# Visual Sovereignty and the Making of NIIPA: Tracing an Archival History of the Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association (1985-2005/2006)

by

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# Abstract

The Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association (NIIPA, 1985-2005/2006) was a national, non-profit artist-run centre in Hamilton, Ontario, that sought to develop a community of Indigenous photographers and to promote a positive and contemporary image of Indigenous peoples through the production of a newsletter and the facilitation of annual conferences, workshops and both in-house and travelling exhibitions. This major research paper is a culmination of a year-long archival investigation of NIIPA that chronicles the organization's history from its paternal roots in Hamilton's Photographers' Union to its closure in 2005/2006. Drawing on extant archival materials housed in the Toronto Reference Library and the libraries of OCAD University, the Art Gallery of Ontario, and the Royal Ontario Museum, and focusing on four of NIIPA's main publications: *Visions* (1986), *Silver Drum* (1986), *No Borders* (1991), and *Reminiscing* (2000), the paper provides an overview of NIIPA's two decades of activities and advocacy for Indigenous photography to demonstrate its pioneering role in Canadian photographic history as an agent of Indigenous self-determination and visual sovereignty, and to lay the groundwork for future considerations of the role NIIPA played in setting a precedent for Indigenous image-makers today.

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# Introduction

This major research paper is a culmination of a year-long investigation of the history of the Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association (NIIPA), which formed after the first conference of Indigenous photography in Hamilton, Ontario from March 8-10, 1985.[1] Spearheaded by Co-Directors Yvonne Maracle (Mohawk) and Brenda Mitten (Seneca), NIIPA (1985-2005/06) was a national, non-profit artist-run centre that sought to develop a community of Indigenous photographers and to promote a "positive, realistic, and contemporary image"[2] of Indigenous peoples through the production of a newsletter and the facilitation of annual conferences, workshops, and both in-house and travelling exhibitions.[3] Despite the many prominent Indigenous photographers who came through NIIPA's doors, little is known or written about the organization.[4] Through undertaking research in the Toronto Reference Library and the libraries of OCAD University, the Art Gallery of Ontario, and the Royal Ontario Museum, I found substantial archival materials, including over fifty newsletters, conferencing proceedings, and four major catalogues, which I have used to chronicle the organization's history from its paternal roots in Hamilton's Photographers' Union to its eventual closure twenty-one years later.

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[1] Brenda Mitten, "Introduction," *Visions: From Contemporary Native Photographers* (Hamilton, ON: The Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association, 1986) 3.

[2] "Mandate," Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association, last modified August 10, 2003, https://web.archive.org/web/20030810222150/https://creative-spirit.com/mandate.htm.

[3] It is unclear whether NIIPA officially seized operations in 2005 or 2006, as Chartrand writes, "various NIIPA members have provided corroborating evidence to suggest it could have been either year." Rhéanne Chartrand, *#nofilterneeded: Shining Light on the Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association, 1985-1992* (Hamilton, ON: McMaster Museum of Art, 2018), 9-11.

[4] Notable NIIPA alumni include: Richard Hill (Tuscarora), Marin Akwiranoron Loft (Mohawk), James (Jimmy) Manning (Inuit), Murray McKenzie (Cree-Métis), Shelley Niro (Mohawk), Jolene Rickard (Tuscarora), Greg Staats (Mohawk), Jeff Thomas (Onondaga), and more. Although little has been written on the history of NIIPA, scholar and curator Rhéanne Chartrand (Métis) provided a brief history of the organization's early years (1985-1992) in the exhibition catalogue for *#nofilterneeded: Shining Light on the Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association, 1985-1992.* For further reading on NIIPA's foundational years, I encourage readers to consult that text.

During the process of researching the history of NIIPA, I was fortunate to have my research coincide with an exhibition curated by Rhéanne Chartrand (Métis), Curator of Indigenous Art at the McMaster Museum of Art, titled *#nofilterneeded: Shining Light on the Native/Indian Inuit Photographers' Association (1985-1992).* The exhibition brought together for the first time in over thirty years works by nineteen NIIPA members selected from the organization's first two travelling exhibitions, *Visions* (1985) and *Silver Drum* (1986). I had the opportunity to travel to Lethbridge, Alberta with my father in November 2019 to view a traveling version of the exhibition at the University of Lethbridge Art Gallery and attend a curator's talk by Chartrand. The exhibition and talk, as well as the exhibition's extensive catalogue, complement and confirm the findings of my own research and assisted in my re-construction of the organization's early history.

