

Brenda L. Croft

Brenda L. Croft's large-scale pieces *caravan*, *east/west* and *west/ward/bound* are drawn from her father's photographs, found after his death. Croft describes the power of these evocative records as "moments that were captured in miniature [that] made my heart ache...the safe distance of years offers respite, but there's still a catch in my throat, a punch in the guts whenever I've been brave enough to open his ugly old brown vinyl suitcase... I love these little scratched and faded envelopes of light, these markers of before, sentinels of somewhere else. Because bits of me are imbedded in them, like DNA, my fingerprints are all over them, even before I held them."

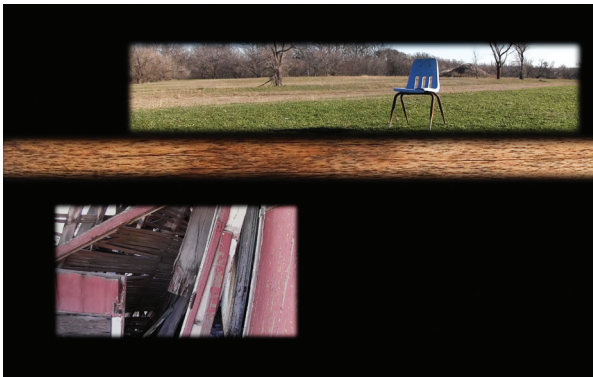


Brenda L. Croft, *caravan*, 1959 - 2009

About the artist: **Brenda L. Croft** is from the Gurindji/Malngin/Mudpurra peoples in the Northern Territory of Australia. She has been involved in the arts and cultural sectors for over a quarter of a century as an artist, arts administrator, curator, writer, lecturer and consultant. Croft is a Senior Research Fellow with the National Institute for Experimental Arts, College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales. From 2009 - 2012 she was a lecturer at the University of South Australia. In 2009, Croft received an Honorary Doctorate (Visual Art) from University of Sydney (Sydney College of the Arts).

Anna Tsouhlarakis

On the Navajo reservation, some canyon walls are lined with black streaks—coal embedded into the layers of rock. The streaks hint at bigger deposits of coal and fade in and out as they continue along the canyon wall. As a young girl, these lines were a language to me, telling me the stories of my family and my future. During my kinaalda we would walk to the canyon and offer prayers. The prayers spoke of family, growth and harmony. I remember reading the lines as we faced the rising sun, wondering if the stories and prayers were real. The ceremony is about the transition into womanhood. It is about preparing for your life as a Navajo woman. It is about knowing your role in a matrilineal society. At points, the line is disrupted, but it is never broken.



Anna Tsouhlarakis, Still from "3/4", 2012, Multi-channel video installation

About the artist: **Anna Tsouhlarakis** was born in Lawrence, Kansas. Her family comes from the Navajo Nation in New Mexico and the island of Crete, Greece. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Dartmouth College in Native American Studies and Studio Art and a Master of Fine Arts from Yale University.

Tsouhlarakis' work consists of various media including sculpture, installation, video and performance art. She has been part of numerous exhibitions including: Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, Santa Fe; Wave Hill Gallery, New York; Dreamspace Gallery, London; McMaster Museum of Art, Ontario; and the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian.

Thicker Than Water is supported by a grant from **The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.**

Thicker Than Water

Brenda L. Croft
Tom Jones
Greg Staats
Anna Tsouhlarakis

MUSEUM of
CONTEMPORARY
NATIVE ARTS

A center of the INSTITUTE of AMERICAN INDIAN ARTS

THE CITY OF
SANTA FE
ARTS
COMMISSION

108 Cathedral Place, Santa Fe, NM 87501
1.888.922.4242 www.iaia.edu/museum

MoCNA

THICKER THAN WATER

Brenda L. Croft | Tom Jones | Greg Staats | Anna Tsouhlarakis

Co-curated by Nancy Marie Mithlo and Ryan Rice

19 January – 12 May 2013

The Museum of Contemporary Native Arts invited four photo/mixed media-based artists – Brenda L. Croft, Tom Jones, Greg Staats and Anna Tsouhlarakis– to address the complexities of family, biography, and race that intersect through blood and memory. Portraiture, family photo albums, documentary film, private and public archives and performance offer a rich platform to explore manifestations of Indigenous knowledge that negotiate ideas of “blood” as metaphorical and racial/biological measures for family and communal relations.

Autobiography often connotes a concern only with one’s personal genealogy and the nuclear family. *Thicker Than Water* recognizes a broader understanding of communal ideologies that extends into and then past this western construct of individualism to encompass Indigenous references of community, clan, and nation. An awareness of these various levels of belonging enable conversations where the imaginary and the real intersect, co-mingle and create space for a more comprehensive understanding of Indigenous realities in global contexts. The selection of artists from Canada, the US and Australia facilitate this more expansive conversation on what the notion of “belonging” means in a globalized 21st century.

“Blood memories” and Indigenous worldviews serve as powerful political tropes that bear witness to the legacies of colonialism. Memory in this sense engages trans-generational experiences as a means of upholding the persistence of communal knowledge. Our stories and the visual representations of our ancestors become the language of remembrance, belonging and place across borders and time. The body acts as a potent reminder of all that has occurred over the past centuries via acculturation, death, disease and survival. Our blood, ever thicker than water, continues to instruct, remind and renew us as we move into new territories, imagine new stories and continue to create in the ever-evolving ways of our ancestors.

