aboriginal people and the dominant society as they are now, is that much of the history was being wiped away. When anthropologists visited the Aboriginal peoples at that time, around the turn of the twentieth century, their purposes were clear, and the community knew what they were because their cultures were being attacked; languages were disappearing, as well as ceremonies. When I was a young boy, the reality of loss was

always impressed on my mind; so-and-so passed away and had died with the information that he had and had not passed it on because nobody was around to take it on. From what I understand, when these photographs were taken, the people did not have access to photography themselves, for the most part.

So I thought, well, how did they view being photographed? The natural assumption is they assumed the “Indian” kind of pose or adopted a manner before the camera at the direction of the photographer. In the case of the photographs taken by Edward S. Curtis, if they didn’t look “Indian” enough, Curtis simply dressed them up to look more “Indian,” for his own audience of course.² But I thought: when they looked into that camera lens, what were they thinking about? What was going on in their mind? When I began working with this idea, delving into the Geological Survey of Canada photographic collection at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, I began to think that the people depicted in these early anthropological portraits imparted something. They were part of the process; they just didn’t sit there – there was a reason why they sat there. What was that? Were they looking to their future generations and thinking, yes, our culture is changing but we want our descendants to know what we look like. It is similar to when you meet somebody and you look in their eyes and shake their hand – the way they present themselves to you says a lot about who that person is. I believe the same interchange happened when Aboriginal people stood before the camera. They were participating in a process. That is my perspective about the photographs; that is why they speak so loudly to me. It’s because when I look at them I feel humbled. I feel I am the negotiator. I am bringing them out, in the best, most honourable way that I possibly can. When I began looking, I realized there is a voice that is better than those anthropological photographs and that the reason it has not emerged until this time is because we have not been looking at them in the way that I have described. Now that we are, the dynamics around those images will begin to change.

In terms of the curatorial approach to this exhibition – and I must add, this is a query that first provoked me to become a curator – there was the question of how

do we get the information and ideas that we generate out to the public, how do we communicate what it is that we want to say, what we feel should be understood? I think that it is a growing process, it is an emerging process. *Emergence from the Shadow* was seen by viewers from all over the world. I was curious to see how effectively an exhibition like this could change perceptions about Aboriginal peoples. Most importantly, I did not want to have anybody dressed up in a stereotypical way. Viewers who had preconceived ideas of Aboriginal life would be shocked; none of the Aboriginal people in the photographs – contemporary or historical – would be dressed as the viewers would expect them to be. Viewers would see people. For me, that is what is important: people coming together and talking. The most effective way to deal with stereotypes and associated issues in a diverse society – the only way that we can really challenge and change things – is by talking. This was the idea behind these photographs: you can come into an Aboriginal community, and certainly, if you want to go to see an elder or someone in the community and talk to them, you can go into their house, as a humble person, and you sit down and you treat them with respect. This is the same idea I wanted to convey through this exhibition and that the artists talked about as well; it is about the communication of ideas. And my hope was that the exhibition would move people; that we would have people from museums coming to hear the artists talk about their work, that we would have people coming from art history departments who one day will be teachers, instructors, who would hear what Aboriginal people have to say about their work, and we would build on that nucleus.

The Exhibition: Using Historical Photography to Create a Dialogue between Past and Present

At the entrance to the exhibition space, I placed the Shelley Niro work *Are You My Sister?*, which juxtaposes a contemporary photograph by artist Shelley Niro with *Daughter of Jessie Lewis* by F.W. Waugh. The work encapsulates the enduring sense of community between First Peoples, past and present. This diptych

panel greeted the visitor in the entrance area. It set the tone for the exhibition: that a relationship takes place between the past and present within the gallery space. The title of the piece also makes the point of a meeting or reintroduction taking place between the two segments of the exhibition; it suggests a family gathering. I see the work of all the artists in the exhibition as paired with images from the past.

The historical side of the gallery, which was dedicated to the anthropologist's camera, displayed works by each anthropologist grouped in sections. Anthropologists in the field often used photography as part of their documentary process, and the archives of the Canadian Museum of Civilization contain many thousands of photographs that record various aspects of the lives of First Peoples. These include many photographs of individuals of the fieldwork portraiture type; in these, there is a notable absence of stereotypical images of feather headdresses, painted faces, and bows and arrows.

