

Pull/Push

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Abstract

Pull/Push

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Photomedia/New Genres

Guw'aadzi gai dawaa haupa. Andrew sush dá dyaami wassht'i. Ó'sahsh hanu shush dá. Su'siisru Miitra, hinum'e w'ee Aak'um'e. Dzii k'ui kadyeekuya? Sudyaat'ita. Hisrum'e ts'idyaadrani. Hello to everyone, and welcome. I am Andrew, my big clan is the Eagle Kid Clan, and my little clan is the Sun Clan. My indian name is Mi'itra, and I am from the Pueblo of Acoma. What are you doing? I am writing this, and you are reading it. This work is about the good medicine that comes from indigenous skateboarding communities in the United States, and how I navigate the world through various non-western concepts such as kincentricity and reicprocity. Being indigenous in the current state of settler colonialism leaves me vulnerable to institutional, social, and governmental racial violence. Resistance through community and healing is how I have found the make artwork while also supporting others in the same position as me.



PULL/PUSH

BY ANDREW ROIBAL

Thesis Statement:

My project is called Pull/Push

These works are a part of my project around the convergence of Native American and skateboarding culture. I am mixing photo mediums like silver gelatin and Polaroids with traditional painting or wood working, into the language of today's skate scene. Tradition and culture are not stagnant, they flow continuously like a river, adapting and growing with the land around it. This mix of traditional and alternative culture shows the immense love and community that has sprouted in the face of colonialism, on and off the Rez. Almost every board I have made I have given away for free to other Natives, to enable them to keep enriching local communities and to take up the space they deserve. Themes such as reciprocity and kincentricity are central to my way of life and artmaking, and these are throughlines in both Native and skating communities. When we combine both, we become living embodiments of resilience. This body of work and writing is describing how skateboarding and Indigenous cultures are incredibly intertwined in healing from a post-colonial country. Making good medicine with and for each other through cultural practice and common activities such as skateboarding, along with holding sovereignty rights absolutely in these practices.

Chapter 1: introductions



Introduction:

Guw'aadzi gai dawaa haupa. Andrew sush da dyaami wassht'i. O'sahsh hanu shush da. Su'siisri Miitra, hinum'e w'ee Aak'um'e. Sudyaat'ita.

As an artist, the only throughline in my work has been myself, and my journey as I navigate the world. My subject matter changes, my concept changes, my preferred medium changes, but who I am is the constant. I am an artist, from the United States of America, from the state of New Mexico, from the city of Albuquerque, from the Pueblo of Acoma. Born at the tail end of the '90s into a suburban environment, to a Catholic family, a persistent feeling that I experienced was shame and loneliness. This is not unique to just me, but whereas some people have invested their time and energy into more negative activities such as drugs or violence, I decided long ago that I needed to make art and express myself through some kind of positivity.

I grew up always wanting to skateboard but never had the confidence to take the leap of faith and get on a board. I played video games, watched videos, and read magazines all about skateboarding, but even as a child I wrote off my ability to do it. These magazines had such a profound impact on me that this thesis is formatted like one through and through, directly inspired by Glen E. Friedman's *FUCK YOU TOO* book, as well as the countless homemade zines and publications. The way that creative information is presented is profoundly thoughtful while also appearing effortless, very similar to the act of skating itself. I then lived a decent portion of my life, always keeping it in the back of my head, paying attention to what went on in the skate world, who was doing what, etc. During the pandemic I even got a longboard but couldn't commit myself to it. As my life shifted me more towards art photography, I began to renew interest in photographing not just skaters, but skaters who *needed* to be photographed, and *needed* to be seen, to be known. In 2023 as I was finishing my Bachelor's in Fine Arts at UNM, I was told of a new skate group that had formed.

The Burque Babes, was a group of queer/femme skaters that met together at the skate park in solidarity, to support each other and not be harassed by other skaters. I immediately understood how important this was, and I offered them free photography services for life. When I showed up to my first meet, I was also happily surprised to see many of them were Native, just like me. As a young artist, I was told that I need to value my work and time more, and not do anything for free. However, I recognized just what my work was worth, and committed to providing them with anything they needed.

For years I worked with them and delivered photos, videos, and became a very typical Filmer¹. One meetup, a few months before I had to move to Washington state, they all suddenly began to tell me that I needed to get on a board with them too, no exceptions. Absolutely scared shitless, I tried to come up with as many excuses as I could, to no avail. A few minutes later I was on a board for the first time, incredibly nervous, but also happy, fulfilled, and unquestionably supported by all my friends there.

Fast forward to now, and as I am about to finish my MFA at the University of Washington here in Seattle, I have made it my business over the past few years to support other Native skaters like the Burque Babes did for me. I have given away three dozen skateboards to any other Native, young or old, who wants one. I run a weekly skate meet, teaching other Natives how to skate and gain the same confidence that I was able to achieve. Possibly the hardest sport (a combination of gymnastics, skiing, hockey, etc.), if you can skate you can feel like you can do anything in the world. I also help the Shellhouse Canoe Family (an organized found family of canoe pullers, artists, and wood carvers), First Nations UW, Ancestral Sisterhood (Intertribal drumming circle), and yəhaw' Indigenous creatives Collective, all to forward community healing with other Natives.

We live in the fourth decade or so of Indigenous Skateboarding Culture right now, with the founding matriarchs and patriarchs of tribal skateboarding still kicking it and pushing on their boards every day. Trailblazers such as Douglas Miles (founder of Apache Skateboards, San Carlos Apache, OG), Walt Pourier (Wounded Knee Skateboards, Oglala Lakota), Amy Denet (Modern Matriarch Skate Jam, Diné), and Shawn Shine Harrison (MASA TV, Diné, new OG) are showing this country that there a great desire to support Natives skating and it is a *necessity*.

When I moved here, I only knew of a few other people like those who skated, and it was slow going, getting

1 Filmers are different from typical photographers who stand on the sidelines. Filmers are directly a part of skate groups and teams, and are given much more respect and acknowledgement compared to other sports-based photographers.

connected to them. Most of these contacts fell through over my first quarter here as I adjusted to the intense life of being in a graduate program. I focused on making work reflective of the past, very slowly trying new things, but only taking baby steps. I decided to say fuck it one day and draw pottery designs on some old Polaroids I had². I have a huge amount of knowledge and experience with manipulating instant film, from transparencies to emulsion lifts, and everything in between. That being said, nothing I tried actually connected to the concept of positivity around Indigenous skating. It all felt like I was trying to flex more than actually progress my work. One day, I was reminded of an acquaintance, Alexas Monroe, and her work with instant film in Texas³. I took a workshop with her a few years ago and I remembered how we used acrylic markers to write on the white frames of the Polaroid, leaning in to connecting with the composition of the image within the frame. I ended up taking some sharpies and drawing some basic pottery motifs on them, nothing fancy, but might as well try? God damn was I apprehensive about it, though. I can't retake any of the instant film photos, and if the drawing didn't end up well, then the whole thing was fucked. Hey, no half-measures anymore though, right? After making a few of these I was really pleased and posted them on social media.

Fast forward a few weeks later and these painted Polaroids are in a show for the Belltown Artwalk at the Creative Department. Curated by Iy Cardona, I was very nervous as crowds of people came into the gallery, smiled at my work, but left soon after. Right before closing when I was just talking bullshit with Iy, I got a tap on my shoulder. Lo and behold, thousands of miles away from my home rez, I see a Native guy smiling at me, wanting to talk about my work! He noticed that I titled my works in Keres⁴ and he was delighted that he could read them. This guy introduced himself as Leo DeNevarrez, a Yupik Native who had lived in New Mexico Indian country for a few years. He returned to the PNW and was just checking out art walk on a whim, and we ended up chatting for the rest of that night together. We connected over what it was like to be Native living in urban centers, what it means to use our language, and how much we both fucking love skateboarding. A few weeks after that we started skating together, swapping stories and hanging out, and the rest is history. As I am writing this, I am actually about to see my boy Leo in a few minutes for another skate sesh. If I hadn't "encoded" some of my work behind a language only a few thousand people can speak, I don't think I would have made such a meaningful connection. By having multiple layers of opacity in my work, the more the viewer works or knows, the more meaning they get. If my work had completely direct translations and nothing else, it would be shallow both conceptually and aesthetically. Because I am able to hide some treats from the average viewer, it makes those small treats that are much more meaningful for those who do get them .

I utilize a variety of art mediums in order to fully communicate my thoughts. My instincts always kick in with photography, being my go-to form of expressing myself creatively. Photography conceptually and technically needs to utilize real life in order to have a form given to it, so naturally I shifted my photographic practice into something more like a chronicle diary. I think the term documentary photography applies best to my work, in a broad sense. The Tate says.

"Documentary photography is a style of photography that provides a straightforward and accurate representation of people, places, objects and events, and is often used in reportage"⁵

While Anton Kratochvil and Michael Persson say:

"Through documentary work, the photographer has a chance to show the interwoven layers of life, the facets of daily existence, and the unfettered emotions of the people who come under the camera's gaze. When finally presented, viewers are encouraged to use their intelligence and personal experiences, even their skepticism, to judge." (Kratochvil and Persson 2001)

Kratochvil and Persson's idea most closely resembles my visual style, but its intentions don't fit right with me. Charlotte Cotton writes in *The Photograph as Contemporary Art*, something that connects with me more than anything these other definitions try to cover. In this book, Cotton covers what she calls Intimate Photography. Among these pages she mentions people such as Nan Goldin and Latoya Ruby Frazier, direct influences for me as an artist. Intimate photography is:

2 I have been obsessed with Polaroids for years; they are literally the reason that I started photography in the first place.

3 Pete Madden Jr, virtual studio visit, November 15th, 2024.

4 Western Keres, the language of my home Pueblo of Acoma.

5 <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/d/documentary-photography>

“Symbolic points in life, at times when we acknowledge our relationship bonds[...]”. (Cotton, pg. 149, 2020)

This is later expanded into talking about how interpersonal relationship subtexts are remade in this style of photography (Cotton 2020). My photographic works generally focus on a mix of intimate, calm, happy moments of the people in my community, with typical skateboarding editorial photography filled with action shots. This didactic is so that my art can give the idea of what it is like to skate with a bunch of Indians. Yes, there are the impressive tricks, the loud smacks of the board against concrete, maybe some yells if someone has a hard slam on deck. There are also many intimate conversations about life, love, friendship, and supporting each other⁶.

Something that many photographers fail to recognize is how pervasive and damaging previously made photographs of natives are. Photographers such as Edward Curtis can be painted as conceptual villains, tokenizing natives through specific portraiture techniques. Forcing us to wear clothes that were not our tradition, holding manufactured props, or similar actions, resulted in an inaccurate picture of Indigeneity in America. Made to exoticize and make us feel like we will be lost to the past (Wakeham 2008), photography has been a direct tool of Western Imperialism ever since it was invented, and I intend to flip this medium on its head and take back power. I have been directly inspired by, and made friendly relations with, other Natives like Zig Jackson, who turns the camera around on colonizers too. By photographing people expressing themselves wholly as they are in the here and now, I am directly contesting every claim made by Curtis during his career.

My sculptural and nonphotographic works are (occasionally) less reflections of my outward social life, and more like showing my inward explorations of my life journey in a physical form. In previous bodies of work, my sculptural works were props or costumes, meant to shine from within my photography. I broke the mold at the end of my undergraduate thesis by placing uranium-238 and thorium-234 isotopes into a glass container covered in golden spikes, filled with dirt from my Pueblo. The crown of thorns metaphor was so literal it wasn't even a metaphor at that point, but it taught me that if I take big leaps, my sculpture can fill in gaps that my photography cannot.

Right now, I use three-dimensional works to connect with my spirituality. Similar to when I sing, when I work on sculpture I am praying. To Creator, to myself, to people reading my poorly-written grant proposals, everyone. Sometimes no one, just praying to the process to give me a singular action to focus on. I started by combining my photographic processes like silver gelatin printing into sculpture, and while I had some successes, it was not exactly what I was hoping for. It was only after I began to work with wood that I really found something magical. Making skate ramps, carving canoe paddles, and altering skateboards allowed me to draw on local indigenous knowledge bases and reinterpret it for myself, bridging the conceptual gap that my photography was not able to make. This has also helped me gain a better understanding of reciprocity here in Coast Salish cultures. Every time an elder or peer teaches me something new, I thank them and give them a gift next time I see them. This has extended from wood carving to singing, beading, and weaving. While I am still new with some of these mediums and their techniques, I am extremely grateful of being invited to share in these knowledge bases by local Natives and participate in this cultural reciprocity. For me, sculpture is a way for me to interrelate kincentricity and reciprocity with everything around me in my life⁷. I use skateboards every day, so I carve one. I use baskets every day, so I weave one. By intimately working with these new materials, I bring out my Pueblo's visual language elements into local knowledge bases, once again building cultural bridges through my inward meditations.

It is for people like Leo that I want to continue making artwork like this. I'm asked occasionally in critique "who is my audience?", in a very Western American way. Subtextually, what is being said "I do not understand your work immediately so clearly your work is of less value to me, but who does value it?". My honest answer is everyone. Just because my work's primary concern is Indian Life, doesn't mean that others cannot connect to it. Does it require a bit more effort from non-Native viewers in order for them to receive the artwork in the way that I intend? Absolutely. But I am making non-Western art in a Western society, so that will always be the case regarding identity-based works. Yes, anyone can enjoy my art if they want to meet me halfway. But it is the people whose life changes, like Leo, who I make my work for. It is *not* for non-Natives who center themselves in decolonization efforts, which is incredibly common. Tuck and Yang described in their acclaimed work "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor" the various methods in how colonization still takes places from seemingly innocuous people in society.

6 Along with many dick jokes and complaining about the state of food in Seattle.

7 Kincentricity is an Indigenous belief that humans and everything in the world are related together into an ecological family. For us this means that plants, animals, and other things are literally our living relatives.



Uninformed but good-intentioned actions still result in further imperialization by Westerners.

Anyone can appreciate a sculpture to a certain extent but bring in a sculptor into the gallery space and that person, along with the art, becomes activated to a level that was not there before. The same is said for my work. While anyone can appreciate it, Natives and skaters activate my work in its space. From my Canoe Family ooh-ing and ahh-ing at a slideshow with photos of them, or some skaters hitting an axle stall on a ramp I put in a gallery, which is when my work enters its full potential.

K'awaasa senasrka.

Chapter 2:

Background

concepts

BACKGROUND CONCEPTS

RED. NOT WHITE. NOT BLACK. RED.

North America is a very complex place when it comes to racial-cultural understanding. As a country, it was founded by White Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPs) who removed Indigenous peoples from the land, and bringing in enslaved Black people to work the land. This pretty much explains how Americans consume different facets of American culture right now. WASP or WASP-adjacent groups consume culture and labor from BIPOC culture is pushed out of the picture, not to be considered in any meaningful way. Even with progressive academic structures, this is similar. Other cultural ideas and structures are being taken into consideration from contemporary Latin American or Black American heritages and policies but still not Indigenous ones. This is evidenced by the constant erasure and removal of Native spaces and voices, with the Shellhouse Canoe Family of the University of Washington being denied a place at the historic Shellhouse itself.

Many figures within institutions, be they academic, community, or governmental, have an internal (oftentimes also externally) otherizing view of Natives and Native culture. Even simple events such as Powwows are seen as spaces that non-Natives aren't even allowed to be in, while also denying Natives from carrying out everyday tasks such as praying. Native and Indigenous culture is so outside the purview or concern of the average American that most racism perpetuated against Natives is seen as a non-issue and not worthy of concern, if it is even recognized as such. This is seen on both micro and macro levels, from interpersonal issues in schools or workplaces to massive industries and anti-environmentalist movements.

