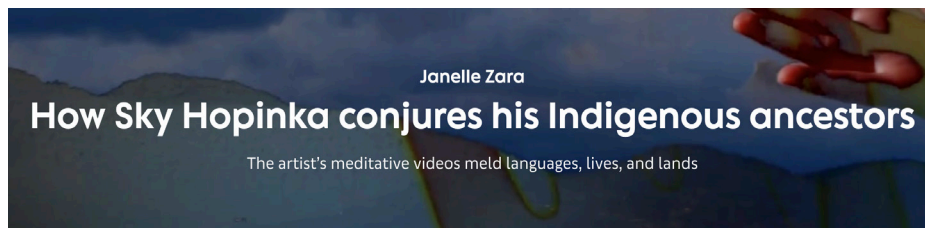


Tanya Leighton

Art | Basel



Sky Hopinka, *Sunflower Siege Engine* (HD video, 16mm, stereo, color, 12'23"), 2022. Courtesy of the artist and Broadway.

Language – sung, spoken, and written – is a central element of Sky Hopinka’s experimental filmmaking practice, blurring distinctions between cinema and poetry. *Kicking the Clouds* (2021), a short film that the artist describes as ‘reflections on descendants and ancestors,’ features audio of his late grandmother learning a few words of Luiseño, the Indigenous Pechanga language that she was denied the opportunity to learn as a child in Southern California. This 50-year-old recording alternates with his mother’s own pained and nostalgic recollections of her mother, which score sweeping visual meditations on Hopinka’s native Washington State. Granular, lyrical 16 mm footage of cloudy shorelines and woodland roads unfolds, accompanied by a poem that appears as subtitles at the bottom of the screen: ‘We imagined the colors were their dreams churning in their memories.’

Born in Ferndale, Washington, Hopinka is a member of the Ho-Chunk Nation of the Midwest, with maternal heritage in the Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians of Southern California. For more than a decade, he’s explored the possibility of an Indigenous cinema, one unbound by conventions of linear narratives, Hollywood spectacle, or a reductive Western gaze.

Art Basel, April 2023

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# Tanya Leighton



Sky Hopinka, *Fainting Spells* (HD video, stereo, color, 10'45"), 2018. Courtesy of the artist and Broadway.



Sky Hopinka. Courtesy of the artist.

'I tell stories that are relevant to an Indigenous audience, unburdened by explanations to an audience unfamiliar with its context,' he says. He embraces circular story structures, ambiguous translations, and hallucinatory special effects. The inclusion of abstracted audio and visual elements, he adds, leaves portions of his films open to interpretation, therefore opening points of access to a wider audience. 'I don't want to foreclose a non-Indigenous audience from seeing parts of themselves or their histories in the work.'

In Art Basel's Statements sector in June, Hopinka debuts *Just a Soul Responding* (2023), a new four-channel film about the repatriation of bodies to Indigenous burial mounds. Voiceovers in both English and Ho-Chunk add rhythmic wordplay to layers of imagery and text, synthesizing a distinct cinematic language that reverberates with the traumas of colonization. 'I'm hoping that there are conversations to be had around the topics in the film – around gathering and solitude, but also Indigeneity and colonization,' he says. 'The colonization of the Americas is the history of Europe, too.'