

## **Archival Encounters**

by Veronica Passalacqua

When I was invited for the Geske Lecture, I considered how to respond to the series intention of addressing arts, history and the regional influence of the Great Plains. As a curator, I thought about the subject area in visual terms of material objects within the vast canon of historical and contemporary Native American art from throughout the Plains. As an author and academic of Native American photography, I considered the rich Native American history of this region and the pivotal experiences of Native peoples.

The lectureship also provided the opportunity to examine the permanent collections at the Great Plains Museum to create an accompanying exhibition. In collaboration with the museum and renown photographic artist, Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie (Seminole/Muscogee/Diné) we were able to blend these visual, materials and textual perspectives to create a series of new works derived, and exhibited alongside, the Museum's photographic archives.

In the course of my research and curatorship, I have been fortunate to work with photographic archives from numerous institutions around the world. Most of the time, it is a daunting task that challenges the researcher to balance the desire to view everything, leaving no box unopened while working in a sort of research triage methodology to avoid being visually overwhelmed. With each collection, I try to approach archives broadly in subject matter and without a specific agenda, remaining open to the photographic images that reveal themselves. Within a search of Native American historical photographs portraits, landscapes, communities, and material objects resurface. The photographs are rich in visual content, documenting moments of westward expansionism, governmental surveys, and Native American material culture that breaks through the frame for the viewer to consider who took the photograph, why it was taken, how it was used and the persistent existence of the photograph to survive in collections. But above all, for me, it is the power of the image which in an instant is able to transport the viewer back in history to these multifaceted contexts to wonder about all the stakeholders involved in the

photograph – the sitter, the photographer, the patron, the consumer, the collector, the archivist, the researcher and the viewer.

### Artist Collaboration:

Encountering the work of Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie for the first time, viewers are plunged into debate of politics and history. Her provocative work challenges the viewer's own perspectives and memory, while at the same time conveys a sense of a national and global Indigenous communities. She accomplishes this by targeting the viewer's memory, whether it is from experience, media, Western historical accounts, or preconceived stereotypes which she transforms through a visual deconstruction in the hopes of supplanting new and lasting memories.

I met Tsinhnahjinnie in 1998 and became familiar with her work as part of the exhibition, Native Nations (Alison 1998). It was through planning discussions that I began to understand the field of Native American photography and Tsinhnahjinnie's perspective towards historical and contemporary photographs. In the exhibition, her works filled a room and she contributed to exhibition text panels, as well as writing for the catalogue.<sup>1</sup> My continued research of Tsinhnahjinnie's artistic portfolio revealed that she is, without a doubt, one of the leaders of the field evidenced by the volume of exhibitions and publications of her artwork with a singular commitment to the medium of photography and more recently video.

**Fig 1.** Damn! There goes the neighborhood, 1998.

The Damn! series reclaims and liberates images that the artist perceives to be embedded in colonialist history which she then relocates to an Indigenous context through the use of digital collage. She facilitates the dialogue by giving agency to the figures in text through an expression of her own voice and thought. The series combines subtlety, resolute statements, and humour deeply rooted within Native epistemology. The popularity of the series, can be attributed to the power of the works to engage the varied

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<sup>1</sup> In exhibition: *The Damn Series* (1998) (5 pieces), *Memoirs of an Aboriginal Savant* (1994) (15 pieces), *Grandma and Me* (1997), and the video *NTV* (1994).

international, US and native audiences. No matter what degree of Native knowledge and experience the viewer possesses the art works are enabled to initiate a dialogue.