Understanding of Indigenous culture and heritage is rarely given the respect and distance⁸ it deserves. Too often people try to take ownership of Indigenous knowledge bases without having any connection to it at all. These are just some prominent examples to show you that you really need to take on an entirely new perspective that is not your own, if you are not Indigenous yourself. This means that as a reader or viewer of art, then you need to put in more effort to give the artist the respect they deserve. Native artists do not get the luxury of putting a piece on a white gallery wall with no label, letting the work "speak for itself". Our history has been erased and denigrated for centuries on every level including cultural, institutional, and governmental. It has gotten to the point where any pro-Indigenous action is immediately seen as being anti-white (to white people) (Kamper 2025). If you do not take the time to better educate yourself on these topics when viewing Native art and culture, you will perpetuate a misunderstanding of the culture that has stemmed from colonization itself forever. America is marketed as the great melting pot, but why does the average American only consider the Black and the White?

OPACITIES

One thing that is important to understand once you begin to look at Indigenous art, or art from any somewhat-insular community, is the opacity the artist is presenting. Édouard Glissant described "the right to opacity" in 2009, and Simon Wu expanded upon this:

"a stance intended to preserve all the nuances of one's humanity amid forces, often colonial or imperialist, that seek to capture and flatten one's subjectivity for easy legibility or categorization." (Wu 2022).

By encoding some works or aspects of work in traditional knowledge bases and motifs, one is preserving their specific cultural practices. It is because I titled artworks in my ancestral language that I made such a deep and valuable connection with Leo. When I utilize specific Puebloan iconologies such as parallel lines for rain, solid triangles for mountains, filled-in triangles for thunderclouds, I can then create a narrative scene in a landscape that can only be seen by a select few. Glissant understood how important community building is but also how difference and nuance is a positive thing. Universality destroys cohesive culture, so differences are to be celebrated and not destroyed. Having the right to choose what one does or does not reveal through their actions, art-specific or otherwise, gives one power and the ability to give or revoke consent with knowledge bases. He continues:

8 Not all knowledges or experiences are open to everyone, and this needs to be respected.

“A racist is someone who refuses what he doesn’t understand. I can accept what I don’t understand.”

Openly acknowledging that one does not fully understand an artwork, and being okay with that, is demonstrating enormous growth and virtue. Opacity vs transparency in art is something that is specifically controlled and considered, not lending itself into incomprehensibility. Those with the proper tools and knowledge to fully understand and appreciate what the artist is doing will find that they end up in a space that is much more satisfying than being handed the answer without any effort.

A consistent theme with understanding work around personal and cultural identities is that the viewer needs to be open-minded and willing to learn and admit wrongdoing when needed. Without being mentally prepared for this, there is almost no point in interface with the artwork in the first place. You are entering the artwork on the artist’s terms, not from an imperializing and oppressive way. Indigenous knowledge bases, aesthetics, and ways of life are very deep and complex, with many layers of meaning and understanding being present. Even in native communities there are multiple levels of understanding that one can have, behind things such as practices, songs, aesthetics, etc. By leaning into these protective ways around how opaque or transparent an artwork’s meaning is, not only does the Indigenous artist preserve their culture, but we are also resisting the art world’s constant need for work to “speak for itself” and be fine living in a white box.

In my own work I encode the full meaning when I utilize motifs, symbols, and stories from my tribe in multiple ways. I title my pieces in my home language Keres; I use materials that are sacred to me and my family. By doing this I am adding layers upon layers of conceptual and spiritual meaning into my art that can only be understood by certain people. These certain people will go down the visual path of my artwork and piece together what I am really saying with it. However, this means that general audiences will most likely not get the full pictures from my work.

The Puebloan shapes, colors, and aesthetics are not fully revealed to the public or general audiences because frankly, knowledge of these must be earned. For example, the double-barred skate deck cross piece, *Tsaapi*, has a tremendous amount of meaning embedded in it. I will decode it here only for academic purposes, but for the most part, I will only reveal details of this piece to those who earn it. Those who might earn it would be those who ask questions, take the time to speak with me, or other Indigenous peoples. Back to it, *Tsaapi* as a word itself means fly. The fact the shape itself is a double barred cross lean into centuries of history between Puebloan and European interactions. In the Spanish Catholic tradition, double barred crosses represent conversion. In Puebloan culture, it represents dragonflies, water, and life. When missionaries handed out double barred cross necklaces, Puebloans accepted them thinking they were dragonfly objects, resulting in the missionaries thinking they had performed a miraculous conversion. This is the kind of concept that other Indigenous people like me, or those who have the knowledge, can piece it all together, and see the story that is taking place within the work itself.

By accepting that you may not fully understand a cultural-based artwork, you are honoring that work and respecting the fact that certain things may not be able to be translated. A decolonized headspace leads to decolonized realizations, and Western academia and society at large do not like information to be kept from them. Knowledge bases are preserved from outside influence by having layers of opacity even within cultures themselves. Many tribal practices have layers of exclusivity to them which can strengthen bonds and the passing of knowledge from elders to youths, and this can be seen across North and South American Indigenous tribes.

Last thing I will say on this for right now, is that for myself in my artwork, having layers of opacity is incredibly strengthening. Because I am conscious of this, I am able to lay out specific pathways into understanding and appreciating my work that really rewards the viewer once they traverse these paths of language, semiotics, or other Indigenous principles. Both the viewer and I as the artist are enriched by interactions that happen from conversations after someone is able to go down these pathways, which leads into how peoples’ lives get changed through my work.

TAKING SPACE

One of the key components to my work and my use of specific mediums is the idea of taking up space. For an Indigenous person to take up any space is in itself an act of rebellion in the face of a colonizing imperialistic nation

like the United States. For a Native to be off the reservation and just be in any mode, connected to their culture or not, is a statement of being that they cannot escape. We are intrinsically outsiders on our own lands, in our own nations. The United States has “granted” 2.3% of its total land area to Natives and this means that outside of these lands we are seen as trespassers. There is a reason that some of the most dangerous sundown towns in the country are located extremely close to Native reservations in Idaho, Minnesota, and similar states with high Indigenous populations or nations (Railton 2023).

Similarly, skating itself used to be confined to very specific contexts, spaces, and times. We go into this further, but just for now, recognize that skateboarding for the first 20 or so years of its invention, was relegated to skate parks to do various tricks, or quite boring skating on sidewalks. Because of this, skateboarding’s popularity waned in the 1970s a bit. It was not until the Ollie was invented in the mid-1980s that skateboarding became a real mode of rebellious transportation and actions. With the Ollie, skaters could perform tricks outside of the skate park all over city streets and within further urban spaces. From this comes the sort of trope around an older person angrily shaking their fist at a skater taking up space by performing tricks through street skating.

Natives in urban spaces are even less so welcomed. Quite literally, legislation was passed so that it was completely illegal to be a Native American and be in Seattle through Ordinance No. 5 for a time being in 1865⁹. Resulting in the forceful removal of local Indigenous peoples from their land, this is much more vicious than a few boomers cursing at some skaters who flipped them off in return. For a Native to take up space in a meaningful way, is inherently an almost revolutionary action. Through the communal guidance and values that encompass Indigenous life, for someone to take this step invites others to follow suit, which would immediately go against heterogeneous efforts to keep Natives outside of America, both culturally and physically.

My work responds by also forcefully taking space that was typically denied to Native artists and similar artworks. Art galleries and museum spaces are already seen as almost holy sites by the average person (Berger 1973), and for something so un-artistic to take that space is upsetting the status quo and subverting art viewers’ expectations. As an example, I install skate ramps in galleries and museums and play my skating playlist very loudly. This leads to relatively dangerous activities (skateboarding) and sounds unpalatable to the Western ear (thrash punk and traditional singing) filling these oh-so-sacred art spaces in the name of healing our Indigeneity. My work does follow formality, but not Western formality. There are formalist qualities within the work 100%, but these are Indigenous qualities that carry immensely deep meaning that are not meant to be understood by general audiences. The fact that my work incorporates mediums not typically associated with fine arts also drives this point home. By taking fine arts space with skate decks, vinyl stickers, and zines, I am making a prominent statement that I know that I am unwelcome and I don’t care, I will continue to be.

My work and I are unwelcome in many spaces for butting heads against the white box gallery. Anti-conformist activities such as skateboarding on sculptures, expressing Indigenous culture, and general rowdiness are actively pushed out of formal art spaces. With musical elements that are not made for the Western ear that fill the gallery, I am also making sure that my work is ever-present in the gallery visitor’s mind. Similar to shirts or hats seen around Seattle and more widely across America now, it serves as a reminder that we are on stolen land. Not only this, but my work depicts Indigenous joy which is not how Western people view us. The Western Gaze sees us through a lens of damage and suffering, so intensely that we are reduced to only those two things as a concept stripping us of our individuality.

The fact that I invite people to skate my art pieces means that I will butt heads with many institutions. It is not a revolutionary action for someone to make a guerilla skate spot. In fact, it is so popular that Thrasher Magazine has a dedicated playlist on YouTube on how to make guerilla skate spots in cities. It is so normalized for us skaters to construct our own spaces that one of the most popular and world-renowned skateparks in Seattle is the Marginal Way Skatepark. This was designed, built, and maintained entirely by local volunteer skaters.

Similarly, Natives genuinely have to fight tooth and nail for any kind of space to be opened up for us and then fight like hell in order to keep it. Even within vacuous institutions such as here at the University of Washington, multiple Native clubs and organizations do not have consistent spaces to host their meetings, and constantly are victims of institutional displacement. The Center for American Indian and Indigenous Studies here on campus has had to move Canoe Family spaces out from the Shellhouse to a closet in the Chemistry Library, to multiple rooms in the Art building, to now the Great Room at the Water Activity Center, all within the past year. This is being done despite the

9 Seattle Ordinance No. 5, legalizing the forced removal of Natives from the city of Seattle.

fact that there are spaces built for Natives, which are instead being used by non-Native groups.

By forcefully having my work in typical fine arts spaces and labelling zines and stickers as fine art, I am making very strong statements. As mentioned earlier, oftentimes pro-Indigenous action in America is seen as being automatically anti-white to white people. This means that yes, my work will be subjected to more racially motivated comments or critiques than other peoples' work. So be it, I would rather carve out this space for others to also occupy than be obedient to a system that has proven for centuries that the only way it deals with Natives is violence and oppression.

KINCENTRICITY

Another key concept that needs to be understood by non-Natives, and continually reconsidered by Natives, is kincentricity. heather ahtone outlines quite well in *Shifting the Paradigm of Art History* what is important to consider with Indigenous artists' work:

"This is not an alternate view to an Indigenous familial lineage but a rather flat view. For communities whose relationships extend beyond the nuclear family to include the strong influence of extended family and, further, society and clan relatives, it cannot be assumed that a biographical survey will account for these critical voices. In fact, one has to consider the role of the artist's whole identity, understanding her relationship to the land, the community broadly, and the responsibilities carried by the family to the community." (Igloliorte, Taunton, and ahtone 2022)

The word itself being made by Dennis Martinez, kincentricity is a state of living throughout the world and everything in it with a keenly aware spiritual presence in all living and non-living things. Even in a very urban and somewhat religiously absent/cynical space such as Seattle where I am writing this, spiritually never leaves me as I make art. Kincentricity is an incredibly meaningful and healthy way for Indigenous people who are less connected to their roots feel at home in various spaces. In short, it is about recognizing everything around you as being a living relative or ancestor. Every bird and insect, every rock and stream, even the sky and the sun are not just hosts or representations of spirits. They. Are. Family. Everything is extremely interconnected with us and through us, as we are with and through them. Some Indigenous worldviews lean so far into kincentricity epistemologies that they could even be described as not having an anthropocentric view, compared to many Western ideas on our place in the world. Western, and especially American, values are very self-serving and self-centered, especially through colonialism and consumer capitalism. Kincentricity is complex, it is not simple, but it provides immense harmony for Indigenous livelihoods. ahtone also goes on with:

"As strained as our postcolonial Indigenous identities may be, for many of us our place within our families and tribes remains rooted in our relationships to the natural world. The importance of this cannot be understated in the work of many artists who elect to remain close to the landscape in which their identity is rooted. For those who are able to live sustainably in places away from their cultural landscape, they often work diligently to remain culturally connected through regular visits, through ceremonial participation, and by maintaining those relationships for their children through the oral tradition of storytelling. By telling a story, they share their knowledge and reanimate it for their own edification.

Kincentricity is outlined by Mitch Distin as well in *The Indigenous Notions of Kincentricity and Reciprocity: The Keys to Sustainability and Climate Change*, however this still is leaning towards indigenous knowledge bases for an anthropocentric view, of averting climate change. While the book is well intentioned, it is using Native culture to further the continued use of our environment and landscape in a way that is absolutely not in favor of wholesome kincentricity. Kincentricity helps me fully appreciate not just everyone and everything around me but helps me live here and now. Not to get too morbid, but truly every moment could be our last. If I am not living in full appreciation and love of each moment, then that is a moment wasted. Through my photographic work, both digital and instant film, I am able to reflect on moments both positive and negative with a growing perspective. In the moment, some situations are too good to be forgotten or fade away as memories usually do. In other negative moments, I can better reflect on the situation and try to come to better terms with it. Through kincentricity as a conscious pull in my artmaking, I am able to relate myself to everything, everyone, and every event that happens around me.

Every day gives me more meaning when I pass by Cousin Rabbit, seeing her chewing on grass. When I park at Safeway and go inside to get my overpriced trail mix, I am reminded to share some with Brother Crow as I walk back to my car. When I fall on my ass in the skatepark because Grandfather Rock decided I needed to be humbled, then I guess I'm falling on my ass in the skatepark. Remembering I am directly related to everything and everyone around me helps me continually reframe my expectations of life and shift my perspectives when things are going very wrong or very right. Either way I am kept in check by the spirits and made to appreciate the fact that not only am I alive, but I make the world better by being connected to it.

I am very conscious of how I interact with and view the world via a kincentricity-focused perspective. Because I am aware that everything and everyone is interconnected and interrelated, my intentions and use of land, materials, and peoples' time must be well thought-out. I must be keenly aware of the landscape that I skate because otherwise I will get injured or worse, injure someone else around me. There is an etiquette to navigating skateparks when they are busy; you need to pay careful attention to everyone around you and patiently wait your turn to skate a specific feature. Even more so when skating on the street where people do not expect skaters to be.

This sentiment is the same as my artmaking. Not only am I representing many positive, and sometimes negative, moments in my life, but I am representing other people too through my photographs and some art styles. I owe it to the people around me that allow me to be in their lives to represent them in a positive way. I do not make art or photograph overly negative moments from interior forces, such as falling on a skateboard, maybe flubbing a song or dropping a drumstick, etc. The only times that I do make work around these is when my friends around me tell me to, often saying "that would make a good picture!" while grinning! I have a duty through kincentricity and connectedness to do right by those around me.

RECIPROCITY

Related in this family of background concepts, we lastly come to Reciprocity. Something that is a bit easier for Western audiences to understand, but no less important, is this way of navigating relationships. While Kincentricity recognizes that we have active relationships with everything around us, reciprocity could be seen as how we have a reciprocal and healthy relationship with our relatives that make up Everything.

I have reciprocity at the forefront of my mind most days now, as I have been given so much joy and healing from local Seattle native communities, I strive to give back. When I first moved here, I began to make unique skate decks from painting, photo collage, or other decorative mediums. I would then continually go into Yehawli, UW's weekly native student dinner, and offer them to anyone who wished to skate together. After I spent a weekend learning how to paint a canoe from John Edward Smith down in Skokomish, I gifted them my family's elk jerky and sacred Pueblo corn meal.

