Photographic Encounters in the American Desert

by Alexander F.teen

The desert landscapes have also been, and still are, heavily used by scientists and the military to develop and test the most advanced weapons. American Indians and war technologies have generated two significant and apparently very distant forms of tourism. The first has a longer lineage, and began at the end of the nineteenth century. The second, a more recent trend, emerged in the early 1950s, and is commonly referred to as “atomic tourism.” One may argue that in both cases the objects of fascination and attraction are determined by war and its effects. Of course, this is spectacularly clear in relation to the phenomenon of atomic tourism. In the case of the encounters with the native inhabitants of the region, the history of past violence and the pace of present conflicts are less evident, if not hidden.

Paul Chalat Smith, a Comanche and an assistant curator at the National Museum of the American Indian, has recently written that in the United States, a most forgetful country “whose state religion seems to be amnesia,” Indian history, and in particular recent Indian history, needs to be relentlessly recalled. A significant portion of such history involves precisely the accounts of how Native Americans (and their cultures) have been stereotyped and commodified in order to satisfy an ever growing and variable tourist industry. One may say that tourism has been another form of conquest and subjugation, another Indian war. In such a war, in an previous ones. American Indians valiantly developed forms of resistance that since the very beginning found as one of their privileged targets that quintessential tourist weapon: the camera.

Travelogue: 1997

I went to visit the American Southwest for the first time in 1997. I was already planning to write a book on the American desert, and had read extensively on the topic, including books dealing with the Native American inhabitants. I knew about the pueblos of the Zuni and the Hopi, of the presence of Navajo and the other tribes living in the reservations, and about the spectacular and mysterious pre-Columbian ruins. I was also aware of how, since the beginning of the twentieth century, the architecture, arts, and traditions of these peoples had been exploited, commercialized, and even transformed in order to serve the tourist industry. In addition, I was familiar with the ethnographic literature about the various tribes, from the notorious accounts of the Zuni written at the end of the nineteenth century by anthropologist’s first “participant observer,” Frank Hamilton Cushing, to the celebrated Patterns of Culture (1934), in which Ruth Benedict established her famous opposition between the “Apollonian” Pueblo cultures of the Southwest and the “Dionysian” attitudes of the Native Americans of the Great Plains. At the time, for about two decades the work of the first American ethnographers had been under intense critical scrutiny, as part of a general process of re-assessment of the discipline. With the writings of Paul Rabinow, Edward Said, Boy Frankfurt, James Clifford, George E. Marcus and Michael M.J. Fischer, anthropology’s claims to provide authentic interpretations and convey an authentic experience of other cultures had been radically challenged. The mirror had been turned, so to speak, on the discipline, revealing a rather disturbing picture. During the same period, tourism and tourists had been extensively investigated by sociologists, anthropologists, and experts of semiotics, all intent on demonstrating the hopelessly inauthentic character of the modern tourist experience.

Before even arriving in the Southwest, I was therefore prepared to enjoy the inauthentic nature of the experience and accept the limitations of a role that I considered insurmountable. I was going to be a tourist, consciously part of the global phenomenon of commodified culture. I had no illusions about the possibility of acquiring a superior or detached status by qualifying myself as “traveler,” “pilgrim,” “observer,” or “sympathetic researcher.” But I presume, was also the attitude of my companions. I was traveling with four others, architectural critics and historians. None of us was American, and for all of us this was the first encounter with the region and its native inhabitants. We landed in Albuquerque loaded with guidebooks and cameras. Each of us had at least one camera at the beginning of the trip and, before the journey was over, we all ended up acquiring disposable Rolodas to take panoramic photos. We had the impression that panoramic photos were best suited to capture the spectacular scenery. The truth is that no apparatus can really capture such landscapes. No matter how many commercial, films, photographs, or paintings by the best artists one has seen, no matter how much one has the feeling of already knowing these places, the reality of them is going to surprise, enchant, and overcome the traveler. Nevertheless, like every good tourist, we took hundreds of slides and photos, and bought postcards, more guides, more books, and more slides on sale at various tourist locations, not to mention every possible kind of souvenirs, from Native American jewelry to Pueblo pottery and baskets. Native American artists were also employed to decorate the hotels and stores of the Fred Harvey Company; together with craftsmen and women practicing their art, in appropriate settings, under the very eyes of the tourists. The author of the Times article dryly observed that the exhibition gave the impression that both sales benefited from the encounter, without any hints of the Indians being victimized in the exchange. This feeling was echoed in a quotation from a speech given shortly after the opening of the show by Raina Green, director of the American Indian Program at the Smithsonian Institution. The Indians of the Southwest, she said, had already “learned to play Indian from the 17th century onward, first from the Spanish.” The article, however, came with a chilling quotation from a video about Native Americans still recalling the glory days of the Fred Harvey Company. What the company did, said a 70-year-old Zuni, “was only one of the joints enjoyed by the trip to Santa Fe with a detour to visit the pre-Columbian ruins at the Bandelier monument—haunting and inscrutable in the freezing, trans-parent winter afternoon—and a very cold and uncomfortable first night at a Best Western Hotel.

