



the *Double* Entendre of  
**RE-ENACTMENT**

GERALD McMASTER

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## ENACTING as *Inscription* .....

For over 2 years, Vtape and the imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival have been in discussion about commissioning a program from the renowned curator and writer, Gerald McMaster, Curator of Canadian Art at the Art Gallery of Ontario. This year McMaster proposed an intriguing topic for research and investigation: the idea of the historical re-enactment (*a la* Edward Curtis' photographs and Robert Flaherty's films) as *re-interpreted* by young Native North American media artists. He wanted to look at all of those very vexing (and vexed) pictorial documents produced *about* Native North Americans in the 19th and 20th century, and – remembering that these were all produced by non-Native writers, photographers and filmmakers – to then consider their cumulative effect on the psyche of the Native North American in the early 21st century. His results are both subversive and liberating: his programme of clips from the original re-enactments and the new films and videos makes for enlightened viewing.

This monograph by Gerald McMaster –*The Double Entendre of Re-enactment* – is a joint venture between Vtape and imagineNATIVE, resulting in a curated programme for the 2007 festival and an essay that is highly nuanced, offering a layered reading of topics seldom explored but of critical importance.

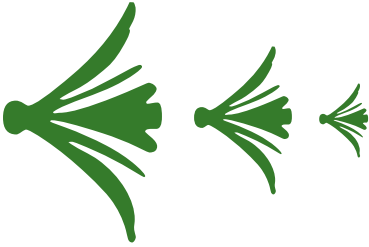
I extend my thanks to the staff at both of our organizations for the high degree of professionalism committed to this project. Kerry Swanson, Interim Director at imagineNATIVE has been key in the development of this important piece of research. At Vtape, Wanda van der Stoop, with her extensive knowledge of Aboriginally-produced media artworks, has been crucial to the success of this program. As one of the founders of the imagineNATIVE Festival, Vtape is honoured to be actively engaged in the research and presentation of works by Aboriginal and First Nations media artists to audiences in Toronto and around the world.

Lisa Steele  
Creative Director, Vtape, October 2007

# the *Double* Entendre of RE-ENACTMENT.....

'The Indian,' in general, and more specifically *The North American Indian* exist only in the mind of the beholder. That view is supported by evidence from the history of photography; the history of imagery of 'the Indian,' both scientific and popular; and the history of Indians and Indian cultures. Generalizations from this evidence run the risk, themselves, of lapsing into stereotype and should be judged accordingly. (Christopher M. Lyman<sup>1</sup>)

American performance artist James Luna first performed *The Artifact Piece* in 1987 at the San Diego Museum of Man in front of an unsuspecting audience in the midst of the museum's permanent exhibitions. Lying on a bed of sand, with various personal artifacts around him, arranged in quasi-museum display, Luna was, as British art critic Jean Fisher describes, the "undead Indian of colonialism." *The Artifact Piece* prompted diverse reactions from the observers who stared at the "body-as-artifact," as representation and thus synecdoche. Viewers were attracted to the body because of its reality effect. The occasional movement in the belly belied the "body-as-object," and evidenced its identity as living being. The semiotic effect of this piece lies in the viewer's treatment of it. The museal discourse compelled viewers to treat it as object. It is likely that museum-goers, in this southern California state where the Native American is both fiction (of Hollywood) and artifact (of the museum), did not know the historical underpinnings of this piece. In some ways, this is the attractive aspect of it, in that it caught viewers completely by surprise, as Luna, the artist, is rendered powerless and excluded, until, of course, he decides to get up off the table. At that point he renders viewers suddenly self-conscious as



they realize that they are now the spectacle: “This ‘being seen’ is precipitated in the voyeur by what Sartre calls ‘*le regard*’.” The observer is now on view and becomes “other.” For a moment, the artifact piece is alive, giving the artist/aboriginal person control over his identity and subject position. This work re-enacted the dead objectified Native American of museal displays.

While Luna is a Native American, there is a history in which the Native American has long been the thematic focus. In this all too brief essay, I will touch upon a few key figures that have used re-enactment as a fantasy role-playing in which appropriation of either a real or imagined past is the central theme. I will examine a few filmmakers, contemporary artists and others who use re-enactment as a form of entertainment, historiography and identity.

In the early 1840s, the American artist George Catlin (1796-1872) was among the first to take Native performers (some prefer “show Indians”) to such European cities as London and Paris.<sup>3</sup> In the preceding years, between 1832 and 1836, after four trips into Indian Country to paint landscapes and portraits of Native Americans, Catlin had amassed 474 paintings, 300 of which were portraits.<sup>4</sup> He debuted his “Indian Gallery” in New York City in 1837. Why such an intense interest in Native Americans? Historian Brian Dippie indicates that Catlin “believed that America’s native peoples, once proud ‘noble savages,’ were being destroyed by advancing civilization.”<sup>5</sup> Catlin tried to get a disinterested US government to acquire his work with little success. Instead he took the “Indian Gallery” to Europe; his first stop was London’s Egyptian Hall at

It was during this time that the Canadian artist Paul Kane sees Catlin's shows and is inspired to create his own Indian Gallery. Kane felt a similar sympathy for the rapidly disappearing Native American/Canadian, believing that a record of their lives should be recorded. Upon his return in 1843 to Mobile, Alabama where he set up a studio working as a portrait painter, he eventually made enough money to pay off his debts and move back to Toronto. In 1844-45 he prepared to travel west. ....