Many of the experiences in native community that I have participated in here are incredibly meaningful to me, and I wish to always give back a physical representation of how grateful I am for the people around me. Back in Albuquerque, through reciprocity, I decided to volunteer my own time, money, and space by offering free photography to the Burque Babes. By allowing me to be in their space and make art from their skating abilities, I felt that the least I could do was offer my services and buy them a few meals.

The Potawatomi botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer, who is also the director of the Center for Native Peoples and the Environment, gives us an incredible way of understanding reciprocity through storytelling at the 28th Headwaters Conference when speaking to the topic of "Science, Story, and Justice" in 2017. Kimmerer says:

"Reciprocity produces balance or equilibrium in which conditions as we know the, in which life can flourish on Earth[...] We have to play by the rules that govern ecosystem function, because as far as I know, no one has repealed the laws of thermodynamics just on behalf of one species[...]"

While there, Kimmerer speaks of reciprocity from a very scientific standpoint, We as Indigenous people understand this and how it extends into a cultural standpoint within our everyday life, like kincentricity. It is another lens that we use to better see and understand everything around us. Reciprocity is *not* a transactional way of life, far from it. Transactional ways are impersonal, without emotional or familial considerations. Reciprocal ways are

deeply personal with keen insights into kincentricities. Indigenous knowledge and culture bases lead to valuing relationships immensely, as we are all we have. We need to protect what we have, and this was understood pre- and post-contact.

Kincentricity reminds us we are all related, and while in Indigenous societies there are hierarchies, it is not like Western hierarchies. With non-anthropocentric views of life, we (all beings) all rely on each other. Everything is equally important to each other, no matter how distant the connection may seem. For some this means laying out a plate of food for the spirits at mealtime. Others may take extra time to discard harvested meats in a way that other animals may make use of them. Constant giving back to each other is super important to maintaining these healthy relationships. This of course extends into interpersonal relationships.

Because this is not a Western way of navigating life and relationships, it may take people time, practice, and consistently open communication in order to grasp it. I think this is actually an incredible benefit for us to practice. Open communications are generally frowned upon in America, with heavy emphasis in interpersonal communications relying on the reading of body language, facial expressions, and other nonverbal cues. This means that cues given by accident by some who may be less socially practiced results in a breakdown of relationships or vice versa. This is incredibly true for Native communities in urban spaces as we interact with those who live on the rez. Different mannerisms, senses of humor, and values can lead to an odd disconnect between people who are from the same tribe, same clan, and same family. Just think about how often miscommunications and hurt feelings happen in nuclear family units, now imagine varying levels of connectedness to historical culture and heritage. It is because of this that I take great care to navigate reciprocity as a medium for my relationships and friendships.

Building meaningful connections between all Indigenous peoples around me is one of my most favorite aspects of my life right now. So much that I spend immense amounts of time, money, and other resources to foster Native skating communities between anyone who wants to join in, and that I try to support them as much as I am able. These people have given me the opportunity to participate in very meaningful practices, from traditional knowledge gathering to general community activities. Carving canoe paddles, sharing meals, going to karaoke, and being present for each other through thick and thin is what we need to do to navigate this capitalist imperialist landscape. We need each other, but we must also be grateful for each other.

When someone takes time to give me meaningful knowledge or experiences, I take very conscious efforts to give them a gift as a token of how meaningful it is. One of my first times painting out canoe, the Willapa Spirit, I gifted our carver John Edward Smith elk jerky, sacred ground cornmeal, and Cota tea. This was not to make this experience transnational, as a direct impersonal trade of goods. This show that I understand it was a lot of effort, time, and patience for him to teach us an incredible practice, and that I want to show my appreciation in a direct and material form.

One of the main reasons that I utilize photography in my work is that the medium is inherent in sharing special memories between people. The people in my community are able to see how I see them, in a very special light. I take these photos or make gifts to give back as a way of trying to share my perspective of coming in and being in need of healing communities.

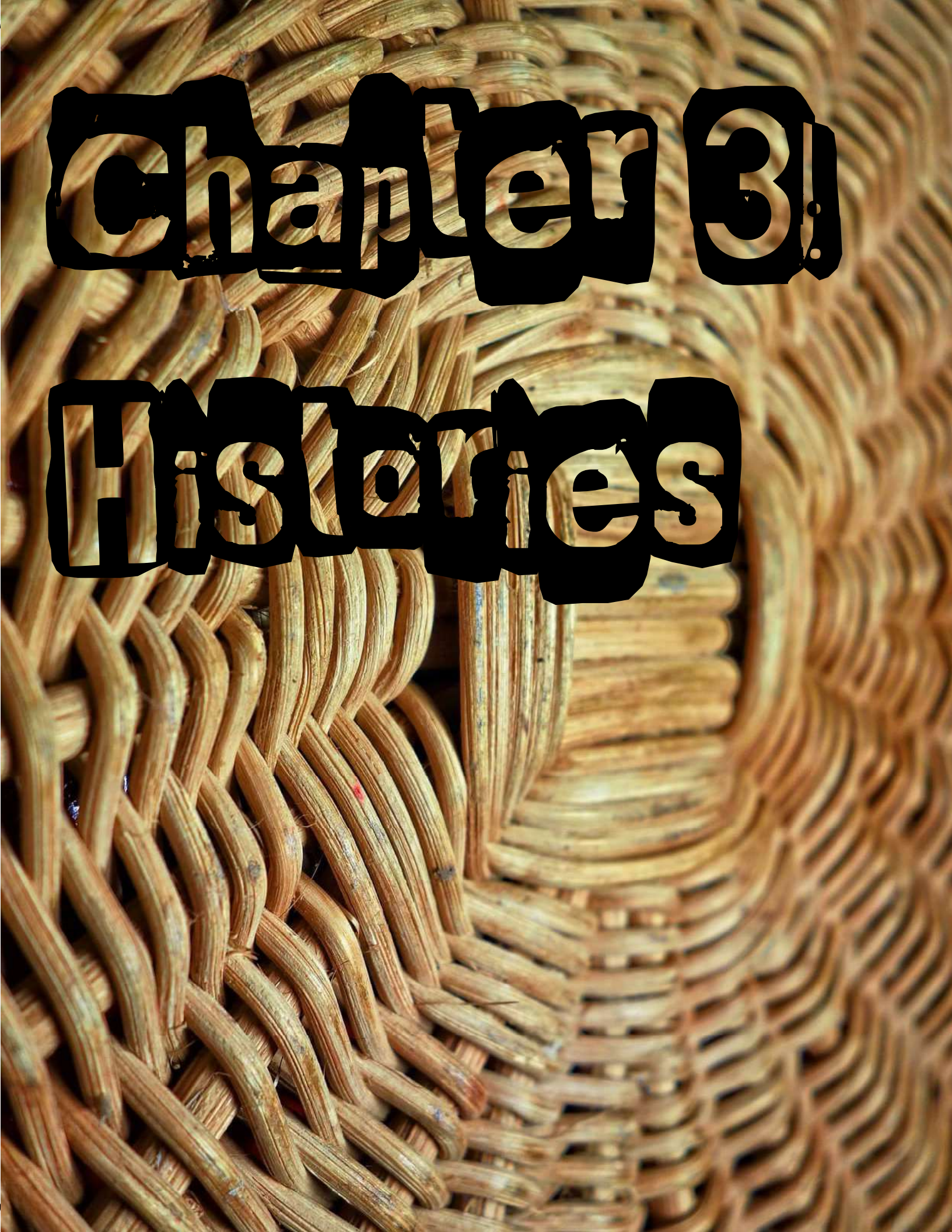
I usually have my Polaroid camera with me at events or outings with my Native community and take photos very often. One of my most favorite parts of utilizing instant film is that I can give my community members photos of themselves immediately, and they really treasure them. The look on everyone's faces when they gather around this tiny photograph and talk about its colors, the memory it just became associated with, and everything else just fulfills me more than anything else. This is not the end result of my practice through reciprocity, but it is a reminder to be thankful for those around me and to show my appreciation by giving away these photos.

Similarly, I give out skateboards to Natives in need of them all the time. A skate deck is a low barrier of entry to the healing that is skateboarding and everything that follows, and I am more than happy to use my resources to help others and lead the way. I have done hand-painted designs, darkroom alternative processes, printing adhesive vinyl, or hand carving, all to make an art piece that connects my Indigeneity to skating. These boards are packed full of meaning and tell a narrative that only people familiar with me can decode, and it is for those people that I make these boards. They have taken the time to talk with me and invest emotional effort into who I am, and I am more than happy to give them a deck in exchange for how they have helped me continue to grow.



The use of material goods such as beaded jewelry, canned salmon, or other items is used fairly often within my circle as gifts for reciprocity. Handmade goods show the person being gifted the physical, emotional, and conceptual weight that the gifter has received from the person they are giving the item to. The gift could also just be knowledge transference such as teaching a skill, telling a story, or other immaterial good. What matters most is the effort to show one's appreciation for the other person in a clear and direct way. By taking to time to formally say "Hey you did something that is really special to me, and I appreciate you for doing that", you are breaking down nonverbal barriers and expressing emotions in a way that is incredibly powerful.

Reciprocity can be complex with many different avenues of entry. However, similar with gifts for holidays in the Western perspective, it truly is the thought that counts. Equity among beings leads to kincentricity, and the sacred ways of navigating this world. I am to be reciprocal to local natives for being so welcoming to me, guiding me and providing me support where I need it the most. The least I can do is to not say "thank you". The least I can do is say 'thank you very much, take this gift that I made for you in return for changing my life for the better'.



Chapter 3!

Histories

HISTORIES

These histories are in this document because I need to set the stage for why I am doing what I do. There is a tremendous amount of Native, art, and Western history topics that go into the many different layers of my practice, and not all of these topics are well known to people who don't lead the life that I do. In order to have the proper context to fully grasp what I am getting at, you, as the reader, will need to meet me halfway here.

SKATEBOARDING AS AN AMERICAN

Skateboarding itself has a very storied history, and a history in which its development has waxed and waned over the years it has been A Thing. While the earliest examples of skateboarding could be traced to the 1940s with crate scooters, the most concrete example of The Skateboard coming into existence was in the 1950s (Borden 2019). Innovated in a way that surfers could cruise during the off-season, this was called sidewalk surfing. Southern California is where this sport was born and continues to lead the way in the culture. Skating ruled in drained backyard pools, and large, purpose-built structures such as halfpipes and skateparks. As we know, this mode of simple transportation of a plank with clay rollerskate wheels bolted to the bottom, to be ridden barefoot, evolved elegantly into its own iconic object. Layers of fine maple, manufactured trucks, wheels, bearings, specially made adhesive grip tape, and loads of accessories all came by and were added one by one.

In the 1970s, boards were still surfboard or rocket-shaped, no grip and still ridden mostly barefoot. In Santa Monica, surf shops became combination stores, offering both surf and skate accessories to their patrons. As is typical in new sports and cultural developments, friendly (and not so friendly) competitions began to spring up. One of the Santa Monica teams came from the Jeff Ho Surfboards and Zephyr Productions shop, one of these combination surf and skate stores. The Zephyr Competition Team, nicknamed the Z-Boys, really began to take charge of what the culture was going to be. With determination and technical ability, they competed in competitions around Southern California and developed brand new styles of skating, called Vert and Transition skateboarding. These styles utilize steep inclined surfaces such as ramps that transition from flat to vertical, in order to perform various tricks. This grew from a desire to not skate around on flat ground where there were not many options of tricks, at the time. With speed and velocity, a lot of airtime could be had, allowing for one to develop amazing manipulations of the board. These skaters revolutionized what it meant to skate in other cultural ways as well, not just technical.

The Z-Boys were not the inventors of skateboarding, but they sure as hell decided what skateboarding was going to mean, all the way up to the present day. The lineup actually was not just for boys but included women in their roster as well. The most "original" lineup of the Z-Boys is usually referenced from the Del Mar competition in the mid-1970s. This included: Shogu Kubo, Bob Biniak, Nathan Pratt, Stacy Peralta, Jim Muir, Allen Sarbo, Chris Cahil, Tony Alva, Wentzl Ruml IV, Peggy Oki, Jay Adams, and Paul Constantineau (Stecyk and Friedman 1996). A damn long list, some of the specific members began to be the face of a certain kind of person, that would embody skating. People like Tony, Stacey, Shogo, Jay, Nathan, Bob, and Wenzel were absolutely diabolical. I do not mean this in the Machiavellian way of a cartoonishly evil villain, but rather in an absolutely culture-breaking way (Kamper 2025). These people were photographed extensively by Craig Stecyk, who utilized photography as a medium to portray these skaters as rebellious, gritty, badass, and unquestionably cool. Set against the beaches of Venice and Santa Monica, these photos and their success as a team influenced pretty much the rest of the planet on what it means to be a skateboarder. This tradition continues today, resulting in self-made zines, magazines, or even photo essays dedicated to people expressing how meaningful it is to be in this community (Ong 2021) (Tokion 2022).

The rebellious attitude and cool demeanor, of course. But to also have their exploits be photographed, recorded, and disseminated through magazines? No skate crew is complete without a filmer/photographer, to this day. Through the end of the 1970s and into the 1980s, skateboards and camera technology developed alongside this team along with their storytelling abilities. Now, it was one thing to tell a group of people eating burgers outside your skate shop how you did a nose stall revert in a pool, but to have a close-up photograph, or even video of it while The Runaways blasts on the radio? That right there is fucking culture. That right there is everything. Storytelling, sharing, elders and youngsters, special language, locations, and actions, which is everything. Telling stories through various mediums, music, and oral tradition, the parallels between skate and Indigenous culture are too many to name.

Bringing it back, the 1970s did define what skateboarding as an attitude and demeanor would be, but it was still awkward in a sense. Yeah, you could cruise down the sidewalk and sort of swerve back and forth, or hippie jump on your board a bit, but the real action was at the skateparks, which were not as common as they are today. And maybe at your local skatepark, there's some assholes there you want to avoid, but you can't really do much outside of a park or pool, so what can you do?

This question was always at the forefront of one skater's mind, and he then spent an incredible amount of time trying to do a trick that could open the door to new possibilities. Vert style was still incredibly popular, but what about when you're on the streets? That skater then developed a new trick where he would rock his board front and back with an incredible amount of energy, pulling up the nose of the board and pushing down the tail, only to reverse and push the nose of the board back down, popping the tail, and subsequently the whole board, into the air. In 1982, Rodney Mullen invented and unveiled the Ollie to the world, once again completely transforming skateboarding forever. No longer was a ramp or pool essential to pull off a trick, you could innovate from completely flat ground now. This became the foundation for almost every trick invented afterward, and reinvigorated interest in skating as a whole.

The new allure and ruggedness of skaters in the 1970s had worn away, and national concern over the sport had waned. This brought everyone's eyes back to it, and remade what street style skating meant. Street skating was no longer cruising along the sidewalk, maybe doing a strawberry milkshake, now it meant launching yourself in the air to grind down handrails, it meant to ollie onto a vertical wall and ride it down, defying gravity. Broken free from the bounds of the skate park, the pool, the halfpipe, skateboarding could truly be done anywhere. Skateboarding culture would continue to progress, regress, go up and down and everything in-between. It would be another decade or so until one fateful man would repopularize vert skating again at the 1999 X Games. Utilizing traditional vert skating techniques along with street styles from years past, a new generation of kids would forever look up to and be inspired by the man himself, Tony Hawk, who would eventually personally work on building the first ever skatepark on the Navajo Nation in 2023.

SKATEBOARDING AS AN INDIAN

Some days it's a good day to skate.¹⁰

Living as an Indian immediately brings various challenges in life. While Reservations are not the hopeless poverty-stricken wastelands that media typically portrays them as, they are still a rough fucking place to grow up in. Even for Natives living in urban spaces, a disconnectedness from your people can bring about depression and sadness. Ellis writes that.

