

A Space Gallery

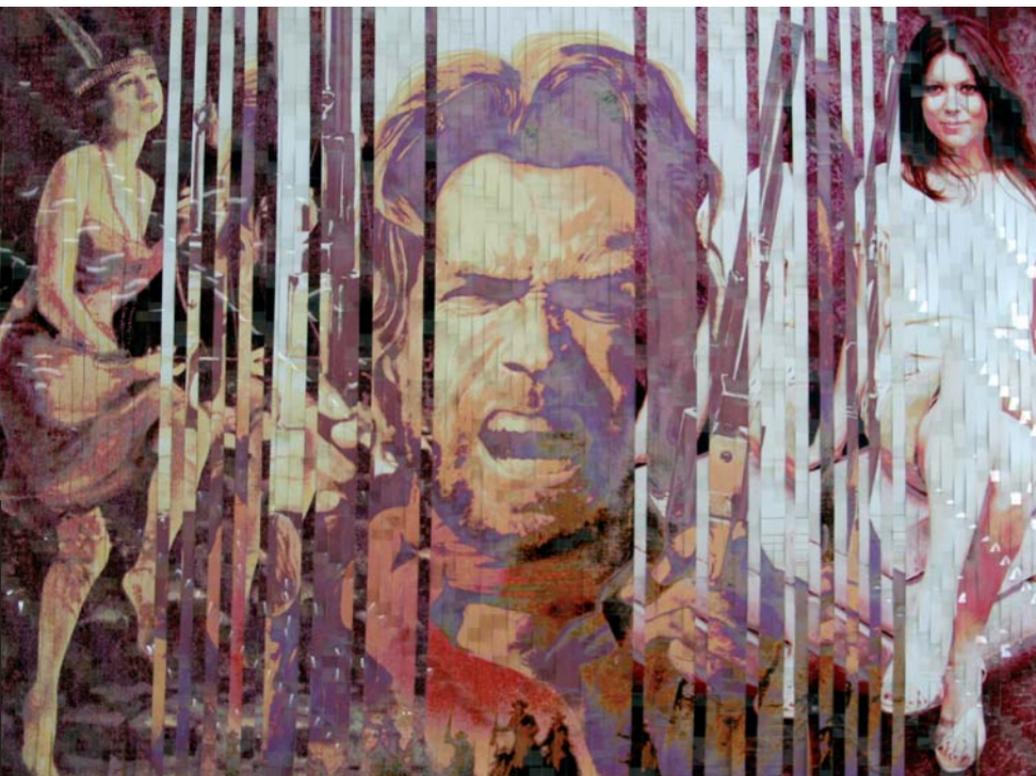
Trinity Square Video

imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival

present

HOW: Engagements with the “Hollywood Indian”

Curated by Ryan Rice



A Space Gallery: Oct 17 - Nov 21, 2008

Nadya Kwandibens, Walter Kahero:ton Scott,
Torry Mendoza, Sarah Sense, Rosalie Favell

Trinity Square Video: Sep 25 - Oct 25, 2008

Greg Staats, Terrance Houle, Tommy Deer

Joint Reception on Oct 17

5-7pm at TSV and 7-9pm at A Space with Curator talk at 6pm

Casting Call Performance

Friday Oct. 17 10am-3pm; Saturday, Oct. 18, noon-4pm



Walter K. Scott, *Kaniehtio*, 2007, acrylic and ink on paper

HOW: Engagements with the “Hollywood Indian”

Tonto is the quintessential “Hollywood Indian”, fashioned from the grand success of the silver screen’s late 19th and early 20th century’s innovative and profitable Western genre. The “Hollywood Indian” was, and continues to be an invention, from a constructed imagination influenced by the anthropological “vanishing race” theory, the Western concept of Manifest Destiny, and erroneous/misconstrued popular beliefs of Indigenous societies and cultures. Through the exhibition *HOW: Engagements with the “Hollywood Indian,”* eight First Nations artists and the artworks selected either deconstruct and dispel the myths invented by confronting the simplistic misconceptions imposed upon the Indigenous collective spirit, or extend the discourse beyond Hollywood driven paradigms and expose the alluring influence, dreams and desires for an inclusive and compassionate Hollywood.

Tonto was different than other “Hollywood Indians” who came before and well after him. He was part of a team, a dynamic duo who consisted of an alliance between invented “natural enemies” — a cowboy and an Indian. Imagined and created as a sidekick to the Lone Ranger (a white cowboy), Tonto was still a secondary character, filling a role conducive to a settler/colonial point of view reiterating the portrayal of Native North Americans’ subservient nature to a dominant Euro-American hero.