Within the series, *Damn! There goes the Neighborhood!* (1998) is perhaps Tsinhnahjinnie's most popular piece. During exhibition of the series at the Barbican Art Gallery in London (1998) the piece received more attention than any other single exhibit in the large show. Despite the lack of cultural knowledge by the majority of the London audiences of the central figure, Shavano (Ute) and the Oscar Meyer Wiener-mobile, most of the press attention focused on this piece. As part of my consultancy work for the exhibition, I was invited to conduct a gallery tour and when I reached this piece there was a noticeable shift in my audience's inquiries. The visual humour of Shavano's smoking gun and the bullet-riddled Wiener-mobile in combination with the familiar phrase, *Damn, There goes the Neighborhood!*, intrigued visitors. That the neighborhood resembles Shavano's territory could be easily perceived, as well as the arrival of the amusing wiener mobile as a humorous analogy for the arrival of non-native people, products, and commercialism. During international viewing, in this case the UK, the identification with American popular culture and the Oscar Meyer hot dog, or fast food companies such as McDonalds, potentially creates an empathy with cultural colonialism in the UK viewer who might be predisposed to seeing this unfavourable conjunction and recognizing it on a visceral level. I believe this is a European favourite precisely because the piece highlights the colonial element of American popular culture.

In a touch of irony the piece is further compounded by Shavano's documented resistance to be photographed as part of the U.S. Geological Survey in 1877. Fleming (1986) details the story of Shavano's photographic history. As a Ute chief, he was photographed as part of a Washington DC delegation, and then later by William Gunnison Chamberlain in his studio at Denver, which is the image from which Tsinhnahjinnie digitally reclaimed his portrait. According to Fleming and Luskey (1986) Shavano's experiences with photographers led to his distrust of government representatives who used pictures against them. As part of the Hayden Survey, William Henry Jackson, met large bands of Utes who were hesitant to being photographed, and Shavano is explicitly named as speaking against Jackson. Despite Shavano's opposition, his portrait was later featured in Jackson's 1877

Catalogue (Department of the Interior and Jackson 1877). Though Tsinhnahjinnie was not aware of this story until later, she felt further validated in creating this work and contextualizing him in an Indigenous role of resistance (Tsinhnahjinnie 2003).

A strong Indigenous artistic base ignited by her father, fused with her mother's commitment to community and protocol created the catalyst for this artist of political conviction. Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie was born in 1954 into the Bear and Raccoon Clans of the Seminole and Muscogee Nations, and born for the Tsinajinnie Clan of the Diné Nation. Raised in Phoenix and Rough Rock, Arizona, she attended the Institute of American Indian Arts. She completed her BFA from California College of Arts and Crafts in 1981. The Bay area became Tsinhnahjinnie's home for the next twenty years (1977-1997) and it was during that time that Tsinhnahjinnie developed strong intertribal friendships and ties. She remains active in numerous Native organizations where, in addition to her fine artwork, she frequently undertakes portraiture commissions to document artists and events.<sup>2</sup> Tsinhnahjinnie earned her Master of Fine Arts in 2002 from University of California, Irvine and is currently Director of the C.N. Gorman Museum and Associate Professor in Native American Studies both at University of California, Davis.

The inherent power of the photograph to validate truth, fact and history fuels much of Tsinhnahjinnie's eloquent artwork. She states that she does not seek approval or validation from an outside non-Native entity, but as one of the first generation of photo artists founding this dynamic landscape, she documents her views with self-experienced Native authority (Tsinhnahjinnie 2003).

Recognizing that photography by non-Native photographers has historically been one of the strongest reinforcing agents of Native American stereotypes, she is cognizant of her unique position as a Native photographer to directly challenge, re-interpret, and reclaim these images through her artwork. As such, she purposefully utilizes the reifying power of photography to establish her own form of documentation of history, memory, and

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<sup>2</sup> In addition to documenting events (such as protests, powwows, and conferences) Tsinhnahjinnie continues to photograph award recipients for the First Peoples Fund Community Spirit Award. She expresses that it is important that she continue to photograph within the Indigenous community. With the recent passing of Te Arikiniui Dame Te Atairangikaahu, the Maori Queen of 40 years, Tsinhnahjinnie felt compelled to attend the funeral to pay her respects. She also photographed some of her experiences which were recently published in the magazine *Tū Mai* Tsinhnahjinnie, H. J. (2006). Te Arikiniui Dame Te Atairangikaahu. *Tū Mai*: 30-32.

family from an Indigenous perspective. This idea of reclaiming and reinterpreting histories and experience is at the very foundations of the genre of contemporary Indigenous photography.