"Expressions of kinship and community define the powwow as an event that draws Indian people together in a profoundly meaningful way".

Kamper goes on to elaborate on this but describes how in-person shared activities connect people and bring about a new appreciation and understanding for each other. While Natives deal with oppression, fewer economic chances, and heightened racism, these activities provide a reprieve from all that and bring about immense joy and love. Kamper then says that.

"This balance of joy and despair in quotidian life is particularly acute in Indian Country"(Kamper, pg. 41).

The incredible number of challenges faced by us on the rez is staggering, and most Americans are flabbergasted when learning of them. There are the well-known issues such as poverty, and food allocation (reservations can be food deserts), but these can become as extreme and active nuclear waste and deadly levels of radiation that go untreated by the US government (Dunbar-Ortiz 2014). Luckily, there are a huge number of people who have been pushing for skating to be an optimal activity for young warriors on and off the rez. While every skater will look up to these figures such as Tony Alva, Rodney Mullen, and Tony Hawk as OGs, we have our own OGs, which could even be referred to as Skate Elders (Kamper 2025). While I agree with Kamper that this is not *exactly* the best wording

10 Real ones will get it.

to describe them, I think it gets the point across to people who are less familiar with interpersonal tribal dynamics on and off the rez. Ever since its popularity grew, skating has attracted a great number of Natives to its scene, especially in Indian Country in SoCal, which spread across the reservations and with urban natives alike.

One thing to note is that our OG Elders in Native skating are not because of their technical prowess necessarily, but for their cultural contributions. Skating is both a solo and group activity, and is infinitely more fun with other people, so gathering together with people like you is only going to be natural when forming a skate crew. For us, our OG Elders have taken the wheel to lead the way through many hardships in order to develop a better future for Native skaters. With resources on and off the rez lacking, leaders who can contribute their time, money, and knowledge become the most valuable and well respected.

Someone that every Indian skater knows is definitely an OG, Douglas Miles Sr (Mvscogee Creek). Both Kamper and I have personal experiences with Douglas, Kamper having been friends with him for years, and me knowing him through the All Nations Skate Jam. Douglas utilizes a great variety of artistic mediums himself to express his Indigeneity through skateboarding. Video, paintings, merchandise, etc., he has done it. He is also the owner and operator of Apache Skateboards and has been pushing Native skateboarding movements almost his entire life.

In the beginning of the 2000s, while Douglas was establishing his vision, more and more Native skaters began wanting to forge a path forward as well. Jim Murphy AKA Murph (Lenni Lenape), and Andy Kessler (Greek) created Wounded Skateboards, along with Walt Pourier (Oglala Lakota). Another, Dustin Craig (White Mountain Apache and Diné) established Four Wheels War Pony. In a relatively short amount of time, multiple indigenous groups centered around community through skateboarding popped up. Rather than see each other as competition to be against as typical Western businesses do, they decided to work together. While they are Native, they all have entirely different experiences and walks of life as Native people. When appropriate, they decide to collaborate together on various projects. One more man who I personally have spent time with is Todd Harder, the man who hosts the All Nation Skate Jam back home in New Mexico, in my hometown of Albuquerque. This event is where all these OGs converge and work together to put on an Indian skate event for Indians and by Indians. This event takes place during the Gathering of Nations every April in Albuquerque, even though it is not directly affiliated with the powwow. Todd in particular helps the event nowadays and created an incredible space for Native skaters to converge and share time and space together. While this event is very much a pan-Indian cultural affair, it reflects Todd's own identity, being the result of the Urban Relocation Program. He is Creek, but opens up the jam with an Oglala song, the AIM Song.

Why is there such a heavy investment into developing Native skate culture and movements? The culture around skateboarding is actually very parallel to Indigenous cultures and identities and practices. Natives can tend to live a lonely life, on or off the rez, and skating builds community. It is a physically and mentally challenging activity that requires intense focus, dedication, and prowess, a very specific set of skills. Sharing time and space with other people in that activity allows you to build emotional bridges together, and as a result become less lonely. Skating builds a lot of self-confidence, just through the difficulty of the activity itself. I personally have played about half a dozen sports growing up, along with a handful of martial arts, and out of all these activities, never have I been more mentally frustrated, or dealt with more painful injuries, as I have with skateboarding. For many people it is one of the hardest activities to do in the world. As such, if someone is able to comfortably skate, then almost everything else in life seems like a breeze in comparison. Skating has inherent storytelling qualities and activities as well, which is incredibly important when thinking about Indigenous epistemologies. Oral and written histories are the first steps in forming our own identities. Where we come from, where we go, all stems from foundations of stories we are told growing up, all the way to what stories we tell others around us.

The relationships skating has to specific places is keenly similar to Indigenous practices as well. Specific skate parks, urban spots, and stories all contribute to a history of Indigenous skating exploits, similar to older modes of knowledge. If we do a quick dive into the act of skating itself, we see a lot of time, skill, and physical prowess condensed down into something that untrained eyes can barely comprehend. As Kamper puts it:

"Skating is an excellent mode to articulate a dense set of meanings about American Indian Culture[...] Native-owned skate companies use the graphic section, always coated onto the underside of a skate deck, to represent Indigenous and tribal history and culture and to confront stereotypical images of Indianness[...]. The act itself of skating channels physical energy and particularly vigorous body movements toward an Indigenous expression of presentness and an ongoing relationship with local terrain and place." (Kamper, pg. 109)

Let's also not forget the extreme artistic ability of skaters as well. Painting and decorating skateboards is one of the go-to hobbies when not actively skating. Skate decks as works of art are an entirely different thing that I will get into later, however. One of the aspects that I have alluded to a few times has been about knowledge bases. Sure, one can learn skating through a few online videos and some trial and error. But as with most things, the best way to learn is to have a more experienced teacher guide you through the process. This lineage from experts to novices creates lasting and meaningful bonds that are very healing. You will see many indigenous skaters utilize tribal semiotics and iconologies when making skate decks. My boy Victor Corpuz (Acoma Pueblo) in Albuquerque has made skateboards in the shape of ears of corn. Di'orr Greenwood (Diné) utilizes woodburning to apply weaving-style burn-ins to her skate decks. Selina Mullen (Diné) creates stickers and other apparel of Native punks and skaters in a mix of traditional and hardcore clothing. Naomi Glasses (Diné) is not only a skater, but also a very high profile fashion designer. Spirit Ta'an'pe'tu Miska (Hunkpapa Lakota and Sāmoan) is a prominent figure in the local Seattle Native skate scene. She organized All My Rolling Relations, a Native skate jam here, and is the former director of Skate Like a Girl Seattle, a non-profit dedicated to making safe learning spaces for femme and trans skaters here. Before this, she also published zines about public health concerns, explaining that:

"Skateboarding extends beyond oneself and the board... It can mobilize entire communities into action and cultivate a strong sense of belonging, diversity, and trust." (Miska, "Skateboarding is Medicine, pg. 6)

Important to note here, is that all of these mentioned artists and organizers utilizing skating as an avenue for creative indigenous expression, have all directly worked with or for one of the Native OG Elders I listed before. Many of these artists have also become direct leaders themselves. Victor and Shawn Shine run free skate workshops on the rez every week, further developing the relationships between natives on and off the rez, creating intergenerational and intertribal relations. Indigenous leadership is rooted in sympathy, respect, and responsibility, which all of these people have demonstrated (Alfred 2009).

This support and respect are not just for other Natives either. A popular trend the past few years has been to undergo the ultimate challenge: to skateboard coast-to-coast across North America. This was popularized by Chad Caruso and followed up by Jason Vanporppal. Both these skaters were making this journey to raise awareness about addiction, and even provided support for each other, as they did their journeys separately, during different years. But interesting to point out, both of them spent time traversing through reservations in the southwest. Caruso on the 2nd day of his journey, and Vanporppal from day 21 to 25 of his trek. Both of them extensively documented the extreme care that was given to them by Natives, people who also weren't even skaters. Constantly throughout the days, people would drive for hours across the desert to bring them snacks, water, battery chargers, even new shoes. Contrasted to when they started passing through the Midwest and began to be harassed constantly by police, these complete outsiders were welcome with more than open arms by Indians who recognized their importance (Caruso 2025).

For native skaters, being ourselves is the truest form of what it means to be happy. We are not taking a "nontraditional" sport and "Indigenizing" it. By simply skating, we are indigenous skaters. We express ourselves through the ways that satisfy us and connect us with our community. As natives, we feel connected by being with others, sharing happiness, sadness, and everything in between. We learn and grow from everyone and everything around us, not from any one individual source. Kamper has pointed out something to me that I didn't even think about, but it makes so much sense in a non-Western context that doesn't rely on the Nuclear Family system. He says:

"One way to measure successful mentorship may not be so much in the length of the mentoring relationship, but rather whether mentees begin to see themselves as mentors to those coming up after them." (Kamper, pg. 187).

To skate as a Native means to not only take care of ourselves and our current community, but to always look ahead and help out the next generation of young warriors and skaters. For them to have a bright future, we have to start our work now.

Lastly, skating is an avenue that represents contemporary Native American cultures in a profoundly innovative and true way. The skateboards as objects are more than just a medium for artistic expression, but more on that later. As described earlier, the act of skating is all about one's body having a physical interaction with the surrounding land in there here and now, ever present. Active engagement in skate culture also roots itself in storytelling, community

knowledge transference, and contributing to a shared history.

PHOTOGRAPHY AS A MEDIUM

“There has been a lot of people photographing the skate world, but most of that fades over time. The ones who captures a certain period of time in skating and have their work shown in the art world is smaller. You can probably count them on one hand[...].”

-Ed Templeton, *Last Days of Summer*. (Holland 2024)

The 1980s had incredible parallels with these subjects that fascinate me. Skaters were photographing and filming themselves not just skating, but also hanging out, egging houses, smoking weed, providing comfort for each other, sharing very intimate lives together. At the same time, Nan Goldin was photographing and filming her and her found family of queer people in New York, across the country. As she would take photos, she would put on slideshows in local bars while local bands play, and local peoples would see photos of themselves over the music. Now a well-known artist and activist, Goldin ran away from home to live in NYC with drag queens, whom she lovingly refers to as the dolls, a now historical term almost in essence. Similarly to skating filmers/photographers, she had a found family with which she was deeply attached to and poured a tremendous amount of love and passion into her project of representing all of their lives together.

I have begun to emulate Goldin's actions not just in artmaking but also organizing movements. Indeed, slideshows have become what I like to think of as an extradimensional photobook. When I make my slideshows, I become incredibly conscious of time and sequencing of images, because I essentially become the viewer's guide through my own internal thoughts. Being able to adapt to multiple spaces and scales lends itself to my family's line of Indigenous artmaking scales too, from adobe house-building to miniscule jewelry and ceramics. The second part my previous statement has been organizing my own Indigenous skate group to have space and hold it for each other. Because the activity itself can be daunting and is arguably one of the hardest sports in the world, external group support makes good medicine for us when we need it the most.

This decade had many people photograph their personal journeys through life not just for the sake of archiving them but sharing them with those who matter most to them. Like today, if one were to pull out a camera without any warning and begin taking photos of the people around them, they would not be getting a very warm reception. This is very much the case of what it was like to skate in New York in the 1980s as well (Gesner and Weisburd 2022). If you are going to photograph a group of people, you owe them just as much vulnerability to yourself, as they are showing you. You owe them your time, your perspective, and the ability to opt out. This is not exactly how many street photographers operate now or back then, but I digress. Photography is inherently an intimate medium; one that requires trust, understanding, and love.

Most skaters and art photographers, until somewhat recently, utilized film as their light-sensitive medium of choice. Pretty consistent, fast shutter speeds, small and agile cameras, the ability to print multiple images, a multitude of accessories to get the job done, why would you use anything else? Nowadays, digital reigns supreme, with a large renaissance in film happening since before the COVID-19 pandemic. That's all there is when people think of photography as a serious medium. Everything else is just far too bulky or hard to work with so why would anyone try? Why not continue a time-proven medium such as digital sensors or 35mm film?

Ever since their invention in 1972, integral instant film such as the Polaroid SX-70 Film format have been keenly close with ideas around intimacy. The idea behind instant film is almost the antonym of what makes photography desirable as a medium. Reproducible? No. Fast and easy to handle? No. Inexpensive? No. Can it be enlarged? No. It is a one and done, do-not-fuck-this-up medium. Cutely small in size, with a distinct frame around it, this is a unique photo object of something that was worth the extra money in film, it is worth making the photo one-of-a-kind, it is the special moments we only have once in a while. We can all take a decent photo even with our phones nowadays and blow it up to a huge canvas print and hang it on the wall, and we can all give a slight nod in approval. But taking out an instant film print, everyone will squeeze shoulders, they will 'ooh' and 'ahh', and fight over who gets to keep the prints (Ewing 2017).

Instant film is inherently the most special format for me because of all of this. It is showing yourself and everyone around you that you care so much about this specific moment in time, the people around you, the emotions flowing through, that you will sacrifice convenience to make something truly special. It is the photographic medium that requires you to really lean in, to focus your eyes, to touch and feel. The glass in these instant film cameras is not the best, if it even is glass and not plastic. The chemistry is so temperamental, it has a short shelf life and cannot be frozen. It is sensitive to ambient temperatures in its color development. Everything around you affects what will happen to your instant film when you press down on the shutter. Like you, the instant film is there at that moment of time, in that space. It. Is. Present. It is so present that it can practically ruin itself trying to remember what it is supposed to be. Dreamy, less-than-sharp results mean that images taken on instant film are not documents. They are memories. Therefore, instant film inherently rejects extractiveness through its unique one-and-done properties, making it perfect to gift through reciprocity and live in the moment.

Photographic mediums can have a wide variety of applications, which can sometimes lead into a novelty of the imagery, leading to the artwork as a whole being taken less seriously. Straight, typical applications of photography through printmaking has been the gold standard for art photography since it became accepted as a form of art in the early 20th century. But if we tweak things a bit to less-than-typical photography, we create intrigue without invoking novelty and being taken less seriously. Processes such as cyanotype, darkroom printing, projection, and older techniques can accomplish this very well. Polaroids and other instant film formats operate in a different, weird place on the spectrum. Their inherent qualities of being instant prints makes them a novelty, along with their smaller sizes compared to enlarged prints. The plastic framing doesn't help either. In order to have this medium be taken more seriously, as some people wish, the envelope needs to be pushed until it is inside out, the medium needs to be taken to its extreme limitations to demonstrate technical prowess along with conceptual development.

Instant film is in and of itself a goddamned miracle, it barely works and when it does, we hold on to those success prints because they took a lot of effort and luck to achieve. Why would we mess around and possibly ruin one of these works? Sure, it may be posturing, but it can also be done to really hit home conceptual aspects of a work that are not inherently present in the subject matter when dealing with photography. For me this has meant playing with the medium in ways that have been somewhat explored in the past. My many friends within the Instant Film Society utilize breathtaking manipulations with instant film, but how can I put my own spin on it?

I have utilized older mediums such as instant film along with Pueblo pottery painting and design, along with subject matter that is unquestionable in the present day. By painting a medium that is barely kept alive by one factory in the world, I am backing up a moment taken from the present with generations of past knowledge and technique. The weight of my ancestors on my shoulders, down my arm, through my hand into this print to bring forth my indigenous identity into these charged images of friendship and family through Native communities.