I approach this research as a mixed Cayuga-settler woman. Much of NIIPA's work took place on Haudenosaunee land, and I feel it is important to honour the relationship I have with it. I grew up in Guelph, Ontario, largely disconnected from my Indigenous ancestry. Since my teenage years I have worked to re-build these connections. Art and image-making have always been a large part of who I am and this experience of researching NIIPA and travelling to Lethbridge with my father, whose family is from Six Nations, to view the exhibition, has brought me closer to my Indigenous relations and ancestors through images.

The genesis and the radicality of NIIPA lies in the organization's challenge to a history of Western photography that has exploited and objectified Indigenous subjects. At its core, NIIPA's objective – to assert control over the self-determination of Indigenous imagery – serves to counter a colonial history of representation, one in which, as former NIIPA member and curator

Richard Hill (Tuscarora) wrote, "is really an invention of the great white imagination."[5] In his book, *The Imaginary Indian* (1992) Canadian historian Daniel Francis elaborates on this "invention"[6] by stating that the 'Indian' never actually existed, but rather "began as a White man's mistake, and became a White man's fantasy."[7] Both authors suggest that the image of Indigeneity in the minds of Euro-Canadians has been entirely fabricated by the European imaginary.

The advent of photography was predated in North America by the documentation of Indigenous cultures by painters George Catlin (1796-1872) and Paul Kane (1810-1871), who were two of the earliest artists to take up the subject, believing they were saving an "entire people from extinction"[8] by preserving a visual record of a 'dying' culture before it was gone forever. In their paintings, they chose to highlight traditional lifestyles based on their "fantasy"[9] of what life was like before settler contact. While veracity of photography promised a portrayal of "Real Indians,"[10] the idealized paintings of Catlin and Kane were used as models for photographing Indigenous subjects. Western photographers sought to capture the spirit of Indigenous culture by relying on earlier stereotypes to create an image of a noble people who were thought to be disappearing. For example, the American photographer Edward S. Curtis (1868-1952) devoted more than thirty years of his life to documenting Indigenous portraits, ceremonies, stories, and songs, resulting in over 40,000 photographs and 10,000 wax cylinder recordings that were later published as *The North American Indian* (originally published in

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[5] Richard Hill, "Through the Lens Darkly," *Visions: From Contemporary Native Photographers* (Hamilton, ON: The Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association, 1986) 7.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: the Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (Vancouver, BC: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2011), 21.
[8] Ibid*,* 38.
[9] Ibid*,* 21.
[10] Richard Hill, "Through the Lens Darkly," *Visions: From Contemporary Native Photographers,* 7.

1907).[11] Curtis deliberately staged many of his images to construct a narrative of Indigenous life as fleeting and on the verge of extinction, and in doing so, rendered Indigenous peoples, their culture, and way of life a relic of the 'less civilized' past.

NIIPA came together in 1985 with the intention of working against these colonial stereotypes of Indigeneity. By actively deconstructing the colonizing gaze through taking the camera into their own hands – NIIPA members sought to replace the 'imaginary Indian' with contemporary representations of Indigenous life. Former NIIPA member and scholar Jolene Rickard (Tuscarora) asserts that NIIPA achieved visual sovereignty through the active and conscious "[deconstruction of] the colonizing gaze"[12] in their photographic work and activities. Following the lead of Rickard, I adopt her understanding of visual sovereignty in her own Haudenosaunee context as a form of "direct action,"[13] and use the term self-determination to refer to the process by which NIIPA members (re)claimed their image through the medium of photography in order to achieve visual sovereignty. My paper pieces together from disparate archives an historical narrative of NIIPA that seeks to demonstrate and honour NIIPA's pioneering role in Canadian photographic history as an agent of Indigenous self-determination, and in effect, Indigenous visual sovereignty.

I do so by narrating the little-known history of NIIPA from its origins in Hamilton's Photo Union to its eventual closure in 2005/2006 through a focus on four of NIIPA's primary publications – *Visions* (1986), *Silver Drum* (1986), *No Borders* (1991), and *Reminiscing* (2000). The following chapters – *Visions*: The Establishment of NIIPA (1983-1985), *Silver Drum*:

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[11] Mick Gidley, ed., *Edward S. Curtis and the North American Indian Project in the Field* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 5.
[12] Jolene Rickard, "Diversifying Sovereignty and the Reception of Indigenous Art," *Art Journal* 76, no. 2 (March 2017): 82. https://doi.org/10.1080/00043249.2017.1367194.
[13] Ibid.