The intimacy of the bond between photographer and sitter is readily apparent in this selection of photographs. More than a simple anthropological record, the photographs provide a window to the past, enabling us to become better acquainted with the living and breathing people they portray. Through this photographic record, the sitters have, in effect, ensured that evidence of their world would be guarded for the future discovery by their descendants.

A good example is the early photographic work undertaken by F.W. Waugh among the Iroquois people of the Six Nations Reserve near Brantford, Ontario. Having grown up close to Six Nations, Waugh had a good understanding of the Iroquois. His respect for them is evident in his choice of lighting and photographic composition, as well as in the way he reveals the relationship between individuals and their environments. In the more iconic work of commercial photographers like Edward S. Curtis, the priority was to capture what was understood to be the "authentic" tribal Indian character, even though the tribal world had already undergone a series of changes as a consequence of reserve life. Photographers went to great lengths to ensure that their images communicated a sense of timelessness, with the result that

any signs of modernity were edited out of the final image. Waugh and his GSC colleagues did the opposite; they showed the everyday world of their sitters, including depictions of log homes, corn cribs, as well as the clothing of the sitters, who sometimes appeared in their best clothing or in work clothes. There was a relaxed feeling in these images, a sense often missing from other photographers' work.

Waugh began his association with the Geological Survey of Canada in 1911 as a contract ethnologist. He worked in the areas of material culture, food, medicine, ceremonies, ethno-botany, and linguistics, and his tribal studies included the Iroquois and Ojibwa of Ontario and the Naskapi and Inuit of Labrador. In 1913 Waugh was formally hired to work as preparator for the GSC, and he was later appointed associate ethnologist.

Charles Marius Barbeau was another prominent ethnologist. A trained anthropologist, folklorist, and ethnomusicologist, Barbeau worked for the GSC between 1911 and 1948. His interest in recording the stories, languages, and songs of First Peoples took him from Ontario and Oklahoma to British Columbia and Quebec. His study of Huron culture began near Amherstburg, Ontario, where he met Mary McKee, who suggested that he continue his research among her relatives in Oklahoma. "Go and see them," she said, "and there you will learn far more than I can give you." Barbeau accordingly travelled to Oklahoma in 1911, where he recorded the Huron language, songs, stories, and names of clans. During his travels, Barbeau also set up his camera, recording the faces and environments of the people who shared their stories with him.

Barbeau's portraits document people who were then believed to be among the last to speak the Huron language and practise Huron traditions. Their level of comfort before the camera shows their trust in Barbeau's desire to preserve their traditions for posterity. This relationship between the Hurons and Barbeau represents a two-way dialogue between ethnologist and Aboriginal peoples. The subjects of these photographs understood that their way of life, especially their language, was quickly disappearing. This is obvious from the conversations of my elders, who were especially con-

cerned about the younger generation's lack of interest in their Iroquois culture. Fearing that it would be lost forever, these earlier Aboriginal sitters believed that the best solution was to entrust the anthropologists with their knowledge. Although such thinking coincided with the salvage mentality that drove anthropology, it nonetheless helped preserve aspects of culture for the future.

I also believe that this logic is what eventually led me to the Canadian Museum of Civilization, where my elder said to me during a conversation, "What happened to the information the anthropologist from Ottawa had collected from Pa?" This is a trail that could easily have been bypassed given the negative sentiments First Nations people have toward anthropologists and museums, both of which have been criticized for preying upon First Nations culture. However, I am not sure that I could have curated this project if it had not been for the influence of my elder or if I had thought that First Nations people were critical of my archival work.

The anthropologist Francis Knowles had an artistic sensibility, and his anthropologist's eye for detail is clearly evident in his photographic portraits of the Iroquois. He was a trained artist, and his photographs provide an unexpected and compassionate record, transcending the scientific instruments he used as a physical anthropologist. Knowles's fieldwork included noting the physical details of his subjects, not only facial features and the length of limbs, but also skin and hair pigment. This clinical approach was in marked contrast to his portraits, which he handled in two ways. One method was to depict the subject from the side and front in the fashion reminiscent of the typical mug shot seen in police archives. But Knowles also had another class of portrait, one that showed a relaxed sitter who was engaged with the photographer. We can almost hear the friendly banter going back and forth.