This brings a very specific avenue of art history forward to today, right here, right now. While I do employ typical applications of digital prints to have a very literal translation of my thoughts, I have come to realize that photography itself can become a sculptural medium to shape and reform. People have many preconceived notions about skaters, Natives, and photography, and this work does not necessarily aim to break those, but to reveal bits of truth that I live every day. My life is my truth, and my work is meant to reflect that.

THE "VALUE" OF NATIVE ART

This may be a bit of a tangent but bear with me. This section may have been better placed earlier in this writing, but it is so integrated in my thinking that I continually forget about how it is not the case when it comes to people's ideas on indigenous art. One of the most important actions that I have taken as an artist is to continually call my work fine art. This includes all aspects of my work from stickers to framed prints, or slideshows and skate decks, all of them I bestow the title of Fine Art. Considering some of my materials, this is already an act of resistance when considering how the rest of the art world thinks of these items.

Throughout colonization of indigenous groups, their artwork and aesthetics continually are adopted as cultural trophies by the colonizing force, taken by force and without consent. These artforms and aesthetics revolve around Indigenous life and existence and generally will be integrated into functional objects or acts. Some examples are the famed Chilkat blankets, Salish canoe paddles, Acoma pottery, Metis beadwork, or Unagax weaving. All of these

objects are held in very high regard in Western eyes, some of them being the gold standard of Native art to outside peoples. These artworks, when sold, are still incredibly devalued for the amount of labor and materials that go into making them. For centuries after colonization began, many trading posts and tourist shops began to sell Native work reproductions or even the authentic works themselves, sold at incredibly low prices.

If you have seen any Native art or products today while on a road trip or at a tourist stop, there is a good chance that you are at a shop that calls its products “folk art”. Calling work folk art is a very easy way for WASPs in the United States to sever the millennia of history that went into making these objects. By calling a piece folk art you are genericizing it, turning something with a huge amount of conceptual and material meaning into a commodity that is only valued when it is sold. This also opens the gateway for non-Native individuals to manufacture artworks that are “native-inspired”, allowing them to reap profits without shouldering any of the responsibilities that comes with making these objects which results in commercialism of culture without consent. Economic Imperialism.

If you look at some of the examples that I listed out, you will hopefully have noticed a pattern, if considering how a Western lens would look at the various mediums. Textiles, pottery, and beading, are all art forms that are historically only done by women or femme-presenting peoples in the Western world. While many of these art forms are also typically done by women or femme-presenting peoples among indigenous communities, it was hardly the rule, and it was never denigrated or devalued if done by different-gendered individuals. Gender in Indigenous society is a very interesting topic, one that I do not have the ability to go too in-depth with here, but I can give a quick example of gender ideas. Yes, many duties, songs, dances, or art works were culturally meant to be done by a specific gender, either through reciprocity or through logistics. However, gender was also pretty damn fluid, pre-colonization. My tribe is the home of the longest continually-inhabited settlements on this entire continent, with our people being present for over 2000 years. Our history of two-spirited people is literally older than the religion of Christianity by a longshot, along with our ideas on gender. Post-colonization, Euro Americans saw works that women made and while they loved them enough to buy and sell them, they still treat them to this day as a lesser art form that is meant to be a commodity.

Indigenous ideas on formalism can also differ drastically from Western ideas on formalism, and while Western peoples are the ones in power, their word is law. It does not matter what is seen as the highest form of art either conceptually or technically through an Indigenous lens, if a native artwork follows western formalist ideas, then that is all that matters. A lack of willingness to reframe one’s eyes when looking at native art or stories will also reinforce the ideas of how Native art is not as materially or culturally valuable as those made by Western artists.

One of the main reasons that Western powers devalue native works as well is the fact that many of these are functional objects. By being made to fulfill a purpose or be a tool, and not being made “for art’s sake”, Native works do not deserve to hold the high authority title of being Fine Art. As an anecdote, I grew up having a tremendous amount of pottery in my house. My family line includes a lot of potters, so many are handed down as gifts for special occasions or to mark special occasions. As such, my mom had quite a few pots and vases around of very large size that would be generally unattainable by the average American.

Traditionally, our pottery was made to hold cornmeal, seeds, dried clay, and a huge host of other items. They’re storage containers, just like pottery today. Interestingly, one of our pots was the “change pot”, used to hold coins and loose change. Another was used to hold a few utility knives and spare blades, maybe a barbecue grill lighter. The one I remember most had tremendous triangular cloud designs with the finest painted parallel rain lines down the side, along with a squash blossom motif that was just stunning. I remember this because we used it to hold our TV remotes, and it is where my phone went when I got grounded. We also had many baskets that I inherited, which sit in my apparently holding tea, my keys, and my jewelry. All of these are stunningly gorgeous pieces of art by both Indigenous and American perspectives, but they have active functions in my life and always have. This is a huge art faux pas, which leads to many similar Native arts being devalued.

Many Native arts are made to be best enjoyed and activated through very different modes than what we typically think of. Blankets of the Northwest Coast are only activated when danced and sang with. Plains Jingle Dresses are also meant to be danced in order to be heard and seen. Pots and basketry is meant to hold objects and keep them safe. Teepee paintings were done not just for aesthetic purposes, but also basically bragging rights through storytelling. Because many Native-made arts were made to NOT live on a blank white wall, i.e. arts institutions, the institution rejects them and instructs others to do the same, contributing to them being devalued even further.

When I make works that are meant to be used, I imbue them with tremendous intention from start to finish, encoding layer upon layer of meaning on them. One of the first decks I made was a mix of adhesive vinyl photographs adhered to the surface of the board, with squash blossom motifs. This deck demonstrated motion through repetition; the photographs were a series of my friend Nathalia performing a trick, one photo taken after another, similar to how motion is shown in skate magazines. The squash blossoms demonstrated blessings and life; in the photographs, Nathalia lands the trick and celebrates. This art piece would be seen as a “crafts project” by the Western gaze due to it being a used, scuffed up object covered in what is essentially stickers and paint markers.

Being used does not remove value in Indigenous epistemologies, quite the contrary. For example, a naaxein (Chilkat robe) is an object that holds incredibly sacred power and meaning. It is also an object that Euroamerican colonizers sought after desperately during western expansion. They are ornately made by hand, woven through techniques unlike many others in the world, with hand-picked mountain goat or wooly dog fur. Being robes, they are not meant to lay static and flat, but flow around in dances and movement, no matter what. The spirit of the naaxein calls for it, the naaxein knows what it is meant to do. In 2024, the Sealaska Heritage Institute held a ceremony welcoming home a historic robe that was taken and held for almost a century by non-native collectors. Secured by Native weavers like Evelyn Vanderhoop or Lily Hope, the naaxein was brought back to Alaska, and after a century of non-archival storage, was in rough shape. Nevertheless, as a part of a Spirit Dance in the welcoming ceremony of the robe, dancers had large wooden carved crests fixed to their heads. Two volunteers held the naaxein upright and taught, and the dancers, not-so-gently tapped their wooden crests against the top edge of the robe, with enough force to send packed down feathers in the crests flying. After a century of behind held hostage, the naaxein was home, fulfilling it's duty again(Sealaska Heritage Institute, “HISTORIC CHILKAT ROBE WELCOME HOME CEREMONY”, 2024).

My art pieces like the skate decks, helmets, and ramps are made to be used until they are broken. They are functional objects *and* they are fine art. Just because indigenous formalist designs are on them, or if they use sacred materials, does not mean that they cannot be both. We have thousands of years of history of sacred and important objects being used for a purpose, and to deny these objects their purpose would be a disservice. Their value is what we decide it is, not an outside, abstracted, Western art market. Our artworks' spirits cannot be diminished.

THE SKATEBOARD AS AN INDIGENOUS OBJECT

Let's now think about all of the things that I described when talking about Indigenous art objects, and how a tremendous amount of them are similar with the value in skateboards. Skateboards, specifically the decks, are incredibly meaningful to the skater. There is incredible intentionality when it comes to the deck's measurements itself, as those measurements affect the comfortability for the skater. Specially made objects that fit exactly what the user's needs are is exactly how indigenous objects are made. For example, moccasins (leather made footwear popular in many but not all North American Indigenous tribes) must be made specifically to each water's foot and are further customized by beadwork often. Similar to moccasins, skate decks are also elaborately decorated. Ornate drawings, paintings, or printing methods are the first layer of the visual language around skating. Usually, a logo or design from a specific company can be interpreted as an advertisement in a way. Occasionally a skater will buy a blank deck and decorate it themselves in order to really personalize it and make it their own. Further decorations can be made by adding stickers to the bottom of the deck or even cutting special designs into the black grip tape on the top side of the deck. This links a lot with indigenous uses of decoration and artmaking to customize clothing and objects, imbuing them with meaning and aesthetic qualities. Elaborately decorated items were sought after by colonizing anthropologists and ethnographers due to their aesthetic qualities, specifically more so up here in the Pacific Northwest and Northwest Coastal tribes (Cole 1995).

The skateboarding being skated, similar to a blanket or robe being dances, becomes activated only through human intervention. Rather, only through specific human intervention. Both objects have been put on display in museums like the Burke, on flat planes. While from a museum visitor's standpoint, this is necessary, it is not true to how these objects are *meant* to be used. The intentionality and specificity of actions and reactions as the human body utilizes these objects unlock their true potential. The elaborate designs and decorations I just described with skate decks are very rarely seen when the board is actually being ridden. In order to see them, the skater must demonstrate a lot of technical abilities and prowess in their craft to manipulate the board enough for others to see the underside.

Another fun detail that bridges the idea of the board as an Indigenous object is the sounds of it. Not as it being skated, but of something more special. At a skate sesh, if someone lands a particularly gnarly trick successfully, the skater's peers will smack the wooden portion of the deck vertically straight down against the ground to make a very loud clapping sound. We do this to hype each other up and to celebrate our peers for accomplishing something difficult. It is a very distinct sound to be sure. On the other side, in my Canoe Family we carve our own paddles. Carved from Alaskan yellow cedar, we spend weeks if not months going over every single detail of it and passing down knowledge from our instructor Ty Juvinel (Tulalip). While out on the water pulling the canoe, if we meet another canoe family or want to hype each other up, we will take our paddles out of the water and raise them straight up. After this, we will smack the handles of our paddles against the bilge (interior floor of the canoe) vertically down, to also create a clapping sound.

By owning a board and walking around or using it, skaters also open themselves up to certain types of harassment by authority figures. It is a well-known trope of a skater being chased by security guards or cops in an act of rebellion. To utilize native objects such as sage, carving tools, or other items, a native is also susceptible to being harassed more by those same figures, as well as more WASPy individuals. This extends to more extreme acts than just passive aggressive comments. Police brutality in this country is understood, but the extent of their cruelty due to being faced with "others", i.e. people do not like them, is astonishing. Police have been witnessed going out of their way to run over and kill skaters who are harmlessly enjoying themselves¹¹ as well as executing Native carvers while those carvers are on the job here in Seattle¹².

I decided to mix all of these avenues of my life together into a physical form with my silver gelatin skate decks. Simply enough technically, they are uncoated skate decks slathered with silver gelatin chemistry, then exposed and developed with typical darkroom chemistry and techniques. However, I take this further. The photographs themselves develop only the shadows and black portions of the photograph, and leave the raw wood uncovered as the highlights of the image. This is imbuing the wood grain itself with my community, culture, and artmaking all into one. Taking it further, I beaded necklaces and wrapped the decks in them with my grandfather's turquoise, as well as integrating woven cedar and found raven's feathers. As I assemble the deck, I think good thoughts and memories, intentionally pouring positivity and good medicine into the board, asking the spirits to help me too. The end result is a ceremonial object that is immensely powerful, both through its imagery and the spirit that it now holds. I install these skate decks above entryways into my exhibition spaces as a smudging practice, cleansing bad energy and keeping out evil spirits from my sacred spaces.

As both a Native and a skater, I can say one last thing on the matter. Skating and taking up space by having fun is one of the most Indigenous things that I think I can do. We are immediately connected to the land and the present time, taking in little details that no one else notices. We gain very specific relationships with the land and people around us by doing these activities, be it skating or other more tradish stuff. The connections made between something like an adze and a skateboard can seem pretty thin at first glance. However, the more we analyze and begin shifting our perspectives, the more wholly we can be educated in the world around us.

11 <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/nov/05/la-police-skateboarder-dashcam-video>

12 <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/10-years-ago-a-police-officer-shot-woodcarver-john-t-williams-the-grief-reverberates-today/>

Chapter 5!

Stories

STORIES

ALL NATIONS SKATE JAM 2025 / ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

I rush out of my car and immediately get hit with a wave of heat. I take the last bite of my burrito from Frontier, tossing the wrapper into my car to deal with later. Me and my partner Jeanie begin unloading everything out of the car. Backpack with snacks, water, stickers, and skate trucks. My first Canon camera bag stuffed with a Nikon and a Polaroid. Two skate decks I need to put grip tape on and screw in the trucks from my bag. Half my pockets are already filled with stickers to give out, my own, Skate Like a Girl, and Apache Skateboards. No sunscreen, I have a bandana which should take care of that issue. No helmets for either of us, no plans on competing ourselves, just hanging out and supporting our friends who are. As we walk to the bleachers in the park, we pass but one of the few booths here, looking at homemade shirts, beaded medallions, and custom printed decks. My friend Victor won't be here today, but his mom recognizes my stickers from his booth, and we start talking about traditional pottery designs!

After that quick chat we find Pearl and her family under a camping canopy, with coolers and donut boxes filled to the brim. Pearl, her husband, and their son all skate together, and all of them plan on competing, along with our other friend Nathalia. Shawn isn't here, he is with Victor at their shop downtown, getting ready for the afternoon. It is the Gathering of Nations Powwow here in town, and due to Derek Matthews (the head organizer) being outed as a pretendian, the local community has ramped up grassroots native events all across the city. The Gathering of Nations is the largest powwow in the country, with hundreds of different tribes all coming together to celebrate Indigenous culture and share in community across the city. Victor and Shawn are putting clothes, food, and merchandise into baskets to do a Pueblo throw. A throw is a large giveaway ceremony during harvest seasons, redistributing wealth from those with a greater bounty than their neighbors, making sure everyone is taken care of. The fact that my boys are missing the All Nations Skate Jam so they can give away to those in need is very touching to me, considering they both live and breathe skating.

Chilling and hanging with the Burque Babes, me and Jeanie grab our boards and start warming up around the park. We do a few laps, and eventually I run into a big motherfucker built like me except a foot taller, also wearing a battle vest. I asked if I can photograph him and he says sure but not to expect anything special, he is just going for speed right now. I grab my camera and follow him around the park, pushing as fast as I can but still unable to keep up with him as he is laughing at my struggle. Shooting not even from the hip, but from the knee as I am crouching on my board hoping my wide-ass lens is getting him in frame.

I show him the photos on my camera, and he is all smiles and introduces himself to me.

"Yaknow those sandwiches you find in gas stations? Those fuckin ones wrapped in foil under the heat lamp all day. That's me, call me Tha Sandwich."

After that, his brother comes by, also on a skateboard, also built like a shed, also wearing a battle vest. Turns out his brother is in the local metal band Eye and offered me a beer for taking photos of them, but I declined. Palmer (yes, the legend Rob Palmer) starts whistling at everyone in the park to gather up. Todd, a Creek serigraphist, is in the middle of the entrance to the park, with some of the guys from the Redrum Motorcycle Club. Their hand drums are out, and a smudge is being lit, and while they sing the intertribal AIM song, they pass the smudge to a younger boy to take through the crowd. As he passes me, I gather a handful of smoke and pour it over my being as if a bowl of water, cleansing my spirit. I raise my hands up to him the Salish way, as I say "Dawaa'eh". Once the song finishes, Todd announces the first bracket and we collectively kick our boards up to our hands, almost mirroring the drums that were beating just seconds before.