Tonto was also different because he was *our* Indian. The original role was played by Mohawk actor Jay Silverheels, who was born Harold J. Smith of Six Nations, Ontario. The Tonto character, originally made famous on radio broadcast, uniquely positioned Silverheels as a professional actor, representative of Native actors struggling to breakthrough Hollywood’s insensitive barrier of casting non-Native actors from Jack Palance to Elvis in principle “Indian” roles. Silverheels was the first Native to land a principle role as an Indian, and played Tonto to Clayton Moore’s Lone Ranger for an impressive run of 250 1/2 hour television broadcasts and several big screen productions.



Torry Mendoza, *Kemosabe version 1.0*, 2008, video still



Greg Staats, *Harry J. Smith; Jay Silverheels; Tonto*, 2006, still image from video, colour 7min52secs

In the short film *Harold J. Smith, Jay Silverheels, Tonto* (2006) artist **Greg Staats** gracefully bestows honour upon the innovative role model by driving him home, along the 7th line river road on the Six Nations of the Grand River territory, underscored by the soundtrack to Silverheels’ guest appearance on *The Jack Paar Show* in 1960. Staats’ delivery is ephemeral. The isolated drive, shot on home video, incites and rekindles “personal” memory to place and to community through an encounter far

removed from Hollywood Boulevard’s Walk of Fame. Staats also exhibits two archival photographs side by side, one introducing Harold J. Smith — a Mohawk man, and his alterego, Jay Silverheels — a Hollywood Indian.



Tommy Deer, *Creation Story Trailer*, 2007, still from Multi-media 2min44secs.

Filmmaker **Torry Mendoza** engages with the Hollywood Indian in his short media works, stirring Tonto (Silverheels) and the Lone Ranger's one-dimensional dialogue to a pulsating dance beat in *Kemosabe Version 1.0* (2008). Mendoza scrutinizes the duo's relationship by remixing and mashing-up a

conversation between the two, revealing a master and servant disposition similar to the disparate relationships assumed by the nation-states with Native nations. He continues to scrutinize and appropriate specific Hollywood films in his other short film works and toys with stereotypes created, romanticized and perpetuated by the enduring attitudes and misconceptions embedded in the cultural landscape and memory that spans the history of the medium.

Casting Call (2007 — ongoing) is a multi-city community oriented interactive performance conceived and carried out by artist **Terrance Houle**, who instigates the process of an open audition for Native actors (amateur and professional) vying for roles of Natives playing non-Natives acting in Native roles. Through the means of a casting call, Houle imitates the process and power Hollywood perfected to ridicule and he critiques the industry's insensitive attitudes by overturning the "Indian" typecast they invented and sustain.



Terrance Houle, *Casting Call*, 2006 - ongoing, video still

Emerging artist **Walter K. Scott** contemplates those stereotypes etched in the popular mind's eye, and challenges their "authenticity" in his portrait series inspired from his own community and generation. In reviewing and deconstructing an American translation of a French 1960's publication titled *Indians!*, Scott painted portraits of his Mohawk contemporaries on top of the heavily romanticized depictions of Indians of North America. Comically inclined, Scott's cartoon-influenced real life "peeps" show no commonalities with the Indians they are positioned with, at the same time his characters exhibit disdain, confusion and an air of embarrassment towards the iconic representations and expectations (public and private) of identity they confront day to day.

Chitimacha/Choctaw artist **Sarah Sense**, raised in California, acts out the cultural stereotypes she confronted throughout her life under the influence of Hollywood idealism and pop culture. Sense reinvents traditional Chitimacha basket weaving techniques as a medium for interpretation. Her raw materials are movie posters depicting Hollywood legends, Indian princesses and fierce savages merged with digital images of her community and self. *The Sex is in the Mouth, Narrative 1 — 4* series (2008) contests the depiction of women, in particular the archetype of the Indian princess and her counterpart — the squaw, in relation to white males.

The female “Hollywood Indian” stirred a sexual energy in the moving pictures that was cunningly positioned in need of being controlled, rescued, and invaded.

Controlling the image is how Hollywood and the industry typecast culture, gender and to an extent — politics. The politics of representation is essential to **Rosalie Favell**’s four giclée prints: *I Awoke To Find My Spirit Returned* (1999), *Voyageur* (2003), *I Searched Many Worlds* (1999) and *Transformation* (1999). Favell inserts herself into Hollywood productions and by doing so, Favell breaks away from the roles “Indians” get to play and favorably imagines what it is like to be portrayed with poise, power and popularity.

