

Jeremy Dennis



Nothing Happened Here

Jeremy Dennis

Nothing Happened Here

February 8 - March 15, 2018

Flecker Gallery
Suffolk County Community College
Ammerman Campus, Selden, NY

On the cover: "Nothing Happened Here #3", 2017, giclee print on ultra board, 1/10, 48 x 60 inches

Director's Foreword:

Flecker Gallery is pleased to present "Nothing Happened Here," a solo exhibition of new photographs by Jeremy Dennis at the Suffolk County Community College Ammerman Campus. Dennis is an indigenous artist who was raised and continues to live and work on the Shinnecock Indian Reservation in Southampton, New York. His large-scale photographs presented in the exhibition and in this catalog offer a fictional narrative that flips the historical script. Dennis' work is borne of his experiences of the myriad challenges of contemporary indigenous life. These images are intended to arrest the viewer and transport the audience into the role of the subjects - unsuspecting, fatally pierced; injured out of nowhere. This bit of shock is necessary and purposeful.

The Shinnecock Indian Nation has lived on Long Island for more than ten thousand years and has been recognized by New York State as an official Nation since as early as 1789. In 1977 the federal government created the Federal Acknowledgement Process, and in 1978, the Shinnecock Nation petitioned for federal status. It took twenty-five years for the petition to advance to the "ready, waiting for active consideration" list. It took another five years to be placed on active consideration. Still awaiting an answer, the Shinnecock Nation sued the Department of the Interior in 2006. Official federal recognition was finally granted in 2010 (Gottschalk). This recognition comes with access to federal funding including Housing and Urban Development grants, low interest bank financing for mortgage and business loans, and public funds for roads and other infrastructure maintenance, as well as the possibility of casino gambling, which has been pursued, but has failed to date due to bureaucratic complexities, competing interests, and internal conflicts.

Throughout their history, the Shinnecock suffered disease brought by European settlers and weathered skirmishes between the English and the Dutch on Long Island. Marginalized and oppressed for generations, it is an indigenous culture, like others in New England, which lost everything, including its language on the path to assimilation. There have been no fluent speakers in over a century. Native culture had been largely replaced by the dominant culture of colonial settlers and the new America by the 19th century. However, a movement began in the early 1980's in the ongoing attempt to retain some of what has been lost, namely to revive the language. Tribal leaders devised strategies for re-asserting their traditional culture. Parents once again began naming their children in the Algonquin language, adults made it common practice to use Algonquin greetings, and the school began to incorporate the Mohegan-Pequot language - the particular Algonquin dialect of the Shinnecock - in school lessons using art and music to imprint the language onto memory (Simone).

The Shinnecock Nation consists of approximately seven hundred and fifty acres on the south shore of Long Island, near the Town of Southampton, NY, although the original reservation was designated an additional three thousand, six hundred acres. These acres were recognized in a 1703 lease agreement between the tribe and the Town of Southampton, stating the tribe would own the land in perpetuity, leasing to the town. However, under dubious circumstances, those thirty-six hundred acres seem to have been allegedly swindled from them in 1859 by white residents using forged documents and circumventing official processes, most notably approval by the U.S. Congress. The Shinnecock had no legal recourse for generations. In the summer of 2005, the Shinnecock Indian Nation filed a lawsuit in federal court against, among other parties, New York State and the Town of Southampton. The Nation sought financial compensation and the removal of all current residents from the land so that it may be returned to the tribe. The claims amount to over \$1 billion worth of land in the Hamptons, including Shinnecock Hills Golf Club, site of several U.S. Open golf tournaments. The lawsuit failed in 2006, with the federal district judge ruling in favor of "pragmatic concerns" in a ruling that repeatedly cited the rarely used legal concept known as "laches" intended to discourage parties from waiting unreasonably long periods of time before making legal property claims (Doolittle). The reservation is surrounded by opulent wealth and

celebrity homes; an area where the median home price is two million dollars, while the median income on the reservation is just over fourteen thousand. Recent census information indicates there are just over six hundred and fifty tribal residents on the reservation, with just over twelve hundred members total.