CANOE JOURNEY 2025 / BETWEEN PORT TOWNSEND AND JAMESTOWN ON THE SALISH SEA

I wake up in my sleeping bag, barely conscious and only slightly aware that I'm even in a sleeping bag. Of the past 4

days, 20 hours were spent in transit either by car, train, or ferry. But I made it, finished my work in Garibaldi and in Seattle, now I can relax on Journey! I stretch a bit and open my phone to see if I magically have reception compared to last night, and I don't. I figure (hope) that the tsunami warning last night left the sea too choppy to pull the canoe through so that I can sleep in a few more hours and I can actually relax.

As I step outside of my tent to go to the latrine, I see that Kuwllkadim, our Skipper, is already awake and dressed. Cedar hat on, life vest on, and cup of coffee in his hands, he says good morning and asks if I'm good to pull. I remember my leg which still has 5 stitches in it from shredding it on the concrete a few weeks before, and how the ER told me to stay clear of submerging it in water. Fuck it, I'm sure it'll be fine. We are the čawayaltx^w ʔiışəd.

I start trying to rush to get my camping pack and tent taken down but Skipper reminds me that our ground crew will take care of everything for Jamestown. I get dressed in my water gear, life vest, and hand off my camera bag to those who will go on our support boat. We head down to the docks in the car and see over a dozen deer just wandering through people's front yards among the dew and mist blanketing the ground. As we get to the docks and get ready, I look out and see the water almost like a solid mirror. "Shit's glass", I hear Skipper say, and I can hear the smile in his voice from under the cedar hat. "Should be an easy pull, you picked a great day to get here man", he continues.

Our Canoe, Willapa Spirit, was gifted to UW's Shellhouse by Marylin Oliver-Bard, with the artwork of the Salmon and Eagle painted on the canoe originally by art legend Marvin Oliver. Marvin was Quinault and part Pueblo (Isleta), further deepening the strange ties that I have from home in New Mexico to here in the PNW.

We hop in the canoe with Ethan and Sarai on the lead bench at the bow, setting the pace for the rest of us. Best seat because you get breaks first, get the best view, and don't have to worry about getting splashed, generally! As we begin, I feel absolute fucking bliss. My first time pulling on Journey, first time pulling on the sea, and just gliding through the water that is so calm it's like a mirror. We pass Point Wilson and see the lighthouse rise above it, and see the mist begin to gather. One hour in, I've had a few breaks, taken a few videos on my phone, enjoying the sun! During one of our breaks, a cedar strip canoe filled with teenagers and a few elders just glides past us nearby. We all wave, wishing them safety and good travels on their portion of Journey.

Hour two and the fog is really starting to gather, and our paddles begin to get caught up in the bull kelp around Cape George. These location names are completely unfamiliar to me, and I barely can distinguish between the different types of algae in the water. Give me 20 different cacti and I'm your man, but anything in the ocean and I'm (for now) fucking useless haha! My arms are seriously getting tired, even after switching sides with Jean to even out my left and right shoulders. That cedar strip canoe is from Lummi, and we've been passing each other back and forth, seeing who can pull the fastest for the longest, who can sing the loudest, in the friendliest competition!

We are now three hours in and Jesus Fucking Christ my arms are going to give out literally any second. Every pull I have to consciously focus on each and every muscle I am using, commanding them to keep going and not let me give up and be first to ask for a break on Journey. The fog is now so incredibly dense our support boat has to go ahead of us and blare the foghorn every minute or so, preventing us from ramming into rocks or even another canoe. It's been a hot minute since we've seen the Lummi canoe though, even in the fog. Finally, Skipper tells us we are gonna swap in fresh pullers from the support boat.

Somewhere between three and four hours on the water, while resting on the support boat, Wes tells us that the Lummi canoe is in trouble and we need to help them. Engines are off, and I see Willapa is helping Lummi pull up to the support vessel and just take a long breather. Apparently one of their kids got seasick from how the water got rougher as the day went on, and they should be ok on a more stable platform like our vessel. While trying to safely hook everything up the engines started by accident, leading the person tying up the canoes, Roland, to go straight into the cold ass water.

Wes rushed past me to shut off the engines with the captain and to run down to get Roland back on the vessel. I lean over the edge and see Roland standing there on the edge of the ship already but completely dripping wet. Honestly if there was anyone to go overboard in Salish water, it's our boy from Shxwhá:y Village, built like a fucking brick wall yet made for the water. I grab a few towels for when he comes further up and deck and see that the cabin is absolutely filled with these Lummi kids, all of whom needed a break it seems!

With everyone on board we make sandwiches and shoot the shit the Lummi canoe family, and god damn these kids are hilarious. They started calling Roland Buff Man, and the second I told them about my skateboards they all crowded around my phone wanting to see, asking for stickers when we got to Lower Elwha. It is fucking uncanny how much they remind me of my younger cousins back home. Same mannerisms, same way of talking, same t-shirts of Biggie Smalls, all of it. One of the teens, Sebastian, tells me their canoe is named Little Sister.

ALL TOGETHER SKATEPARK AUGUST 2024 / SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

I walk up the hill from my apartment to the 62 bus stop near Magnuson Park, just with my backpack. I start my year-long descent into misunderstanding time and distance as I get on the bus to go 5 miles from my apartment, a 53 minute journey. I am used to the more spread out city of Albuquerque or even Austin, where you can go almost a mile a minute with your own car, which I no longer have here in Seattle. I spend a few minutes just scrolling through my phone before I get carsick again, not used to riding the bus for so long and not used to its ship-like sways over the concrete waves and hills here. Carsickness leaves me for the most part as I look out the window, always loving the greenery at every bus stop, every shop overhang.

As I step off the bus, I look around to get my bearings. I'm used to towering mountains perpetually east of me, which is not the case here. Eyes half-glued to my phone's map navigator, I walk the 80 or so steps to get into EVO near Fremont. More of a mountain biking and adventure skiing place, huh. I ask one of the workers if the skatepark is here and they guide me down into their basement, at the loading dock. I walk down the last few stairs and see a wall of bookshelves bursting with skate magazines, some brand-new and some older than me by a wide margin.

I have some trucks and wheels in my backpack that my partner Jeanie mailed me. My last skateboard was stolen along with my car, but my helmet was recovered, covered in scratches. I'm a big guy so an 8.75 deck is what I need, along with some grip tape and I'm good to go. The attached shop has an attendant, who hands me an orange Antihero board, not usually the color I'd go for but fuck it. They also help me set up the board and install everything on it. While I want to skate at the park ASAP, it's kids' lessons for the next few hours so I'm out of luck (maybe). Instead of skating, I grab a fat stack of the older magazines from the early 00's and chill on the bench in the park. First article I open up is talking about how rednecks go backside on rails, but that's still more straight than going frontside on one. I pour over the magazines for about an hour, taking photos with my phone every now and then of articles or photos that catch my eye. Without thinking much into it, I get to a magazine from mid-2003. Same schtick, speed reading articles, staring at the film photography to capture insane moves, and then I see a small advertisement.

Opposite to a full page spread on sneakers from some company that has been bankrupt for decades, there is a small photo ad someone took out. It shows 2 kids, and I mean 18 year old kids, shaved heads in Desert Battle Dress Uniforms. They are doing some flip trick on an upward angled bench over rubble, no doubt in Iraq. The only text with this photo is in large bold letters: "BOMB HILLS, NOT PEOPLE". Fuck, man.

UNCLE JOHN'S HOUSE MAY 2025 / SKOKOMISH INDIAN RESERVATION

I step outside the UCAR with my backpack and realize that wearing shorts in the heavy sun with a fresh leg tattoo was probably not a great idea. I see the black and red canoe on a trailer outside John Smith's house, with a table ready with paint, tarps, and brushes. Tay and Shayla are already here, chilling with some soda waters in the shade while talking to who I can only assume is Uncle John. Loud laughs are heard through the low insect buzzing as me and Ken grab our canoe paddles out of the UCAR, along with our carving kits, in case we have some downtime as we repaint Willapa Spirit.

First few hours of being here, not a single paintbrush is picked up. We are only tracing the original salmon and eagle designs, straight from the cut-off hull of the first version of the canoe. Made by hand by Marvin Oliver, these designs are our only guide. A year before I came here, the canoe was given to John for him to repair it after some heavy use. New supports, new benches, restructured gunwales, but it doesn't have Marvin's touch on it just yet. We are using huge sheets of tracing paper to get his motifs and elements just right, in order to transfer it on the new canoe.

After staring 2 inches away from a paper and having to have the steadiest hand possible, me and Ken take a break to adze our paddles a bit more into shape. We stand the boards up and start chopping as we were taught, hoping to have our personal paddles done in time for Journey (haha). Honestly there was nothing better than taking a breather from slow and steady movements to fast and muscled ones. With no less precision though, otherwise we will fuck up our paddles beyond repair, and we have no clue when we will have a new teacher to guide us.

After a few minutes of this, John sees us working these boards of yellow cedar The Old Way. He definitely seems a bit impressed considering this is mine and Ken's first sorta wood carving experiences. After a few minutes, he tells us to come check something out in his woodshop. We walk over to his massive barn, wood all over the ground, the walls, a new canoe being built in the dead center too. I have a weird moment of almost déjà vu, recalling times when my own Uncle Daniel would show me how he knaps obsidian knives, or coils a pot.

Similarly, John grabs a random board off the ground and grins at me and Ken. Before he turns his bandsaw on, he says:

"Hey watch this."

So fast that I barely have time to get my phone out, John begins ripping this random piece of bastard cut wood into a gorgeous canoe paddle before our very eyes. Zero measurements, no marking the board, just pure skill and experience. In less than two minutes, he is standing there laughing at me and Ken while holding a new canoe paddle. Our mouths are wide freaking open, both in seeing John's carving skills in action and also from realizing we are using hand tools for MONTHS to get what John just did in one hundred seconds. Backwards cap on with Rush blasting over his property speakers, laughing his ass off at me and Ken's shock, John sure as hell just showed me exactly who he was the very first day I met him.

A quick lunch break later, we are sitting down at the canoe again. The tracing paper has been transferred to a layer of masking tape, which we will now cut out to roll on layers of paint to get the bulk shapes done. Kuwilkadim hands me the last thing I thought I would be using when working on a canoe, a fucking Xacto knife. Literally my least favorite art tool I've ever used in my life. The last time I used one of these, I cut out over 150 individual hummingbirds from canvas paper, using 4 different shapes, using an Xacto knife. Over two sleepless nights when I was doing art in community college, only for these pieces to get put into an installation I got in trouble for (it was my fault but anyways).

My lasting memory of Xacto knives is hand cramps at 4 am while some random Netflix show played in the background, for my Art Practices 1 class in community college. Now I need to use one and give the best that I could possibly do, because this canoe is going to outlast my time at UW by years, hopefully decades. There is no fucking way I could half-ass this and have a shoddily painted portion of the canoe because they asked the only art student (who does photography of all things) to help out.

Sweat literally dripping off my nose as I concentrate and try to remember the technical use of the knife, I cut out the shapes needed. Shapes that are, at the time, unfamiliar to me in indigeneity, but trigons, circles, and not-quite-ovoids. I don't even remember how many of the 4 sides of the canoe paintings I cut out but apparently it was a lot, Kuwilkadim was impressed so fuck it we ball. Finally done, I go back to adzing my canoe paddle to let out my anxiety on the cedar and realign myself. After convincing Roland to shotgun a LaCroix like the bad influence I am, we sit back down at the canoe, now stenciled out and ready for painting.

A few coats on with rollers, it is definitely the hottest part of the day. Kuwilkadim has his big wide cedar hat so he's chilling, John has his shirt off so he's chilling, and Roland busts out his drum and starts singing so he's definitely chilling. Me and Wes are there in the heat, big boys with a lotta hair, just sweating nonstop. But Wes doesn't stop painting and neither will I, I'm here for a reason and that is to paint.

A few more hours go by, and the sun gets a bit lower. The main shapes of paint have been rolled on and now we are focusing on layers, since we are using acrylic paint. Everyone has gotten a round of time to connect their phones to John's speakers and play a bit of their music, and it's been nothing but bangers. Heavy metal to old school punk, hard rock and nu metal have been just flowing through the air. My turn is up and I just throw on my Summer Playlist. I remember there's a bit of The Pretty Reckless in there, Generation X, and Los Mocos. I feel good, and

happy to listen to my songs as the playlist goes on.

My new job on the canoe is to paint sharp and straight lines on the trigons and circles, since I have some painting experience. Most of my stuff back in the day was gestural landscapes but I am batting a thousand right now with these Salish elements. Sharp lines helped by me dabbing the paintbrush on my shorts, permanently staining them, but this canoe is gonna be perfect, whatever it takes. John comes round to my end of the canoe to inspect my work, and says:

“Damn that’s pretty good! Y’know Marvin would be impressed by that; you’re doing great dude.”

Holy shit did he actually just say that as I’m doing the part of art that I’m the least comfortable and confident at? Hell yeah, I guess I still have my painter abilities hidden somewhere. Another minute goes by and my playlist, set to randomize, does a hard shift from Ventura Highway to Sticky by Tyler the Creator. Forgot I threw his recent album on my playlist, and I’m so used to hearing it I don’t even notice it at first. But everyone else sure does. Kuwlkadim, Roland, Wes, everyone’s heads goes up to see who the hell is playing this song right now. An audible “What the fuck?” comes from John’s direction as I realize what I’ve done and fumble my phone to switch it back to the appropriate mood. Nice one there, Andrew, god damnit.

ANCESTRAL SISTERHOOD JANUARY 2025 / SODO, SEATTLE

I am finishing up reading *Pushing Across America*, by Chad Caruso. There’s some incredible stuff in it, even if it is a pretty short book. Great photography, and it’s talking about a journey that I am familiar with only by proxy. Chad did his skateboard journey a few years ago and inspired others to do the same, and I watched other people’s journeys. Never did I experience the original, and here I am, starting and ending the book on the same day. His writing is so succinct, it’s so friendly, it’s like I’m talking to him, and fuck I’m jealous.

Anyway, I’m doing all of this sitting at a tiny table on a plastic chair at Ancestral Sisterhood, a local native arts group ran by Alayna Eagle Shield and Ixtlixochitl Salinas-White Hawk. I’ve been coming to these weekly drum gatherings ever since they started in Cap Hill. We had to move the whole organization to an entirely new place of business during the fall. Instead of being a few blocks away from the train station, nestled between a bookstore and a boba shop, we are next to an industrial recycling center. We moved because a night yoga studio that was the floor above us in Cap Hill complained to the owners of the building, and subsequently got Ancestral Sisterhood removed for not waiting to drum after their yoga finished at 9 pm.

Every single urban space or group that is about Native culture, that I have been in, has dealt with constant displacement like this. Our canoe family is the same, with the Native-purposed longhouse on campus only allowing us to have meetings there once in a while. Our canoe has also constantly been moved around, with UW’s Water Activity Center not allowing us consistent access to our own canoe in storage there. The original Shellhouse the canoe family was named after has been abandoned for years, right next to the WAC, with UW leadership refusing us to have access when it is finished renovating.

Back to the present (the past, as I write this?), things are still very cozy here, and while the drive isn’t always fun, and the industrial area is pretty dark and not super safe, it is a comforting space to be in. I haven’t really been drumming or singing as much as I used to, at least since the new year started. Every time I come here, I spend at least 90% of my time studying, just reading and writing and maybe joining in for the final song of the night. These weekly meetings always have food provided for free, Ancestral Sisterhood organizes either potluck days or direct catering from Chef Shawn, in Muckleshoot. He dedicates a huge amount of his time and energy every week to sending us healthy homemade meals, usually enough for people to have leftovers and take home. I am usually the person to take the most leftovers, at Ixtli’s beckoning because I’m a student.