Documenting a Community (1986-1989), *No Borders*: Losing Focus (1990-1999), and *Reminiscing*: Final Reflections (2000-2005/2006) – chronicle a talented and resilient community of Indigenous photographers, many of whom are now renowned artists and scholars in the contemporary Canadian and international art worlds. This chronicle of NIIPA's two decades of activities and advocacy for Indigenous photography does not constitute an authoritative reconstruction or definitive history of NIIPA, but rather provides an overview of the organization's major achievements gleaned from written and visual documentation to lay the groundwork for future considerations of the role NIIPA played in setting a precedent for Indigenous image-makers today.[14]

[14] At the time of this paper's writing, COVID-19 has made it impossible to access many of the images I would have liked to include in this document. I have made all efforts to include as many photographs as possible, however I encourage readers interested in viewing further contextual photographs and images to consult Anne Milne, "'NO CEES, NO PHOTOS.' Re-Inhabiting The Photographers' Union Gallery," *Hamilton Arts & Letters*, 9, no. 2 (2016-2017): https://samizdatpress.typepad.com/hal_magazine_issue_nine2/re-inhabiting-the-photographers-union-gallery-by-anne-milne-1.html and Rhéanne Chartrand, "Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association," Building Cultural Legacies Hamilton, accessed November 27, 2019, https://buildingculturallegacies.ca/artist/native-indian-inuit-photographers-association-niipa/.

# *Visions:* The Development of NIIPA (1983-1985)

## The Photo Union

In 1982, Canadian photographer Lynne Sharman (1947-2014) founded the Photo Union, a non-profit artist-run centre that sought to generate opportunities for local photographers to meet and exhibit their work. At the time, photography was still fighting to be accepted as a medium of fine art within Hamilton's arts scene, which was dominated by more traditional mediums.[15] In contrast, the Photo Union promoted more exploratory forms of artistic production and engaged in anti-racist and feminist rhetorics in their monthly newsletter, *The Photo Pipeline.*[16] Former Photo Union member Anne Milne notes that under Sharman's "activist leadership,"[17] the Photo Union positioned themselves as advocates for "not merely inclusivity […] but a real recognition of privilege and a commitment to community service rather than self-service."[18] While a number of their projects engaged Hamilton's working class, they also showed a commitment to working with Hamilton youth, holding "One-Day School of Photography"[19] courses for local high school students.

It is likely due to Sharman's involvement with youth groups that she ended up at a Sir John A. MacDonald high school art show. Here she encountered the photographs of sixteen-year-old student Yvonne Maracle. Milne writes that Sharman contacted the school's principal on September 12, 1983, and offered Maracle a position at the Photo Union through the Hamilton

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[15] Anne Milne, *Photo Re: Union: Processing a History* (Hamilton, ON: Hamilton Artists' Inc., 1993), 12.
[16] Anne Milne, "'NO CEES, NO PHOTOS.' Re-Inhabiting The Photographers' Union Gallery," *Hamilton Arts & Letters*, 9, no. 2 (2016-2017): https://samizdatpress.typepad.com/hal_magazine_issue_nine2/re-inhabiting-the-photographers-union-gallery-by-anne-milne-1.html
[17] Anne Milne, "NO CEES, NO PHOTOS."
[18] Ibid.
[19] Anne Milne, *Photo Re: Union: Processing a History*, 55.

Board of Education's Co-Op program.[20] Sharman's immediate affinity to Maracle led Maracle to later reflect that:

> [Lynne Sharman] took a great interest in Native people. I guess that she looked at me and found something herself, as her views could be expressed in a Native context and legitimized with my aid. This interest occupied Lynne's time as she developed and created programs to educate our Native group in the medium of photography. "Indians" with "cameras," this was an idea that wasn't accepted by various members of her peer group. Some questioned "why should we do this, let those who could afford it, use the medium."[21]