**Fig. 2.** Dad & the Wall, 2008

At the heart of Tsihnahjinnie's works is the importance of memory, for the artist as well as the viewer. She challenges various forms of memory that include media and western histories, while at the same time creates new works of beauty in respect and remembrance of those depicted. Throughout Tsihnahjinnie's career she has incorporated images of her family, which for a lens-based artist would seem to be a given. Distinct from more traditional documentary or family photography, conceptual Native American photographic artists, such as Shelley Niro (Mohawk) and Larry McNeil (Tlingit/Nisgaá) feature family members in their works, emanating from a context of love and memory. Tsihnahjinnie's inclusion of family, most frequently her father, acclaimed Navajo painter, Andrew Van Tsinajinnie takes this further by transporting him to the present, to serve as her agent and support in the surrounding political dialogue. The strength of her father, his pride in the military, and his experiences in Indian Boarding school, the army, and service in the Pacific Theatre during the 1940s bring a personal depth in the works she creates with him. In a visit to Palestine in 2006, Tsihnahjinnie was overwhelmed with information and discussions but visually she was most inspired by the Wall, and how people interacted with the wall itself. She honed in on the graffiti art of British artist Banksy, and she's been doing her own form of 'tagging' since then. (Banksy 2005)

In the series *Portraits Against Amnesia* (2003) she includes historical images of her grandmother and father in the series, and in the eight other works<sup>3</sup> she revitalizes historical images of people unknown to her whom she believes to be of Native American ancestry. Tsihnahjinnie's burgeoning fascination with E-bay in 2000 was the catalyst of this important series which is based on real photo postcards which she purchased from the auction website. Searching by tags of 'Indian' and 'Native American' she looked for

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<sup>3</sup> The series consists of the following works (in no particular order): *Dad*, *Grandma*, *Hoke-tee*, *Boy in the Moon*, *Ista-cha-tee Aspirations*, *Oklahoma*, *Grandchildren*, *Idelia*, *The Three Graces*, and *Che-bon*.

arresting images of Native people, bidding against unknown buyers in the auction. She presumably bids against commercial dealers and collectors, and it is not surprising that she is most successful when the sitter is dressed in non-native attire. For the most part, monetary value in vintage photographs of Native Americans is piqued only when sitters are dressed in regalia, or fit “the white man’s code of Indian, wearing feathers and buckskin”. (Tsinhnahjinnie 2003) But then the dealers are looking at the photographs, and perhaps cannot see that the sitter is actually looking at them. Unlike many ‘collectible’ vintage Native American photographs, the gazes in commissioned studio portraits are not voyeuristic, not anthropological, not part of government documentation, and not about the photographer. In these portraits the authority, agency and power is held by the subjects who control their own identity in the way they wish to be represented.

It is through the portal of digital technologies that Tsinhnahjinnie transports the sitters of these vintage photographs through time, space and technologies. Always riding on political currents, the sitters often look out of the artwork to ponder, question and challenge what they see. At other times they are given agency through Tsinhnahjinnie’s artistic voice of social commentary and critique. For the artist, it “is about not forgetting these images that are floating around deemed of little value by collectors, but should be valued and collected by Native people” (Tsinhnahjinnie 2003).

The original portraits in the series were all postcard size, but in their remembering Tsinhnahjinnie has made them into large twenty by thirty inch prints; now too large to be misplaced or forgotten. Some of the figures are larger than life-size and gaze directly out of the photograph to the viewer, leaving their time period behind to be present in the new millennium. The latest digital printing technologies, in particular platinum lambda prints produce a golden luminous finish within the sepia tones that makes the figure ever-more present, further empowered to fight all forms of amnesia.