Santa Fe

The titles of two 1997 publications, both published dur- ing the trip, evoke part of the feeling of walking the streets, visiting the museums, and shopping around the plaza. The first, The Myth of Santa Fe, written by Chris Wilson, a professor of the Uni-versity of New Mexico living in Albuquerque, is focused on architecture and the politics of culture, and investigates the invention and “creation” of a “modern regional tradition.” Wilson’s book meticulously maps the history of the occupation of the area beginning with the so-called Pueblo Indians (sedentary people who practiced agriculture), followed by the arrival of the nomadic ancestors of present-day Apaches and Navajos, and then by waves of Spanish and Anglo-Saxon colonization. After sketching a narrative of conflict, repression, and domination, but also of exchange and racial miscouplification, Wilson proceeds to demonstrate how, from the early 1900s, the city was deliberately designed to appear a romantic and exotic destination where three distinct and equally “picturesque” ethnic groups were living together in harmonious segregation. The second book, the catalogue of an exhibition, presents the system- atic marketing of the entire region under the title Inventing the Southwest: The Fred Harvey Company and Native American Art.” In his article about the show, published in The New York Times in December 1997, remarks on how Fred Harvey, an English immigrant, set the standard for material cultural packaging already in 1876. The company operated the dining cars of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway, and created along the line restaurants and tourist hotels designed in a style mimicking the adobe construction of Spanish and Pueblo settlements. The company was also re-sponsible for collecting, displaying, and organizing the sale of antiques and contemporary Indian artifacts, from Navajo blankets and silver jewelry to Pueblo pottery and baskets. Native American artists were also employed to decorate the hotels and stores of the Fred Harvey Company; together with craftsmen and women practicing their art, in appropriate settings, under the very eyes of the tourists. The author of the Times article datly observed that the exhibition gave the impression that both sales benefited from the encounter, without any hints of the Indians being victimized in the exchange. This feeling was echoed in a quotation from a speech given shortly after the opening of the show by Raina Green, director of the American Indian Program at the Smithsonian Institution. The Indians of the Southwest, she said, had already “learned to play Indian from the 17th century onward, first from the Spanish.” The article, however, came with a chilling quotation from a video about Native Americans still recalling the glory days of the Fred Harvey Company. What the company did, said a 70-year-old Zuni, was take them “from ritual to retail.” Strolling in the plaza, peeping in every shop and art gallery, what did I experience, precisely? The atmosphere of an invented romantic Spanish colonial past was made too well maintained, and the artists (long marketed through tourist colonies).
and Indians were there, playing the tourist game in a rather digested and ironic way. It didn’t particularly disturb me; after all, I was from Venice (Italy), a city that had been surviving mainly as a tourist attraction for centuries, selling its own atmosphere of glorious art, architecture, death, and decay. I was used to sharing the narrow Venetian cuff with masses of tourists unaware of the rules governing the navigation of the labyrinthine urban fabric, watching vegetable stalls and bakeries disappear daily to give way to souvenir shops, and explaining patiently that no, Ponte Vecchio is in Florence, what you are looking at is the Rialto...  