Photography Without a Camera

With the help of Maracle, Sharman began directing the Photo Union's energies toward the implementation of a Native photography program and on May 15, 1984, the Photo Union was granted $16,000 by the Exploration Program of the Canada Council for their project "The Photographer as Cultural Facilitator."[22] This project was intended to "give voice to minority and ethnic groups heretofore approached in an anthropological manner via documentary photography."[23] Sharman introduced the idea for this project through her manifesto, "Photography Without a Camera," published in a 1984 issue of the *Photo Pipeline*. In the manifesto, Sharman advocated for the production of images by Indigenous photographers and called upon privileged members of the photographic community, "particularly white males,"[24] to voluntarily "put aside your camera for a year or two… and pass on your skills, not your images, let someone else have access to production."[25]

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[20] Ibid*,* 57.
[21] Yvonne Maracle, "NIIPA… in the Beginning," *NIIPA,* Summer 1994, 4.
[22] Anne Milne, *Photo Re: Union: Processing a History*, 62.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Anne Milne, "NO CEES, NO PHOTOS."

Milne writes that it was around this time that many Photo Union members began to drift from the group. She claims that both underlying racism within the Photo Union and a general unwillingness to engage with the tenets of "Photography Without a Camera" caused many who had joined the group out of an interest in sharing and exhibiting their photographs to leave. Milne speculates that many Photo Union members disagreed with Sharman's vision of "Indians with Cameras" and others felt that a Native photography program should be run by Native photographers rather than by a non-Indigenous group.[26]

VISIONS: The First Conference of Native Indian Photography

By the end of 1984, there were four Indigenous photographers employed through the Photo Union: Yvonne Maracle, Brenda Mitten, Patrick (Pat) Green (Mohawk), and Valerie Green (Six Nations),[27] who together ran the Native Photography Program, delivered in partnership with the Hamilton Regional Indian Friendship Centre. Sharman's interest in supporting Indigenous photographers led her to approach the group about organizing a conference of Indigenous photography.

The early 1980s was a time of growing excitement for Indigenous art: artists Bob Boyer (Métis-Cree), Robert Houle (Saulteaux), Carl Beam (Ojibwe), Edward Poitras (Métis), and several of their contemporaries were helping bring Indigenous art to the mainstream by gaining international recognition from their inclusion in exhibitions such as *New Work By a New Generation* at the Norman MacKenzie Gallery in 1982 and *Contemporary Native American Art* at Oklahoma State University's Gardiner Art Gallery in 1983. Works of photography however, were still not being actively collected or shown by many major institutions. In the exhibition

[26] Anne Milne, *Photo Re: Union: Processing a History*, 22.
[27] Yvonne Maracle, "NIIPA… in the Beginning," 4.

catalogue for *#nofilterneeded: Shining Light on the Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association, 1985-1992,* curator Rhéanne Chartrand writes that at this time, "there was no widespread Indigenous photography movement, nor an effort to support, develop, [or] promote Indigenous photography as art."[28] When asked which photographers they would like to invite to the conference, the organizers could think of only one name: Jeff Thomas (Onondaga), a self-taught photo-based artist and curator who, as early as 1980, began vocalizing the utility of photography in confronting photo-based stereotypes of Indigenous peoples. On his series *Strong Hearts Portraits* (1982-1995), he writes (fig. 1):

> I was struck by the powerful sense of self the dancers exhibited on the powwow grounds. I also saw a link to the images made in the early twentieth century by Edward S. Curtis but, unlike the Curtis subjects, which are usually photographed against a plain backdrop and seems frozen in time, I was interested in pulling back the curtain to show the background activities that led up to the dance. I was determined to find social meaning beyond the tourist-like veneer of the exhibit.[29]

Thomas agreed to meet with the Photo Union and with his help their list of invitees grew from one photographer to fifteen. It was during these early meetings that the title of the conference, "VISIONS," was decided.[30] From here, Brenda Mitten, who was employed as the Photo Union's Co-ordinator of Documentation and Research, began calling every artist, friendship centre, and news outlet she could think of to locate and invite Indigenous artists to what they described as a "once in a lifetime conference for Native photographers … a historic event."[31]

"VISIONS: The First Conference of Native Indian Photography," co-sponsored by the Native Women's Centre, The Hamilton Regional Indian Centre, and The Photographers' Union,

