

NIHUNAVEA :
My Heart My Center



On the brink of acquiring their first land base in nearly 175 years, Sandra Hernandez (project co-director) of the Tejon Indian Tribe sets out to tell a collective tribal story of coming home—a 21st century creation story from Native California to combat a history of erasure and dispossession.



HISTORY

Through the Treaty of Tejon in 1851, the Tejon Indian Tribe was promised the largest reservation allotment in California. Through government corruption, bureaucracy, and outright lies, the Treaty of Tejon came to be one of California's 17 Unratified Treaties. Instead of remaining the homelands of the Tejon Tribe, the Tejon reservation would instead become the largest private landholding in California—the Tejon Ranch—while the tribe lost their land and was legally dissolved in the eyes of the Federal government. Sandra's tribe has felt the effects of this wrongful dispossession every day for over 175 years.





Due to an administrative error in the 1970s, yes an 'administrative error', the Tejon Indian Tribe was left off a list of federally recognized tribes. This sent the tribal chief Kathryn Montes Morgan on a decades-long journey to prove the tribe had never ceased existing. In 2012, after decades of struggle, the Bureau of Indian Affairs reaffirmed the status of the tribe, paving the way for the tribe to receive much-needed federal assistance and plan to purchase and occupy their very own landbase in the future. That time has come as the tribe plans to break ground on their very first economic development initiative at the beginning of 2024. This is a story of justice deferred.



2-33



2-27



This film reanimates memory and contemporary reclamation efforts to be part of a new history in the making—a 21st century creation story for our times. Stories and memories from the past flash up and influence the present in unpredictable ways. By telling the collective story of federal recognition and coming home to a newly reorganized community, this film offers an entry way into native narratives of coming home.





In 2012, after over a decade of petitioning and generations of struggle, the Tejon Tribe was reaffirmed and placed back on a list of Federally Recognized Tribes. Re-affirmation opens many doors. It gives the tribe the authority and the standing to act as a sovereign government, and reach inter-governmental agreements with the state and county. Most importantly, re-affirmation allows the Tejon Tribe to care for their people.





STORIES
MAKE HISTORY

This film explores the stories of tribal members' experience as part of a movement towards narrative sovereignty. It explores a place-based history of the Tejon Tribe set in contrast to typical linear constructions of historical progress.

Through stories both new and old, we weave together a unique story of what it means to be Tejon today. Traditional archives replete with oral histories, 35mm slide photographs, and cultural artifacts are juxtaposed with new forms of remembering and memorializing the past.



A photograph taken from the driver's perspective inside a car. The driver's hands are on the steering wheel. The rearview mirror shows a reflection of the driver wearing sunglasses. The side mirror is visible on the left. The car is driving on a road through a vast, arid desert landscape under a clear blue sky. The word "COMMUNITY" is overlaid in a serif font on the left side of the image.

COMMUNITY

We imagine this film to be about the rebirth of a sovereign nation. In light of historical dispossession, what does it mean to be a newly formed nation? What are the struggles, triumphs, problems? Simply put, what does it look like for a community to be coming home?

Through interviewing tribal members about their own experiences of 'coming home' and collecting personal photographs and histories, this film engages collective memory as a means to counter institutional histories. From old cassette recording of elders no longer with us to 35mm photo slides from the past 100+ years, there is an interweaving of the past with the present efforts of the tribe to reclaim a sense of home.