Piccadilly on February 1, 1840.<sup>6</sup> His popular lectures were in part to promote his book, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs and Conditions of the North American Indian*, but it was his re-enactments of Native life that he called *Tableaux vivants* that created the most impact. Historian L.C. Moses points out

that Catlin first hired English men – “Cockney actors, twenty men and boys, to play the parts.”<sup>7</sup> He argues that “In Catlin’s career as showman, art and extravaganza had not mixed well ... His *Tableaux vivants* raised troublesome doubts about his intellectual integrity and his instincts as an entertainer. He never devised a successful method to use the Wild West show to illustrate his ideas.”<sup>8</sup> Eventually he finds authentic Native Americans who perform for such luminaries as Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. Catlin takes his shows to Paris where Charles Baudelaire and Eugène Delacroix are in attendance.

Can we view Catlin’s work with the same sympathy and passion he showed his Native American friends? Like many succeeding generations of directors of re-enactments, who recreated a journey into a utopian paradise that was a quest for an ancient past, Catlin did this in part for political reasons as Western civilization was rapidly encroaching. In a way he was giving voice to those who were not given such a space to speak. During the time Catlin was on the Plains he would have come in contact with the massive numbers of tribes who were forced to move from all along the eastern US to the newly created spaces in Oklahoma, Nebraska, and Kansas. Alternatively, it could be argued that Native Americans not yet forced to assimilate were enjoying their freedom.

Next, there is the American William F. “Buffalo Bill” Cody (1846-1917), the entertainer extraordinaire, who in the 1880s and 1890s created the “Wild West Show,” a program that was about re-enactments. He first staged these re-enactments in the United States then eventually Europe. Cody made it a policy to always employ Native Americans, including cowboys and former soldiers of the US Army. Among the Native Americans was the Lakota holy man Black Elk, who, when he was 23, recounts an experience in one of the shows: “We stayed [in Madison Square Gardens, NYC] and made shows for many, many Wasichus (White people) all that winter. I liked the part of the show we made, but not the part the Wasichus made.”<sup>9</sup> Moses argues that Catlin proved audiences were willing to pay to “witness re-creations of scenes of Indian life from western America [via his *Tableaux vivants*, but it was Buffalo Bill Cody who] succeeded in his entertainments where Catlin failed, perhaps because he retained some of the rapture and torture but introduced a hero with whom

audiences could identify.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, Cody constructed a narrative that appealed to his audience rather than merely lecturing. The hero was of course Cody and the underlying narrative was the win-

ning of the West (from the Natives). Cody took his show to England in 1887, where once again Queen Victoria was in the audience. His show toured all over Europe, to such cities as Barcelona and Rome. A well-known photograph taken on the Grand Canal in Venice shows Cody and his entourage in a gondola. They had been performing in nearby Verona. Some historians argue that visits such as this one to local sites was part of Cody’s strategy to show off his Indians to locals in an effort to whet their appetites for his increasingly popular show.<sup>11</sup>

The Lakota spiritual leader, Black Elk also went to Europe to perform, but in Paris he missed catching up with the others in the show who had left for other parts of Europe. He stayed for a while but eventually, he became awfully home sick and when he reunited with Cody many months later, Cody understood how Black Elk felt and agreed to send him back to the United States. ....



By the turn of the 20th century the shows were changing; nonetheless, Cody's "Wild West," still delighted audiences, but now he and others were discovering a new medium – film.

[Cody saw the] possibilities of real Indians in on-screen battles. With a boost from government and a guest appearance by General Nelson Miles and cavalry troop, Buffalo Bill Cody produced and starred in a panoramic film called *The Indian Wars*. Reportedly the Indians (who were re-creating the very battles in which some of them had fought) contemplated employing real ammunition in the grand finale—filmed at the Pine Ridge Reservation.<sup>12</sup>

Yet very few films of this era remain because of the inherent instability of the physical film itself.<sup>13</sup>

Unlike the re-enactors of today who are usually serious history buffs, Cody was a showman. He made a lot of money, so did his Native Americans; yet, Cody could retire a free and successful man, unlike his Native American actors who all returned to the restrictive conditions of the reservation. To the end, however, Cody maintained that his actors maintain a fidelity to the authentic, so that for his audiences history came alive. For a brief moment, however conflicted, Native Americans were given freedom to re-enact a past that was no longer.