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[28] Rhéanne Chartrand, "Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association," Building Cultural Legacies Hamilton, accessed November 27, 2019, https://buildingculturallegacies.ca/artist/native-indian-inuit-photographers-association-niipa/.
[29] Jeff Thomas' *Plenty Chief*, a photograph from his *Strong Hearts Portraits* series, was later exhibited as part of *Visions* in 1985. Jeff Thomas, "Strong Hearts Portrait," accessed March 13, 2020, https://jeff-thomas.ca/2014/04/strong-hearts-portraits/.
[30] Yvonne Maracle, "NIIPA… in the Beginning," 4.
[31] Ibid, 4.

was held from March 8-10, 1985 at the Photo Union Gallery in Hamilton, Ontario. Photographers, editors, writers, and students came from as far as Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Quebec to take part in this unique event.[32] Chartrand describes "VISIONS" as truly a "conference of convergence."[33] It marked the first time a group of Indigenous photographers from both Canada and the United States had gathered to discuss and share their work. Maracle notes that the main response from each participant was the same: "they thought that they were the only ones working with photography. Isolation and trying to counteract the negative stereotypical images of the past were the battle at hand."[34] The conference was successful in bringing a sense of unity to geographically disparate Indigenous photographers who showed commitment to the same goals. The two-day conference engaged participants in panel discussions, live photo critiques, slide presentations from invited guests, and the opportunity to present up to six of their own photographs (fig. 2).[35] Chartrand synthesizes the conference as representative of:

> A shared frustration and concern on the part of Indigenous image-markers with regard to how Indigenous peoples had been and were continuing to be portrayed in history books, museums and galleries, pop culture, and media (news) outlets. They felt that, for too long, Indigenous peoples had been portrayed through someone else's lens, and that it was time they took control of their image in order to contest and demystify stereotypical representations of Indigenous peoples.[36]

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[32] The following Indigenous photographers were recorded as having been in attendance: Dale Auger (Sakaw Cree), Cliff Bunnie (Métis), Pena Bonita (Apache/Seminole), Bert Crowfoot (Siksika/Saulteaux), Dorothy Chocolate (Dene), Jim Goodstriker (Blood), Patrick (Pat) Green (Mohawk), Richard (Rick) Hill (Tuscarora), Tom Hill (Six Nations), Joel Johnson (Anishinaabe), Tim Johnson (Mohawk), Martin Akwiranoron Loft (Mohawk), Douglas Maracle (Mohawk), Murray McKenzie (Cree-Métis), Lance Mitten (Seneca), Shelley Niro (Mohawk), Jolene Rickard (Tuscarora), Greg Staats (Mohawk), Charles Sheppard (Regina, SK), Bernie Shoflay (Winnipeg, MB), Jeff Thomas (Onondaga), and Lee Williams (Vancouver, BC), as well as several non-Indigenous artists and museum staff. Rhéanne Chartrand, *#nofilterneeded,* 9-11.
[33] Ibid, 11.
[34] Yvonne Maracle, "NIIPA… in the Beginning," 4.
[35] Rhéanne Chartrand, *#nofilterneeded,* 12.
[36] Ibid.

The Establishment of NIIPA

Once the conference came to a close, it was clear that an annual meeting of Indigenous photographers was of shared interest to the conference attendees who, as Maracle writes, had jointly voiced their concerns that they could not "let Indian photography stop here."[37] And so, on March 13, 1985, just two days after the conference concluded, the decision to establish the Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association (NIIPA) was made.[38] Yvonne Maracle and Brenda Mitten became NIIPA's first set of Co-Directors, and committed members Patrick Green, Valerie Green, Lance Mitten (Seneca), Sharon Smoke (Six Nations), and Martin Akwiranoron Loft (Mohawk) helped develop the name for the group.[39] Other founding members Dorothy Chocolate (Dene), Murray McKenzie (Cree-Métis), Robert (Tim) Johnson (Mohawk), Jolene Rickard, and consultant Richard Hill, formed NIIPA's first Board of Directors.[40]

Maracle and Mitten's first job in organizing NIIPA was to set forth the organization's goals and objectives. As the development and implementation of the group was a direct result of the "VISIONS" conference proceedings, many of the following objectives were a result of the collaborative discussions the conference attendees participated in. NIIPA's organizational objectives read as follows:

1. To promote a positive, realistic and contemporary image of Native Indian/Inuit people through the medium of photography.
2. To host an annual conference for Native photographers to share ideas and knowledge.
3. To inform the network via a newsletter publication and to encourage and develop critical writing skills among the Native photographic community.
4. To organize archival material and establish direct contact with other collections, galleries, educational institutions, museums and Native communities
5. To increase the visibility of Native photography in mass media publications.