## Double Vision Series

Tsinhnahjinnie's approach to the series and the Great Plains Museum archives is expressed in her artist statement when she writes,

"I have had the great fortune of visiting photographic archives nationally and internationally, and do not hesitate when invited to view or respond to them. So it was with great anticipation that I viewed the Great Plains Art Museum archives and I was not disappointed. Archival photographs that I find intriguing are the early images of Indigenous Nations, individuals, land, and animals. I scan the images for messages, intentional and unintentional messages. Through the photograph I am transported to consider the shifting political atmosphere, speculate about the space between the subject and the film, wonder about the intention of the image maker, and reflect upon the intention of the 'subject'." (Tsinhnahjinnie 2011)

When we began to work together on the series, we poured over hundreds of collections image files and multiple database lists. The tiny thumbnails and pdf printouts provided hints about their subjects which brought the first round of selections to around 60 images. The second round was aided by more detailed image scans in which the figures began to resurface and make themselves known. Reviewing the images, I wondered what Tsinhnahjinnie might select for her final works. The richness of the collection encompassing key historical western photographers, I wondered if she might be drawn to the work of a particular photographer, a counter narrative to anthropological discourse, the experiences of expansionism, or the depth of landscapes or portraiture. In reality, none of my analytical preconceptions played a role, as Tsinhnahjinnie started by simply selecting images that she found beautiful and evocative, images that emanated a voice and a presence. Engaging portraits of people whose faces looked out at her, and whom she felt needed to be repositioned in a new, Indigenous space from which they could say something more. At the same time, she was arrested with the beauty of the hand-colored photograph of bison grazing, with the contrasting trauma of the photographic waste in their slaughtering.

Without intention, all of the portraits Tsinhnahjinnie selected were by William Henry Jackson who served as official photographer for the U.S. Geological and Geographic Survey, and is most well known for his work in the voluminous Hayden Surveys of 1872

that documented the land, railroad, animals and Native nations through the views in his lens. He was an accomplished photographer and explorer, certainly skilled to be able to produce his works under difficult environmental conditions. His images garnered circulation in public and ethnographic spheres, but their primary purpose and functionality was to be illustrative and evidentiary, serving as visual data for the federal government to justify and support western expansionism. However, Jackson's images and portraits of Native peoples are only able to depict what he and other non-Native photographers of the West could see - what they were willing to see, or what they were permitted to see. They do not examine or include context outside of the frame, not to mention those images that were taken in a costume of false regalia or under military force. Yet, capturing and viewing these historical moments from a Western perspective, the photographer and viewer is able to create, find and self-validate what one expects to see. Images from this era are generally thought to be ethnographic, and at the time validated by the burgeoning field of American Ethnography/Anthropology in tandem with the federal government's attempt to represent truth, reality and an unquestionable authenticity.

Tsinhnahjinnie creates the work, *The Special*, 2010 (**FIG. 3**) as an advertisement and labeling of Jackson's work in depicting Native Americans, specifically the Pawnee and Omaha peoples. The photograph of his travelling darkroom is obscured into the background to antagonize and challenge his position of representing authenticity.

These early encounters between photography and Native Americans have a history that for Native Americans is associated with racism, colonialism, broken treaties, captivity, and romanticism. While a great deal of contemporary Native American art addresses many of these issues, photography is in a unique position to directly confront these histories and reclaim and resituate the images from within its own medium. Contemporary Native American photography has become a genre unto its own, infused with Native cultural capital and evidenced by a rich history of Native peoples practicing photography as early as the 1890s. While the techniques of photography are based in western history, its appropriation by Indigenous artists has generated a sovereign Indigenous space; a territory created, propagated, and continually mediated by Native artists, authors, and curators.

For this new body of work, Tsintahjinnie employs similar methodologies to her previous series by resituating the subjects into a new politicized Indigenous context of her making. In their original form, the images are printed as carte-de-visites, cabinet cards, stereopticons, and real photo cards. Their transformation is size from a few inches to up to five feet in size and the infusion of vibrant colors from a muted sepia-toned palette renders the figures to be undeniably present. She further liberates the images from the fixity of the photographic paper by producing them on shimmering poly-satin fabric. Mounted inches off the wall, the pieces and subjects seem to be in movement, gently wafting with the breeze of passing by. Paying homage to the Bison and in respect for the peoples of the Plains, she gives voice, agency and presence to the figures to serve as a protagonist.