Knowles began working for the GSC as a physical anthropologist in 1912. He undertook fieldwork among the Iroquois of the Six Nations Reserve in southern Ontario and the Seneca (Iroquoian) of the Tonawanda Reserve in New York State. Using detailed body measurements and hair samples taken from living subjects,

Knowles compared this data with pre-contact skeletal remains from Iroquoian archaeological sites. In this way, he hoped to determine the evolutionary impact of European contact on First Peoples.

Harlan Ingersoll Smith's photographic portraits of First Peoples in British Columbia provide a detailed look at a unique way of life. His portraits also merit artistic consideration for his use of composition, natural light, and communication with the people he photographed. Each person is placed in a position of power before the camera – usually in a frontal pose with direct eye contact – opening a clear and powerful line of communication between sitter and viewer. This was contrary to the typical format of the time, which placed First Peoples at a distance from the camera and in profile. Smith recorded extensive caption information, including dates of birth, names, family lineage, community roles, time, and location. He also ensured that the people he photographed received copies of the pictures he took. This may have been an unusual practice in the early twentieth century, for most First Peoples likely never saw the photographs that were taken of them. Smith joined the Geological Survey of Canada in 1911. His ethnographic fieldwork included the Bella Coola, Nuxalk, Carrier, and Chilcotin First Peoples and focused on their use of plant and animal materials, social organization, and ritual traditions.

Although little documentation exists regarding the photographic training of Waugh, Barbeau, Smith, and Knowles, their photographs provide the evidence that they were all accomplished photographers. Moreover, from the technical expertise they display in their use of available light, to their skilful handling of awkward large-format cameras and glass negatives, to the intimate way they capture the individuality of their subjects, it is clear that all four men had a passion for photography.

As accomplished portraitists, these anthropologists must also be considered to have been serious artists. Knowles, in particular, had formal artistic training and a passion for sculpting clay busts. Waugh, Barbeau, and Smith showed mastery of the basic principles of painterly composition, and their photographic portraits

are clear evidence of a developed artistic sensibility.

Unlike photographs that function as simple documentation, evocative portraits like the ones featured in this exhibition are more than a historical record. They are the creative expressions of photographers who wanted to capture the essence of humanity. Changes in photographic technologies also helped to convey more intimate messages about Aboriginal life and individuals. When most of us think of early photographic portraits, we think of stiff poses and unsmiling faces that give us no hint of the person behind the image. This was indeed true of very early photographs, in part because of a need for long exposure times. By the early twentieth century, however, photography had become more advanced, and photographers were able to capture people laughing, mourning, at work and at play, making them seem more like real people than "types." This interest in capturing the individuality of those being photographed did not always extend to cultural minorities, however. Members of other cultural groups were frequently considered sufficiently "exotic" on their own, and early photographers often found it unnecessary to capture their unique personalities.

Today, we understand that photography can act as a window, enabling us to learn more about people as individuals. Knowles's 1925 portrait of Mrs Blue Sky (Fig. 14.3) does this admirably, reaching out to us across time through the warmth and openness in her face. By posing the newlyweds, Mr and Mrs Benson, standing proudly before the church in which they were just married, with the clergyman, church, and guests just out of focus



Figure 14.3

Francis Howe Seymour Knowles. *Mrs. Blue Sky*, Seneca, Tonawanda, New York, 1915. No. 35528. Courtesy of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Gatineau, QC.



Figure 14.4
Marius Barbeau. *Mary McKee with a Mortar, Pestle and Baskets, Essex, Ontario, 1912*. No. 19945. Courtesy of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Gatineau, QC.

in the background, Harlan Smith captures the lives of First Peoples as they adapted and interpreted the ways of European arrivals.