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[37] Yvonne Maracle, "NIIPA… in the Beginning," 5.
[38] Rhéanne Chartrand, *#nofilterneeded,* 12.
[39] "History," Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association, last modified November 23, 2003, http://web.archive.org/web/20030810221209/http://creative-spirit.com/history.htm.
[40] Ibid.

6. To have Native photography represented on a national level through exhibitions.[41]

These goals reveal a commitment to advocating, supporting, and training Indigenous photographers as well as promoting a positive, realistic, and contemporary image of Indigenous peoples through a network of Indigenous photographers that could share, promote, and critique each others' work, with the hope that, "By using photography as a visual element, other people will be encouraged to look at the real image of Native people as they live and work in today's world."[42]

Visions: From Contemporary Native Photographers

Following the success of the "VISIONS" conference, NIIPA was given a contract by the Department of Indian Affairs to develop a tour of Indigenous photography that could "travel across the country and give people an opportunity to see Native people as [they] see [themselves] rather than in the stereotypical sense that has remained with [them] through history."[43] With the help of curator Richard Hill, NIIPA assembled the touring exhibition *Visions: From Contemporary Native Photographers,*[44] which included sixty-seven works that had been presented by attendees at the original "VISIONS" conference. These photographers included: Simon Brascoupe (Mohawk/Algonquin), Dorothy Chocolate, Valerie General, Patrick Green, Joel Johnson (Anishinaabe), Tim Johnson, Martin Akwiranoron Loft, James (Jimmy) Manning (Inuit), Douglas Maracle, Murray McKenzie, Brenda Mitten, Lance Mitten, Shelley Niro, Greg

[41] "Mandate," Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association, last modified August 10, 2003, https://web.archive.org/web/20030810222150/https://creative-spirit.com/mandate.htm.
[42] Brenda Mitten, "Introduction," *Visions: From Contemporary Native Photographers,* 3.
[43] Ibid.
[44] *Visions* toured to Native Heritage Gallery at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (Regina, Saskatchewan), Centre Eye Gallery (Calgary, Alberta), Kermode Friendship Centre (Terrace, British Columbia), Floating Gallery (Winnipeg, Manitoba), and Muse de Pointe Bleu (Point Bleu, Quebec). Richard Hill, "News about NIIPA," *Portrayals,* 1986, 1.

Staats, Morley Stewart (Cree), and Jeff Thomas. A catalogue was produced to accompany the exhibition and included an essay by Hill titled "Through the Lens Darkly" which provided a historical overview of Indigenous peoples relation to the camera – noting: "Few people have been affected by their image in the popular mind as much as the Native people of this land" (fig. 3).[45] Echoing Hill's frustrations and reiterating the organization's goal ("We are here to promote a positive, realistic and contemporary image of Native Indian/Inuit people through the medium of photography"[46]) were the artists' statements that announced the unique potential of photography in the hands of Indigenous image-makers:

> I try to capture the good side of the native people… other journalists do enough to cut us down. I try to get the whole face and all the details, especially the lines, that's what is important."[47]
>
> A photograph provides concrete, visual evidence of who we are. Through my photographs, I can accurately document people and events that are meaningful to me and perhaps someday they will be appreciated by future generations of Native people.[48]
>
> Photography affirms and poses questions of a community, thus playing an important role in community development. I believe strongly that photographs by Indians can reflect our unique view of the world. Not only is it possible, but it is our duty.[49]

## The Fall of the Photo Union

After the "VISIONS" conference, NIIPA and the Photo Union began working as parallel institutions, sharing facilities at 210 Napier Street (fig. 4). Milne writes that the Photo Union had poured so much of their energies into their Native Photography Program that after the conference, which resulted in the formation of NIIPA, the Union was left "a little empty."[50]

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[45] Richard Hill, "Through the Lens Darkly," *Visions: From Contemporary Native Photographers,* 7.
[46] Brenda Mitten, "Introduction," *Visions: From Contemporary Native Photographers*, 3.
[47] Murray McKenzie, "Artist's Statement," *Visions: From Contemporary Native Photographers*, 29.
[48] Brenda Mitten, "Artist's Statement," *Visions: From Contemporary Native Photographers*, 31.
[49] Simon Brascoupe, "Artist's Statement," *Visions: From Contemporary Native Photographers*, 11.
[50] Anne Milne, *Photo Re: Union: Processing a History*, 21.