Thicker Than Water SYMPOSIUM

The Personal Archive: Memory and Imagination in Contemporary Art

Saturday, January 19 | 2-4 pm

Panelists: Brenda L. Croft | Tom Jones | Greg Staats | Anna Tsouhlarakis

Portraiture, family photo albums and archives provide a fertile space to explore racial, family and communal forms of belonging. “Thicker Than Water” curators and artists explore how legal, social and personal records are memorialized in contemporary fine arts contexts. These rich visual testimonies offer expanded ways of seeing and understanding race and identity in contemporary contexts of dislocation, refuge and loss of cultural memory. Fertile perspectives about the nature of community, the notion of home and the importance of intergenerational knowledge as a core source of self-perception will be brought forward in the discussions.

Thicker Than Water Symposium is supported by a grant from the New Mexico Humanities Council.



Greg Staats, *dark strings*, 2010

Tom Jones

In this series, “Identity Genocide,” I am continuing my ongoing photographic examination of issues affecting American Indian communities, and more specifically my tribe, the Ho-Chunk Nation. In 2004, the Ho-Chunk Nation passed new legislation that required all new members to have DNA testing to prove their Ho-Chunk ancestry. I am coining the term “identity genocide” to describe this new form of self-imposed tribal eradication and assimilation by the Ho-Chunk Nation.

Today, we have children whose parents are full-blooded Indians, but of different tribes. According to new tribal enrollment policies, they will no longer be considered a member of any federally recognized tribe, because they are only one-eighth of each individual tribe. Often these children are raised culturally as Ho-Chunks, but will not be tribally recognized.

This issue is not only affecting Ho-Chunks, but also all of Indian country. Traditionally, the Ho-Chunk people have adopted non-Ho-Chunks (whether they were Native or White) into the tribe. In addition, there was constant intermarriage among the tribes before contact with whites. These practices continue today. Marriage and adoption do not change who you are culturally, if you are raised within the Ho-Chunk community you are Ho-Chunk. The tribe’s DNA testing is self-colonizing its own people through federally imposed ideas of American Indian identity. Tribally self-imposed assimilation has its beginning in governmental mandated reservations, boarding schools and relocation. This new form of eradication did not arise from wanting biological purity, but instead from the desire to control how casino revenues are dispersed.

About the Artist: **Tom Jones** is an Associate Professor of Photography at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He received his MFA in Photography and a MA in Museum Studies from Columbia College in Chicago, IL. A member of the Ho-Chunk Nation, Jones’ photographs examine identity and geographic place with an emphasis on the experience of American Indian communities. Jones is a co-author on the book “People of the Big Voice, Photographs of Ho-Chunk Families by Charles Van Schaick, 1879-1943.” His work is in numerous collections including: the National Museum of the American Indian, Polaroid Corporation, Sprint Corporation, The Chazen Museum of Art, The Nerman Museum, Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, and Microsoft.



Tom Jones, *Identity Genocide*, 2012,

Greg Staats

My lens-based work and more recently, performance, video installation and sculpture, combines language, mnemonics and the natural world as an ongoing process of reconnecting with a Haudenosaunee [Iroquois] restorative aesthetic that defines the multiplicity of relationships with trauma and renewal. The trauma that is felt from my personal and existential displacement from the Kanien’kehá:ka (Mohawk) language and subsequent relational worldview, has motivated my recent sequencing aesthetic of video and photographic works within a mnemonic continuum. In place of this systemic linguistic deficit, I have also assembled and created an archive of images and documents, both personal and familial. In creating new works for *Thicker Than Water*, this intuitive visual restitution has created a mindfulness of influences from within my family archive, which consists of diaries, letters, photographs and audio recordings; the Haudenosaunee creation story; the ceremonial continuum of performative burdens of condolence, and my imagined role as observer and participant, all in an effort to elevate the mind and to countervail complex trauma, dissociation and the existential loss of self. In facilitating this personal renewal, I have incorporated the mnemonics of loci; the centre of representational communication of oral sequencing that has remained my entry point into the complexity of relationships to the natural world and the countervailing of grief. Furthermore, this powerful new resource is an externalization of what is carried within the body, a repository, and has enabled me to move forward, toward a meaningful renewal in dialogue with the psychic space in which the overwhelming is held.

About the Artist: **Greg Staats**, a Mohawk from the Grand River, Six Nations, Brantford, Ontario, is a photographer who also works in short video. His work draws upon a traditional Mohawk restorative aesthetic that defines the multiplicity of relationships within a mnemonic continuum. Staats assembles and creates an archive of images and documents, both personal and familial to build and maintain strong connections with the land, nation, community, and family.

He has had solo exhibitions at the Kitchener-Waterloo Arts Gallery, Walter Philips Gallery, Tom Thomson Memorial Art Gallery, Mercer Union: A Centre for Contemporary Art, and McMaster Museum of Art among numerous group exhibitions.

Greg Staats wishes to acknowledge the generous financial support of City of Toronto through the Toronto Arts Council, The Ontario Arts Council, an agency of the Government of Ontario and the Canada Council for the Arts / Conseil des arts du Canada.