As this catalog goes to print, a former Shinnecock tribal leader is fighting charges of illegal fishing in the Suffolk County Courts, rights that are protected by historical treaties. According to a January 6, 2018 Newsday article, "Court papers cite the Shinnecock tribe's rights to free trade under the 1664 Fort Albany Treaty, and the 1659 Wyandanch Deed with Southampton Town. That agreement provides for the tribe to keep "our privilege of fishing, fowling or gathering of berries, or any other thing for our use," the plaintiff's court papers say" (Harrington). There is a long history of trampling on rights granted to native tribes by scores of U.S. treaties and agreements with municipalities. In other recent news, one might think of the Water Protectors at Standing Rock, North Dakota. Peaceful protesters were sprayed with water in freezing temperatures, maced and shot with rubber bullets, attacked by dogs, and kept in cages as the interests of oil barons and pipeline investors were advanced, while sacred sites were bull-dozed and native land rights granted by historical treaty, as well as immediate concerns for the health of the community were once again tossed aside. One might also think of the current presidential administration's slashing of land from Bear's Ears and Grand Escalante National Monument, undoing designations granted by Presidents Obama and Clinton, cutting the former by 85% - over 1 million acres lost. The latter was cut in half (Turkewitz). Progress towards social justice for indigenous people seems as illusive as ever; we should be better than this by now.

These photographs by Jeremy Dennis are both powerful and perfectly suited to our current moment in history, resonating the concerns of his Shinnecock heritage and also harmonizing with numerous critiques of patriarchal society, white privilege, and blindness to both. The work in this series presents a challenging scenario for many audiences; one that turns the tables on the legacy of colonialism, and the subsequent assumptions and fears that are a root cause of many forms of social injustice today, including systemic institutional marginalization, disenfranchisement, inequality, and racism. I am moved by this work. Indigenous societies have faced genocide, destruction through assimilation, denial of rights to property and sacred sites, exile to remote or undesirable lands, abject poverty, racism, disrespect, and misrepresentation in American society. The Shinnecock Nation has endured all these, yet continue to press on and fight for justice and equal opportunity against impossible odds. Is this work a fantasy of justice and/or vengeance? Is it a re-imagined alternate ending? Does it ask the question, "What if?" Does it spark unease? It should. Perhaps if we imagine ourselves in the role of the target, the defeated, the slain, we can reflect and also see ourselves as the progeny and legacy of colonialism. Then perhaps we can better practice empathy, and more actively work to share its humanity and humility. And finally, perhaps we can come to a deeper understanding of who and where we are, and awaken to a reckoning for the injustices and the complexities of our past and present.

Matthew Neil Gehring, Director

Simone, Alina. "This Native American Tribe on Long Island is Trying to Raise its Language From the Dead." Public Radio International. Jan. 14, 2016. <https://www.pri.org/stories/2016-01-14/native-american-tribe-long-island-trying-raise-its-language-dead>

Doolittle, Justin. "This Tribe Wants to Kick Rich People Out of the Hamptons." Vice, Sept. 3, 2014. https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/qbexbp/this-tribe-wants-to-kick-rich-people-out-of-the-hamptons-903

Harrington: "Former Shinnecock Leader Asserts Ancient Fishing Rights." Newsday. Jan. 6, 2018. <https://www.newsday.com/long-island/politics/shinnecock-suffolk-fishing-rights-1.15872716>

Turkewitz, July. "Trump Slashes Size of Bear's Ears and Grand Staircase Monuments." New York Times. Dec. 4, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/04/us/trump-bears-ears.html>

Gottschalk, Kim Jerome. "Shinnecock Indian Nation of NY." NARF.org. <https://www.narf.org/cases/shinnecock-indian-nation-new-york/>



"Nothing Happened Here #8"; 2017, giclee print on ultra board, 1/10, 48 x 60 inches



"Nothing Happened Here #16"; 2017, giclee print on ultra board, 1/10, 48 x 60 inches



"Nothing Happened Here #7," 2017, giclee print on ultra board, 1/10, 48 x 60 inches



"Nothing Happened Here #4," 2017, giclee print on ultra board, 1/10, 48 x 60 inches