MEMORY





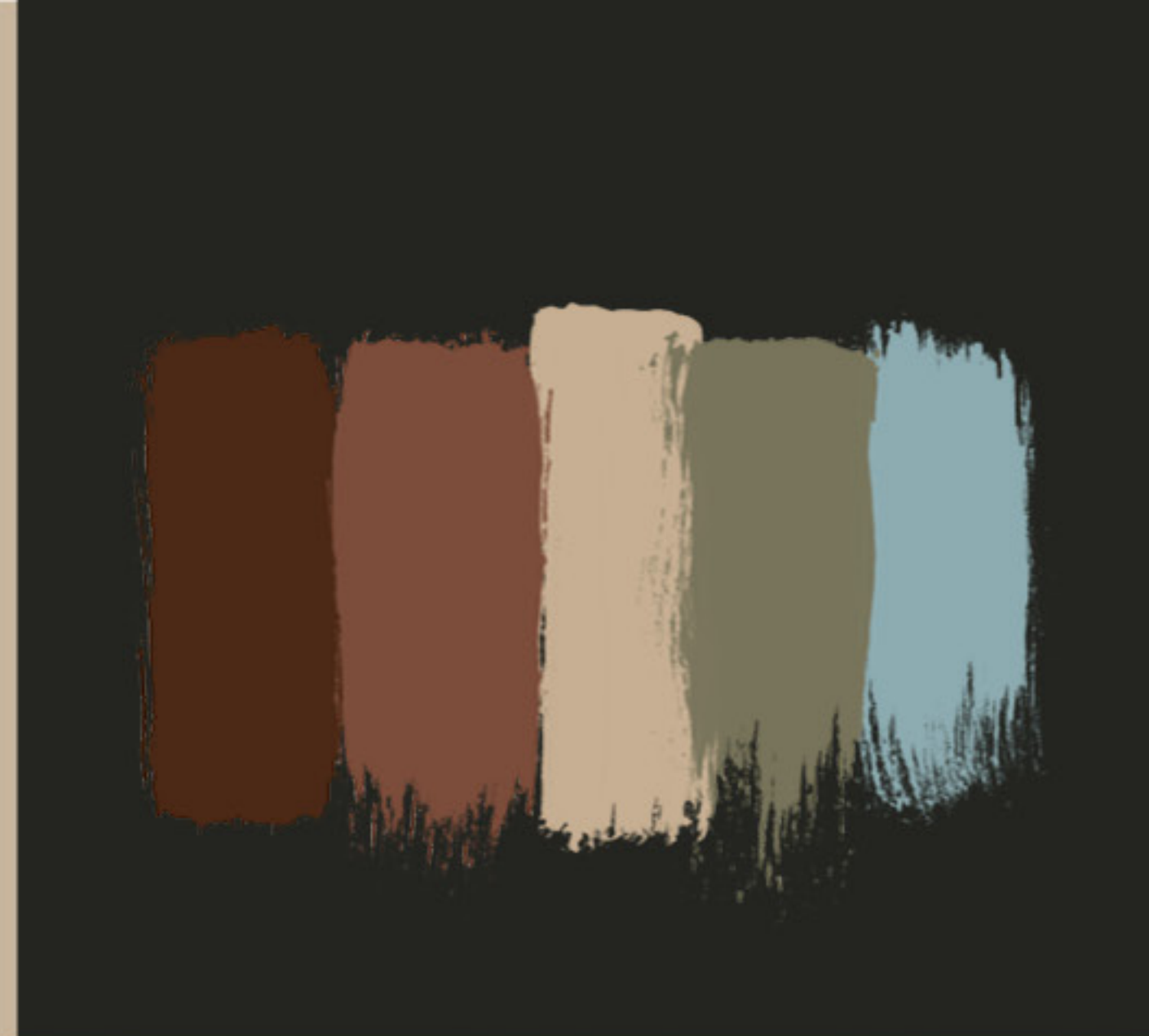
The past is ever present on the Tejon lands. We must understand the past to know the present. And yet, the present must be seen and revered with the same history-making power we give the past.

Only once you name it can you see it.

"After centuries of Tejon leaders' efforts to ensure our tribal family remained connected, we persist in the pursuit of honoring our ancestors' prayers: that our people remain as in the old days – a functioning Tribe, caring for each other, our community, and our ancestral lands." –Tejon Indian Tribe







The visual language of Nihunavea is connected to the landscapes in and around the Tejon homelands. The immediacy of this film is only possible through years of collaboration between the filmmakers and community members.

The color palette is part and parcel of the landscape. The mountains, the oak forests, the endless blue skies are all explored visually to evoke both an intimacy and longing for a place to call home.



SANDRA HERNANDEZ--

Past wrongs were acknowledged in 2012, with the re-affirmation of the Tejon Indian Tribe by the Federal Government. It was my aunt, Chief Kathryn Montes Morgan, who successfully led our tribe in regaining Federal Recognition. One of 12 children, Kathryn Morgan's family was the last native family to leave our ancestral lands in Tejon Canyon in the 1960s. Her family's departure marked the first time all Kitanemuk people had left our homelands since time immemorial. Through Federal Recognition, our Tribe has begun to reclaim their homelands, pursue economic and educational opportunities for tribal members, and heal the cultural and spiritual pain of colonialism. This film, this is another one of our 'firsts' and we are telling this story of, by, and through the strength of our ancestors.

Project Directors



COLIN ROSEMONT--

The silences of the archive ring out. History is too often told as a sequence of chronological events—a steady march of progress. Film is an incredible tool of collaboration and facilitation—to incite new ways of seeing and in this case, new ways of telling stories. I have collaborated with Sandra and members of the Tejon Tribe on media projects and short documentaries for nearly 6 years now. I am humbled to be part of the process of reanimating a collective story of becoming. It is not a story that looks only to the past, but understands the past as always present in the struggle for what's to come.

Thank
you



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