

Without Paths or Boundaries: Films of Sky Hopinka

Thursday, May 10, 2018 at 7:30pm — Artists' Television Access

Presented in association with

the Communications and Media Studies Department at Sonoma State University
and

UC Berkeley Ethnic Studies Department

Sky Hopinka in person

Sky Hopinka's film work scrutinizes the layered structure of identity in relation to homeland, landscape and language. Like puzzles, his films are constructed with fragmented and superimposed images. Watching them is like experiencing memories inside of a dream, their fragments recomposed without any particular order by the unconscious. This does not make the result less truthful; quite the opposite, it is more real than ever. (Almudena Escobar López: *Afterimage*)

Indigenous American filmmaker Sky Hopinka's (Ho-Chunk/Pechanga) video work centers around personal positions of homeland and landscape, the precarity of indigenous languages and the concomitant reality of language as a container of culture. While depicting lives and locations from the Bering Sea to Standing Rock, Hopinka's vision of the North American landscape and its people is borderless and tentative, and inclusive of individual account and collective memory as grounding forces central to cultural survival and resistance. Avoiding a documentary approach to filmmaking in favor of a more nuanced and obliquely angled approach to cinematic ethnopoetics, Hopinka's lushly visual films often allude to persons and places not present and hint at stories and histories untold and perhaps not completely knowable as disparate voices—familial, poetic, ancestral and contemporary—speak across time and distance.

Visions of an Island (2016) by Sky Hopinka; digital video, color, sound, 15 minutes, exhibition file from the maker

An Unangam Tunuu elder describes cliffs and summits, drifting birds, and deserted shores. A group of students and teachers play and invent games revitalizing their language. A visitor wanders in a quixotic chronicling of earthly and supernal terrain. These visions offer glimpses of an island in the center of the Bering Sea. (Sky Hopinka)

wawa (2014) by Sky Hopinka; digital video, color, stereo, 6 minutes, exhibition file from the maker

Featuring speakers of chinuk wawa, an Indigenous language from the Pacific Northwest, *wawa* begins slowly, patterning various forms of documentary and ethnography. Quickly, the patterns tangle and become confused and commingled, while translating and transmuting ideas of cultural identity, language, and history. (Sky Hopinka)

Jáaji Approx. (2015) by Sky Hopinka; digital video, color, stereo, 8 minutes, exhibition file from the maker

Logging and approximating a relationship between audio recordings of my father and videos gathered of the landscapes we have both separately traversed. The initial distance between the logger and the recordings, of recollections and of songs, new and traditional, narrows while the images become an expanding semblance of filial affect. *Jáaji* is a near translation for directly addressing a father in the Hočąk language. (Sky Hopinka)

Venite et Loquamur (2015) by Sky Hopinka; digital video, b&w, stereo, 12 minutes, exhibition file from the maker

A group of students and teachers gather in an historical mansion in the woods of West Virginia for a week-long retreat in spoken Latin. I observe and I participate, navigating the errata with my camera. (Sky Hopinka)

Anti-Objects, or Space Without Path or Boundaries (2017) by Sky Hopinka; digital video, color, stereo, 13 minutes, exhibition file from the maker

The individual is not an autonomous, solitary object but a thing of uncertain extent, with ambiguous boundaries. So too is matter, which loses much of its allure the moment it is reduced to an object, shorn of its viscosity, pressure and density. Both subject and matter resist their reduction into objects. Everything is interconnected and intertwined. (Kengo Kuma).

The title of this video, taken from the texts of the architect Kengo Kuma, suggests a way of looking at everything as “interconnected and intertwined,” as are the historical and the present, the tool and the artifact. Images and representations of two structures in the Portland Metropolitan Area that have direct and complicated connections to the Chinookan people who inhabit(ed) the land are woven with audio tapes of one of the last speakers of the Chinookan creole, chinuk wawa. These localities of matter resist their reduction into objects, and call anew for space and time given to wandering as a deliberate act and the empowerment of shared utility. (Sky Hopinka)

I'll Remember You as You Were, Not as What You'll Become (2016) by Sky Hopinka; digital video, color, stereo, 13 minutes, exhibition file from the maker

An elegy to Diane Burns on the shapes of mortality and being, and the forms the transcendent spirit takes while descending upon landscapes of life and death. A place for new mythologies to syncopate with deterritorialized movement and song, reifying old routes of reincarnation. Where resignation gives hope for another opportunity, another form, for a return to the vicissitudes of the living and all their refractions. (Sky Hopinka)

*“I'm from Oklahoma I ain't got no one to call my own.
If you will be my honey, I will be your sugar pie way hi ya
way ya hi ya way ya hi yo”
-Diane Burns (1957-2006)*

Dislocation Blues (2017) by Sky Hopinka; digital video, color, stereo, 17 minutes, exhibition file from the maker

An incomplete and imperfect portrait of reflections from Standing Rock. Cleo Keahna recounts his experiences entering, being at, and leaving the camp and the difficulties and the reluctance in looking back with a clear and critical eye. Terry Running Wild describes what his camp is like, and what he hopes it will become.