I haven’t met Chef Shawn yet, but every single week we sing a song before eating and talk about how special it is for him to make us food out of the kindness of his heart. Consistently for months, I have always been able to rely on a hot meal and good community in this space. Anyway, I’m chilling at the table still studying, eating a little cup of jelly from Uwajimaya, a local Asian market. I get here pretty early most days, so that I can help set up chairs and tables and have extra time to read or write. Everyone here lives by Indian Time, so perpetual lateness is expected. I take



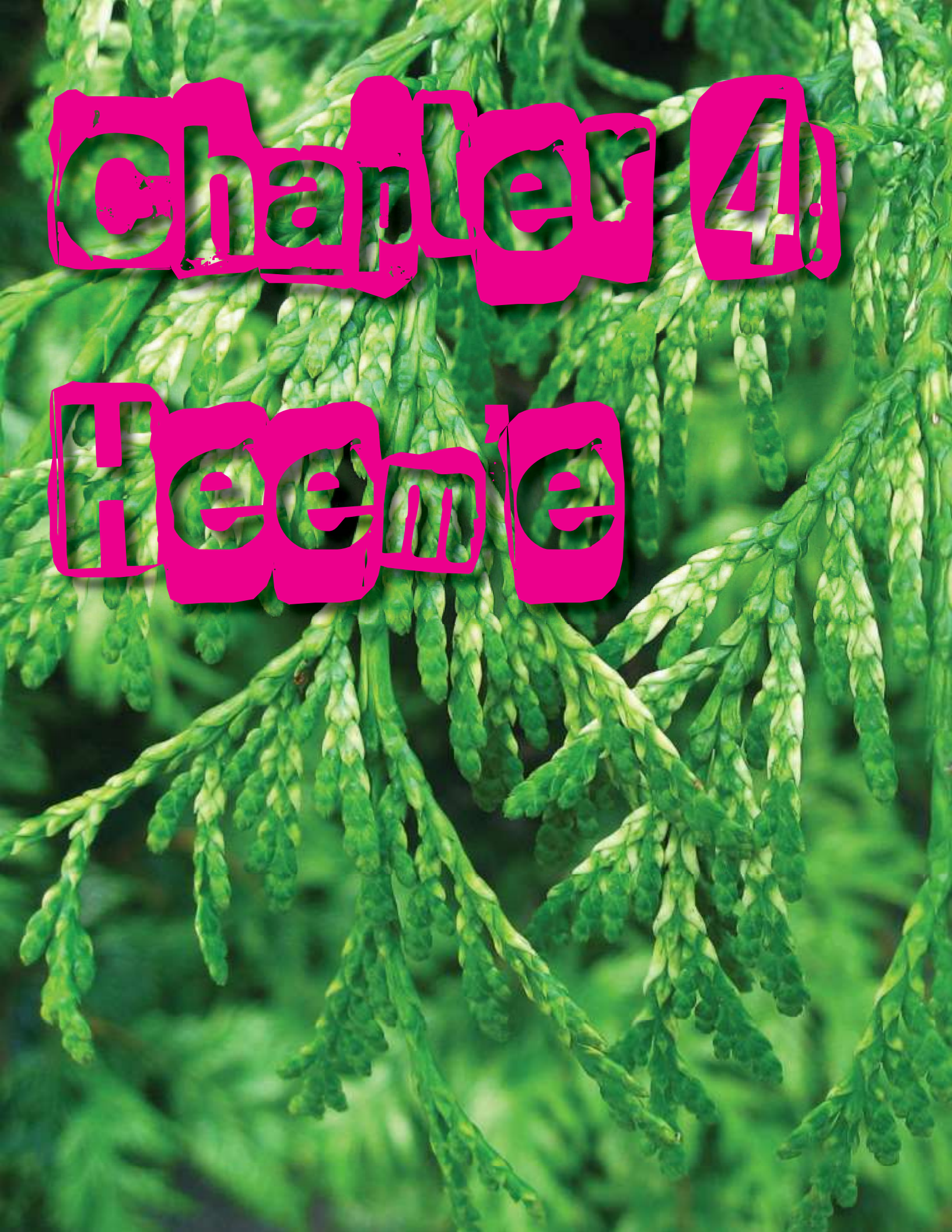
advantage of this to get out of the house sooner, try to beat traffic, and enjoy calmness before the drums of the night begin shaking my brain.

After some time, people begin to show up, and I take a break from studying to help get more tables and chairs. More people come by and start socializing, and I do join in on a few conversations around my table every now and then. Eventually my boy Brian shows up, which is great news! Brian just came back to Seattle from a trip and found out his job was beginning layoffs. He lost his job, and I offered him help to bump up his resume to begin sending out. We start working together, reorganizing and rephrasing, adding new work entries, all that good shit. People are gathering and the food is being laid out, with some new people joining the space as well. This is not a rare occurrence, at least one new person comes by every week, and most people consistently return. I don't want to get off track from Brian's resume, so we just keep working away.

The opening song is played by everyone, a Lakota thank you song, and once it ends, Ixtli begins her usual announcements of the week. Talking about family, gratefulness, and other local Native events to keep an eye out for. She also gestures to one of the people I don't recognize here and tells everyone how incredibly special it is to finally, for the first time, have Chef Shawn join us. Immediately I feel incredibly honored to have him join us, incredibly embarrassed that I did not introduce myself yet, and incredibly anxious that I didn't bring something to give him as a gift. Just as fast, as that thought, we all begin our usual introductions or our name, our tribal affiliation, and for tonight we are going to talk about a favorite memory from coming to these drum circles. Very sweet and meaningful words are shared by everyone, and afterwards we sit down and let the elders get their plates first.

The night continues with me and Brian working on the computer, trying to polish everything up and get ready to send out. I passively sing some songs outside of the circle, mostly to myself, just to participate a little bit. While we are adding new skills and descriptions to our document, Mark, who is Ixtli's partner, brings Shawn over to the circle and sits him down at a drum with one of the sticks. Shawn is not Native, he is African American, but he is a chef in Muckleshoot every day, so he is surrounded by the culture for years. From the look on his face and he is handed the drumstick, I think we can all see this is the first time he has been asked to participate. From my corner with Brian, I can see he have a very determined attitude, completely different from the laidback approach he has had all evening, and he is doing his damned best to keep up with the drumming. Never mind the singing, just staying on beat to the constant ebbs and flows of the songs is a challenge itself, but he makes it through the rest of the songs of the night with the biggest smile on his face. Everyone else in the room is also sharing in this warm fuzzy feeling of community and love. This is what I live for right now.

Thank you everyone
for these memories.



Chapter 4:

Trees



AN UNINVITED PHOTOGRAPHER INTERRUPTING OUR DRUM CIRCLE AT THE PARK



JACK'S FRESH NEW BRUISE.

ANOTHER UNINVITED TOURIST







AND ANOTHER



Chapter 6:

Heyawaashu

CINCO DE MARGO 2025





BURQUE BABES MEETUP 2023





ANTIDOTE SKATE MEET 2024



HERITAGE DAY METAL SHOW 2024

RENS DEN, NATIVE AMERICAN





LOS ALTOS SKATEPARK 2025



A person in a black t-shirt is pouring red paint from a can into a bucket. In the foreground, there is a table with various painting supplies including paint cans, brushes, and a pink container. The background is a wooden wall.

JOE REPAINTING THE WILLAPA SPIRIT 2025





JAM AT MARGINAL WAY IN NOVEMBER 2025



PULLING PRACTICE BEFORE JOURNEY 2025



Chapter 7: Interviews

INTERVIEWS

INTERVIEW WITH MIKAELA SHAFER, FEBRUARY 19TH, 2026

Andrew: What does Indigenous Community mean to you right here and right now?

Mikaela:

I think it could be many things, but for me, Indigenous community is, like, as an urban Native, is just the connection that we have with each other and the camaraderie we have with each other of our shared histories and stories and the support that we give to one another, living in an urban area, sometimes far from your homelands. Yeah, it's just, like, camaraderie and community and support and collaboration. It's definitely different here than in other places.

While I love, you know, being in the Southwest it feels like here, because there's so many urban Natives, there is a lot more intertribal connection and community building. It's not so, like, segregated by your tribe and, like, who your family is or where you're from. Which I really love.

Andrew: What fulfills you the most in your life right now?

Community building is the most important thing to me of anything. I think that I've kind of figured out that in my life, my role in community is a connector of people. I've always been kind of an introverted extrovert. Like, I love to organize things. I love to see gatherings. I love to see people connecting together. But I'm, also very kind of shy and quiet and reserved and very private. So, I've, like, learned that my role in community is the connector of people. I see where people can connect with each other. I see where there's common threads between each other and I connect with those people. Then watching those relationships blossom and, like, things come out of that is the most exciting thing to me.

When I see people build deep friendships or, like, plan an event with someone that I've connected them with or have a really good opportunity from someone I've connected them with, like, that is what brings me a lot of joy and a lot of pride in the life that I live. The work that I do with yəhaw really kind of helps me to fulfill that on a greater scale with our Indigenous roster and curating shows, like, The Land Remembers and having this opportunity to connect people to really important opportunities that they might not have otherwise known about or understood how to access.

Being someone that when I've learned something for myself, I'm understanding that that is something that I have to share with others and figuring out how to use the knowledge that I've gathered to open doors for other people, whether that's, like teaching them how to apply for a grant or leading them to a resource or, you know, connecting them with someone.

Andrew: Absolutely, I can tell what you mean by that! It might also be nice for you to know that I saw Amber Stephens (Puyallup) at the recent Coast Salish Creation Stories Exhibition at Tidelands! I was going there just because I knew Epiphany Couch was in the show, but when I got there, I saw Amber's piece and flipped the fuck out. I ended up seeing Joe Seymour Jr. there too along with some others from my local drum group, and Amber!

Mikaela: I was excited to see that she was part of that show, too! Yeah, she had said that The Land Remembers is one of the first times she's shown that work and then now to see her showing in other spaces like that [is nice]. I haven't had a chance to see it. I was out of town during the opening, but I need to come up and see it. I went last Tuesday to go see it. I forgot that Tidelands isn't open on Tuesdays! So, yeah, I'm excited to see it. I'll probably go next week or something. But truly it's just, like, growing. I was just looking at her portfolio today because I'm writing a piece with her in it. Just looking back at the last, like, five years of her work and how much it has progressed is really incredible.

Andrew: Who has inspired you to continue to be in community the most?

Mikaela: So many people. I would say to everyone that I've met through yəhaw has been really supportive. I feel like

before I started working with yəhaw , I feel like I was aware of community and I would cross over into community, but I didn't feel in community because I felt so separate from everything. Then getting involved with yəhaw has really been this door open for me. All the people that I've met through there, Asia is, like, just such a great advocate for Native people and really someone that I aspire to be like a lot. Anytime she sees an opportunity that she thinks that would benefit me, she always shares it with me and encourages me to go after those.

Seeing all the different artists and what they're doing and what they're capable of, you know, Taylor White, I admire her a lot. Just her confidence and ability to just, be herself in a space that often really wants you to be a certain way as a Native artist. I just wrote, it's funny, right before we were talking, I was just writing an Instagram post for yəhaw on women artists on our roster who are telling the story of land through art. One of the women was this woman named Brenda Mallory, when I was in Arizona I went to the Herd. I walked in and she had an installation there and it was the most mind-blowing, beautiful thing I had ever seen.

Like, it was what I want to do with my art on a grand scale, and it really changed a lot of things. It got gears turning in my head! I was like oh wow there's so many ideas and so much beauty in what she's doing. Then come to find out she's from the Northwest and I didn't know that, and she's on our roster!. This person that I'm super inspired by and I've been following her and, absorbing all of her artwork, and then she's from right here! Anyone who really is reconnecting and trying to tell a story in that way, like Epiphany Cough is a huge inspiration to me and Malia Peoples. Just knowing that there's other Indigenous people who have to be, for one reason or another, so far from their homeland, so far from their people, and how they tell that story and how they hold on to that connection, no matter how far they get away from it, is really inspiring to me.

Because it is so hard to be Native in a land that's not yours, when you want so badly to be connected to your culture and, hear your language and see people that look like you. As much as you have other intertribal community members, there's still that, like, loneliness and longing. Seeing how other people tell their stories and keep that connection and keep that alive is really inspiring to me.

Andrew: What is something that changed the way you view yourself as an Indigenous person?

Mikaela: Wow, change the way I see myself. I think for a long time like when you grew up native it's not every day you're like, Oh, I'm native you wake up and you think it. I think, especially growing up in urban settings, it wasn't like a focal point of my life for a really long time.

I would say that having children really made me realize how important it is for me to be connected and to preserve culture, and to be proud to be native. To carry on that legacy. Because it is like a dying art, for generations it was forbidden, and it was looked down upon, and access was taken away.

Now we're kind of in this generation where now we have connection to our culture through the internet, and through each other and through all these different community resources and we really need to take advantage of that and have pride in that and use up those resources to keep those connections alive and keep our stories alive.

Because it will die out. If we don't, if you think about generations from now the way that they quantify indigeneity or your access to the languages, it will die if we don't take part in it. Having daughters in, you know, coming from a matriarchal matrilineal culture, it made me [think] oh god my daughters are not going to know anything about who I am, who my people are, if I don't tell them. If they don't have pride in that, they won't tell their daughters.

If I don't tell my daughters it dies here in my family. If they don't tell their daughters it dies there, so it's so important for us to talk about who we are and be proud of that and so I think, yeah, I would say like that's the biggest thing that changed how I see myself as a Native person. It's less like, Oh, this is, you know, just part of my DNA, and more of this is every fiber of who I am and I have to be proud of and be loud. Yeah, and coming from a matrilineal culture where, you know, you are this culture because your mother is. [This] means I have a deep responsibility to make sure that my daughters understand that because they have a responsibility to matrilineally.

INTERVIEW WITH IXTLI SALINAS-WHITE HAWK, FEBRUARY 24TH, 2026

Andrew: What fulfills you the most in your life right now?

Ixtli: Right now? It's a simple question, but a very heavy question. You know, what fulfills me is... Being of purpose, and also learning how to give myself grace to be able to accept help for my children and others.

This society, this contemporary world that we live in, it teaches that to be of value, you have to be productive. That we have to generate. So for me, at this time, I'm trying to learn to slow down. That is very hard for me. I am learning to slow down, to listen to myself, to my body, to follow teachings. That it's in a manner where... Not only does it help me grow and evolve into the way that I need to be in this world, but it also helps to model it for others.

I feel that a lot of times, especially as indigenous people, our fuel is trauma, and trauma is not sustainable. Because if our fuel to do all the things that we do is that trauma, then it means that we never get to heal. Learning how to heal and let the fuel be actually love, then that's what is sustainable. Consider that the majority of us carry different types of traumas and generational traumas, right? It makes it very complex. The way that I personally show up for people is in two ways.

It's like what I was taught and trained to do. What I needed when I had no one else around me, what I envisioned for my kids since they were little, when we first moved back to Seattle. I try to lean into what elders teach me. I try to lean into their words. I try to not be reactive and really come back to a place that is fed by ceremony and by prayer.

Mind you, I'm human, right? And so that's where a lot of my peers come into play. Whether it's ceremony people, people that I hold high value in their knowledge. To be able to lean into them. One thing that my dad said to me, when we first found out that my mom had Hodgkin's lymphoma, and they sent her home because the hospital was like, her immune system is vulnerable here at the hospital right now. So they sent her home and so I was over there and I was just bawling. And he was like, oh, she has cancer, right? And my mom was just sitting there real quiet, you know, happy to be home.