Scapgoat
Architecture/Landscape/Political Economy
Issue 03

Realism
bronze-voiced father far back in the resonant ages. My mother was no virgin. She lay in her hour with this dusky-lipped tribes father. And I have not forgotten him. But he, like many an old father with a changing son, he would deny me. But I stand on the far edge of their firefight, and am neither denied nor accepted. My way is in my own, old red father; I can't clutter at the dream anymore.” This impossibility was explored in its most grotesque ramifications in Brave New World, the ominous science fiction novel written in 1932 by Aldous Huxley, before his visit to Taos, on the basis of a number of conversations with Lawrence. The book depicts a future society ordered in castes of laboratory-produced individuals, conditioned to like the work they are destined to perform, made happy by the government-directed drug soma, and practicing compulsory, organic, and meaningless sex. Only on a reservation in New Mexico, surrounded by barbed wire fences, is there a few thousands Indians left to live a savage life. Too tourists from the “civilized” world visit the reservation to observe with mounting disgust the filthiness and squalor of the Indians’ existence. Punished and repulsed by the lack of hygiene, the sight of women actually giving birth, familial relations, and funeral ceremonies—Huxley here offers a quite fanciful portrayal of regional religious ceremonies, mixing Navajo rituals and the Spanish Penitentes’ practice of self-flagellation—the tourists rescue one of the “savages” to bring him to the civilized world as an object of curiosity. The novel ends with the suicide of the rescued savage, unable to fit into the technologically controlled, consummate, “happy” society that he finds inhuman and revolting.

I found the well-meaning, paternalistic, but eventually exploitative and even racist attitudes of these early-twentieth-century intellectuals disillusioned with western culture much more disturbing than the straightforward commercialization of entreprenuers like Fred Harvey. Nevertheless, the former left quite a mark on the region and its houses; the landscape they described, painted, photographed, has become a major tourist attraction. One can visit Mabel Dodge Luhan’s house, Ghost Ranch, where D.H. Lawrence lived with his wife Frieda, the chapel where his ashes are supposedly preserved, the residence of Georgia O’Keeffe in Abiquiu, and Brett House (the home of the painter Dorothy Brett, the only member of Lawrence’s urbinant community), which at the time of our visit had become an upscale restaurant. Tourist brochures publicized the “shaming of O’Keeffe country,” and invited you to plan excursions to “H.H. Lawrence’s haunt” in and around Taos. We did, of course, retrace some of their footsteps, and I remember visiting the Kit Carson Home and Museum, and the house and studio of one of the co-founders of the Taos Society of Artists, the painter Ernest Blumenschein. But what I remember most about the town of Taos is the overwhelming New Age atmosphere. Later I learned that already at the beginning of the eighties the number of alternative healers proposing mental and physical therapies tabbed one hundred; matched the number of artists residing in the town. Most of the New Age healers took inspiration from Indian and Hispanic practices and subscribed to the legend that mystical, restorative forces were at work in the area—and a lot of them, of course, were Jungians. This was something about which I was not easily convinced. A lot of scholars concerned with the American Southwest refer to the heavy presence of Jungians in Taos. In 1972, for example, architectural historian Vincent Scully, in his monumental Pueblo, Mountains, Village, Dance, observes: “Taos attracts Jungians, especially, like flies to compost, and indeed everyone who is attracted to the mystery of humanity’s buried thoughts.”

Carl Gustav Jung was one of the early visitors to Taos, a big catch of the intangible Mabel Dodge Luhan, herself a Jungian. Jung went to sit at the feet of the scribes of Taos Pueblo to gather a new perspective on the psyche of “the white man,” and more material to support his theory of the archetypes and of a collective unconscious. Despite the apparently disparaging remark, Scully himself seems to follow in Jung’s footsteps by proposing a parallel interpretation of Indian rituals and Greek tragedy. In the preface to his volume, Scully presents the research, largely based on ethnographic literature, as the prolongation of his study for The Earth, the Temple and the Gods. Greek Sacred Architecture, a book he published in 1962. The analysis of the Pueblo, writes Scully, “grew directly out of my previous work in Greece, where the landscape the American Southwest strongly recalls, and not least in the forms of its sacred mountains and the reverence of its still inhabitants for them. Only in the Pueblos, in that sense, could my Greek studies be completed, because their ancient rituals are still performed in them. The chorus of Dionysus still dances there.”