Sharman began directing her attention away from "Photography Without a Camera" and towards the implementation of a new media and computer-based arts program. On June 20, 1985, just four months after the "VISIONS" conference, NIIPA was officially incorporated as a non-profit, artist-run organization. In less than a month, NIIPA moved out of the shared office and into a new space at 124 James Street South. Maracle noted that this change was "due to difficulties with the Photographers' Union Gallery and their administrator, Lynne Sharman."[51]

Present in both the archives of the Photo Union and of NIIPA are suspicions that much of Sharman's work towards realizing the goals of "Photography Without a Camera" was being done as a "fundraising tactic."[52] While these suspicions are speculative, these claims are supported by a letter Sharman sent to NIIPA member, Murray MacKenzie, on February 21, 1986: "ps I overheard a very funny comment the other day… we have been trying to make money 'off Indian people' …I'm not sure, but it may be an outdated cliché."[53] This claim was further supported by Milne, who writes:

> Some people say NIIPA is the Photo Union's greatest accomplishment. Neither the Photo Union or Lynne Sharman make it as Honorary Members on NIIPA's 1992 membership list. There was always this suspicion. Cynicism within both the Native and non-Native membership(s). That all of this or some of this way being done as a fundraising tactic. Whites using Natives to secure government funding. NIIPA needed to form and separate. The formation of NIIPA was, rightly, NIIPA's victory.[54]

On March 19th, 1985 Sharman wrote a letter to Judy Gouin, the Film, Photography, and Video Officer at the Ontario Arts Council, writing, "As you know, part of our mandate is planned obsolescence… The Photographers' Union is in an observer stance as we watch NIIPA become a reality,"[55] and in 1986, Milne writes: "The Union found itself embroiled with landlords

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[51] Yvonne Maracle, "Historical Overview II," *NIIPA,* Fall 1994, 13.
[52] Anne Milne, *Photo Re: Union: Processing a History*, 21.
[53] Ibid, 42.
[54] Ibid, 21.
[55] Ibid, 42.

and lawyers and lock-ins, charges of non-payment of salaries, artists' fees, damaged and disappearing photographs, [and] loss of documentation."[56] The combination of these events led the Photo Union to its closure later that year.

Despite NIIPA's eventual separation from the Photo Union, Sharman continued to be recognized by NIIPA's members as being a key figure in the organization's early development. As Maracle writes, her time with the Photo Union "was a great opportunity for me to learn in a career field that interested me […] this was the start of something that would change my life."[57] Maracle carried these lessons with her as she and Mitten became NIIPA's Co-Directors, noting that, "the first couple of years proved to be both adventurous and stressful. Starting an organization was one thing, but keeping it afloat was another. Between Brenda and myself, we worked to keep the dream alive because it was a worthy dream"[58] (fig. 5).

[56] Anne Milne, "'NO CEES, NO PHOTOS.'
[57] Yvonne Maracle, "NIIPA… in the Beginning," 4.
[58] Ibid, 6.

# *Silver Drum*: Documenting a Community (1986-1989)

> *"In September 1985, I had the opportunity of attending a conference at Princeton University entitled, "The Photograph and the American Indian." As I expected, it was an ideal place to meet other Native photographers, and I met Betty Crouse. Betty asked me if I knew Jonas Snow and I said, "Yes, that was my grandfather, my mother's father." As it turned out, Betty and I were related through a solid bloodline as Jonas Snow was her great-uncle. Meeting Betty was special, not only because we were related but also because she had a photograph of Jonas. This was a black and white photograph taken in his early years. The photograph was reproduced and copies given to my mother and her brother, Windsor Snow. The happiness the photograph of their father brought to them will always be remembered by me."*
>
> – Brenda Mitten[59]