Beginning around 1904 and lasting through the early 1920s, the Hiawatha pageant plays played a role in the construction of an essentializing "Indianness" that was played out for tourists.<sup>14</sup> This was a brutal time period in the history of Native peoples across North America. While governments were enacting policies of aggressive civilization on so-called primitives, museums were re-enacting the failed promise of an authentic Indian through their displays of historicized drama of their own making. Popular culture in the form of pageant plays continued where Buffalo Bill left off. To some extent these plays, like the shows and films, affirmed an aboriginal identity, giving its performers a brief, albeit emancipatory, moment, one that was however based on anachronism (past). Yet the totalizing assimilated "pan-Indian" present was a safe space since all Native peoples were under extreme duress. So when shows wanted real Indians they had to ask the permission of

the government, since Natives were wards of the government. The question is, of course, why would this fantasy role-playing with its appropriation of an imagined past appeal to viewers? In a way there was sympathy for these dislocated tribes. Though highly romanticized, the narratives were accessible to the audience's cultural frame of reference. The pageant plays were an entry point from which to understand aboriginal history via the tragic but noble terms from which they understood both Hiawatha and aboriginal peoples. As well, the powerful marketing of the ideal Indian begun by Buffalo Bill and presented abroad was now being sold at home often through pageant plays. Nonetheless, the swing away from authenticity to a pattern of relatively little authenticity reached its peak with the passion plays, but it was now about to swing the other way with two powerful filmic voices in Edward S. Curtis and Robert Flaherty.

The famed photographer Edward S. Curtis (1868-1952), who made it his passion and life's work to photograph Native Americans, wrote and directed a film called *In the Land of the Head Hunters*. His work, like Catlin and others before him, was largely the documentation of the Native American before extinction. Curtis wrote of his debt to Catlin: "He did a remarkable work, one for which the world will always be his debtor. He made mistakes, many of them natural,

➤ Curtis also had his patrons in mind. One of whom was then-President Theodore Roosevelt, who once claimed, "I don't go so far as to think that the only good Indians are the dead Indians, but I believe that nine out of every ten are, and I shouldn't inquire too closely into the case of the tenth." Through Curtis' work, Roosevelt intended to preserve the Indian as a symbol of the natural world, a project that relied on the demise of living cultures. ....

and anyone working as he did would, perhaps, have made as many. Unfortunately he seems to have had his readers too much in mind and yielded to a desire to interest."<sup>15</sup> Curtis filmed *Head Hunters* in British Columbia where he had spent three years photographing the Kwakwaka'wakw tribe re-creating their way of life prior to contact.<sup>16</sup> In 1972 the film was restored by

Bill Holm, David Gerth, and George Irving Quimby. The film's title was later changed to *In the Land of the War Canoes* after objections from the Kwakwaka'wakw people even though the plot was essentially about "head hunters." Anthropologist Bill Holm in the film *The Shadow Catcher* says,

[Curtis] went to some great lengths to return to the pre-contact times in his photographs, in the film especially, he made great effort to remove evidence of trade or contact material. I really think he was reproducing the old ways as he understood them from his Indian informants. I don't think he invented any of this, and if there seemed to be romantic poses and romantic combinations of costumes, I think the romantic idea may come from his attempt to reproduce the old ways.<sup>17</sup>

Prior to the turn of the 20th century, almost all Kwakwaka'wakw travel was done by dugout canoes, but in 1920, Curtis would have found it impossible to assemble the half-dozen canoes he needed for the film. These were commissioned along with a replica of an old village, a number of poles and house posts, all during a time when the government had outlawed such practices. Indeed, Gloria Cranmer-Webster, a member of the Kwakwaka'wakw community, who also appears in the film, overlooks the theatricality of the story. Cranmer-Webster says:

... the most important thing about it is it's one of the few films where you see those magnificent canoes moving ... in the film you get some idea of the way they moved in the water, the use of the masks, I think is something that's very important.<sup>18</sup>

➤ Curtis' methodologies for eliciting information from his subjects is documented in his own journals, in which he acknowledges one technique of deliberately misquoting "facts" of Aboriginal beliefs and cosmology to his subjects, such that they would feel compelled to "correct" him with information that they were otherwise attempting to withhold.

Preparation for the film's production took three years and required the creation of cedar bark capes and other costumes, whole house fronts to be built and painted, as well as masks, poles, implements and canoes carved. With the help of George Hunt, a Hudson's Bay Trader and son of a Tlingit noblewoman, Curtis found a remote location to recreate house fronts characteristic of pre-contact life. During the shooting of the film, a motorboat was used to tow the canoes to location.....

➤ The actor who played Nanook was named Alakariallak. Nanook, transliterated from nanaq in Inuktitut, means “bear.” In fact, Flaherty had originally intended Nanook to hunt polar bear as the film’s conclusion, but the crew’s failure to simulate a bear hunt led to the on-camera execution of a walrus instead. As a possible consolation, Flaherty had Nanook wear polar bear pants, in spite of the fact that this was not practiced in the film’s location of Inukjuak.

During the hunt scenes in the 1995 *Our Land* series, the filmmakers (Zacharias Kunuk and Norman Cohen) deliberately remained faithful to history, recreating a motorboat (reportedly the first in the Igloolik region, circa 1946), and using guns and harpoons. These hunts were filmed without simulation, and the killing and butchering of walrus and polar bears continued after cameras stopped rolling, in accordance with standard hunting protocol. As such, the film is a record that parallels the performed daily tasks of hunters and trappers in the Igloolik region.

By contrast, the seal hunt in *Nanook* was a performance in place of a real hunt, which would have taken too long to be accommodated in the filming schedule. As the hunter Nanook flails onscreen, tethered to a rope that appears to be pulled at the other end by a seal buried beneath the ice, what the viewer can’t see is a group of production assistants offscreen, pulling the other end of the rope. The seal that emerges after the struggle was, in reality, an already-dead animal supplied to Flaherty’s team prior to the shoot. ....