Boyer Bambam, in Sounds in America Disorda, describes Scully’s efforts as “the most splendid and disastrous of all puffy attempts to focus on the Indian phenomenon.” Scully’s “flights of fancy,” explains Bambam, were to some extent acceptable in the case of Greece, where he went equipped as a scholar trained in a classical tradition greatly indebted to Greek civilization. With regard to the Pueblos and their culture, which Scully knew only in “translation,” he was utterly missing the mark by attempting the comparison between “polis” and “pueblos.” In this controversy, I found myself on the side of Bambam, even if Scully provides at least an interpretation—like Bambam, I was at least fascinated but incapable of comprehension. And still I had not seen the Indians dancing.

Towards the conclusion of his extended critique of Scully, Bambam oddly remarks: “What the book does deliver is photography (much of it his own) that has the unmistakable ring of truth.” Is photography always truthful, and does it explain anything? One would expect a surfer comment from such a thoughtful and keen observer as Bambam. In fact, his statement is also inaccurate. Scully states in the preface of his volume that he had to use a great deal of old photographs because of the restrictions already in place in numerous communities. Photography of any kind was forbidden in the Hopi and Keres towns. The Zuni villages, Taos, and Acoma permitted photography of the towns, but never of the dances. These prohibitions made his task very difficult, but Scully approved of them: “We can only be glad,” he writes, “that the surviving Americans have been so canny at last. Otherwise, one is soon doing it for the camera rather than for the god, and that is the end of it all.” The interdictions in most cases included (and still include) sketching, filming, and painting, and Scully is not the first scholar to signal them. The earliest ethnographic reports from the Southwest, including the famous (or infamous) narrative of Cushing, insist on taking and buying pictures. At the same time, they are careful not to overtress resistance against, any form of representation of themselves and their communities. In spite of this unwillingness, scientists, journalists, military, missionaries, tourists, and professional photographers systematically captured their physiognomies and most sacred rituals on camera. Some photographic reportages were conducted with the best intentions, even if with the utmost disregard for Indians beliefs and feelings. Edward S. Curtis’s epic project of documenting the “vanishing race” is a case in point.” Equally momentous in the field of art history was the photographic records collected in New Mexico and Arizona by Aby Warburg at the very end of the nineteenth century. Oddly neither Bambam nor Scully mentions the visit of the German scholar, and the crucial role it assumed in the development of Warburg’s “phantom formula” in the Dionysian impulse in the arts. Warburg went to the Southwest after a number of conversation with the ethnographers of the Smithsonian in Washington. He registered in his journal the Indians’ displeasure with photography, but went on taking and buying pictures. At the same time, he kept mourning the killing of the primordial vitality and unity still expressed in Indian rituals, an irreparable loss brought about by the insatiable scientific and technological character of the schizophrene European “civilization.”

In a recent essay, Beverly Singer, professor of anthropology and Native American studies at the University of New Mexico, refers to a renewal of interest for Indian photographic portraits in 1970s that led to a revisiting trend in the collection of everything native. “The late 60s and early 70s were the years during which Scully and Bambam conducted their explorations of the Southwest. During this period, Bambam explains, “Indian culture was to be admired as an exemplar to wasteful and ecologically destructive Western man.” It must have been precisely the eye of the epic migration of the hopes from the birthplaces of the counterculture to the American Southwest. Leasing Blight-Ashley in San Francisco or Lower Manhattan (both increasingly overrun by junkies and other ugly characters, and constantly covered and exploited by the media), the flower children were converging on the arid and exotic territoies of Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico in search of free (or cheap) land where they could experiment with alternative, communal ways of life. New Mexico, and Taos in particular, became the epicentre of the phenomenon. In 1969, Stewart Brand, editor of the Whole Earth Catalog, forum for the dispersed tribes of the counterculture, was proclaiming: “New Mexico is the center of momentum this year and maybe for the next several. More of the interesting intentional communities are there. More of the interesting outlaws design are.” Around the same time occurred the mythical Aldy conference, which took place during the spring equinox of the same year in an area...
situated between the Mescalero Apache Reserva-
tion and the Trinity atomic bomb test site. Ac-
cording to Brand, the initiator of the confer-
ence was Steve Baer, inventor of the Zone, a
variation on Buckminster Fuller’s geodesic dome, which
became a favorite model of construction in the
newly founded countercultural communities.
What Steve Baer had in mind, explains Stewart
Brand, was “a meld of information on Materi-
als, Structure, Energy, Man, Magic, Evolution,
and Consciousness.” Given this premise, the
choice of the site for the conference was quite
strategic, reflecting the interests not only of Steve
Baer (who moved to Albuquerque after studying
mathematics at the ETH in Zurich), but of most
of the participants. In fact, many of 150 outsider
designers present at the conference shared a com-
mon fascination for the sciences and the most
advanced technologies, including those developed
by and for the military, and a profound interest
in Native American culture—and not just because
of the exemplary ecological attitude cultivated by Ban-
ham. What attracted the generation who followed
LSD prophets and gurus expounding the wisdom
of Native American Experience.
For that you need time immersed in the
land and neighborhood acquaintance at least
with some in fact Indians."

He was preaching to the converted. Members
of the counterculture in the Southwest were already
fascinated with the local natives, displaying an
active interest in particular for the people cere-
moneies, living in tepees, wearing Indian attire,
and adopting names like New Buffalo for their
newly founded communities.
They were also rediscovering the previous
generations of escapees and Indian lovers, from
D.H. Lawrence to Aldous Huxley and Mabel Dodge
Luhan. In the cult film King Rider (1949), the
tragic accounts of a journey of two countercultural
bikers travelling from Los Angeles to New Orleans
in search of America (and which incidentally also
presents a fictional portrayal of New Buffalo),
one of the characters, played by Jack Nicholson,
constantly quotes D.H. Lawrence. Dennis Hopper
himself, after the incredible success of the film,
moved to Taos and lived in the house of Mabel
Dodge Luhan with the hope of creating an alter-
native movie centre.
This enthusiastic exposure of Indian costumes
and way of life was inspired more by a fanciful
image of the Native Americans than the reality of
local tribal traditions. The tepees, for example, was
far from being the typical habitat of the region.
The Nasa disposed few huts and Pueblo adobe archi-
teecture. Likewise, names like New Buffalo evolved
more the hunting and nomadic life of the tribes
living on the plains than the sedentary habits of
the Pueblo who subsisted mainly on a diet of corn,
beans, and squash. Nevertheless, scholarly books,
diaries, memoirs, and oral narratives copiously
documented these encounters and the tolerating
attitude of the Native Americans.
In the eyes of many palaeists, an alliance was
in fact staged between hippies and Native Ameri-
cans. Years later, Brand noted: “By the end of
the 60s, Indians had been adopted by the hippies,
and to everyone’s astonishment, not least mine, it
basically worked out. There was a transmission
of traditional frames of reference from older
Indians to hippies, who were passing to their
young peers in the reservations and a lineage was
inadvertently, but I think genuinely, preserved.”
But what was the Indian perception of this sup-
posed alliance? And did it really take place? Scully,
in Pueblo: Mountain, Village, Dance, offers a
glimpse into the Indian response by retelling an
episode that took place in June 1968 at Shipu-
lost. Hays chorns were performing during the inter-
vals of a kachina dance, “satirizing social work-
ers and the agents of the Bureau of Indian
Affairs. At other times they have taken off hopp-
es and missionaries, tourists, and especially all
Indian lovers, always.” On a different occasion,
reports Scully, in one of the kivas of Mishongnovi,
in the course of a ritual, some hippies, “wrapped
Indian-like but unfortunately not Hopi-like,” sat
by mistake on the benches reserved for the danc-
first, but the women carried on until they stirred
themselves to make the hippies move. A number of
them passed out (zonk) later.”

The year after our trip, Philip Deloria, a histo-
rian of Indian descent, published Playing Indian:
A thoughtful investigation of the way Americans
since the time of the Boston Tea Party have
repeatedly appropriated Indian dress and acted out
Indian roles in order to shape their national
identity. Retracing this fascinating history, Delo-
ria devotes an entire chapter to Indians and the
counter-cultural New Age, wherein he describes
the response of real Indians. As a conclusion,
Deloria observes: “Like many before them, they
[the countercultural and new age Indians] had
turned to Indians as sign of all that was au-
thentic and aboriginal, everything that could be
true about America. […] Yet like those who came
before, they found that Indians inevitably
required real native people, and that those people
called everything into question. Playing Indian,
as always, had a tendency to lead one into, rather
than out of, contradiction and irony.” However,
尽管所有误解和不一致，不一致
和矛盾的呈现者之间的hipsies
和印第安人,这些年为反对
主导价值观的美国社会，和的
胜利，对印第安人产生了深远
影响。我将学会，在19世纪中
期美国印第安人找到了
的种子，使他们不仅在文化
交流，而且在19世纪70年代
，当我们在去1977年，由于著
作的旅程中，我们去
的情况而留下的印度人，而是
去打猎和游牧生活，传统上
是印第安人的
不只以印第安人的 imaginaries
来蒙骗这些人，而是
这些经历使我们学会
我们到了1976年，当
们参与的活动，而不存在
，而我们几乎忘了
拥有的公共生活空间
的想象力，使我们能够描绘出
的想象力，使我们能够描绘出

extravagant face of the Atomic Age. Las Vegas, the city of "sin," was strangely gaining a new legitimacy by joining the Cold War effort and transforming the spectacle of nuclear annihilation into spectacle. Documents about the Las Vegas of the time, like the famous postcard advertising the Pioneer Club (circa 1955), with its winning cowboy sign and a glowing red mushroom cloud in the distance, show how images related to atomic tourism quite often employed the strategy of association with the pioneer and Native American past of the area. Resorts and gaming establishments like El Rancho or the Hotel Last Frontier in the early 40s were offering "authentic" western experiences like horseback riding, BBQs, and line dancing. The 1950s saw the creation of the Last Frontier Village, a sort of theme park, complete with old western post office, general store, jail and museum illustrating the Indian roots of the region. In 1957, the Hotel Last Frontier added a new building to the north of its property, naming it the New Frontier Hotel and Casino. The intention was to discard the western theme in favor of a modern atomic or space-age experience. Nevertheless, contemporary photos show attendants dressed in cowboy attire and full Indian regalia waiting for the guests at the main entrance. After reducing to entertainment the painful history of war, domination, and conquest over the western territories and their indigenous occupants, Las Vegas was performing the same operation on the Cold War and the threat of obliteration of life and civilization: the tragedies and pests of the old and new wars were reassuringly contained and gloriously reframed by the powerful, all-American myth of the Frontier.

In February 2005, the Atomic Testing Museum opened in Las Vegas. An affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution, it’s located only a mile from the Strip and appears to be quite a popular tourist destination. To judge from the numerous postings on the internet, visitors love to be portrayed in front of photographs of spectacular nuclear explosions. The mission of the museum is to present scientific matters in a compelling way, preserve the legacy of the Nuclear Test Site, and promote public accessibility and understanding of the site. The various galleries document the history of the NTS in the context of the Cold War show how the Atomic Age was reflected in popular culture, and display photographs, films and interviews with on-site workers and prophets. The most spectacular section of the museum is the Ground Zero Theatre, a replica of a bunker where visitors can watch a video of an atomic explosion accompanied by a realistic multi-sensory experience of deafening sounds, shaking, vibrations and blasts of hot air. Not far from the Theatre are the Steward of the Land Galleries I and II. The first covers geology, hydrology, and radiation monitoring. The second is dedicated to archeology, endangered species, and Native Americans. According to the museum authority, a collection of illustrated crafts and various objects used by the ancient inhabitants of the NTS is being completed with the collaboration of a local tribe.

Nuclear Power and Native Americans

At the Atomic Testing Museum, we find the association, albeit carefully reframed and updated, already constructed and exploited by Las Vegas of the 50s. At the museum, the Indians, instead of being presented like the warriors of a Buffalo Bill show, are offered to the visitors as descendants of a primordial civilization living in harmony with the arid territory. The label "Stewards of the Land" seems to suggest a possible reclamation of the technologically devastated terrain thanks to the everlasting wisdom of its original occupants. A similar strategy is deployed at the Nuclear Test Site, which has now also become a tourist destination. The signs posted on the fence surrounding the NTS, after describing the function and the origin of the area, tactfully announce: "Archaeological studies of the NTS area have revealed continuous occupation by prehistoric man from about 9,500 years ago. Several prehistoric cultures are represented. The last aboriginal group to occupy the site was the Southern Paiute, who foraged plant foods in sea son and occupied the area until the arrival of the pioneers."

Once again Americans are playing Indians, or better still playing with the Indians. The Native Americans represented at the museum and mentioned on the NTS signs are not the contemporary custodians of immemorial knowledge, captive to tradition and authenticity. Indeed, tradition and authenticity are the trips that a new generation of Native American artists are exposing and trying to evade. They are questioning and challenging the carefully constructed prony where they are condemned to conform to a required stereotype, and their weapon of choice is very often photography. From a wealth of provocative artists, I will mention only three examples.

In 2005, Zig Jackson became the first Native American photographer represented in the collection of the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. Jackson donated four photographic prints from each of three series. The first group of photographs, under the title "Indian Photographing Indian," humorously represents invasive tourists taking pictures of reservation Indians. The second, "Native American Veterans," more somberly honours military veterans and their families from Pima-Indian reservations. Entering Zig’s Indian Reservation, is the final, drolly amusing, series in which Jackson represents himself. Wearing Indian attire and sunglasses, he poses at various sites in San Francisco next to a huge, official-looking sign that says, “Entering Zig’s Reservation.” Under the heading, the sign lists private property rules that include “No Picture Taking,” “No Hunting,” “No Air Traffic,” and “No Agers Prohibited.”

Hulieah Tsosieyahmos, a Diné/Navajo/Mescalero, is an artist that privileges photography as a medium and conducts the political expression, and became internationally famous with The Damn Series of 1997. When exhibited at the Barbican Gallery in London, two images in particular captured the attention of the audience and the press. This is not a commercial. This is my homeland, and Damn! There goes the Neighborhood. The first depicts Monument Valley, the iconic southwestern panorama of mesas and red rocks, depicted inmmemorable times as a setting for advertisements and films. The superimposed titular inscription subtracts it from the realm of cliché and reframes the iconic scenery as sovereign Diné land. The second represents a desert landscape with an old photograph in the foreground of an Indian warrior holding a smoking gun, and a garish, bullet-ridden Oscar Meyer Wiener mobile behind him. Once again, the inscription that seems to come out, cartoon-like, from the mouth of the warrior, eloquently de-monstrates the fate of the Indian people and of the lands they have lost.

In 1992, James Luna, a Luiseno Indian, proposed a performance at the Whitney Museum in New York entitled Take a Picture with a Real Indian. Visitors were asked to pick a real Indian from a selection of cardboard cut-outs and invited to take a Polaroid. The work was inspired by a trip through Nuu-chah-nulth land during which Luna had seen Indians selling souvenirs and catering to tourists.
A few years before, in an exhibition called Artifactual Perspectives Luna had spectacularly called attention to the exhibition of Native American people and their relics by displaying himself in a glass case at the Museum of Man in San Diego. For days he remained motionless, dressed in a linoleum and surrounded by personal documents and ceremonial objects. Many members of the public were stunned by the discovery that the unmoving figure on exhibit was actually a living and breathing individual. In another memorable performance, Petroglyphs in Motion, Luna presented a non-linear history of Native American man using typical stereotypes. Beginning with a petroglyph, Luna in turn impersonated Shamus, Rockabilly, War Veteran, Drunk, and Coyote. Vertiginously traveling through time, his characters mutate, learn, and evolve.

The powerful works of these artists eloquently speak of a new form of resistance and self-representation. The camera, held for so long in the hands of the white man, the scientist, the missionary, the military, the tourist, is no longer kept at bay with interdictions of every sort. Ignorance, now in the hands of American Indians, is no longer tied to record stereotypes, monumental tradition, or confirm authenticity. Poignantly or ironically it expresses unbalanced systems of relationships, different perceptions of time, history and reality. The Indian was forced to move new battlegrounds. Postfingerprint James Luna, who in 1993 together with Ed Ruscha represented the United States at the Venice Biennale, tourists beware: the petroglyphs are in motion. x

Notes