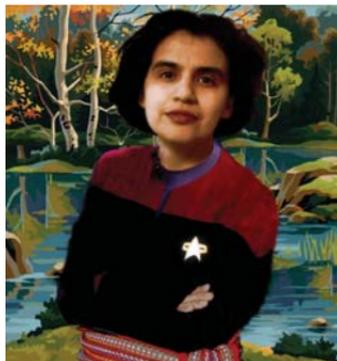


Nadya Kwadibens, *Jennifer* (Concrete Indian series), 2008, digital photograph

Photographer **Nadya Kwadibens** is actively depicting the Indian with passion and integrity. She captures an Indigenous spirit (individual and collective) and resuscitates characters overshadowed by the burden of false impression. Her aesthetic, whether shot in black and white or color, is cinematic. Her portraits carry personal and collective strengths forward and create lasting impressions, making everybody a star.

The narratives our Nations share have yet to become cinematic blockbusters, yet our stories are epic. They are filled with fantasy, drama, comedy and horror and contain elements suited for CGI special effects, blue screen technology and blockbuster budgets. *The Creation Story*, as passed on by the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) is one of those “legends” lead illustrator **Tommy Deer** and his associates at the Kanienkehaka Onkwawen:na Raotitiohkwa Cultural Center have in production. Deer’s *The Creation Story Trailer* (2007) packs a powerful punch by introducing the timeless tale of how creation began. The trailer — the film industry’s strategy to tease moviegoers of future productions — incites desire to see the full-length movie. Deer’s illustrations/animation, combined with simple cinematic techniques, come to life and leave you wanting more, indicating that it is time to engage with Hollywood on our own terms.

HOW: Engagements with the “Hollywood Indian,” in conjunction with the film and performances showcased at imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival 2008 corrals a multitude of talent brought together to disseminate the vision of the Native community. Greg Staats, Torry Mendoza, Sarah Sense, Rosalie Favell, Walter Scott, Nadya Kwadibens and Tommy Deer are among many who instinctively or intuitively engage with the repressive invention of the “Hollywood Indian” that stalls our growth as nations. In its place, our imagination is free to grow.



Rosalie Favell, *Voyageur (Plain(s) Warrior Artist)*, 2003, Giclée print

BIOS

Sarah Sense, born and raised in Northern California, is an artist currently living in Santa Fe, NM. She graduated from Parsons School of Design and worked as director/curator at the AICH Gallery in New York City. Her work is represented at the Berlin Gallery in Scottsdale, AZ and Blue Rain Gallery in Santa Fe, NM.

Greg Staats is from Ohsweken, ON, and has lived and worked in Toronto since 1985. He is an established artist working in photography and video who draws on a traditional Mohawk restorative aesthetic. He exhibits widely and is in numerous collections.

Tommy Deer, Mohawk from Kahnawake, QC., graduated from the Illustration & Design program at Dawson College in 2000. He works at the Kanien'kehá:ka Onkwawén:na Raotitióhkwa Cultural Center as a graphic artist/illustrator.

Terrance Houle, Blood, is an interdisciplinary media artist whose work ranges from painting to drawing, video/film, mixed media, performance, and installation. He received a BFA in Fiber from Alberta College of Art & Design in Calgary, AB. He is also a powwow dancer. www.terrancehoule.com

Nadya Kwandibens is of Ojibwe (Anishinaabe) / French heritage from the Northwest Angle #37 First Nation in Ontario, Canada. Identifying mainly with her Ojibwe roots, Nadya is also known as Makoons and is from the Loon Clan. Her professional practice consists of work in numerous forms of media including: photography, video production, website design and radio. www.nadyakwandibens.net

Walter Kahero:ton Scott was born and raised in the Mohawk community of Kahnawake, and currently resides in nearby Montreal, Quebec. An emerging artist, Scott is studying for a Major in Print Media at Concordia University.

Torry Mendoza, Mescalero Apache, is a video/film maker living in Syracuse, NY. He utilizes film and digital media to approach various aspects of Native American life to contest the negative connotations attributed to Native Americans. He received his MFA from Syracuse University. www.torrymendoza.com

Rosalie Favell is an established artist, born and raised in Winnipeg, MB. A photo-based artist, much of her work draws upon her family history and her Métis heritage. She earned a MFA from the University of New Mexico and is currently living in Ottawa completing a PhD in the Cultural Mediations program at Carleton University.

Ryan Rice is a Mohawk of Kahnawake and an independent curator. He received a MA in Curatorial Studies from Bard College, New York, graduated from Concordia University with a BFA, and received an Associate of Fine Arts from the Institute of American Indian Arts, New Mexico. Rice is co-founder and coordinator of Nation To Nation, and co-founder and director of the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective.

(front image) Sarah Sense, *The Sex is in the Mouth, Narrative I*, 2008, digital prints, mylar



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