**Fig. 4a**-Mega Sale, 2010. **Fig. 4b**. William Henry Jackson, Pawnee Indian, 1868.

In *Mega Sale*, Tsintahjinnie transforms this Pawnee man from a small 2x3 inch carte-de-visite into her own form of a vibrant and graphic advertisement measuring five feet wide. She brings history and consumerism together for the Mega Sale. The idea that history is about us, emerges from within the writing of Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (1999) seminal book, Decolonizing Methodologies within which she examines the history of western research through the eyes of the colonized. Tsintahjinnie writes on that image that "they will take everyone's tongue and replace it with a consumer language" with the intention of an expression of consumerism, both historically and now. Tsintahjinnie's version of the advertisement is reminiscent of those seen in fashion magazines of a striking close-up of the male face which ironically shares a syncretical view from Jackson when, in the Hayden Survey of 1872, he captioned the work *Particular to the time of day - Pawnee*. She includes her own Paul Frank monkey in the corner to identify with graphics infused in children's clothing, indoctrinated into forms of commercialism, the consumer language, with their earliest thoughts. She wants to create her own drawings and superheroes for Native children that exist outside of the vast consumerism of Disney, Dreamworks, and Marvel Comics. She wants to recall and remind viewers of the brutalities in the historical banning of cultural practices and specifically speaking Indigenous languages that occurred throughout the country at federal, regional, and local levels through the implementation of boarding schools and geographic confinement. At the same time, she celebrates the

resilience of Native languages to survive as demonstrated by the recent cultural and academic resurgence in learning, teaching, documenting and speaking Native languages.

**Fig 5a.** The Promises were so sweet, 2010.

**Fig 5b.** William Henry Jackson, Pawnee, ca.1872

This elegant Pawnee man sits with the markers of wealth and status, adorned in an army uniform with now-gilded buttons and complete with officer epaulettes, holding an intricate pipe ax, wearing shell or bone earrings, rings, a beaded choker, and covered by a buffalo robe. Everything about this portrait emanates agency in the decisions of his visual representation. Jackson's only identifier is simply, Pawnee.

Tsinhnahjinnie's vision of this man heightens the intrigue to wonder who he may be, what he is thinking, and what are the stories behind these signifiers. She draws the viewer to his hair and piercing eyes to consider his new repositioned context. The image has a haunting semblance to the Washington DC formal delegation portraits by Vannerson & McClees of the 1850s depicting delegates dressed in fine regalia, with objects evidencing federal relationships, during the course of earlier nation-to-nation treaty negotiations. (Fleming and Luskey 1986) The opulent studios with ornate carpets and furniture give way to the sense of portraiture in field, the survey photographs with blank backgrounds feel as hollow as the as the treaties that were made so distantly in DC. This piece speaks directly to the treaties and the beliefs that the treaties would be met. Tsinhnahjinnie creates wonder about the promises that were made and broken to Native leaders, as well as those who served as collaborators. Two for one...continues the sale of land, people, and cultural knowledge and the artist continues to reflect upon Linda Tuhiwai Smith, in her consideration of an anthropological perspective of research with "The idea of an idea, or not..." In the background, she places a buffalo walking by, ever-present and enduring throughout the many contexts of time and space.

**Fig. 6a.** Remembering, 2010.

**Fig 6b.** William Henry Jackson, Otoes (Standing Indian and Blanket), ca. 1872.

Another portrait of the series is based on Jackson's image, identified as Otoes (Standing Indian and Blanket). The small carte-de-visite makes it difficult to read the photograph of the man standing. Its exposure, size and faded condition seem to make it blend in with the collection of unnamed people. But looking closer one can see that he is richly adorned with a fur hat, necklaces, moccasins, and a medallion underneath the blanket he wears. The backdrop sits uneasily in the picture as irrelevant, adding little to the composition or portrait. The sharpest part of the photograph is the man's face, looking off to the distance rather than facing Jackson, possessing a wealth of knowledge that feels contributes to the sense of intellectual distance from the camera and the photographer.