"Nothing Happened Here #1"; 2017, giclee print on ultra board, 1/10, 48 x 60 inches



"Nothing Happened Here #18"; 2017, giclee print on ultra board, 1/10, 48 x 60 inches



Artist Statement:

Nothing Happened Here explores the violence/non-violence of postcolonial Native American psychology. Reflecting upon my own experience and observations in my community, the Shinnecock Reservation in Southampton, New York, specifically the burden of the loss of culture through assimilation, omission of our history in school curriculum, and loss of land and economic disadvantage; this series illustrates the shared damaged enthusiasm of living on indigenous lands without rectification.

The arrows in each image act as a symbol of everlasting indigenous presence in each scene. The images may be as compelling if the subjects were of indigenous descent, but the decision to use non-native subjects reveals a shared burden. The question remains of how to overcome this troubled past. As we learn of early contact-period history between colonists and indigenous groups, that history sticks with us, and it is difficult not to link current predicament of power, gained or lost, with that important past.

-Jeremy Dennis

"Nothing Happened Here #15," 2017, giclee print on ultra board, 1/10, 48 x 60 inches



"Nothing Happened Here #10", 2017, giclee print on ultra board, 1/10, 48 x 60 inches



"Nothing Happened Here #14", 2017, giclee print on ultra board, 1/10, 48 x 60 inches



"Nothing Happened Here #19"; 2017, giclee print on ultra board, 1/10, 48 x 60 inches



"Nothing Happened Here #9"; 2017, giclee print on ultra board, 2/10, 48 x 60 inches



Jeremy Dennis was born in Southampton, New York and raised on the Shinnecock Indian Reservation. He is an artist and photographer, who graduated in 2013 with a BA from Stony Brook University in New York with a minor in Digital Arts, and received an MFA from Pennsylvania State University in 2016.

The essential issues he works toward resolving are indigenous identity, assimilation, and tradition. Throughout his analysis of American history and post-colonialism thinking that influence his work, he questions and disrupts social norms, popular culture references, and historic narratives in relation to indigenous people. By looking towards the past, Dennis is able to trace the source of issues that plague Native American communities today, and work towards creating an awareness of histories and interactions between contemporary America and a seemingly distant culture. Much of these questions arise inherently by living in the environment that many indigenous people face; growing up on a reservation, omissions of relevant history in education, and subtle cultural influences.

A major theme of Dennis' work is indigenous mythology. The stories that influence his imagery serve as a method of peering into the minds of his ancestors and getting a glimpse of their views and values. These images provide an alternative to the testimony of western histories and religions. While preserving cultural identity in these stories, he is also able to defend the land we all occupy, giving it spiritual recognition, and presenting our environment with an importance that is not so different from ourselves. On the most fundamental level, myths explain the uncertainties of nature and the chaos that controls our lives. While science has resolved many of our curiosities about natural phenomenon, the question of identity still remains. In an environment that seems so eager to move past conflicts of race and such "far-away" histories, myths grant a sense of community and place in the universe.

Using digital photography, Jeremy Dennis creates images that reference the most common depictions of indigenous people, the cinema. Utilizing its ability to charm and influence the viewer, he attempts to create conversations about uncomfortable themes of post-colonialism in a Hollywood film style.

Jeremy Dennis
(b. 1990, Southampton, New York)

Education

2016 MFA, Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA
2013 BA in Studio Art, Stony Brook University, Stony Brook, NY

Solo Exhibitions

2017 "East Hampton Indigenous"; Guild Hall, East Hampton, NY
"Indigenous People of Suffolk County"; Suffolk County Historical Society, Riverhead, NY
"On This Site"; Contemporary Art Gallery at Shinnecock Cultural Center and Museum,
Southampton, NY
2016 "Pauppukkeewis"; Zoller Gallery, Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA
2012 "Dreams"; Tabler Gallery, Stony Brook, NY

