

## ***In Our Hands: Native Photography, 1890 to Now***

Jill Ahlberg Yohe, Jaida Grey Eagle, and Casey Riley

Minneapolis: Minneapolis Institute of Art, 2023

\$40 (296 pages) ISBN 978-0-300-27216-1

Reviewed by Katherine Feldkamp

MA candidate in Art History

University of Delaware

**W**ith the history of Indigenous photography as its primary focus, the catalogue for *In Our Hands: Native Photography, 1890 to Now* by the Minneapolis Institute of Art (MIA) is an insightful and deeply personal journey into image making through a Native American lens. The exhibition itself was initially conceived during the early days of the pandemic as a collaboration between MIA's Associate Curator of Native American Art Jill Ahlberg Yohe, Shakopee Mdewakanton Fellow Jaida Grey Eagle, and Curator of Photography and New Media Casey Riley. The exhibition and subsequent catalogue became a highly inclusive project that successfully demonstrated how to make room for community stakeholders and noncuratorial voices. Ahlberg Yohe, Grey Eagle, and Riley formed an advisory group of fourteen Native artists and writers who

ultimately helped to produce an exhibition and publication that are arguably by and for Indigenous people. Overall, the book is focused on Native North American photographic production and histories while also being grounded in Indigenous methodologies that incorporate consensus, relationship building, mutual respect, and reciprocity. The artists included in the catalogue are wide-ranging, from respected senior makers to up-and-coming individuals. Crucially, the authors note that they consciously decided not to include the work of any non-Native photographers in the publication, even as comparative images, so as to keep the conversation centered on Indigenous experiences and perspectives. By excluding non-Native artists, and the Western canon by extension, the publication establishes an autonomous Indigenous tradition of photography with a

rich and complex history that stands on its own.

Broken into three sections, the catalogue presents essays and interviews from a range of artists and scholars. Extensive biographies of all the photographers, writers, and curatorial council members evince the wide range of expertise that shaped both the exhibition and book. Full-page color reproductions of the artworks punctuate the various sections while providing moments of visual reflection. Within the essays themselves, nearly all the writers—whether photographers or scholars—resist the traditional genre-defining, hierarchical, time-period-bound approach when discussing either their own work or other works in the show. Instead, the approach taken by almost all the essayists is far more fluid and emphasizes the personal over the aesthetic. Together, this makes for a collection of moving stories and reminds the reader that the subjects represented in these photographs are real people, not merely objects for aesthetic consideration.

A number of themes recur throughout all of the essays. Of particular note, a majority of the authors reflect on the ways in which photography originally aided colonial expansion and extortion and harmed Native Americans by presenting them as an

exotic other or as a vanishing race. The corrective to this has largely been the personal photographic archives created by and for Native people that help to fill in the gaps in the official state-sanctioned record. Mique'l Icesis Dangeli's essay "B. A. Haldane: Inspiring Resurgence through Images of Resistance" perhaps expresses this best by using Haldane's photography career as a case study for Native resilience and communal connections. Wider commentary on women as culture bearers and community champions is also a consistent touchstone, as in Veronica Passalacqua's "Rematriating Photography" and in the interview between Rhéanne Chartrand and Casey Riley, "Researching the Legacy of the Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association (NIIPA)." Additionally, many of the personal essays contemplate the lived experience of being an Indigenous photographer and existing within two worlds. These themes are particularly strong and insightful in Amy Lonetree's "'Indigenous Storywork' and Native American Photography" and in Rosalie Favell's "An Enduring Passion."

While many of the photographs speak for themselves, the inclusion of more formal aesthetic interpretations for some of the images would help to guide readers

unfamiliar with Native photography, as well as to ground the deeply personal narratives many of the artists and scholars share in the publication. Additionally, a clearer organization for the various essays would have aided the narrative thread of the catalogue. Overall, *In Our Hands: Native Photography, 1890 to Now* presents a powerful and deeply moving body of work from Indigenous makers. While this catalogue will primarily appeal to those working in art history, scholars of American studies as well as Native American and Indigenous studies will also appreciate this work. The compelling stories and visuals shared in this publication proudly assert the strength of this field and demonstrate the power of photography to capture and celebrate the resilience and pride of Native people when they wield the camera with their own hands.