Tsinhnahjinnie focuses on his face, to create a work to remember the buffalo and the ceremonies that go with it, as this Otoe man blows smoke in ceremony. The transformation of the faded and small original, in which the man appear no more than three inches high is enlarged to captivate his face and thought when rendered at 4 feet by 5 feet. The becomes more ethereal and filled with movement by the swirling smoke of rich purples and whites that are central to the design, reinforced by the physicality of producing the works in the flowing poly-satin fabric. Layers of time and space create a dimensionality of ceremony that focuses upon the bison, to bring these historical figures from the past to sit within the context of the present.

**Fig 7a.** William Henry Jackson, Untitled (Pueblo Artifacts), ca. 1872.

**Fig 7b.** Anasazi Homage, 2010.

What is seemingly a tangential response to the collections is Tsinhnahjinnie's piece, *Anasazi Homage* in which she reassembles pottery shards into new forms that emulate nuclear reactors billowing smoke. Amongst the portraits of Native peoples and the landscapes, a significant part of Jackson's work related to cataloguing objects created by Native Americans. The abundance of shards, pottery, and petroglyphs in the governmental surveys resonates in archaeological and anthropological research where there is much

tribute given to the skills and technologies to produce such works. Tsinhnahjinnie utilizes this recognition to express that Indigenous knowledge and technologies far exceeds these forms and should be included in consideration of new, green technologies.

**Fig. 8.** Laton Alton Huffman, Buffalo Grazing the Big Open, 1880.

As mentioned earlier, Tsinhnahjinnie dedicates the series to the Buffalo Nation/Bison Nation. She writes that, “As I surveyed the images I had selected to work with, the presence of the Buffalo Nation/Bison Nation felt very strong and as I worked on the images, I wanted to pay homage to a Nation that was nearly slaughtered to extinction. I wanted to pay homage to a four legged Nation that survived in spite of “progress”. While thinking about the Buffalo/ Bison Nation, I couldn’t help but consider the dualities that just their name presents; how, the early settlers could not understand the indigenous names of “things” already present so they had to rename ‘things’ to make them familiar, from animals, birds, cities, streets, even giving the Indigenous Nations the name of “Indian”. (Tsinhnahjinnie 2011)

**Figs 9a-d.** “Today, I was thinking...” 2010

She was drawn to the beauty of the grazing bison in an image by Laton Alton Huffman, allured by the tranquility of the scene and the warmth of the pastels of watercolor hand-tinting. Above all she sensed the timeless nature of the image, the endurance of the Bison and their presence day after day. But one day, colonialism and consumerism in the form of Ronald McDonald came to the Plains, depicted in Tsinhnahjinnie form of tagging in a Banksy style. The iconic figure that has come to represent US commercialism globally, and specifically the commodification of food, reminds the viewer of the early experimentation of bison cross-breeding, and their extermination for a changing economy.

Amidst the grasses, Tsinhnahjinnie brings the ceramic designs from an earlier work to reflect the complex bond between Native American peoples and the Bison. As Zontek (2007: xiv) writes, “Native Americans established a virtually unprecedented human-animal relationship with the bison, in which buffalo country became Indian country. Bison permeate virtually everything material for Native Americans as well as the spiritual.” Tsinhnahjinnie in the fourth piece, includes a comment ‘Real Indians eat curry’ to mock the

misnomers of the terms Indian and Buffalo. Deeper of course is the imposing of Western morals and ideals that were dismissive, offended and ignorant of Native cultures.

**Fig. 10.** Taking the Tongues, 2010

Laton Alton Huffman learned his father's trade, but led a footloose early life. He spent his teenage years working as a wrangler on horseback, became a surveyor for the Northern Pacific Railroad, and in 1878 worked in the photographic studio of Frank Jay Haynes at Moorhead, Minnesota. At Ft. Keogh, Huffman received no salary as post photographer. His income came from the sale of pictures. He also doubled as a guide for hunting parties, sold buffalo hides, and started a small cattle ranch. Hoffman's studio at the fort became a congenial gathering place for soldiers, scouts, and Indians who relished an hour or two of conversation with a drink and a cigar. (Allen 2004) From this vantage point, Huffman's peaceful and tranquil bison photographs also revealed the traumas in their slaughter.