In 1918 Waugh photographed Thomas Smoke in a sequence of images that recorded him at his workbench making canes. At some point during the sequence, a frontal portrait was made. With Smoke engaged with the camera and positioned within his own environment, his strong personality emerges. One can almost hear him say, “Now make sure you take a good picture of me!” The young Ojibwa boy seen peering out of a 1916 photograph by Waugh creates a new visual dynamic within the image. Although the photograph was meant as a visual record of a man’s coat, it is the young boy’s face that attracts us. This lifts the photograph from its anthropological focus and enables it to express universal elements that speak of human beings, not objects.

The 1912 photograph that Barbeau took of Mary McKee engages us on several levels through the visual information it provides (Fig. 14.4). The first level is an anthropological one – the collection of cultural data and artifacts – as seen in the position of the bowl, the grinding tool, and the sitter. A second level highlights the environmental elements: Mary in her rocking-chair, with her house in the background. The final level is the portrait of Mary herself, as grandmother, mother, and community elder. A curious aspect of Mary’s portrait is the way in which it is set up; it is the only Barbeau photo that shows a subject posed with the objects Barbeau may have purchased for the museum. In one respect it has the appearance of a museum diorama. Could this have been a prototype for a museum display case? If this was a possibility, then such a display case would have been a remarkable achievement at the time. The photographs the anthropologists were making had the feeling of dioramas that, if installed, would have cast a much more realistic light on the First Nations world, showing a people in transition and not caught in time.

Contemporary Aboriginal Photography

In 1983 the Native American Photographers Show, held in Oklahoma, brought together First Peoples artists

from across North America. The show not only heralded a new vision of North American First Peoples, but also made it clear that there were many Aboriginal photographic artists at work across the continent.

The contemporary works featured in *Emergence from the Shadow* reflect the legacy of early photographic experimentation in the 1980s while illuminating how, as Sherry Farrell Racette argues in chapter 5 in this volume, contemporary Aboriginal photo-based practice marks a powerful tool of resistance. Artists like Shelley Niro and Greg Staats were part of this first wave of Aboriginal contemporary photographers, and their artistic vision laid the groundwork for a new and critical response to a history that had included the faces of First Peoples but not their voices.

Historically, popular photographic interest in First Peoples' culture focused on the sublime "Indian warrior," a free-roaming, pre-reserve figure. Commercial photographers also left out the less picturesque aspects of reserve and urban First Peoples life in favour of the romanticized "Indian warrior" postcard approach. By contrast, contemporary artists like Mary Anne Barkhouse, Rosalie Favell, Barry Ace, and Greg Hill confront the urban realities of today's First Peoples. Rather than perpetuating imagery from the past, they address complex contemporary social issues through their creation of photographic works of art.

Shelley Niro (Mohawk) is a multidisciplinary artist working in the visual arts, film, and photography. Her strategy is to make the position of women clear, thus exposing dominant Western male views. The voices of Aboriginal women are



Figure 14.5
Frederick Wilkerson Waugh.
*Mrs. Simon Bumberry, Seneca,
Putting the Final Touches
to a Basket, Grand River,
1912. No. 18851. Courtesy
of the Canadian Museum of
Civilization, Gatineau, QC.*



Figure 14.6 Shelley Niro, *Time Travels through Us*, 1999. Gelatin silver print, cotton and beaded mat work, silver-painted wood frame. Courtesy of the artist.

often missing from the historical record. Mainly photographed by white males, Aboriginal women tended to be pictured next to dominant male figures and, when identified, were recorded as little more than “squaw” or “wife of.” In Iroquoian society, the role of women has always been important. Women were the custodians of crops and home, and had the power to decide which men would become chiefs. Iroquoian women are strong figures: clan mothers, faith keepers, and, of course, grandmothers, mothers, and daughters.

Like Waugh’s Mrs Bumberry, whose portrait faces Niro’s work in the contemporary section (Fig. 14.5), Niro can often be found working in her home, where she weaves family members into powerful statements about women and today’s Iroquoian community (Fig. 14.6). She has stated, “I have always looked at pictographs, petroglyphs and bead-work designs, hoping to decipher some unknown truth, or a message, through the symbols and markings of my North American ancestors. Nothing so far has delivered itself to me. As I continue in the search, I now respond to the collective thought of messages, and realize that the search is the most important task. There is comfort in knowing fragments of a history linger for others to discover.”