My dad's sitting there just calm and he was like, why are you crying? And I'm like, oh my mom, he's says, "you know, I'm so proud of you". He goes, "do you see this that is happening right now?" He's like, "that's life". It's like things are going to happen and we have to be courageous and he's, we're scared, but we have to face it.

How we handle it is how we're going to teach you how to grow up into being an elder. I go back to that moment a lot of times when that human part of myself is scared, when I can't change the things that are happening. I go to that moment when my parents are facing this thing as a couple, right? Their sense with it was courage. They linked it to the love that they have for each other, you know? This that is being built, Ancestral Sisterhood, or even beyond the name of Ancestral Sisterhood, is built of what we want to teach our kids. I look at people in the way that I have needed people to show up for me or the communities that I've needed.

I have loved ones very, very dear to me that have died by suicide. That if they had this kind of community and this kind of support, they would still be here. A lot of times when I share about this work with community, and I share about my kids, you know? But there's that other part that is very, very painful that loved ones were lost to the system. And not because no one loved them or claimed them, but because the system literally stole them and prevented myself and other people to have access to them.

So to me is when we build a community, we know when one of us is missing. We know when one of us is hurting. We know when we celebrate, it is genuine. So I feel like all of us are learning together, and it truly is an abundance of collective love, you know? I am sorry if I just kind of went all over the place.

Andrew: No, no, no, that was great. Honestly, that leads into the next question, which was like, you did kind of answer it from all that, which is what does Indigenous community mean to you right here and right now?

Ixtli: So when I first came up to Seattle, I was 14 years old. That's when I first met Bernie Whitefield. And because I always interpreted for my dad, I got to be part of a lot of these conversations. He always encouraged a lot of the things that my dad was already teaching me, and literally my training has been from birth. He just fed more to that, you know? That's how I got to know the Seattle community. When I was in high school, he asked me, "what are you

going to do after high school?" I said, "I don't know, probably going to keep traveling the country". He said "have you thought about going to school?" and I was like "no, not really". Mind you, this kid that, like, we didn't have much, you know? So university, higher education always, always has been seen as inaccessible to people like me, you know? So it was never part of, like, even a thought, you know? And I was like, "I don't know."

[...]

Because of all the cultural work that was done, you know? And, again, I thank them. But, again, it's still something inaccessible. My journey, my path wasn't at that point yet, you know? And when I came back to Seattle, it was after missing a lot of time, you know, it was like a lot of things happened down in New Mexico.

I came back to Seattle because my family was up here. And I was having a conversation with my kids. I overheard a conversation when my middle child was telling my oldest one, "I don't have to go to school because mom did it, right?" And I was like, "oh, no, no". I was like, "what I do, it's been good, you know?". My mom was like, "but if that is the case, then I'm going back to school, right?" So I went back to school. I was going to school at North Seattle College.

I would put my grades up on the refrigerator the same way as the kids, you know? I actually got a scholarship. I had an education plan to go to UW. But there was a lot going on in the community. There was a lot of need, you know? And I remember when I was going to school in high school in Seattle, my experience wasn't a good one, right? I went to school at Roosevelt High. There was only three Native students there. Anyone that was foreign would be assigned to a little bungalow. They had little bungalows behind the school. Whether a person could hold a full-on English conversation or not, everyone went there. Anyways, it was very, very rough.

That's how I ended up dropping out of school and didn't finish my education, right? When I came back, what I came back to was me as a parent, right? What I came back to was me seeing a community that is very, very unique. I was seeing the Seattle community in the way that I experienced it by living. I don't know if I ever shared this with you, but when we first moved to Seattle, we lived in a teepee [at Daybreak Star]. And not just us, but it was like different families. It was some folks from Alaska, some Apache folks. Gosh.

Yeah, there was our own little village, right? That's a very unique experience. And having someone like Bernie as a mentor, right? And so I came back to Seattle with that medicine being fed to me. So me coming back to Seattle was, "okay, let's get to work" right? My kids are little. [...] I was like, okay, I don't have much, but I know how to build community.

How do I build a community that I know that I've needed at different points in my life? How do I build a community that my children need? Because in the way that we are taught is that if you're needing something, chances are someone else is needing something. If you are going through something, chances are someone else is going through something, right? And in the way that I was raised is like, we don't just look out for ourselves, right? It's like, what tools do I have? What can I bring that is going to feed everybody, you know? And I think Ancestral Sisterhood and what we have here is the manifestation of a lot of those teachings that collectively we all have in one way or another is that if I can feed three people here, we're going to be able to feed 30 people here, you know? If we're able to come out and listen to songs, who's to say instead of three people being here, 30 people are here, right? I come from that belief where we are of purpose. Being able to be of purpose is a big honor.

[We talk a lot about birthdays and toys and gift-giving, as some little ones came into our interview room a few times during this conversation]

So, there's a lot of things that are going on in this world, in this administration, all the stuff that is going on, that it impacts everyone in different ways. When stuff is happening, it can throw a person out of balance. And we can't think, we can't come from a place of that abundance, that centering, that grounding, you know? This kind of leads into the sort of ways that I struggle sometimes, constantly showing up. But for me, it's because I know there's always going to be other people there that I really want to be around.



Thank you for sharing
your thoughts with me.



Chapter 8:

Dzeeni



MY OMI AND NANA'S POTTERY FROM THEIR COLLECTION 2024

VICTOR IN ALBUQUERQUE 2025





UPN AT THE MERCILESS METAL SAVAGES FESTIVAL

2024







PEARL, SHEA, AND JEANIE AT THE BRAND NEW SKATEPARK IN RED RIVER, 2021

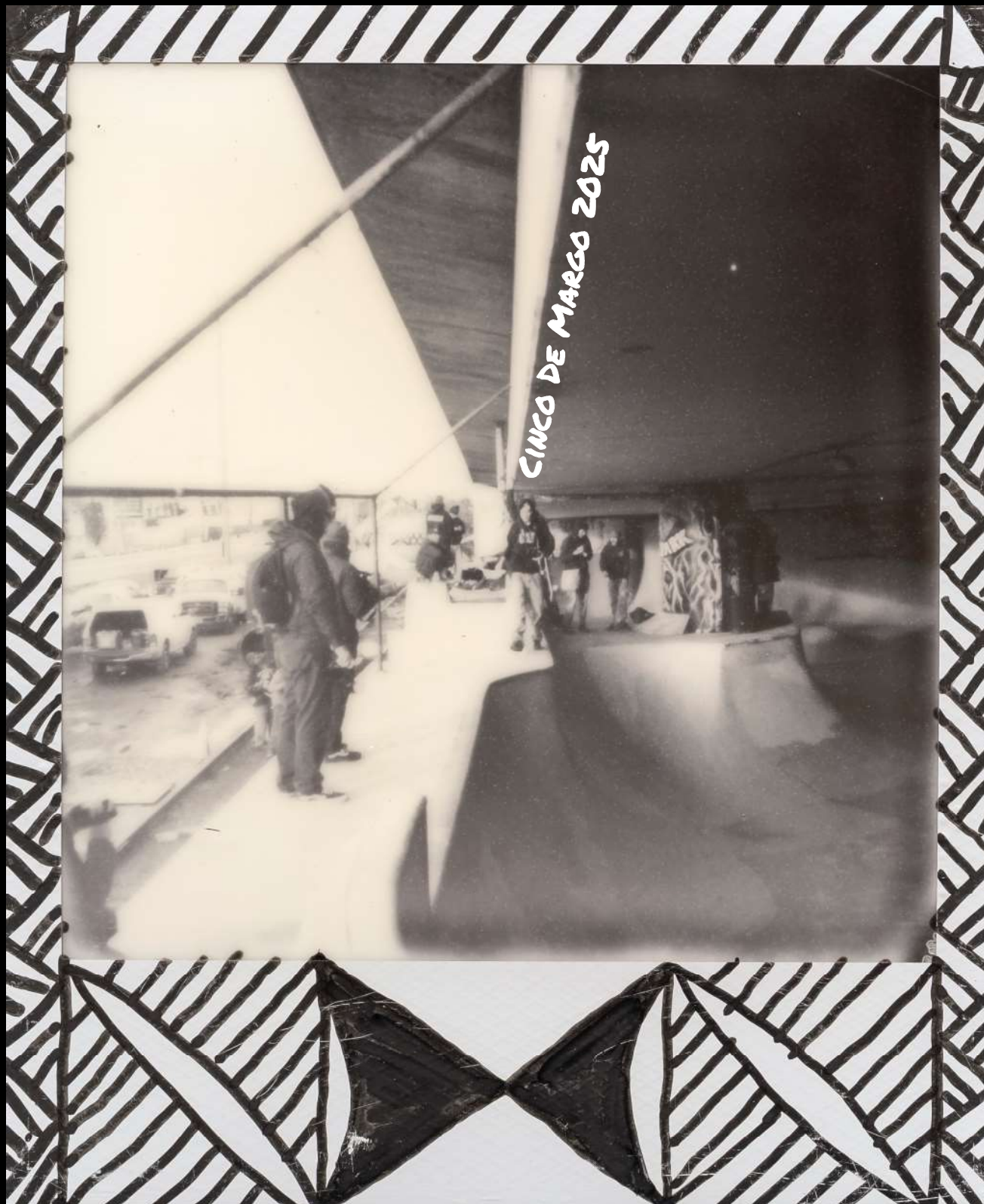


PEARL SHREDDING AT THE ALL NATIONS SKATE JAM 2024





CINCO DE MARGO 2025









FEATURE AT MARGINAL U

WAY SKATEPARK 2025

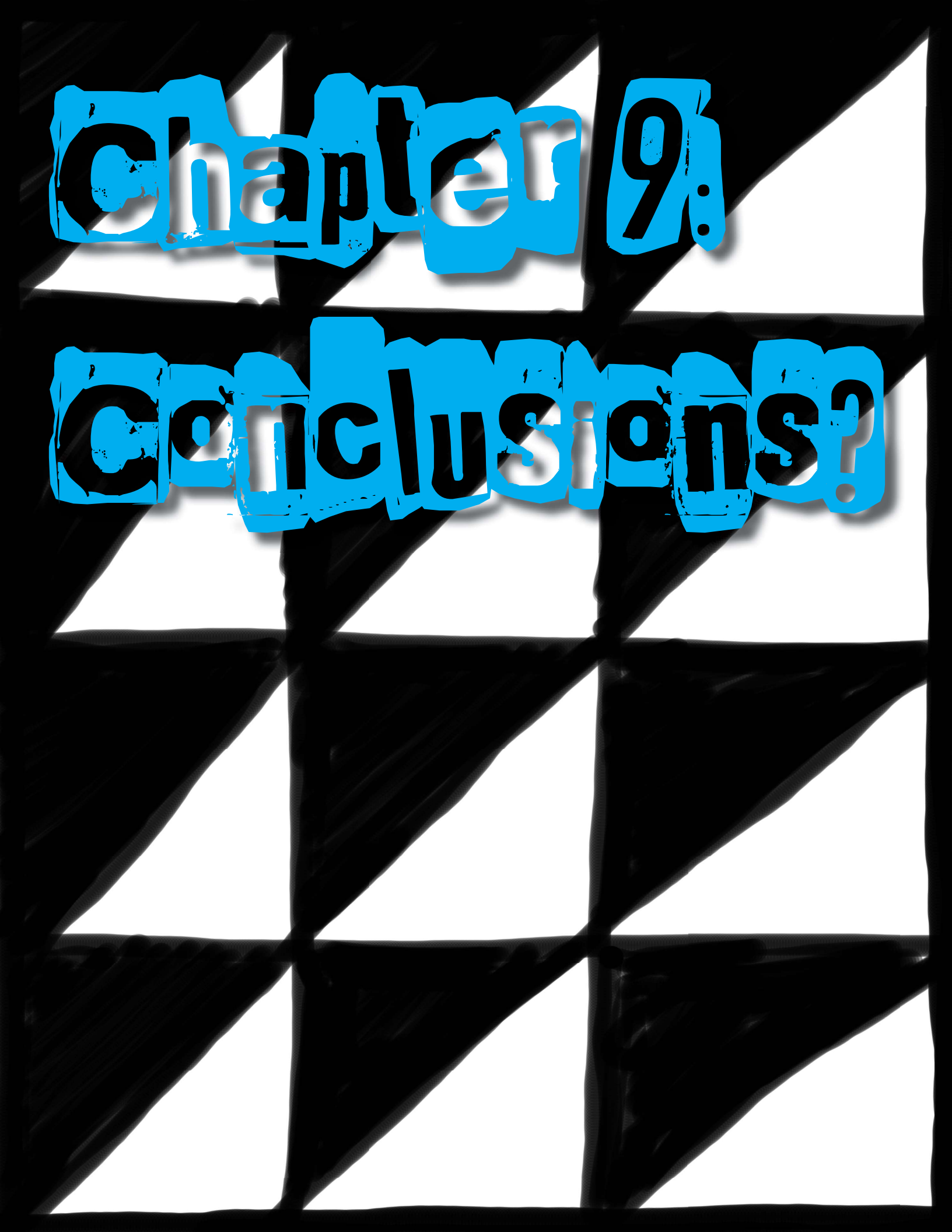




MURDER OR TRADITIONAL BREAD OVEN



IN ACOMA, 2023



Chapter 9:

conclusions?

CONCLUSIONS?

Honestly, it's pretty hard to find a stopping point right here. I feel like I could go on and on about this forever and a day. In taking on this project for the past few years, I realize right now that I genuinely do not see an end on the horizon for me in this. My present lies in community organizing and healing as I continue to run Native skate meets, show up in community for others, and try to lead in what ways I can.

But what is in the future for my work through Indigenous skateboarding culture? It continues to grow more and more every year, every month, every week when someone decides to show up and be together. This type of community does not require everyone to be directly interested in skateboarding necessarily, but just an interest in community period. I myself am not a great skater, but that doesn't keep me from teaching others what I know and showing up for them every week.

The future, past, and present are not separated times or concepts for me. Everything is happening simultaneously. I think of the past and my experiences while I make artwork in the present, hoping to make a better future. When I plan for an event in the future, I think of what has worked today for me, and what has not worked in the past. The spirits guide me as they exist outside of time.

As people like Mikaela or Ixtli pointed out, if we make the choice to not continue on a lineage of culture then it will disappear. It is not an if or maybe, it is a hard truth. I am only one of the most recent in a long line of Native skate elders pushing for more, and I know now that I will not be the last. I am not old, as I am reminded whenever I play my music around the elders. I am not young, as I am reminded by my students through trying to understand the new slang. Nevertheless, Mikaela and Ixtli have inspired me so much through the words we often share, from small things like art materiality, to sweeping ideas on life and spirituality.

Where I am right now and where I will continue to be, is just one of many hands wanting to help other Natives in need. Be it through skating, drum circles, artmaking, fucking anything and I want to be there for others. I did not have someone in my position when I may have needed it most, but I have those people in my life now. My work will also continue to grow through this, from carving to maybe even bookmaking. This body of work can go on for years and years, and why stop now if I know there will be some other Indian kid in need of someone like me? Every meet or hangout, ever print or board I give away, all of these are small steps in continuing on culture. It all adds up in the long run to art that I am proud of, relationships with people I am proud of, and looking back and being proud of myself.

There is no clear stopping point for me to be fully satisfied with this project, and I think that stems from the fact that there are so many other people that I can make great memories with. The material studies that I can explore alone could occupy me for years. Making skate decks out of Pueblo-style ceramics, wood block printing, beading photographs, designing skate features, and new video pieces are all pursuits that I will continue to explore. This path leads me across the country and across the world soon. I can only hope that I can keep supporting others while I continue my work. If I change one person's life for the better through my artwork, then it is all worth it.

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PULL/PUSH

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