Group Exhibitions

2017 "Race, Love, and Labor"; Zuccaire Gallery, Stony Brook University, Stony Brook, NY
"Open Studios"; Woodstock Byrdcliffe Guild (AIR) Program, Woodstock, NY
"Creative Nation II"; Ellsworth Gallery, Santa Fe, NM
"Of Memory, Bone and Myth"; University of ND, Grand Forks, ND
"First Nations Film and Video Festival Inc" Spring Festival, Chicago, IL
"Southampton Scenes III"; Southampton, NY
2016 "SWING State"; Little Berlin Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
"What Keeps You Up at Night?"; SPE MCC Portfolio, San Francisco, CA
"It Must Have Been Love"; Vermont Studio Center, Johnson VT
"Truth and Reconciliation in Concert"; Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA
"Tradition and Innovation"; Hera Gallery, Wakefield, RI
"Odd Couples"; Zoller Gallery, State College, PA
"Broad Horizons"; Hump Day Gallery, State College, PA
"The Shinnecock Nation Cultural Enrichment Program"; Unitarian Universalist Congregation at
Shelter Rock, NY
2015 "Instinct: Why did you make that?"; The Parliament Gallery, York, PA
"New Directions"; Fraser Street Gallery, State College, PA
"Why Are You Here?"; Zoller Gallery, State College, PA
"Graduate Research Exhibition"; Hub Gallery, State College, PA
"Lucid Dreams"; Fraser Street Gallery, State College, PA
"First Year MFA Exhibition"; Zoller Gallery, State College, PA

2014 "Intertribal Arts and Cultural Showcase"; Lyceum Gallery, Suffolk County Community
College, Eastern Campus, Riverhead, NY
"ECNU Resilience"; East China Normal University Gallery, Shanghai, China

Publications

2017 Dennis, Jeremy. *On This Site*, Blurb Inc.
2015 Dennis, Jeremy. *Behind the Dance*, Indigenous Portraits, Blurb Inc.
2012 Dennis, Jeremy. *Dreams*, Blurb Inc.

Residencies

2017 Watermill Center, Watermill, NY
Center for Photography at Woodstock, Woodstock, NY
2016 Saltonstall Artist Residency, Ithaca, NY
Mohegan Field School, Connecticut College, CT
Vermont Studio Center, Johnson, VT

Awards/Honors

2017 Featured Panelist for "Art, Community, and Collaboration: An East End Discussion"; Parrish Art
Museum, Watermill, NY
2016 Speaker at First Native American Heritage Awareness Program, Stony Brook University, NY
Harpo Foundation Native American Residency Fellowship
SPEMA Student Travel Grant, 2016 SPE National Conference, Las Vegas NV
Dreamstarter Award, Running Strong for American Indian Youth, cofounded by Billy Mills
2015 69th Annual Shinnecock Powwow Program Cover, Southampton NY
2013 Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences' Purchase Award, Stony Brook University, NY
2008 Native American Peoples Scholarship, Stony Brook University, NY

Collections

CHROMA
New York State Museum
Talkhouse Music Hall
Center for Photography at Woodstock
Private collections

Jeremy Dennis

Nothing Happened Here

February 8 - March 15, 2018

Flecker Gallery

Suffolk County Community College, Ammerman Campus

533 College Road, Selden, NY 11784

<http://sunysuffolk.edu>

<https://facebook.com/fleckergallery?fref=ts>

Gallery Director and Curator: Matthew Neil Gehring

Jeremy Dennis would like to thank Matthew and the College for this opportunity. He would also like to thank and acknowledge the influence of Noam Chomsky for his lifetime of inspiring work as a humanist and his untiring advocacy for awareness and justice.

Flecker Gallery would like to offer special thanks to Dr. Shaun McKay, Paul Beaudin, Wes Lundberg, Sandra Sprows, Charles Bartolotta, Linda Sprague, Charles Wittreich, Barbara Hurst, Maria Cherubino, Ris Aguilo-Cuadra, Bryan Rooney, Aaron Jeffcoat, Anna Prikazchikova, Keeks DeMurley, and the SCC Association.

Catalogue © 2018 Flecker Gallery at Suffolk County Community College

Works of art by Jeremy Dennis © 2018 Jeremy Dennis

All photos appear courtesy of the artist.

ISBN: 978-0-9979650-4-9

Flecker Gallery