Even though her family was not traditional Long-house, Niro’s father instructed her through Longhouse teachings. These stories, spoken by her father and other members of the community, inspired her imagination, prompting her to bring the memories, stories, or little bits of information back to life. She has said that her work is drawn from memory, storytelling, and paying homage to those

ideas. For her, archival photos are a great treasure because she did not have archival or any other kind of photographs from her family.

Mrs Bumberry was photographed in her home, demonstrating basketry. Waugh took extensive notes about the process and made numerous diagrams. He took great care in composing his documentary photographs. This thoughtful composition gives Mrs Bumberry the dignity of an individual – she is not portrayed as a cultural stereotype – and opens the door to a modern exploration of cultural links with the past.

The body of work by Greg Staats (Kanien'kéha), *Relationships as a Principle of Organization*, maps his personal journey in search of a balanced life by juxtaposing family memories with objects found in the city of Toronto. Staats chose crows as an image for their sense of play and intelligence and their adaptability in the face of a human-altered landscape. Coupled with this is a juxtaposition of objects from Staats's childhood home on the Six Nations Reserve and found objects from his Toronto neighbourhood. The six bundles of sticks, tied up neatly for disposal, express decay, death, and the letting go of negative memories. Staats's organizing principle thus adds a new layer to the reality of the ever-evolving Iroquoian world. As the artist has said, "Since childhood I have yearned for a more complete communication with others and the natural world. My emotional and physical search has led me to gather images that, although strange and animated, remain as familiar as our families. My own observations of photo albums, and images of loss and renewal within the natural world, led me to realize that photo documents can transform my perspective, becoming a metaphor for personal change."

Staats has stated that because he grew up in an arm's-length relationship with a traditional lifestyle, he has felt a great feeling of loss on many different levels. This absence added to his need to search for a more complete communication with himself, other people, and the natural world. His imagery speaks to different themes; as much as they are representative of absence and loss, they can also be seen as ceremonies that are repeated over and over again, a reminder of our mortality and our own

sense of the sacredness of the now. In terms of his personal family photo albums, his great aunt photographed his family on his maternal side. His father's family also produced many photographs, including the one photograph of my father in 1949. These images, juxtaposed with his objects from his own urban setting, provide comfort; they provoke memory and respect for the sense of the now in his own life.

Staats's photograph of stick bundles is juxtaposed with Marius Barbeau's portrait of Dan Smith. Barbeau photographed Smith at the Six Nations Reserve in 1949, the same year the photograph of Staats's father was taken at Six Nations. Barbeau's portrait of Smith was based on an anthropological framework, just as Smith's position as herbalist was based upon an Iroquoian framework. Smith's portrait shows him firmly fixed within his environment, as connected to the land through his knowledge of medicinal plants and to his community by the sign announcing his role as herbalist. Barbeau's field notes indicate that, in addition to being an herbalist, Smith was also involved in road-repair work. The roads he worked on could be seen as a metaphor for the many people leaving the reserve to look for work in the city. The photograph was taken in what was then known as the Tuscarora Reserve (now a part of the Six Nations Reserve), where, as now, roads led in all directions – one of which was to Staats's hometown of Toronto.

The topographical series *Wolves in the City* by Mary Anne Barkhouse (Nimpkish band, Kwakiutl First Nation) is a personal documentary that records her journey through North America, during which she photographed monumental – and not so monumental – kitsch icons and road signs. Barkhouse uses an endangered pack of wolves as a metaphor for how society has treated Aboriginal people, pushing them to the periphery of their former lands to live on small reserves. For Barkhouse, the comeback of the wolf parallels the cultural resurgence and self-determination movement of today's Aboriginal people: "Whether visiting a monument, waiting by the side of the road, or taking in some theatre, the universal 'we' must extend to things previ-

ously designated as ‘varmint’ – such as Indians, wolves, and Richardson’s Ground Squirrel. As a surrogate for the displaced, the wolf represents the renewed presence and empowerment of ‘other’ within the global arena.”

