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Indigenous Photography Exhibit Spotlights Native Artists

NORMAN, OKLA. – Although photographs of Native American culture have permeated North America for the past century, an exhibition of photography by contemporary indigenous artists sheds light on a unique perspective of culture. *Our People, Our Land, Our Images* opens April 11 at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art on the University of Oklahoma Norman campus.

The exhibition includes more than 50 works by 26 artists representing three generations of indigenous photographers spanning North and South America, the Middle East and New Zealand.

“Our People, Our Land, Our Images brings together a diverse community of indigenous photographers who are examining the relationship that exists between identity and place, a topic that will resonate with our Oklahoma community,” said Heather Ahtone, the James T. Bialac assistant curator of Native American and non-Western art. “Bringing this exhibition to the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art provides a glimpse into a direction that I hope we will continue to explore: that relationship between global indigenous communities.”

Whereas the majority of photography depicting Native Americans produced over the past 100 years portrayed what could be considered a subjective, outside view of Native culture, *Our People, Our Land, Our Images* offers a rare opportunity to view indigenous people through the eyes of indigenous photographers. The images presented in the exhibition explore the artists’ connections to their land, community and traditions.
As such, the various photographic approaches of the artists challenge visitors to examine the stereotypes, politics and histories associated with indigenous peoples and make their own judgments.

This traveling exhibition is organized by guest curator Veronica Passalacqua of the C. N. Gorman Museum at the University of California, Davis, and is a program of ExhibitsUSA, a national division of Mid-America Arts Alliance, with the Oklahoma Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts.

“Non-indigenous photographers were traveling or relocating to these regions [of the United States] with the express purpose of imaging the North American Indian and developing their own truths and visions,” said Passalacqua in an introduction to the exhibition catalogue. “The very same medium that exacerbated colonial tensions is now used as a tool for indigenous empowerment and sovereignty by exerting an authority over how, when and why indigenous peoples choose to be imaged.”

The result is a personal, intimate examination of people, place and time. Cherokee photographer Jennie Ross Cobb (1881-1959) captures the Cherokee Female Seminary graduating class of 1902 in a black and white reprint from the Oklahoma Historical Society. In a piece from her Tanning Project series, Erica Lord (Athabaskan/Inupiaq) spells out, “I tan to look more Native” on the naked back of a young woman. And in Skywalker, Apache/Seminole photographer Peña Bonita reveals a woman wearing a welding mask adorned with a feather while overlooking a cityscape.

Our People, Our Land, Our Images mixes sobering works of isolation with humorous imagery, such as Tlinglit artist Larry McNeil’s Yéil, a 2006 digital print of a raven revealing the source of his fascination with Ottawa chief Pontiac.

The exhibition is on display at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art April 11 to May 25, 2014.

Native American artist and activist Shan Goshorn of Tulsa, whose work is included in the exhibition, will lead a public gallery talk at 6:30 p.m. Friday, April 11.

More information about the exhibition and programming is available on the museum’s website at www.ou.edu/fjjma.

The Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art is located in the OU Arts District on the corner of Elm Avenue and Boyd Street, at 555 Elm Ave., on the OU Norman campus. Admission to the museum is complimentary to all visitors, thanks to the
Indigenous photography reveals a uniquely personal view in the new exhibition *Our People, Our Land, Our Images* at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art at the University of Oklahoma. The exhibition goes on display April 11 and includes more than 50 works by 26 indigenous artists spanning four continents, including *This is not a Commercial, this is my homeland*, a 1998 print by Seminole/Muscogee/Diné artist Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie.

Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie (U.S., Seminole/Muscogee/Diné, b. 1954)  
*This is not a Commercial, this is my homeland*, 1998  
Platinum lambda print, 33 x 28 in.  
Courtesy the artist. ©Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie