

INTERVIEW

According to Comanche author Paul Chaat Smith, mainstream images of the “Indian” conjures “a half-remembered presence, both comforting and dangerous, lurking just below the surface.” In this interview, artist and filmmaker Adam Khalil lets the half-remembered presence out by engaging with themes ranging from the temporal double binds of Indigeneity, Christopher Columbus as the first vampire in the “New World,” and the public secret society New Red Order. Christian Lund talks to Khalil about his collaborative projects, and Naja Dyrendom Graugaard contributes with a poetic reflection on racial stereotyping in the Danish school system.

Thanks to: Adam Khalil, Naja Dyrendom Graugaard and Christian Lund
Design: Alexis Mark
Copyediting: Sarah Quigley
Managing editor: Stine Nørgaard Lykkebo
Editors: Jacob Fabricius and Lars Bang Larsen
Print: Eks-skolen, Copenhagen
Edition: 300 copies, first edition
ISBN: 978-87-94396-00-4

Art Hub Copenhagen, 2022

The Interview series is based on conversations with artists who have been residents at Art Hub Copenhagen. Together with an interviewer and guests, the artists present their work in words and images: not just one work or one show, but their current processes, thoughts, and daily challenges.



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ADAM KHALIL

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Are you ready to slowly begin our email interview exchange? I'd like to consider it as a conversation about process, works and everyday thoughts. I hope you don't mind banal and odd questions at times? In my mind nothing is too small or too big to talk about.

ADAM KHALIL:

Sorry for the delay! Thanks for initiating the conversation. I love the odd / banal / experimental :) I'm writing to you now from my studio. Just got oriented by Marie (great person) and I'm super excited to be here. Looking forward to meeting and diving in deep. I've had a lot on my mind as we (my brother Zack and I, and our collaborator Jackson Polys) as New Red Order just finished a cycle of work that took about four years and is up as an exhibition at Artists Space for a few more weeks titled *Feel at Home Here*.

Art Hub Copenhagen

Also, as I'm starting to embark on an iterative and accumulative collaborative project with Bayley Sweitzer and Oba that will probably take 2–3 years to complete. It feels like the closing of one circle and the start of another. My thoughts, politics, and outlook have been shifting subtly for a long time and now with a little critical distance I'm starting to realize it's like starting over again – my convictions are slightly unmoored – but that's a good thing :) I tend to be contradictory and dogmatic – a contradiction in and of itself :) A bit of a preamble ramble...

Most of my recent interest and research have been focused on this new project with Bayley and Oba titled “Nosferasta”. This project delves deep into the dynamic tension between Afro-Indigenous relations and also the split between African and African American in relation to Indigenous groups. I feel like this is a unique moment when this conversation can take the fore – instead of being overshadowed by the constant primary relation both groups have to whiteness. These topics are difficult because of the anti-blackness within Indigenous communities and the sometimes-overdetermined overidentification with Indigeneity from some African American groups.

There's a lot more to be said about all of this, but the research has also led me to a deeper understanding and confusion around the role of the Caribbean in world history. If we think about 1492 as some kind of alien sci-fi movie – as opposed to a pirate movie – things get much juicer. It's as if all the world's problems – good and bad – spiral out of the vortex of the Caribbean. The entire world meets on these small islands. Every continent and people are shaped by the discursive exchanges that have grown out of this place, and I never quite understood that until recently. Okay super long ramble – but it's a start!

These are the texts that have been guiding and informing the development of my research:

- Indigenous Action Group: “Accomplices not Allies: Abolishing the Ally Industrial Complex” (2014).¹
- Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang: “Decolonization is not a Metaphor” (2012).²
- Édouard Glissant: *Poetics of Relation* (1997).
- Horace Campbell: *Rasta and Resistance* (2008).
- Paul Chaat Smith: *Everything You Know about Indians Is Wrong* (2009).
- Christopher Bracken: *Magical Criticism* (2008).
- Michael Taussig: *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative* (1999).
- Kathryn Yusoff: *A Billion Anthropocenes or None* (2018).
- Armand Garnet Ruffo: *Norval Morrisseau: Man Changing into Thunderbird* (2018).
- Vine Deloria, Jr.: “Indian Humor”. In: *Custer Died for Your Sins* (1969).

1 <https://www.indigenoussaction.org/accomplices-not-allies-abolishing-the-ally-industrial-complex/>

2 <https://clas.osu.edu/sites/clas.osu.edu/files/Tuck%20and%20Yang%202012%20Decolonization%20is%20not%20a%20metaphor.pdf>

- Ian Svenonius: “The Bloody Latte”. In: *The Psychic Soviet* (2006).
- Jalal Toufic: *Vampires: An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film* (2003).
- Lou Cornum: “The Irradiated International” (2018).
- Tapji Garba and Sara-Maria Sorentino: “Slavery is a Metaphor: A Critical Commentary on Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang’s ‘Decolonization is Not a Metaphor’” (2020).
- Sylvia Wynter: “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom” (2003).
- Sylvia Wynter: “1492: A New World View”. In: *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas* (1995).

There’s a lot more. This is just where my brain has been recently, many other projects and collaborations that we could talk about and I’m hoping we get to!

I should also preface that I kind of hate writing. It’s one of the reasons I got into filmmaking and art. I really appreciate and admire good writing, but I find it so hard, tedious, and difficult to formulate my own thoughts / politics / emotions in language. I can do it, but it’s hard and not that enjoyable for me. It’d be great if we could talk and dialogue more than write via email if that would work for you?

JF:

Amazing! This is a very great way to begin, but time flew for both of us and now you have two exhibitions at Spike Island (Bristol) and Kunsthal Charlottenborg (Copenhagen) coming up. You have just finished a video interview with Christian Lund from Louisiana Channel, so I was wondering if we should flip the conversation with Christian and let that unfold in this book? How do you feel about that?

AK:

Let's let the interview rip!

TROJAN HORSE FILMMAKING

INTERVIEW
BY CHRISTIAN LUND

CL:

Could you start out by presenting yourself?

AK:

Aanii boozhoo, Adam Khalil indizhinikaaz, Shingwauk anishinaabe-izhinikaazowin. Bahweting indoonjibaa, Brooklyn, NY nindaa. My name's Adam Khalil, I'm a filmmaker and artist, originally from Northern Michigan near my tribe's reservation, the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, but I'm living in Brooklyn for the past ten years and currently living in Copenhagen.

CL:

How would you describe your work?

AK:

I think it's important to acknowledge that I work in these different collaborative constellations. Even though we're talking one-on-one now, there are many other collaborators and groups of people that I work with. I stopped making work on my own about ten years ago because it was too hard.

CL:

Maybe you should begin by speaking about your trajectory towards being an artist?

AK:

Where I grew up in Northern Michigan, there was very little access to contemporary art. I didn't even really know that it was a thing! After I left home and went to college, my first week in school I got stoned, and went to the big art museum on campus [Hessel Museum of Art]. There was a video that Paul McCarthy did where he's naked, covered in ketchup wearing boxing gloves and a clown outfit, punching himself. It was on an old CRT monitor, and I was like, what the hell is this? This is art? And it was really frustrating, but also exhilarating because I didn't understand why or how it could – or should – be art. Maybe it was because of how confused I was that it was actually motivating to learn more about it. I was very lucky that the museum also had a research library attached to it with these pretty rare art publications consolidated all in one place. Then I applied to get a job as a librarian there, which was also great, because I ended up spending most of my time having access to and sifting through all these rare and canonical contemporary art publications. But I still didn't really know what I was doing, so I dropped out of school for a period of time. I fell in love with someone and moved to San Francisco and enrolled in community college courses there and I was like, oh, I'll try a filmmaking class. City College in San Francisco is a really special place. It's \$20 for a class, but they're college-level courses. Then when I was living in the Bay Area, I discovered experimental film and was really fortunate to stumble into ATA, Artist Television Access. This guy Craig Baldwin runs Other Cinema, and he's like the godfather of found footage filmmaking, coming from this Situationist approach or trajectory. He had salvaged 20,000 16mm films, mostly industrial, educational, or medical, and then he would tirelessly assemble these narratives,

these political propagandas, almost. My favourite of his is *Tribulation 99*, where he equates the CIA with an alien force that attempts to take over Central and South America, but it's all based on real history.

Exposure to his practice and also his resilience, in terms of making work by any means necessary, was super inspiring. We worked out this deal where for every hour I helped him, he would let me use his equipment for two hours. He was unbelievably generous as well. He did weekly screenings there of the best of experimental or underground cinema. So, it was also a crash course in terms of learning about different approaches to filmmaking. After a year and a half in the Bay, I went back to school at Bard College. And I didn't realise this when I left, but Bard is really good at experimental filmmaking. All of my professors there were friends with Craig. They were like, oh, you went to San Francisco because you wanted to work with Craig, and now you're back. I was like, yes, that was the plan. But actually it wasn't; it was a series of happy accidents that led to that. In terms of my own trajectory, it was like starting off in experimental film and then transferring more to documentary and then switching from that to narrative filmmaking.

I'm also really interested in this kind of split between the black box and the white cube. I feel like a lot of my collaborative practice is about trying to poke through porous boundaries of different kinds of forms and content, but always with political content at its heart. We're thinking about how to make work that could suggest a political future we'd all like to inhabit. Or this idea of a political imagination. We talk about a lot of our work as being set one week into the future. Maybe there's this hope that by putting these things forth, new ideas could emerge. I guess we don't really have answers to

things, it's more about asking pertinent questions in the hopes that it creates this fertile territory for new ideas to emerge – and not necessarily our own.

CL:

Could you speak more about your way of working?

AK:

I feel like for me, the art that I'm most inspired by is art that's restless and art that keeps trying to push out of any box that it could be contained in. And the artists I respect and admire the most, you can never pin them down. One of Craig's very dear friends and my former professor, Peggy Ahwesh, is a great example of someone who is relentless in terms of their intellectual curiosity and political pursuit. Each of Peggy's works is totally different; you wouldn't even know the same person made it. But somehow there's always her thumbprint on the work. It's ten degrees off in this way what she does. And I know that part of that is because of her intellectual curiosity. All these different threads start to co-mingle and these new projects spurt out of it.

I think that way of making is really important for me and my collaborators because, especially with film, there's such an emphasis on, you write the script, you shoot the thing and then you edit the thing. I feel like we prefer an approach where we allow the film to grow into existence, as opposed to trying to hammer it into existence. And also, maybe this quasi-spiritualist idea that the work is going to be what it wants to be and it's our job to foster that into existence. We're determining the work in many ways, in terms of what's in the frame, what's in the edit. Shaping it in that way. But at a certain point we're

also paying a lot of attention to what the material wants to do. Trying to work with it, as opposed to against it.

CL:

Could we speak about what your work consists of?

AK:

It's funny to talk about "my" practice because it's collaborative, but I guess I could put it into different containers, in terms of that there's three core collaborative constellations. There's one with my brother, Zack Khalil. I've known him for a really long time. We have similar life experiences, a shared set of references. My and my brother's work has been really focused back in our community in Northern Michigan and on thinking through ways to create an inherently Ojibway form of cinema. Ojibway is the tribe we're from.

The other collaborative constellation is with Bayley Sweitzer. Bayley and I make more narrative films, even though I said I would never make a narrative film because I had this punk attitude about how it was commercial and bullshit. But also, in terms of this idea of porousness between form, realising that nine out of ten people don't go to the office the next day and tell someone, I saw a really great, mid-length experimental documentary last night. They just say they saw a movie. So also, as I got older, I'm trying to think about how to translate the work and the ideas we're trying to put out into the world in ways that are more accessible or palatable: where someone could just see a movie and have all these ideas spawn from it, without having to have this pretentious or removed veneer of art. I think in terms of trying to break those distinctions, Bayley's

and my practice is really focused on that. We talk about 'trojan horse filmmaking', where it looks like a movie, it feels like a movie, but inside of it is this radical potential for different kinds of discourses.

Then the third collaborative constellation is one of the core contributors to a public secret society, which is New Red Order. That's with my brother, as well, and Jackson Polys, who's a Tlingit artist, sculptor, and filmmaker. We've been working on developing new strategies to promote indigenous futures as part of the New Red Order. Also, anyone can join the New Red Order. We have a hotline, it's 1-888-NEWRED1. Or you can sign up at newredorder.org.

The one other container is this non-profit that I started with Adam Piron, Sky Hopinka, and Alex Lazarowich. We're all Indigenous moving-image artists who are trying to push formal boundaries in terms of what Indigenous moving-image art could be. And we've been very fortunate to receive a few grants that we've then given out to ten Indigenous artists who are also pursuing that kind of expansion. We're about to do our second call for ten new artists to apply for a grant funding for both sorts: installation and performance. Part of the idea is that there's a lot of funding and support for documentary or narrative film, but people working in the in-between of those don't really have funding opportunities. We're hoping to foster that in a way that's continuing that friendship affect. The great thing about friendtoring is that you learn as much as you give. That reciprocal dynamic is something that's key and critical to the way I look at the world and one of the reasons I collaborate with so many people as well. Because otherwise it's lonely. One of my personal interests in collaborating is also to undermine this idea of the auteur or the

singular person in their brain. Realizing that two heads are better than one, and three might be even better than two. Although three gets tricky sometimes.

CL:

You said that during the making of a film you let the material decide where to go. You're not totally in control, but you put out some material and then you develop it in a conversation with the material and your collaborators.

AK:

One of the difficulties with filmmaking is that there're a million decisions to make at every step. Every frame is a decision, and you have to be responsible for every frame that's up there. I think that's the way we approach moving image, whether it's documentary, art, whatever, in whatever flavor it comes. This idea of allowing the material to become what it wants to be is really critical and key, but that also dovetails into the importance of collaboration in the practice. To have someone you know and trust and appreciate their perspective, to be able to bounce ideas off of, I feel like it expedites the constant decision-making process. Some of the times our collaborations are very intimate and close and familial, but also, we work separately and then bring things to each other. That constant feedback really helps to get results.

The thing I tried to do ten years ago and quit doing would be trying to figure that all out on my own. I personally got lost in the thinking. For me it could be this way or that way or this way, so it's just been so beneficial to have trusted collaborators. They can be like, this is better because of these reasons. And I can come

back and say, actually, what about these reasons? There's a double-edged sword to collaboration; it can expedite things, but it can also bog things down. But I think it's really important to be accountable to my collaborators. And also, an idea that we're really invested in is moving at the speed of trust. If we're pushing too fast there could be some things that aren't addressed, and that's not a good thing for us. There's this constant trying to move really, really quickly, while also taking our time and making sure we're doing it in the right way.

I presented these different collaborations in separate containers, but they really co-mingle. Bayley is an accomplice for New Red Order, and I can unpack what that means. Then my brother has been instrumental in the films Bayley and I have made, in terms of *Empty Metal* and *Nosferasta*, the new one. There's this kind of bleed-over that happens, or even bleed-over in terms of research, for one project will inform the next. When it's really good, those things are happening simultaneously and we don't even really realize yet where those connections are, but you can feel them stick. That's when I know it's getting good. That's the other benefit of this, spinning multiple plates – also in traditional film production, as sometimes films can't keep going for a period of time.

COVID was a great example for this project my brother and I are working on, where we need to be in community with elderly people. We couldn't do that for the past year and a half, so that project had to go on hold. Which means there was space to pick up new projects. This is the idea that, once the film gets going, it's like a train. You've got to hop on and ride it, but a lot of the time the train is in the station. I think that's the other benefit to doing it this way.

CL:

What would start off a project?

AK:

I feel like something I was taught for a while was never to think about the audience, to just express yourself and put those things out there. That always felt really wrong to me because the thing doesn't exist until the audience consumes it. I try to be really honest with myself and others about that apparatus, in terms of production and consumption.

I'd say that across all of the practices, we're constantly thinking of the audience and trying to create situations where the audience feels unsettled because the content is very serious, but there's a tone that's humorous. That probably goes back to where my brother and I grew up. There's this role of the trickster that's really important to Anishinaabe or Ojibway cosmology and identities – something akin to the idea of a sacred clown. The idea that to see the world upside down might actually make more sense. This approach provides an ability to talk about things that are really difficult, but in a way that maybe people can hear them. One of the reasons we drifted away from traditional documentaries – there's a bunch of reasons – but one is that I feel like the audience can leave with the feeling of having done something, when really, all they've done is consume something. Especially when it comes to social issue documentaries. Maybe that's more of a tangent I can go on around my and my brother's collaboration, if that's cool?

CL:

Yes, feel free.

AK:

As I mentioned, my brother and I, and actually all of our collaborators, have a healthy distrust of documentary film. Especially as Indigenous artists, knowing the history of documentary and the proximity documentary has to objectivity, but also how much of a fallacy that is. Because whatever is not in the frame is somehow not present in what's being distributed. Also, the history of ethnographic filmmaking and anthropologists coming to communities, like the ones my brother and I grew up in, to try to extract knowledge. This knowledge extraction mirrors or imitates other kinds of resource extraction that have happened to Indigenous people. My brother and I were very conscious of this and wanted to undermine it. Also, to create ways that are less extractive or that could have a different orientation to history or truth. Now I'm getting ahead of myself. The first film my brother and I made is called *INAATE/SE/ [it shines a certain way. to a certain place/it flies. falls./]*. Super easy title to remember, very Googleable. We were really thinking ahead on that one.

In Anishinaabemowin, which is the Ojibwe language, "INAATE/SE/" means "a movie." But there's also a thought in Anishinaabemowin that each syllable is a verb. "INAATE/SE/" translates to "it shines a certain way to a certain place, it flies, it falls." Which is the traditional film apparatus. So, it's shining on the screen, thus the certain way in a certain place. Flying and falling is the film going up and around the projector. It had this poetic resonance, the title, but for us it also described

the process of making that film. Which again, was our first attempt at completing something.

That film grew out of a lot of grief after our mother had passed away. She was in charge of education for our tribe. Our house was like this drop-in zone where all of the kids in the neighbourhood could come and basically be. Her whole thing, Allison Krebs, our mom, was about being a lifelong learner. At the time she passed away she was trying to complete her PhD, which was about returning agency of Indigenous knowledge back to Indigenous people. Specifically in libraries, archives and other government records and holdings. When she passed, my brother and I were devastated, and also very young, and we wanted to continue her work. We thought the best way to do that would be to do it back home, which would also be a way of reintroducing ourselves to our community as individuals, not as her children. Plus a way of commemorating and collaborating. I think she was with us throughout the process of making that film.

The film revolves around this story called the "Seven Fires Prophecy," which has been passed down from generation to generation, as an oral tradition where I'm from. It predicts and predates first contact with Europeans. We decided that this would be the structure for the film, but also maintaining this tension of not wanting to inform on our own community for others. We wanted to undermine how documentaries are made, too; for instance, in terms of how traditional you want a soundbite to be. When you're going into film, you're basically trying to create a context where you know you can grab these certain things and then it's done. We took a different approach where we asked very open-ended questions, and also tried to engage with the way people are in the community where we're

from. For instance, we met with an elder called Pauline. We'd be like: "Pauline, could you introduce yourself?" And she'd be like: "My great-grandfather was Andy Andrews..." Normally you would cut them off there and ask them just to tell who they are and what they do, and then get on with it. But we didn't stop her and that was because we wanted to create a condition where people could share with us what they wanted to share. Again, as opposed to trying to extract something from them. Also, asking this very open-ended question about what they know about the Seven Fires Prophecy allowed for this cacophony or symphony of voices and perspectives that we could collage and build together into a narrative of the history of our community. Part of this was really important to us because there is a local history that's told there from a settler colonial perspective. It's not objective and it's not the truth. We wanted to present this alternate history, that we all knew to be more true, as a way to counterbalance or counteract that, or to create that kind of collision and discourse.

But also, that film is pretty idiosyncratic because it shifts form and tone constantly. Part of that is there's this Jesus figure in Ojibway cosmology, Nanabozho. He's not necessarily the son of the creator, but he has a special connection as one of the first people on earth. He accidentally creates the world as it is, by fucking things up or by stumbling through it. He burns a squirrel's tail by accident and that's why it's bushy. There're all these stories about that. That tone or register was really important for us, especially because it is such a heavy history in terms of 500 years of colonization, ongoing.

Another thing that was really motivating for us was thinking about how to make an inherently Ojibway form of cinema. Especially when thinking about cinema

through a national lens. Like French cinema, Danish cinema, American cinema – what would Ojibway cinema look and feel like? We were thinking through those things simultaneously while doing these super long interviews, two to four hours, and we did forty-five of them, which made the editing process hell. I guess part of the idea, in terms of thinking about what Ojibway cinema was, was to also rethink how a film is structured. It allowed us to take apart everything and just take the parts that we liked, or that we thought would be relevant or most meaningful to tell the story, to assemble it. One of the things was that traditionally people think of a film or a feature film as an arc, with a beginning, a middle and an end. But we realised that Ojibway cosmology and thinking is much more circular – or actually not even a circle but a spiral. It would just keep going around the same thing. The thing in the middle is the content or the heat, but you can't directly show that, so it's like working around the thing to describe the shape of it. Also, there're different ideas of temporality, in terms of, we're taught to think about things seven generations into the future and seven generations into the past. That way of thinking has been really helpful in terms of the political discourse we're hoping to invoke in a lot of our work.

At times politics can be really frustrating because you want the thing to happen now, but the great gift of thinking about these things seven generations future and past is it's very humbling to realise that the temporal scale of a lot of these struggles is actually much larger than our lifetimes. And I think that's something we're also trying to communicate across these different practices.

Thinking about the Seven Fires Prophecy; it's something that's malleable, just as oral tradition is something

that's meant to change. There's an idea that history should become a narrative that serves the people in the present. The Seven Fires Prophecy embodies that. In a hundred years, the different fires, or chapters, will be different, and 200 years ago, they were different. It's meant to be this living document, as opposed to this thing that is codified or printed. That was also really inspiring for us to think about: How could we adapt this to a film as an oral tradition and contribute our version of it to this larger discourse? I'm not saying this is the definitive version at all, but more one of the stopping points, and someone else will pick it up eventually and tell their version of that story. This is in contradistinction to something like Walter Benjamin's idea of "the angel of history," always moving forward and looking back at the destruction of time. Again, we're trying to undermine this idea of linearity with this circle or spiral.

CL:

Where did you show the film and what were the reactions to it?

AK:

It was a film that my brother and I worked on for four years from start to finish. We were super lucky, as our first film got its premiere at MoMA. We were both very young and it was at the closing night of MoMA Doc Fortnight in 2016. That was a very strange experience for us because we'd been working very hard to author this thing with our community, that's why we included so many voices into the project – and also trying to resist this documentary urge for extraction or becoming informants in our own community.

But then after the film got out into the world, it started doing the thing we didn't want it to do. Because it was mostly playing for non-native audiences and a lot of the questions after the film weren't really about the things we were sharing. It had to do more about people's clichéd desires towards native people, in terms of asking about environmentalism or spirituality. We were like: "That stuff wasn't even in there." That was actually a bummer and something that we were reeling from.

In spite of that, we also had amazing opportunities. For instance, we organized a tour across multiple reservations, showing it to different communities. We went on this whirlwind for a year, getting it out into the world. It was meaningful to see how the context shifted depending on where we were showing it. And then through that film existing in the world we met Jackson Polys, who's one of the core contributors of New Red Order. He told us about this public secret society he was a part of that was examining the desire towards indigeneity from Indigenous and Non-Indigenous people. We were like, oh, this sounds juicy and relevant, especially from what we just came out of. Around that time, we started collaborating in earnest with Jackson as one of the three core contributors to New Red Order.

In terms of *INAATE/SE/*, my and my brother's first film, in the context of when it was played for predominantly Indigenous audiences versus Non-Indigenous audiences, one of the things we tried to do when constructing that film – and I think actually with all of our work we try to do this – is that we never want to leave people out. We want people to understand what we're communicating and that's where I was thinking about the audience. But we're also trying to think about film as something vertical, as opposed to only horizontal. And

that verticality for us has to do with embedding certain meanings that only certain people with certain prior backgrounds would understand. Not as a way to exclude folks, but as a way to make the thing have more dimensionality. A lot of Indigenous art is frustrating because it has – again going with this informant idea – to deal with the fact that we’re asked a lot to be in this pedagogical role. Whereas we’ll teach you about this. And to be able to embed things vertically allows us to skirt around that or to have multiple conversations running at similar times. Because the film’s always running this way, but if you have this thing on top of it then people can go through it. That’s something we’re really invested and interested in. Which also makes the editing very involved, because there’re the micro decisions that might tip our hat or clue certain audience members into certain ideas that other people might not get, and that’s okay.

CL:

You came from the success of this first film and got into the New Red Order. It was also a means of expression opening up for you in this new community. Could you speak about the possibilities that came to you?

AK:

Again, this goes back to anthropology, which I, as an Indigenous artist, feel is something we’re constantly grappling with. Because it’s also about how knowledge is produced. I guess in *INAATE/SE/* and all of our subsequent work, we’re trying to make this distinction between information and knowledge. And this idea is that information should be for all and should be accessible, but that knowledge has a different patina or quality

to it; it’s something that has to be earned or given freely. It’s not something that can be demanded or extracted.

One of the conceits of the New Red Order is rethinking this idea of the informant. In an anthropological context, it’s the person who lives in the community that the anthropologist works with. But then, if you think about crime TV, “informant” is a really bad word. It means you’re a rat or a snitch; it has a very negative connotation. But then there are historical examples of native informants. There’s been this historical revision considering their roles as power brokers and protectors of culture, as opposed to exploiters of it.

There’s this guy, George Hunt, who was Franz Boas’s informant in the late 1800s/early 1900s. Hunt would lie to Boas constantly. He kept a journal, and people were going back through it. He would be like: “No, we don’t do that over here.” Or: “Oh yes, we definitely do that over here.” To steer his interest in ways where certain aspects of Indigenous culture and society could remain non-extractable. Then, an even whackier thinking through of this reimagining of the informant is to view it as a creative collaboration; it’s like the production, the co-creation of knowledge through this strange power dynamic.

So for New Red Order, we also realized that we, as native artists, were being put in that position of having to become informants. Like with the Q&As after my brother’s and my first film, when people asked us very specific things that weren’t in the film at all. They were like: “Tell us more about where you’re from! We love Indians.” It was like seeing how people were very excited about this identity, but also how their excitement felt wrong and inappropriate. Plus, I didn’t get into art to

tell people what to do and what not to do. We started to rethink the idea of the informant and take it on wilfully, as opposed to trying to resist it and identify ourselves as informants. And then we were asking other people engaging with our work in whatever way to also become informants, and asking them to inform on their desire towards indigeneity. When you sign up for New Red Order, we ask questions like: When did you first hear about Indians? What did you think about them? What do you want from Indian people? Just so that in this way there can be a more open discourse that's more real and less posturing. We're really into this idea of calling in instead of calling out. If we acknowledge that there's tons of political and historical ignorance that we're all complicit in, maybe this foundation of being honest with each other is a good starting point.

CL:

Were you also playing with the cliché of recruitment from big corporate or political organizations?

AK:

Yes, there's this recruitment aspect that mirrors military recruitment, or corporate recruitment in terms of headhunting, which is also a bad pun in terms of stuff... I won't get into that. Then, also, self-help and lifestyle because that's part of the calling in. It's taking on those familiar forms as well.

CL:

That's a brilliant example because it demonstrates some of the things you've been speaking about.

AK:

When we were formatting how we would put New Red Order out into the world, one of the things we were thinking a lot about is Indigenous activism post-Standing Rock. For us, Standing Rock was about Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination. But that was such an unsettling idea for the general public that it had to be translated into this hippie political slogan, "Water is Life." Because everyone drinks water, but not everyone is down with Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination.

Seeing the shift in emphasis led to this wellspring of political support from people we would never expect. But analysing people's desires to go to Standing Rock – suppose they were a white person who's always loved Indians and maxed out their credit card to show up in solidarity. As well, there were the dynamic tensions happening between Indigenous people and Non-Indigenous people on the ground there. That was also something that helped us formulate how to approach these things. Again, acknowledging that there is this energy to support Indigenous causes, but it's not coming out in the right ways; it's mangled and squirming on the floor. Part of what NRO's trying to do is to re-channel that desire in ways that actually can promote Indigenous futures. We thought the best way to do that is to introduce what it is. There's *Never Settle: Calling In*, this four-minute promotional video that lays out what our public secret society is all about and encourages people to participate and join, as well as describing a few key critical phrases because we don't want to leave anyone out of the conversation. But you know, when people sign up for cults, there's this short promo video, and then there's the much longer one that

gets into all of it. We've been working on this other film, *Never Settle: The Program*, which is about an hour long now. That goes more into the nitty-gritty details of the different steps and levels and tiers of what it means to become an accomplice or an informant with the New Red Order. It's a two-step process, but anyone can join. Everyone's more than welcome.

You can compare it with a cult, but we're not sure what it really is. It's also a parody of that kind of recruitment communication with this actor and the way he speaks, addressing the viewer. It's playing with the language already known. What is being communicated is more obscure, but you can feel that it's very familiar language; you're so used to listening to that way of speaking.

CL:

Yes, it's so familiar. Could you elaborate on that a little more because you talked about wanting to push back using humor?

AK:

Maybe I'll jump in and start talking about potential proximity to a cult and New Red Order. The New Red Order itself comes out of a contradistinction from the Improved Order of Red Men, an actual secret society. I shouldn't say actual; that's a qualifier. But anyway, the Improved Order of Red Men dates back to the American Revolutionary War. The Boston Tea Party was a protest by British colonists who dressed up as Mohawk Indians to raid a British ship and throw the tea overboard. It's almost like the foundation of America is inherently tied with this idea of playing Indian. Part of the idea is because there was a desire for the kind of freedom that

colonists saw in native people, but also a desire to replace native people. And what better way to do that than to try to become them? This dynamic tension across all of history, in terms of America, keeps popping up. But out of the people who founded the Boston Tea Party, the Sons of Liberty, grew a secret society called the Improved Order of Red Men. The Degree of Pocahontas was the sorority version of it. It still exists today; it's headquartered in Waco, Texas. Both the Roosevelts were a part of it; Nixon was a part of it. It's kind of like the Freemasons in terms of people making backroom deals about business and politics, but they all do it wearing headdresses in wigwams.

So, New Red Order emerges out of the Improved Order of Red Men. We're identifying as a public secret society as opposed to an art collective. We avoid the term art collective like the plague, because then New Red Order can have the potential to be something that's not only contained by art. Maybe it could be a political party; maybe it could be a religion; perhaps it could be a think tank that could have different ways to spiral out into the world. In terms of trying to adopt that approach, let's also think about how people consume media and what media is familiar and welcoming. What puts an arm up and pushes people away? We really want to try to call in instead of calling out, so there's also this attempt to embrace anyone at any stage, or from any background. That's what became really fun and exciting about appropriating this infomercial, self-help tone. And again, we're really interested in unsettling or destabilising the audience. My favorite thing when I'm looking at art is not knowing what it's trying to do, grappling with that, or actually having this internal dialogue or debate with myself about what it means.

I also want to create conditions within our own work that other people can do. And I think satire, irony, and parody (they get a bad name these days because of those kinds of Gen X hangover around certain ideas of a lack of engagement, or nihilism even) – well, at its core, irony has a really radical potential, because when does irony stop becoming real or start becoming real? That wilful manifestation of an alternative reality is something we're very interested in pursuing and developing. Like if you say something is real enough, maybe it is. That's part of the approach regarding how we're reaching out to folks.

CL:

Even though you can easily feel the humor and the satire, there are serious messages being given. I felt there was a strong emotion when you spoke about your first film made with your brother about your background. Could you sum up your work also seen from the perspective of your background?

AK:

The Ojibway tribe that my brother and I are a part of is all across the Great Lakes region in the Midwest and focused around the Great Lakes. Our specific tribe is right on the border between the US and Canada. And then part of the Seven Fires Prophecy is a migration from the East Coast to the Great Lakes. Where my tribe is headquartered, in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, has been under the process of colonization since 1650. Which is different from a lot of other tribes in the US, which had contact later, in the 1850s. That also means that there's a lot of intermixing, racially as well as culturally, in the area that I'm from. But still, practically speaking,

until 1973 it was illegal to engage in Indigenous spiritual practices. A lot of things have been repressed or forcibly forgotten. There's a long history of residential schools where people were forcibly removed from their families to become white.

I think a lot of our work takes the approach of a "serious joke" – our history is so traumatic to unpack and still lingers on to this day in many different ways. To push back against that with rage and humor is the kind of tone that makes sense to us. It's also understanding how absurd the situation actually is – and embracing that absurdity and trying to represent that back in a very flat way.

There's this guy, Vine Deloria Jr., who's like the Foucault of Indigenous theory. He also started the National Congress of American Indians. He's a really amazing thinker. He passed away maybe a decade ago. He wrote this brilliant essay called "Indian Humor" that's been really important for us to keep revisiting. He's advocating that there's no way we can talk about what has happened, and what is happening, without making light of it. Not to the point of dismissing it, but actually engaging with it. That kind of thinking has been central and important to how we approach things. It's also one of the biggest frustrations – that people don't consider the US, Canada or even Denmark as having ongoing colonial projects. Meanwhile, there are people who are under the heels of that political repression still to this day. So it's not something that happened in the past. It's something that's ongoing. This temporal distinction, especially with Indigenous concerns, it's as if to be authentic, to be native, you have to exist in the past. I'm not going to be living in a wigwam anytime soon. I can't revive that part of the culture, but it's also strange how there's such an emphasis on denying contemporaneity.

That's for a reason! If you can't exist in the present, then you don't exist at all. I think that's been what a lot of nation states, settler colonial nation states, have been trying to imprint and impart. To be authentic you have to be something that doesn't exist anymore, which is this terrible double bind.

A lot of our work is trying to deny that denial. But even that becomes a limitation because all we're really talking about is saying: "We're here now." That's not even thinking about the future. I think that's why we also keep coming back to this idea of Indigenous futurism, or questions like: Can Indigenous people exist in the future? Let's think about what that's like, as opposed to just demanding that we're seen in the present being the horizon of our political aims. I guess there's something – in terms of this temporal distinction, the elasticity of time – there's something really important about forging ahead.

CL:

And here we've got the connection between your background and also the very sharpness of your work. Did we miss something?

AK:

It might be helpful to talk a little bit about the stuff that Bayley and I do because it also dovetails into this. As my brother's and my participation in New Red Order was beginning and we were joining the public secret society, I was also working separately with Bayley on this narrative political thriller, *Empty Metal*, about a band that stops making music and starts killing killer cops. The band is a liberal art educated noise band – maybe

even similar to bands that I've been a part of before – thinking through what it means to actually take on political action.

A lot of *Empty Metal* emerged out of both of our involvement in BLM activism at the time in New York. But I was also fortunate to work as a cinematographer on this project called *The Native and the Refugee*, which was comparing native reservations with Palestinian refugee camps. We were fortunate to go all across the US and Canada, as well as taking the work that we made in those places over to Lebanon, the West Bank and Jordan, and creating this exchange between these two sites of exception, a reservation and a refugee camp. In these spaces, citizenship is unclear or precarious. And if you're not a citizen, then you don't have any rights. Working on that project and exchanging those ideas in terms of bringing films from the US and Canada to the Middle East and vice versa, we found all of this crazy history. The first limousine on the Pine Ridge Reservation was Yasser Arafat, showing up in solidarity. And the American Indian Movement sent a delegation over to fight with the PLO in the Lebanese Civil War. This wild history in terms of intersectional concerns – that experience and learning about that history – really became a huge launching point for trying to articulate a political imagination into the future.

It's also a matter of realizing that this stuff already happened. And then it was suppressed, but now it's coming up again. Especially in today's day and age, where I feel like it's so important that the dialogue and discourse become intersectional. Because when it's separatist, then we're all in our own camps and can't really do much of anything. *Empty Metal* shows connections across many generations, across many different identities, with all

hoping for a better political future. One other aspect about that project is that everyone in the film is like a family to us. So, the band are our best friends.

Even the older people in the film are our roommates. One of the stars, Oba, he's a sixty-six-year-old Rasta who played King Alpha in *Empty Metal*. We're making a new project with him now called *Nosferasta*, a Rasta vampire movie. Christopher Columbus is the first vampire in the New World and he bites and converts Oba in 1504. Then Oba becomes the first non-white vampire and Columbus's right-hand person. He went on to infiltrate various African and Indigenous liberation movements in the Western hemisphere for 400 years until 1992. Over the course of the 20th century, he starts hearing about Rastafarianism and Marcus Garvey. Then in 1992 he smokes weed for the first time and it triggers some kind of reefer madness. Then he realises what he's been doing for the past 400 years is incredibly wrong. And he ends up murdering Columbus, but in our world once you kill, you're a progenerator, and you start ageing yourself. Now we cut to the present day; Oba is sixty-six. He's struggling with getting his US citizen documents in order because he existed in the country before the US was a country. He's now having to navigate the Babylon that he helped establish. But Oba is also my neighbour, and we had a band for a number of years.

In terms of trying to grow the film work together, *Empty Metal* and *Nosferasta* are good examples of that because although Bayley and I co-directed it, it was actually created by the much larger community of other artists that we respect, love and admire and consider family. A lot of these projects are bleeding and swirling into each other and it really does feel like an artistic family. We all live within a two- or three-block radius in New York, so very familial.

CL:

Nosferata with the incorporated vampire character – how did that come about?

AK:

While we were making *Empty Metal*, Oba played the character of King Alpha, who's a geriatric Rasta who wants to return to Africa along with the Black Star Liner. While we were filming it, Oba, the actual person, was like: "Can we get done with this bullshit and make the real movie? I want to make this Rasta vampire movie called *Nosferasta*." And we're like: "That's pretty good." So it's really his baby. He co-wrote the story with our friend, Alex Esco, on six sheets of paper, sketching it out. And we've been working with them to develop it into a feature-length film. There's a thirty-minute version that's been making the rounds. It was at Gasworks in London in 2021 and at Spike Island in Bristol in 2022. The cinema version of the short will be premiering at the International Film Festival Rotterdam.

CL:

What happens with the film after the premiere?

AK:

We're going to keep working on the *Nosferasta* project for the next two years to eventually hit feature-length territory. And that's how we developed all of the projects, whether NRO stuff, my brother's and mine, or Bayley's and mine. It's always this kind of extended timeline. And part of that is very intentional in terms of not wanting to hammer the film into existence, but actually

creating opportunities to get feedback, to see when we might have stepped too far one way or the other. Plus it helps to keep ourselves in check, while also keeping the project open to good feedback and new ideas. It's about being nimble, so we can adapt the work, as opposed to just having to live with it.

CL:

I think the idea of the vampire, a fictional figure used in a modern political context, is a very good example of how you work.

AK:

One thing I would add is that vampirism is a great analogy or metaphor for colonialism. In the narrative arc of the film, colonialism and capitalism get wedded together at a certain point in history. Actually, like in our backstory, like Marvel movies, they have the cinematic universe, and they have all these details that never make it into the films but justify the decisions. In the *Nosferasta* universe, Plato is the first vampire and there's a split. There're cold-blooded paedophile vampires and warm-blooded egoist vampires. There are these two strands throughout history, and they're warring factions, but they also get along; it's like Republicans or Democrats, kind of. It goes back to ancient Greece up until the present day. That's the kind of historical arc that we're operating with. But we're only focusing on 1504 to 2022. Only that 500-year chunk, but maybe the rest of the history will come out in a sequel or something.

CL:

How do you present your work in exhibitions?

AK:

Part of New Red Order's practice is also exhibition-making or installation. For instance, we did a real estate office in New York where people could volunteer to give land back to Indigenous people. And we created all these real estate listings in the windows in downtown New York. We had some very strange onlookers who I think were actually trying to buy property and they were very disappointed when they realized these were just examples of people giving back property. I guess a lot of our installation elements also slip into trying to make it as real as possible. So, we have a recruitment station that welcomes people and calls them in with that four-minute video blasting at them.

We've been doing this project called Culture Capture, where we reanimate or bring to life archival material through CGI animation. This is also a way to represent the work that we found in the archive. That's like this involved, large, two-screen digital projection with a series of glass negatives affixed to light boxes and some archival 16mm film that we digitised and printed back out.

The other great thing is that we have this new show coming up. And it's a really exciting opportunity because we're not only exhibiting our own work but we're also inviting other artists to participate in this dialogue or discourse at Kunsthall Charlottenborg. It's exciting to think of exhibition-making as a discursive format similar to video editing, mixtapes, or collage. It's also been fun to stretch the traditional understanding of "art" by including live streaming Indigenous TV channels, music videos, and other forms of media and culture that are typically excluded from "high art."

A lot of the curation has been investigating Indigeneity across an international scope, and seeing how similar the situations are. But the most interesting thing is how they're fifteen degrees different. I feel like learning more about that difference becomes the fertile territory or ground where new decolonial thoughts or ideas or strategies could emerge. So I'm super excited that we're inviting artists from Hawaii to Sápmi and back again, to engage in thinking through what internationalism means in terms of an Indigenous global network.

CL:

We've been talking about these political issues and the world we're living in now. How do you see the changes in the last couple of years where a lot of young people bring forward discussions about colonialism and heritage, etc.?

AK:

I'm not taking credit for any of this, but it's been strange to see concerns we bring up in work become reality – things that we thought were impossible. For instance, *Empty Metal* is advocating for the abolishment of police. When we made it in 2016 – it took four years to make – never in my life at that point in time did I think that would become an actual, legitimate political movement. Not because I didn't want it to be or thought it should be, it was just not feeling like the rest of the country, or the world would be even up for having that conversation. And then to see that become almost mainstream, in terms of a discourse. It's not just the "radical lefties" saying this, it's starting to enter into a larger discourse.

NRO has done a lot of work around monuments and calling for the removal of monuments. Seeing all of that happen over the last year, it's like, woah! But that's also triggered a different kind of thinking. The monument example's a good one, where its removal is complicated, especially for Indigenous people. Especially when it's monuments that could be deemed racist, but that also involve removing representations of Indigenous people or erasing forms of history. Actually, I think what we're aiming for is something that's more nuanced and more complicated. Specifically with that debate, we're talking about an additive approach. Traditionally, when people talk about an additive approach with monuments, they talk about putting up plaques that give historical context. That doesn't really work for us because people barely notice monuments and they notice plaques next to monuments even less. Our idea of an additive approach has started to become thinking about how to deface things: not by removal, but by addition. If you could keep adding things on top of this history, formally or literally, materially, that can change what power those objects or representations have – as opposed to the easiest thing to do, which is just to get rid of it.

The world's a hot mess these days and I really have no idea what's going on, I'm just holding on. But also, I'm excited about it, in terms of feeling like we are in this paradigm shift time where discourses and dialogues are changing in ways that are unprecedented. In *Empty Metal*, we were talking about when you go so far left and so far right, people actually meet up. Again, that was in 2016 and now, seeing things like the capital riot, my leftist militant friends were like: "That should've been us." It's this weird kinship. All these stereotypes are getting scrambled. Or it's also thinking about the power of language and how it's used, and who can say

what, and when. These are things that I'm personally shifting my own perspective on. Especially, for instance, when we were talking about documentary film, I was always like, Indigenous people should tell Indigenous stories. And I still feel that, but I also don't feel that it's right or makes sense to foreclose any other possibility.

The running joke in our New Red Order campaign is going to be a pro-miscegenation campaign, encouraging people to start race orgies. Because then, once we're all bits of everyone, there would be no more problems in the world. Look out for that!

An edited version of this interview can be watched on YouTube or channel.louisiana.dk

Christian Lund is festival director of the Louisiana Literature festival and co-editor at Louisiana Channel.

POST SCRIPT

JACOB FABRICIUS:

You sent me a photo on WhatsApp on October 19, 2022, and I replied: *kindergarten??* You replied: *Yayyaya a block or two away from Arthub lolz*. The day after, you wrote: *Yayayayya to be honest is there anything funny or cute about the literal blind ignorance of this kind of representation!? Am I missing something!? This literally seems unbelievably stupid in a non-humorous : intelligent : interesting: way // it just seems racist and dumb.*

And I replied: *There is a lot of it here. It's adult ignorance mixed with a child's imagination it seems.* You didn't reply to this, and I didn't say, act, or do anything else in relation to the image. You photographed it down the street from the Art Hub office on Sønder Boulevard, Vesterbro, Copenhagen, Denmark, and I have probably passed by this location and institution a million times without noticing the institution *Indianerne* – “The Indians.” In Denmark we have been – we still are – extremely slow at recognizing and dealing with cultural appropriation; that is, the acquisition of other people's and peoples' cultural characteristics, and the use of these characteristics in contexts that are detached from the everyday lives and histories of these peoples. Only recently have we begun to look critically at our colonial past! For generations we Danes have lived with words, pictures, and sayings such as *negerboller* (a chocolate-coated marshmallow-like sweet), *jødekager* (a Christmas cinnamon cookie), *indianer hache* (a spaghetti dish with meat sauce), and *Eskimo is* (an ice cream), and with images of the dark-skinned turbaned man on Tørsleffs vanilla products and the Black woman on the Blå Cirkel coffee packages. This has all been part of our daily lives until

recently, without Danes thinking, acting, or doing anything about it – without even considering the fact that it is wrong to reduce other people, stigmatizing them and their cultures to exotic stereotypes and more or less charming images. I understand your outrage.

Could you share the photo of the drawing in front of the school here?

Jacob Fabricius is Director of Artistic Research and Production at Art Hub Copenhagen.

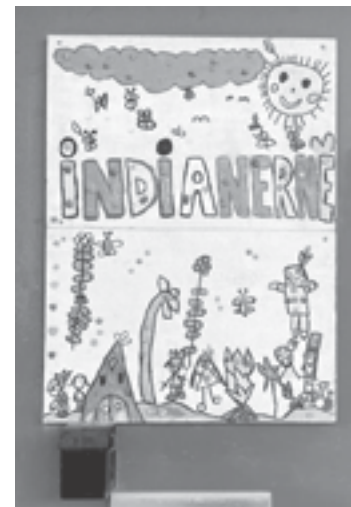


Photo of drawing in front of kindergarten.
Photo: Adam Khalil.

LARS BANG LARSEN:

After you had raised the alarm, Adam, I wrote an email to the kindergarten as their neighbor and as a friend of yours. They got back to me right away, saying that they had no intention of discriminating and that they are aware that their name is offensive: it was “most likely a naïve choice back in the day,” as they put it, and they reassured me that they would consider changing it.

In the bigger picture one wonders what narratives, representations, and cultural archives have informed the construction of the figure of “Indian” in a Scandinavian context. No doubt this construct is differently put together here than in the US, while also in no less complex ways. In his book from 2009 *Everything You Know About Indians Is Wrong*, Paul Chaat Smith – the influential Comanche author and curator who came to lecture in the context of New Red Order’s show at Kunsthall Charlottenborg in 2022 – talks about mainstream representations of North American Indians as conjuring “a half-remembered presence, both comforting and dangerous, lurking just below the surface.” Whether in Europe or the US, these images are simulacra that, to a certain extent, live their own lives but that are susceptible to the configurations of gaze of the hegemonic set-up that has brought them into being, thereby tending to produce distance and numbness to the actual realities and bodies that remain unaccounted for in these (mis) representations.

In the case of *Indianerne*, their name might be expressive of a paternalistic sort of “support” of some vague notion of “Indian” cultures that is based on old ethnocentric attitudes that make it seem legitimate to compare European children and non-Western Indigenous

peoples and the “adventurous” lives that both supposedly lead at the limits of “mature” Western culture, thanks to their notionally “innocent” and “untamed” nature. Which is wrong on all counts, of course – and in more than one sense revealing of how we subjectivize children in Denmark, too.

This whole business of robbing the Others of their representations is a many-layered ethical issue of accountability that we are only beginning to become conversant with in my cultural context. Chaat Smith refers to “the imaginary Indian” as the imagining of an archetype or stereotype: a sort of cultural meme and ambiguously adored star figure in visual culture. I’d speculate that another layer in this discussion is how the catch-all term “Indian” mainly carries associations to the North American Indigenous cultures, while Amerindian cultures of South America are obliterated in more invisible ways because they haven’t to the same extent had the dubious privilege of being figured, commodified, and spectacularized in the Anglo-American media mainstream. This is an aspect that I believe you addressed really well in your show at Kunsthall Charlottenborg, by the way, with the inclusion of Indigenous artists outside of the US.

In any event, you mentioned Naja Dyrendom Graugaard’s poems earlier: in my email to the kindergarten, I attached her text “STILLS: Poetic reflections on racisms in Denmark’s Kindergarten” that you had forwarded to me. It is about the child’s encounter with racial stereotyping in contemporary Denmark, specifically concerning kindergartens. Let’s run it here?

Lars Bang Larsen is Director of Artistic Research at Art Hub Copenhagen.

STILLS:

Poetic reflections on racisms in
Denmark's kindergarten

by Naja Dyrendom Graugaard

INTRODUCTION

Becoming a mother has revealed to me that practices of cultural appropriation, blackfacing, redefining, and stereotyping are disturbingly common in the everyday life of children in Denmark. Generally, these practices seem to be left unquestioned and undebated, excused by claims of innocence and benignity. When challenged, they are defended – often heatedly, and sometimes very fiercely. In my experience, these practices have become so normalized that it is difficult to direct any criticism without being branded as “hyper-sensitive,” “overreacting” or “quarrelsome.” Perhaps poetic writings provide a different way of conversation. The writings presented here are poetic reflections on my personal experiences of being a mother, raising a mixed family in present-day Denmark.

These *Stills* do not ‘unearth’ from an easy birth. The topic invites heartache. Unnerving questions surface from the depths: What will the consequences of these experiences be? For my daughter? For my son? In this light, the *Stills* are essentially written for my children, Atsa and Aapi. Together, we are a Canadian-Danish-Inuit-Anishinaabe family. I cannot know or predict how my children’s individual mixed-multi-racial experiences will unravel, what challenges they may encounter, whether they will identify with their ancestries. Yet I am quite certain that being of mixed heritages will have some place and impact in their lives. So this is an invitation for further conversations and more voices on the consequences of racism in kindergartens in Denmark. To my daughter Atsa, to my son Aapi, and to all kids who are learning to be comfortable in their own skin.

[Two out of seven *Stills* are presented in this publication. First published in *KULT: Postkolonial Temaserie, Racism in Denmark, vol. 15*, June 2018.]

STILL 2: Pocahontas

It is not the first time this happens.
“How are you, Pocahontas?”

our neighbour is smiling at you
we are at a community dinner
and I am speechless
you look up at him like a question mark
for a second
and then scoot over to a more interesting place in the room
I thank the universe for your age
one-and-a-half
and you don't know who Pocahontas is yet
or really was.

Matoaka, Flower between two streams,
of Pamunkey and Mattaponi ancestry
daughter of Powhatan Chief Wahunsenaca
and married to Kocoum as a young woman
according to Mattaponi oral history
Matoaka suffered a horrid destiny
kidnapped by the English
raped, re-married and possibly killed

today globally immortalized in Disney images
romanticized, exoticized, sexualized, racialized
by the strokes of (m)a(ny) hand(s)
your people diminished to “savages”
the colonial history of Turtle Island distorted and
white-washed
and gracefully veiled by the threats of *Colours of the Wind*.

“Are you a little Pocahontas?”
our neighbor seeks your attention again, clinging on to
his cartoons

I am a coward and pretend like I don't hear
too embarrassed to embarrass
my mother who doesn't pretend not to hear.

“Did you call her Pocahontas? Don't call her that.”
“What?”

“I ask you not to call her Pocahontas.”
My mother has been called too many names
in her lifetime to allow anyone to do the same to her
granddaughter
bastard mongrel fridge-Indian fucking eskimo

our neighbour has given up his Pocahontas, for now,
and while you sleep at night
I am on the floor practicing the strength of my mother
firing words and sentences like a ninja
working on an arsenal of anti-racist techniques
building muscle to courage up.

No one shall call you Disney's Pocahontas again
without experiencing the resistance of your mother
and foremothers

STILL 7: Cultural Awareness Event

It is the annual Spring Party at your kindergarten
you have looked forward to this day
to perform with your friends on stage
to show your grandparents from Canada the playgrounds
everything is lined up, organized, prepared
we get out the door on the late side of things

Little Brother pooped just in time
last-minute diaper change, rubber boots, umbrellas, rain
gear, in the car and go!
I take you straight to the indoor stage
leaving behind Little Brother, Daddy and Grannies at the
outdoor activities
while you get ready for the performance, backstage.
“We’ll check out the playgrounds afterwards,” I assure you
before I go to take a seat in the front
I glance at the tickets we purchased at the door.
Spring Party – A Trip Around the World
they really did it up this year

“They set up an Africa-land and an America-land outside,”
my partner whispers in my ear
taking a seat beside me
I am not sure what he is talking about
“Some of the teachers dressed up in blackface, with black
baby dolls tied to their back. They’ve got bongo music
playing, dancing around all hunched over, handing out
bread-on-a-stick.”
I can see how much he hates to tell me this
I cringe. The kids come out on stage. I swallow something.
Mouth dry as sandpaper. Really?
“They also have a tipi and some ‘Indians’.”
Oh shoot. So, this is the trip around the world.

Stunned. Blank. Blank. I look at my parents-in-law in
the back of the room. I wish we hadn’t invited them.

Embarrassed.

Focus. Focus. On stage. Where are you? I find your eyes.
You are smiling.

Proud.

I wave and find a smile for you. My daughter. The only
brown girl on stage among the blond heads and blue eyes.
My four-year-old Anishinaabe-Inuk-Danish girl. How do
I protect you from the hurt of stereotypes? Sudden deep
tiredness overwhelms me.