*Nanook of the North*, Robert Joseph Flaherty, 1922 (left and right)

Inuit in *Nanook Revisited* (1994) they too laughed uproariously, though one of the elders acknowledged that this was once real practice.

In many other scenes the character of Nanook and thus the Inuit is primitivized; Nanook was very much presented as both infantile and superhuman. In the only scene where there is contact with Europeans, Nanook takes his family to see the trader and comes across a gramophone playing. He takes a vinyl record and bites into it. As a great hunter, the seal hunt is an opportunity to demonstrate his skills; it conveys the traditional celebration of eating raw meat from a fresh kill; yet this gesture must have created a sense of distance between Flaherty's viewing audience and the Inuit being portrayed.

Today's audiences may not reinforce the kind of racialized differences invoked by Flaherty's colonial narrative; yet, he had his own vision of vanishing race. In his journal he says:

I'm not trying to shoot a film on what the whites made of these people, in rags wearing these horrible, miserable hats. I'm not interested in the decay of these people. On the contrary, I want to show their primitive majesty and their originality, as long as it is still possible, before the whites destroy not only their character but also these people themselves, who are already disappearing.<sup>21</sup>

It is difficult to position Flaherty's re-enactments in historiographic terms that would help us understand Inuit history; even culturally,

➤ Recently, in a bid for Arctic sovereignty, Canada's Harper government embarked on *Operation Nanook*, which draws on a nostalgic view of a desolate North in the face of growing concerns over issues that range from homeland security to global warming. ....

Flaherty constructs a primitivizing otherness that was so easily manipulated by the colonizing powers of an emerging Canada. The re-enactment of the Inuit other created a utopian space that is today still a powerful metaphor.

As boys growing up in the 1950s, we listened to *The Lone Ranger and Tonto*. The drawing power of these stories had us wanting more. Indeed, these classic “western” narratives with their cowboy/Indian binary always privileged the cowboy, so like all other Native people, we cheered for the cowboy.

Little did we know of other equivalents such as the 1892 German Wild West, *Winnetou and Old Shatterhand*? Arguably the most significant figure in German fiction, Karl May (1842-1912) is the best-selling German author of all-time with more than 200 million copies of his books in print. Germans of all ages read his books.<sup>22</sup> May penned these novels while in prison for various misdemeanours. This is what journalist Cleo Pascal has to say about May’s most famous novels, the *Winnetou* series:

In his books, he is all the things he is not in life – physically strong, morally pure and well-travelled. There are proud father figures, admiring women, until-death-do-us-part friends. He is a perfect shot (but only to maim, never to kill), a great rider and he can speak scores of languages. His Old West is populated by evil Yankees, Mormon land grabbers and honourable Natives. Many of the good palefaces are Germans. The West is full of German beer, German songs and German newspapers.<sup>23</sup>

➤ Despite promising beginnings as a precocious student and an early career as a teacher at fourteen, May was constantly in trouble. He was fired from his first position as a teacher’s assistant at nineteen for flirting with the headmaster’s wife. Then, he was arrested for stealing his roommate’s watch and smoking utensils and sentenced to six weeks in jail; upon release he was forbidden to teach. At twenty-one, he turned to petty swindling and confidence crimes, and was sentenced to four years in prison. Upon release for good behaviour May immediately returned to confidence trickery; he takes turns passing himself off as a police lieutenant from Wolframsdorf, then a Dresden attorney’s representative, each time to falsely assume money and valuable items from gullible victims and ultimately land himself a four year prison sentence, the first served in solitary confinement.

Due in part to May’s use of the “travel narrative” genre, and to his own public admissions, many readers believed that May himself was the narrator of his Wild West stories, a man who spoke 1,200 languages

and dialects and possessed superhuman strength. May himself once claimed, “I speak and write: French, English, Italian, Spanish, Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Romanian, Arabian (six dialects), Chinese, Turkish, and the Indian languages of the Sioux, Apache, Comanche, Snakes, Utahs, Kiowas, besides the three South American dialects of the Katschumany [Kechumaran]. I won’t count Lapplandic” (quoted in *Der Spiegel*, September 12, 1962, p. 65). .....

Beginning in the 1960s, perhaps incited by May, Curtis and others, Germans and other Europeans take to the woods in search for an authentic self, one based on the romance of narrative encounters between Germans and Indians sometimes as a fantasy or as projection. Each summer hundreds, if not thousands, of Germans re-enact the powwows and other ceremonies of the Plains Indians of North

➤ The international phenomenon of hobbyists participating in historical re-enactments range well beyond the “cowboy and Indian” role-playing; of the many forms and subjects explored, one unifying element of hobbist re-enactment is a fascination with war. Such examples include large-scale trench warfare in Pennsylvania, re-enactments of D-Day on Virginia Beach, Virginia, and Civil War re-enactments across the United States. ....