The vast decimation of the North American Bison is certainly well-known to those from the Plains, but the photographic evidence of the shifting economy continues to be emotionally compelling. In particular are the photographs from the 1870s of mounds of Bison skulls measuring up to 25 feet high and 50 feet wide, and the walls made of Bison skulls that seem to stretch into the endless distance. The magnitude is almost incomprehensible in these evidentiary images, but what I find most engaging is that such collection occurred after much of the slaughter was undertaken when it was discovered that the bones and skulls left on the Plains could be ground for use in fertilizer. The men standing atop of these piles and walls were like scavengers after the kill, simply collecting what was left to rot. The so-called hunting parties, who killed for 'sport' by simply shooting the tranquil herds from trains and those mercenaries who traded in the hides and tongues, were at the forefront of this disregard for life and the attempt at their extermination.

In the relationship between the Bison and Native peoples, every part of the animal, literally from teeth to tail was utilized in Native American material culture. Hides were used for a vast range of objects including clothing, bags, housing, drums and containers.

Horns were used for cups, spoons, and ladles while hooves provided glue and rattles. The hair, bones, stomach, brains, and tail all had a role and place in material objects. While the meat, tongue and muscles were dried and stored for sustenance. This integral relationship and reverence for the Buffalo/Bison has led them to be referred to as the great Buffalo Nation.

Adjacent to the economies of trade, destroying the bison to near extinction was another political weapon waged against Native peoples, in terms of sustenance, clothing, and spirituality. From the stereopticon by Huffman, Tsinhnahjinnie draws the focus of the image to the tongue being cut away, tinting it red amidst the the wider landscape which she reverts to appear like a film negative. The inversion of black to white makes the scene feel more graphic and raw, literally highlighting the waste of the slaughter depicted. She further polarizes the image by infusing a brilliant blue sky. At the distant horizon is Ronald McDonald, bringing with him the monopoly of US consumption and to consider the ways in which we eat and view our food today.

**Fig. 11.** A Penny for your Thoughts, 2010.

Utilizing the same image, Tsinhnahjinnie has minted her own buffalo nickel under the United States of Amnesia. She replaces the majesty of the standing buffalo in the original 1913-1938 coin designed by James Earle Frazer, with the reality of their slaughter. The metallic finish to the fabric renders the piece in striking silver with the photographic image clearly visible. The only color she infuses is a blue, again on the tongue.

**Fig. 12.** 5 Minutes, 2010.

The ease of the slaughter is reflected in the title of this piece ‘5 Minutes Work’ buffalo cows. Huffman replicated this image numerous times and in 1907 released it as part of his postcard series and re-titled it *“A Killing of cows and spikes”*. It is difficult for me to imagine the collectible nature of this photograph at that time.

In this concluding work, Tsinhnahjinnie includes a quote from Linda Tuhiwai Smith “the idea that the story of history can be told in one coherent narrative” (Smith 1999) to consider the complex layers involved in this history of the bison, native peoples and

colonialism. She includes her sense of irony relabeling Huffman's work as Progressive Fine Indian Portraits, as well as giving voice to the horse witnessing this tragedy when he states "Excuse me...I did not sign up for this!"

Tsinhnahjinnie's works in this series provide an Indigenous perspective from a personal and political response to the archives. She intended for these works to "present a visual confrontation, an argument with premise that should be critically reviewed and endlessly questioned." (Tsinhnahjinnie 2011) The works validate the critical importance of archival materials as evidencing alternate histories when considered in a contemporary context. From selection, to commentary and her own perspective of double vision, Tsinhnahjinnie demonstrates the partnerships between artists, curators and museums in working with archival materials and a way of bringing light to photographs perhaps long forgotten and buried deep within collections.

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