“Let’s just go straight home after the performance.

Perhaps she doesn’t have to see this,” I whisper
we clap, as the kids leave the stage. Encore! We praise the
Itsy Bitsy Spider and Cat Song

I tell you that we have a party waiting for us at home.

Which we luckily do. Family. And rush out the door.

In our escape attempt, we run into one of your favourite
teachers. Dressed up in full buckskin costume with dangly
flounces, face paint, headband full of ridiculous feathers.
I don’t know what to do. You point at him, laughing.

“Anaana [*mum*], look! He looks funny!”

I am grateful for your good humour and relax a bit more.
You do not know that he is, actually, attempting to
portray your people, relatives, heritage

with stereotypes forged in and through the history of
slavery colonialism imperialism
still

thriving cultivated sold consumed

the childish passive Eskimo

the peaceful pipe-smoking Indian

frequently used for school themes when in lack of some
cultural awareness

you don’t know, not yet

and we go home to be with family
where I apologize to my in-laws for the lack of sensitivity
in Danish kindergartens. They tell me not to be sorry. It
was like this in Canada when they grew up
sure, sixty years ago
we eat rye bread and herring and I buy myself some time
to figure out what the fuck I am going to do about it.

Naja Dyrendom Graugaard is a Danish-Kalaaleq post-doctoral researcher at Aalborg University. Her research focuses on coloniality, decolonization, Indigenous knowledge, gender and environment in Greenland and the Arctic. Naja often draws on arts-based approaches to research and collaborative work, and has published poetic, theatrical and auto-biographical writings that shed light on the (inter)generational experiences of colonization, racialization and resurgence in mixed, Indigenous families in Denmark.

POST POST SCRIPT

ADAM KHALIL:

After we wrote to the kindergarten, and encouraged others to write in order to engage them in a dialogue, they agreed to change their name and they removed the drawing from their door. Action and dialogue can lead to change: if you see something, say something.



Photo of kindergarten without signs. Photo: Adam Khalil.



New Red Order: *Feel at Home Here*. Installation view at Artists Space, New York 2021. Courtesy New Red Order and Artists Space. Photo: Filip Wolak.



New Red Order: *Conscientious Conscripture*, 2018 – ongoing. Installation view at *New Red Order Presents: One if by Land, Two if by Sea* at Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen 2022. Photo: David Stjernholm.



Minimalism-Maximalism-Mechanissmmm Act 3, installation view at Art Sonje Center, Seoul 2022. All rights reserved Art Sonje Center. Photo: Euirock Lee.



New Red Order: *Feel at Home Here*. Installation view at Artists Space, New York 2021. Courtesy Artists Space. Photo: Filip Wolak.



New Red Order: *Feel at Home Here*. Installation view at Artists Space, New York 2021. Courtesy Artists Space. Photo: Filip Wolak.



New Red Order: *Culture Capture: Crimes Against Reality*, 2020. 2-channel video. Film still courtesy New Red Order.



Minimalism-Maximalism-Mechanissmmm Act 3, installation view at Art Sonje Center, Seoul 2022. All rights reserved Art Sonje Center. Photo: Euirock Lee.



Empty Metal, 2018. Feature film. Co-directed by Adam Khalil and Bayley Sweitzer. Film still courtesy the artists.



INAATE/SE/ [it shines a certain way. to a certain place./it flies.falls./], 2016. Feature film. Co-directed by Adam Khalil and Zack Khalil. Film still courtesy the artists.



INAATE/SE/ [it shines a certain way. to a certain place./it flies.falls./], 2016. Feature film. Co-directed by Adam Khalil and Zack Khalil. Film still courtesy the artists.



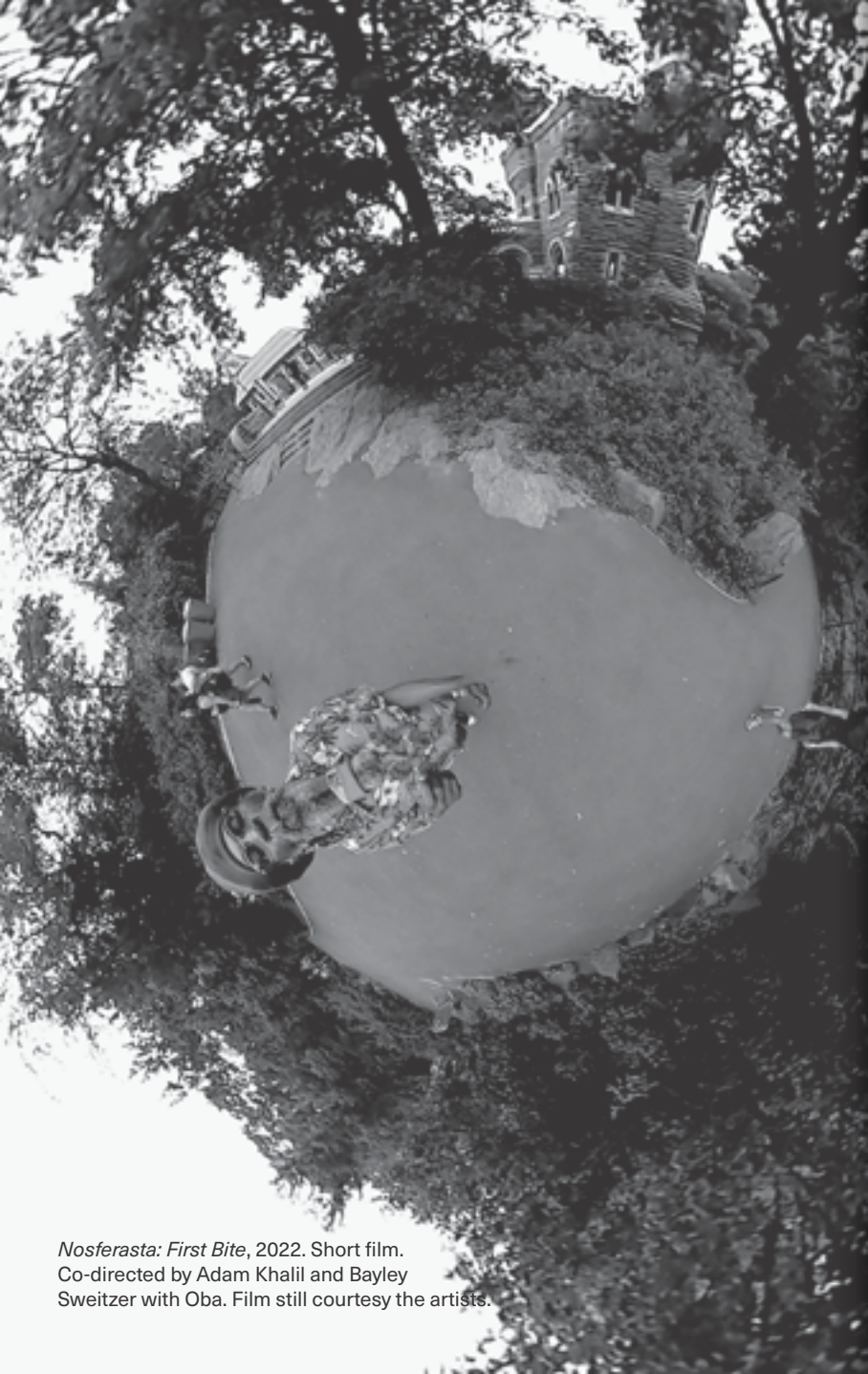
Empty Metal, 2018. Feature film. Co-directed by Adam Khalil and Bayley Sweitzer. Film still courtesy the artists.



Nosferasta: First Bite, 2022. Short film. Co-directed by Adam Khalil and Bayley Sweitzer with Oba. Film still courtesy the artists.



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Nosferasta: First Bite, 2022. Short film.
Co-directed by Adam Khalil and Bayley
Sweitzer with Oba. Film still courtesy the artists.