America, breaking into tribes each with their own names and costumes.<sup>24</sup> Contemporary New York based photographers Andrea Robbins and Max Becher followed these re-enactments seeing them as takeoffs on the works of Edward Curtis, from the series *German Indians*. “Playing Indian ... is patently anti-modern” argues Native American historian Phillip Deloria:

[It] emphasized contact with the natural world—the wilderness that now substituted for the frontier. ... Nature study often displayed this primitivist cast, emphasizing holistic experience over the fragmentation of the city and insisting that to feel nature one had to journey back in time to simpler life, grasp the experience, and then return, richer but unable to articulate what this pseudomystical encounter had been all about.<sup>25</sup>

Unfettered by this duality, re-enactment is hugely popular. German Studies scholar Katrin Sieg’s research reveals that over two hundred Indian clubs are active in Germany and that many groups trace their

➤ May's novels have been made into eighteen films, the first produced in 1962 in Yugoslavia. Among these, the *Winnetou* trilogy features Pierre Brice as Winnetou and Lex Barker as his blood brother Old Shatterhand. The international cast's dialogue was shot in English and dubbed into German. The series went on to become the biggest box-office hit since the end of World War II, single-handedly restoring Germany's film industry.

After starring in eleven May-inspired films, Brice continued to play his famous character Winnetou before screaming fans at numerous Karl May festivals across Germany, until as recently as 1996. All this despite the fact that Brice's character had been killed off in the third and last *Winnetou* film (1965). Five years later, Brice again reprised his role in the severely unpopular, made-for-TV, *Old Winnetou* revival. ...

film re-enacts fictional stories such as Karl May's or the 1927 historical drama *The Battle of Little Big Horn*, re-enactments played on the interactions between Natives and Whites, unlike the socio-documentaries of Curtis and Flaherty.

Authenticity plays a large part in re-enactments. German re-enactors take on a life-long persona complete with a tribe and tribal name, all which is taken very seriously. They often make their own costumes

remote origins to waves of interest created by carnivals and Wild West shows. Varying degrees of seriousness and fidelity to notions of authenticity can be observed among hobbyists.<sup>26</sup>

To return briefly to *Winnetou*, Deloria has argued that moderns have used new technologies to enhance mimesis and thus changing their perception of the world.<sup>27</sup>

For my purposes I turn to the films based on May's Winnetou character, played notably by the French actor Pierre Brice. As Buffalo Bill Cody entertained audiences around the world, Hollywood understood the power of film to entertain masses. The cowboy/Indian theme became a hugely successful genre. Although there are too many to count and analyze, what can be stated however is the enormous impact they had on their audiences. Whether

after years of research in museums or other means. Songs, dances, ceremonies, and other daily routines are also researched and practiced. No doubt they have their rules as the quest for authenticity is serious business. Take Lindbergh Namingha, himself a Hopi from Arizona, who happens to be Chairman and founding member of the Native American Association of Germany. He says that, surprisingly, Germans, unlike American citizens, have a very positive image of American Indians, which he attributes to the books by Karl May. It is the German hobbyist, however, who he finds troubling. He says:

They are like a living museum and I find it very offensive, especially when they refuse to let true American Indians [such as himself] participate in their events. They say we're too modern [or inauthentic] and believe we've lost our Native Americanness. They can't seem to understand that our culture, just like theirs, has evolved from the 17th century to the 21st.<sup>28</sup>

➤ The Karl May Association is one of the largest literary clubs in Germany, and is responsible for the annual tradition whereby over a million fans congregate and re-enact events from May's novels in Western and Indian costume. The group also maintains a steady trade of costumes, wigwams, feather headdresses, tomahawks, and other paraphernalia.

Namingha's group has a membership of approximately 230, of which only 8 are Native Americans—Hopi, Ojibwe, Cherokee and Choctaw—all of whom are US soldiers only temporarily stationed in Germany....

are a staple of re-enactment. They have relied heavily on dioramas to re-enact the so-called classic days of Native peoples, unspoiled by contact with Europeans.<sup>29</sup>

One wonders why Namingha would want to participate in such re-enactments since the whole enterprise is always already anachronistic. For the hobbyists it is about play one moment and being a German the next; for Namingha it is always about being a Hopi, which is a long way spatially and temporally from being a 19th century Plains Indian.

I now shift back to the works of contemporary artists. In museums, especially in displays about the cultural other, dioramas

I began with James Luna's now revered *Artifact Piece*. His second performance or re-enactment occurred in 1992 in Ottawa at the National Gallery of Canada during the exhibition *Land Spirit Power*. Perhaps it was unintentional. During the one-day symposium in which the exhibition artists were all on stage talking about their work, Luna, with microphone in hand, got up and laid down on the table. His audience sat gripped for the next several minutes as he talked about his experience lying in the museum as viewers came by, some whom laughed at him, some poked and prodded him, while others spoke disparagingly about Native Americans. Often through his re-enactment he would tell some jokes. He ended however on a very sober note rhetorically asking himself how he felt about the entire experience, to which he answered, "I was fucking mad." Seeing or rather hearing Luna's re-enactment was hearing a discomfort as if we were witnessing an enforced self-growth. The pain was real and he was reliving it. Was this a living history performance that we sometimes see actors perform in museums? This was neither a passion play nor fantasy role-playing as most re-enactments are prone to be; rather it was a political/cultural work of a post-colonial kind in which Luna was reclaiming a voice for the marginal.

Re-enactments are now becoming ever-more popular with contemporary artists, none more so than Native contemporary artists, as well as non-Native artists who find the subject matter inspiring. Two artists who have been inspired by the work of George Catlin are Native Canadian artist Kent Monkman and the French artist Orlan.