Barkhouse’s family is originally from the West Coast of Canada. For the past hundreds, maybe thousands, of years, her family as produced prominent carvers, including Ellen Neel and Mungo Martin. Barkhouse has said that, in contrast to her own work, the type of design they did was what most would see as stereotypical Northwest Coast art. Although she does not follow these exact traditions, she understands her photographs as imbued with the same values her ancestors held toward the land and each other. Her family, she states, has been “studied to death.” Many had worked with Edward Curtis. She sees her own use of photography as an interesting twist on history, as the medium employed by Curtis to study Aboriginal peoples objectively is now being used in her art to express in a more painterly way other ideas about the First Nations people, ideas that come from the people themselves.

Barkhouse’s work is paired with a 1922 photograph by Harlan Smith. Depicting an unidentified Aboriginal woman scraping a skin near Bella Coola, the image represents a departure from Smith’s more obvious work, where the intent of the photograph is to present First Peoples in a clearly identified community context. The photograph of the woman shifts the focus from evidence to message and opens a window to the work of Mary Anne Barkhouse, merging signs from the past with signs in the present.

Once the anthropologists finished their field studies, they transported their documentation back to museums for study: artifacts were put into storage, papers were published, and displays were created. Today’s artists also gather raw material from the world around them, returning to their studios where the collected material is studied and sometimes put into an exhibition format.

Barry Ace is an Anishnabai (Odawa/Ojibwa) artist, photographer, curator, and teacher from the West Bay First Nation, Manitoulin Island. His interactive installation *Wassechgan* (*Window*) presents a first-person account of his cross-cultural family history and its

meaning to him while also paying homage to his elders. As he says, “Wassechgan is an Ojibwa word for ‘window.’ I chose this title as a metaphor for the way I view the lives of my mixed ancestry family through the historical photograph. Perhaps more poignantly, I want to honour those individuals who I feel are a constant force in shaping my own personal history and hybridity (British/Odawa).”

Ace recounts how in order to create his piece for the exhibition he went to individuals in his family and asked them for something personal that would spark memories, a kind of signifier that would tell stories. In his use of photography, the artist was not looking for descriptive analysis or for who was who in any particular photograph. He was more interested in the storytelling that went with the photograph because that was the important information that was being passed down. Each person gave an object and a selection of photographs they wanted to see included, in terms of telling their lives. Through the use of objects and photographs, Ace wanted to honour those individuals for contributing to his development. The exhibition piece is thus an honouring space; it is a way to look at the photographs and tell stories from his family perspective, an approach the artist finds very lacking within the anthropological collections. Ace’s work is paired with F.W. Waugh’s portrait of Mrs Gadteher, who provides a gateway to the Ojibwa past. The multi-layered depth of field found in this photograph – from the person watching in the mid-background to the light coming in through the window – provides a conduit out of the scene and into the present.

The historical and pop-culture views of First Peoples subscribe to an iconic Plains Indian warrior, resplendent in feather headdress and wielding his deadly tomahawk at white men. This so-called authentic North American Indian was popularized by Hollywood Westerns. Greg Hill, an installation, multimedia, and performance artist whose work explores his Rotinonhsyonni (Iroquoian) identity, confronts the Indian icon head-on in his new body of work, provoking reconsideration of the memories we attach to childhood toys, like these once-ubiquitous plastic Indians (Fig. 14.7). He states,



“For me, these plastic Indians represent childhood memories and fears. They were objects that most children were familiar with, although few knew anything about the people the figures represented. One could inspect them closely, searching for clues about their identity. The ‘Made in China’ label and the grotesque facial features, however, led me to believe that these were actually extra-terrestrial Indians: alien invaders that others somehow confused with me.”

When Hill was a child, the plastic Indians stood for the unknown part of himself; they were an aspect of his iden-

tity that he did not know – and could not know – because they did not really represent Indians. Although he came from a Mohawk and French background, he grew up knowing little about either of those cultures. While in school in the seventies during the height of multiculturalism, Hill learned to hide his Aboriginal heritage for fear of being asked too many questions for which he had no answers, largely because he was so detached from his own traditions and history.

Immediate connections are evident between Harlan Smith’s portrait of the Walking Buffalo family and Greg Hill’s

Figure 14.7
Installation shot, *Emergence from the Shadow: First Peoples’ Photographic Perspectives*, showing Greg Hill’s *Plastic Indians (from Outer Space)*, 1999. Chromogenic prints. Courtesy of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Gatineau, QC.