Monkman's installation *Salon Indien* (2006) which is the name of a hall in Paris where the first public screenings of Lumiere's Cinematographe was held in 1895. Fifty-six years earlier George Catlin, we recall, launched his "Indian Gallery" in London's Egyptian Hall. Monkman's re-enactment is done through his alter ego Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, who recounts the stories of being a "show Indian" in Catlin's *Tableaux vivants*. He delivers a long speech in which we are taken back to those early days, through it all Monkman brings history alive through humour and a Native voice.

French performance artist extraordinaire, Orlan, who is well-known for her live plastic surgery performances, has created a new series of works she calls “self-hybridization.” Instead of undergoing the painful process of surgery, she uses digital technology. In a series that began with African and Mayan cultures, she focuses on the works from George Catlin’s “Indian Gallery” by inserting herself into the paintings. Her intention is to do several dozen, thereby building and re-enacting her own “Indian Gallery”.



*Shooting Geronimo, 2007, Kent Monkman (courtesy of the artist)*

➤ One significant difference between Orlan’s earlier African and Mayan “self-hybridizations” and those based on Native Americans is in her source material. Whereas the earlier pieces were based on self-representations in masks and other carvings, the latter works are based on Catlin’s interpretations and (mis)representations. ....

New York-based photographer Edie Winograde uses re-enactments to explore American history through staging historical

incidents. In her on-going series *Place and Time*, she re-enacts and then photographs such events as the journey of Lewis and Clark,

the Gold Rush, the Oregon Trail, and the famous Battle of Little Big Horn. In each of these re-enactments she is highly concerned that her actors are both Native and non-Native but also that they interact. It is this interaction that we might see on a higher level of knowledge and understanding of their mutual histories. She sees history not as separate but thoroughly collective. In other words, Native and non-Native histories are interrelated. It is what makes us who we are. Re-enactments are a way of access to historical moments that would otherwise exist only in writings.

Other young Native artists making films in which re-enactment is a central driving theme, include the already mentioned Kent Monkman, Dustinn Craig, and Shonie De La Rosa.

Dustinn Craig's skateboarders are so hooked on their own culture it reminds us of when horses were first introduced into Indian country. In one of Dustinn Craig's images, a young hitchhiker holding a skateboard stands along side a long lonely stretch of road, thumb stuck out, yet no car is in sight. Where's he going? Nowhere some may say; others would argue. Is he running from his home, since we can see a small community in the distance, as he looks back? Dressed in urban style hip-hop garb, he carries a skateboard, his only possession. Is he going somewhere to realize his dreams, or is it an adventure, or perhaps he's going to the next village to see his friends? No matter. Modernity has long been seen as a saviour; to



*4-Wheel War Pony*, Dustinn Craig, 2007, video 5:00 (left and right) (courtesy of the artist)

Native Americans it's been an arrestor. We didn't find modernity; it found us. In Craig's work we see the fluctuation between the two positions. In the young hitchhiker, the image is rife with the profound effects of modernity on Native Americans and the landscape, with the paved road cutting across the land. The boy stands on the road and has made his decision to move with the times.

In the other series of colour images, we see 19th century-styled Apache warriors standing squarely in an unmediated landscape

➤ In recent years, First Nations iconography—particularly that of the Northwest Coast—has appeared on the surfaces of skateboard decks (skateboarding began, and is still a predominantly West Coast phenomenon). Considered alongside Craig's fascination with skateboarding's relevance to First Nations youth, whether this reveals growing affinities or little more than cultural appropriation remains to be seen. ....

toying with the photographer. Are they the famous Apache resisters we've all read about in history books? After a series of shots it is revealed they're merely part of a clever advertisement for Craig called *4-Wheel Warpony* (2007), with the by-line "style is king!" This reflexivity is what's been so

appealing to this new generation of "native" artists who routinely go in and out of one identity into another with an ease that disconcerts traditionalists. The four-wheel war pony isn't that different from the horse culture of the 19th century; both enable the user to ride and do bone-breaking tricks. Craig's documentary film *Ride Through Genocide* chronicles a group of American Indian skateboarders who build a skateboard park on the rural and isolated White Mountain Apache reservation. The film follows the pitfalls and opportunities for young men growing up on the reservations.

Kent Monkman's *Shooting Geronimo* (2007) is a double take on shooting, first as a filmic event then as an accidental incident. Like his *Salon Indien*, Monkman's film is a take on the historical silent-film era that harkens back to Edward Curtis and Robert Flaherty; indeed, his lead actor is a doppelgänger named Frederick Curtis. There are



*Trails End/End Trails*, Terence Houle, 2007, 8'x3'  
digital C-print. Photo credit: Jarusha Brown, SKEWGALLERY.

two levels within the film; the first concerns the shooting of the film about Geronimo outside the Long Horn Saloon. Monkman, or Curtis, engages two young Cree actors for the film. Monkman plays his alter ego Miss Chief Eagle Testickle in the character role as the “Lonesome Rider,” acting as a trickster who is able to see from afar as the action is going on, yet s/he is able to affect some of the events. It is a silent film with subtitles shot in black and white, super 8, and presented on two channels. The film is full of camp. Monkman’s work is all-male, all the time, in which the Native male always gets the better of his eventual white-male lover. This reversal is always done with humour and satire. In *Shooting Geronimo* his Indian male body is the erotic other for the white man, in this case Curtis. The usual domain of

erotic other is historically occupied by the white woman as seen in “captive narratives.” Monkman’s inversions are what give his work a new dynamic that makes us sit up and take notice of the Native’s privileged other.

Whereas Craig uses the romantic Apache boys in contradictory fashion and Monkman the romantic Cree satirically, other young filmmakers use the double entendre of the Indian male body.

The original plaster cast of the Fraser sculpture is permanently housed in Oklahoma City’s National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. ↩

Terrance Houle uses himself in the re-enactment of James Earle Fraser’s famous *End of the Trail*; in this instance, Houle is not only overweight with love handles but he sits astride a rocking horse. Houle comes to terms with his unrestrained body that is diametrically opposed to the perfect

Indian male body employed by both Craig and Monkman.

Similarly, in Shonie De La Rosa’s film *The Last Great Hunt* (2005) the main character “Mr. Indigenous” is played by the young Native artist Alan Natachu, who is totally unlike the warriors seen on film or in photographs. De La Rosa says it was a film done “specifically to piss off ABC/Disney during the 2005 American Indian Arts Institute Film Workshop.”<sup>30</sup>

## *Conclusion*

In the end, we may be able to view the work of non-Native artists and filmmakers with the same sympathy they showed their Native American friends of which they were passionate enthusiasts. Like many others in succeeding generations, directors of re-enactments, such as the ones we've seen, recreate some journey into a utopian paradise in a quest for an ancient past. To again quote from Robert Flaherty, "I want to show their primitive majesty and their originality, as long as it is still possible, before the whites destroy not only their character but also these people themselves, who are already disappearing."

The German interest in the American West says Eckehard Koch of the Karl May Gesellschaft "[is] the myth of the 'noble savage,' the discontent with civilization and the restricted freedom caused by the modern world, and the wish to escape from the narrowness of German life."<sup>31</sup> By re-enacting an otherness through mimesis, or of representing the self in a way one wants to be, such acts are a momentary respite from the pressures of the everyday. Yet, they continue to raise disturbing questions from the Native community that remain unanswered.

For contemporary Native American and Canadian artists, on the other hand, the difficulty in re-enacting the stereotype hinges on the absurd degree to which they acutely address – through the strategy of humour – something that is almost completely lacking in the works of non-Natives. For everyone involved in re-enactments, it is a transformative experience, for it allows us to momentarily step into a real or imagined past through a political or cultural lens, never the historiographic route. Thus, the double entendre of re-enactment: when elders are prone to say, "It's hard to be an Indian," we now know it plays both ways for Natives and non-Natives.



## .....END-Notes

- 1 Christopher M. Lyman, *The Vanishing Race and Other Illusions: Photographs of Indians by Edward S. Curtis* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982), p. 23.
- 2 Fisher, Jean. "In Search of the 'Inauthentic': Disturbing Signs in Contemporary Native American Art." *Art Journal*. 51, 3 (1992): 48.
- 3 After Christopher Columbus's first voyage to the Americas he returned to Spain taking with him nine captured aboriginal people. Anthropologist Jack Weatherford indicates that Columbus "seized 1,200 Taino Indians from the island of Hispaniola, crammed as many onto his ships as would fit and sent them to Spain, where they were paraded naked through the streets of Seville and sold as slaves in 1495." In, <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/Taino/docs/columbus.html>
- 4 Brian W. Dippie, "Green Fields and Red Men," in *George Catlin and His Indian Gallery*, eds. G. Gurney and T.T. Heyman, (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian American Art Museum and W.W. Norton & Co., 2002), p. 28.
- 5 Dippie 28
- 6 It was during this time that the Canadian artist Paul Kane sees Catlin's shows and is inspired to create his own Indian gallery.
- 7 L.C. Moses, *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians 1883-1933* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), p. 16-17. Moses goes on to say that "The first program consisted of eleven scenes re-creating Indian warfare, which proved to be most popular. The second performance featured scenes from domestic life, including medicine man's cure of a patient."
- 8 Moses 17.
- 9 John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), p. 217.
- 10 Moses 18.
- 11 Moses 57.
- 12 Raymond William Stedman, *Shadows of the Indian: Stereotypes in American Culture* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), p. 165.
- 13 Moses 230.