Figure 14.8
Rosalie Favell. *I Dreamed of Being a Warrior*, 1999. From the *Plain(s) Warrior Artist* series. Inkjet print. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 14.9
Harlan Ingersoll Smith. *Madine West, Bella Coola River Valley, British Columbia*, 1921. No. 50208. Courtesy of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Gatineau, QC.

work. The Walking Buffalo family is posed next to their camp at Banff, Alberta, which provides entertainment for tourists. Dressed in tribal clothing easily recognizable to the general public as what “real” Indians wear, the family was probably stared at and photographed many times each day. However, beneath the tribal clothing was a family simply making a living at a time when very few jobs existed for First Peoples and permission to leave the reserve had to be granted by the local Indian agent.

Rosalie Favell (Métis, Cree/English) is a photographic artist originally from Winnipeg. Her work explores issues of personal and cultural identity through the use of pop-culture heroes. The historical point of departure for Favell’s new body of work is the nineteenth-century male Plains tradition according to which warriors drew records of their exploits on the pages of ledger books.

Favell’s artistic strategy challenges early photographers whose work effectively silenced Aboriginal women either by avoiding them or by leaving them nameless



when photographed. By effectively negotiating today's cultural landscape through her use of hero figures like the television personality Xena and the historic Métis leader Louis Riel, Favell challenges stereotypes and adds a powerful voice to the forgotten women of the past (Fig. 14.8). As the introduction to the Universal television series *Xena: Warrior Princess* proclaims, "In the time of ancient gods, warlords, and kings, a land in turmoil cried out for a hero. She was Xena: a mighty princess forged in the heat of battle. The power, the passion, the danger, her courage will change the world."

Like Hill, Favell grew up largely ignorant of her Aboriginal heritage. For her, photographs have been a way to connect to the past and to the histories of her peoples in the Winnipeg and Interlake areas. Like Sherry Farrell Racette, also in this volume, Favell considers the experience of going through family albums and looking at snapshots, as well as of engaging in the conversation that goes with that activity, to be very important to her understanding of self, as well as to her art work. She sees the snapshot as representing a particular moment that evokes memories. The act of storytelling has been very significant to her, prompting her to dig through her family's archives as a means to understand why it is that she grew up not knowing the cultural richness of her background.

Historically, Aboriginal Plains men were accorded role-model status through their positions as chiefs and warriors. Looking at the pairing of Harlan Smith's portrait of Madine West (Fig. 14.9) with Favell's self-portrait, one wonders who Favell's and Madine's heroes and role models might have been. In light of the self-determination movement that is sweeping through today's Aboriginal communities in cities and on reserves, the question of who our historical role models are needs to be answered.

Like an old family photo album, the first section of *Emergence from the Shadow* illustrates how photographs by anthropologists can be reinterpreted and infused with a new energy. Unlike the more widely known images of Indian chiefs and warriors, the everyday appearance of the individuals portrayed in these photographs opens the window to new perspectives on First

Peoples. By juxtaposing these photographs with works by contemporary artists, new meanings emerge within the context of today's First Peoples self-determination movement.

Equally important is the renewed sense of community provided by the six artists featured in this exhibition. All of the artists acknowledge a bond with their cultural backgrounds, expressing in their work a profound respect for their histories. In examining the past in light of the present, these contemporary artists effectively explore and critique the world beyond the borders of modern reserves.

Merging past and present, this exploration of the ties that bind creates a sense of intergenerational family reunion. Emerging from the shadow of history and long-established stereotypes of First Peoples, the juxtaposition of early fieldwork portraits with photographic works by contemporary artists serves to remind us how the past continues to inform the present, paving the way for a new vision of North American First Peoples.

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NOTES

- 1 Exhibition files that were used in the preparation of this chapter are now housed at the Canadian Museum of Civilization. *Emergence from the Shadow* fonds, 2000-1-0016, box 1-484 "Texts," vol. 1, and 2000-1-0022, box 1-29.
- 2 The terminology relating to tribal groups, peoples, and places appearing in captions has been taken directly from the anthropologists' notes. The terminology was left unchanged to better capture the vocabulary and attitudes prevalent at the time.