- 14 See Sherry Brydon, "Hiawatha Meets the Gitchee Goomee Indians: The Visualization of Indianness in the Nineteenth Century." *Master's thesis*, School for Studies in Art and Culture: Art History, Carleton University, Ottawa, 1993.
- 15 Lyman 17.
- 16 It also took Teri McLuhan, Curtis' biographer, three years to document his 34 year career.
- 17 *The Shadow Catcher*. Dir. Teri McLuhan. Shadow Catchers, Inc. and South Carolina Educational Television Network, 1974.
- 18 *The Shadow Catcher*.
- 19 Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker, *Robert Flaherty Photographer/Filmmaker: The Inuit 1910-1922* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery), quoted in Alan Marcus, "Nanook of the North as Primal Drama," *Visual Anthropology*, 19: 202, 2006.
- 20 Marcus 203.
- 21 From Robert Flaherty's journal. An edited version can be found in Robert Flaherty, Typed draft for "Film: language of the eye." In Box 48, Butler Library, Rare Books Archives, Columbia University, New York, c. 1948.
- 22 Christian F. Feest, "Germany's Indians in a European Perspective," in *Germans and Indians: Fantasies, Encounters, Projection*, eds. C.G. Calloway, G. Gemunden, and S. Zantop, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), p.37.
- 23 Cleo Paskal, "A Wilden Westen Time by the Rhine: Karl May's tales keep Germans Coming to Canada," *National Post*, Saturday, June 14, 2003.
- 24 My story of meeting Hungarian Indians occurred in 1989 in Budapest. There was a young man in his early 20s, who since the age of 12 had been completely absorbed by being a Blackfoot. Some theorists suggest this inhabiting of psychological and physiological space can lead to a condition referred to as "period rush"—a state of complete absorption in the reenacted event—followed by difficulty transitioning out of the past and into the present" (Vanessa Agnew, "Introduction: what is reenactment?" *Criticism*, Summer, 2004: 15). Indeed, the young man was so focused on me being a true Native Canadian that he repeatedly asked me to sing. I obliged but only after asking them to sing Hungarian folk songs. I, apparently, was the rush he and his comrades had been waiting for all their lives.

- 25 Phillip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian*, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 102.
- 26 Katrin Sieg, "Indian Impersonation as Historical Surrogation," in *Germans and Indians: Fantasies, Encounters, Projection*, eds. C.G. Calloway, G. Gemunden, and S. Zantop, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), p. 223.
- 27 Deloria 117.
- 28 Jennifer Peterka-Hirschfield, "American Indians abound in Germany," *Indian Country Today*, April 5, 2000.
- 29 Here is a text from the American Museum of the Natural History's website. "The Museum's habitat group dioramas, located extensively throughout its halls, are among the most renowned and beloved exhibits at the Museum. With precise depictions of geographical locations and the careful, anatomically correct mounting of specimens, these stunning dioramas are windows onto a world of animals, their behavior, and their habitats. Moreover, since many of the environments represented have been exploited or degraded, some dioramas preserve places and animals as they no longer exist. The viewer of a habitat group diorama is able to travel not only across continents, but also, in some cases, through time." This is, of course, the present-day.
- 30 *The Last Great Hunt*. Dir. Shonie De La Rosa. Sheephead Films, 2005, in *Media Lab*, The Independent Film Channel LLC, 2007.  
[http://medialab.ifc.com/film\\_detail.jsp?film\\_id=3166](http://medialab.ifc.com/film_detail.jsp?film_id=3166)
- 31 Eckehard Koch, "Fistful of dreams: Taming the Wild West in the old World," *Munich Found Online & Munich Found Magazine*, n.d.  
[http://www.munichfound.com/new.cfm?News\\_ID=524](http://www.munichfound.com/new.cfm?News_ID=524)

# PROGRAMME *Notes* .....

THE DOUBLE ENTENDRE OF  
RE-ENACTMENT

AN INTERACTIVE PROGRAM  
WITH GERALD MCMASTER

Oct. 20, 2007, 3:00PM

Al Green Theatre, Toronto

➤ *Shooting Geronimo*

Dir. Kent Monkman, 2007, Canada, 11min, Beta SP

➤ *The Last Great Hunt*

Dir. Shonie De La Rosa, 2006, USA, 6min, Beta SP

➤ *Nanook of the North*

Dir. Robert Joseph Flaherty, 1922, USA/France, 5min excerpt, Beta SP

➤ *In the Land of the War Canoes*

Dir. Edward Sheriff Curtis, 1972, USA, 5min excerpt, Beta SP  
(Original Title: *In the Land of the Headhunters*, 1914)

➤ *The Shadow Catcher*

Dir. Teri C. McLuhan, 1974, USA, 5min excerpt, Beta SP

➤ *Nunavut (Our Land)*

Dir. Zacharias Kunuk, 1995, Canada, 28min, Beta SP

➤ *Winnetou*

Dir. Harald Reini, 1965, West Germany/Yugoslavia/Italy, 5min excerpt,  
Beta SP

➤ *4-Wheel War Pony*

Dir. Dustinn Craig, 2007, USA, 5min, Beta SP

# NOTES

Published in 2007 by Vtape  
401 Richmond Street West, #452  
Toronto, ON M5V 3A8  
Canada

tel 416 351-1317  
fax 416 351-1509

www.vtape.org  
ISBN: 978-0-9734831-5-4

Printed by Print Maximum  
Designed by Linseed Projects

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www.vtape.org

Operating as a distributor, a mediatheque and a resource centre with an emphasis on the contemporary media arts, Vtape's mandate is to serve both artists and audiences by assisting and encouraging the appreciation, pedagogy, preservation, restoration and exhibition of media works by artists and independents. Vtape receives operating funds from the Canada Council for the Arts Media Arts Section, the Ontario Arts Council and the Toronto Arts Council.



The imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival is an international festival that celebrates the latest works by Indigenous peoples on the forefront of innovation in film, video, radio, and new media. In 2007, the festival ran October 17-21.

*Cover photo: Shooting Geronimo, 2007, Kent Monkman (courtesy of the artist)*