## The Photograph and the American Indian

In the fall of 1985, Brenda Mitten, Yvonne Maracle, and Martin Akwiranoron Loft were invited to attend the conference "The Photograph and the American Indian" at Princeton University. The three-day event included presentations by both Indigenous photographers and non-Indigenous scholars in relation to the "photographic record of the 'Indian' image."[60] Towards the end of the conference, the Indigenous photographers were given the opportunity to respond to the proceedings and to discuss their work. "Individually and collectively [they] questioned the value of historical images, arguing that such images depicted the 'white man's Indian,"[61] by upholding stereotypes that rendered them "primitive, savage, and ahistorical."[62] Their opinions were dismissed by the non-Indigenous academics, which only further reinforced the need for an organization like NIIPA. Mitten, Maracle, and Loft used this opportunity to sign up the American-based Indigenous photographers in attendance who expressed a shared desire in

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[59] Brenda Mitten, "Connections," *Silver Drum: Five Native Photographers* (Hamilton, ON: The Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association, 1986) 14-15.
[60] Rhéanne Chartrand, *#nofilterneeded,* 19.
[61] Ibid, 20.
[62] Ibid.

reclaiming their image: Larry McNeil (Tlingit/Nishlca), Victor Masayesva (Hopi), Jesse Cooday (Tlingit), Carm Little Turtle (Apache/Tarahumara), Chris Spotted Eagle, and Herbert Yazzie.[63]

"VISIONS" and "The Photograph and the American Indian" were the first of many conferences that brought Indigenous image-makers from all points of the compass together to "listen to the drum singers, to listen to each other, and to look at each other's photographs"[64] (fig. 6). Isolation and the counteraction of negative stereotypes were still the battles at hand, but these gatherings revealed more than the shared desire to take control of the image of Indigenous peoples; they revealed the highly relational nature of their work. Attending the conference at Princeton did not only connect Mitten to Crouse – it connected Mitten to her grandfather. This interaction led her to consider photography's ability to link generations, and in the spring of 1986, she collaborated with Sandra Semchuk of Forest City Gallery in London, Ontario, to co-curate NIIPA's second touring exhibition, which did exactly that.

Silver Drum: Five Native Photographers

*Silver Drum: Five Native Photographers* brought the archival work of the late Tlingit photographer George Johnson (1884-1972) together with contemporary image-makers Dorothy Chocolate, Richard Hill, Murray McKenzie, and Jolene Rickard. [65] By pairing four contemporary photographers with an "elder/ancestor"[66] photographer, the exhibition hoped to convey the artistic concerns of Indigenous photography at large. As with *Visions*, a catalogue was produced to accompany the exhibit which included essays from Mitten, Hill, and Semchuk on the themes

[63] Ibid.
[64] Sandra Semchuk, "The Silver Drum," *Silver Drum: Five Native Photographers,* 33.
[65] The exhibition opened in London on April 25th, 1986 and toured to White Water Gallery (North Bay, ON), The Photographer's Gallery (Saskatoon, SK), Art Gallery of Whitehorse Public Library (Whitehorse, YK), The Pas Friendship Centre (Pas, MB), Gallery 44 (Toronto, ON), and the Museum of the American Indian (New York City, NY). Rhéanne Chartrand, *#nofilterneeded,* 20.
[66] Ibid.

of connection, community, and the future of Indigenous image-making (fig. 7). In his essay, "Photography's Next Era," Hill posed the question, "What is unique to photography done by Native artists?"[67] He answered:

> It is not like describing any artistic movement or school of photo thought. It is not seen in technique. There is an interesting bond between Native photo-artists that focuses on changing social thinking, correcting the image of the Indian and Inuit in the Great White Imagination. Native photography is regenerating the power of the photograph to influence thought, to break down stereotypes, and to enlighten the viewer.[68]

George Johnson was a self-taught photographer who documented his community in the Yukon from 1910-1950.[69] What Johnson's photographs present are not romantic renderings of the past, but modern views of contemporary life in the North (fig. 8). As Hill writes, Johnson's images "may not be earth-shattering, but [they are] uniquely different in both intent and content"[70] to the work of his colonial contemporaries. Johnson's work showcased the realities of life in his community and was created with the intent of remaining within it: Johnson didn't leave after shooting his 'Indian series,' he was a part of every image he took and remained in the North until his death in 1972. Johnson's photographs were passed hand-to-hand and became, "like traditional art, a part of daily life,"[71] remaining in the homes of the subjects they depicted. These photographs constructed narratives of family and community that existed to preserve the past and leave behind a visual archive for him and his relations to see and trace their interconnectedness. The prints of Johnson's photographs exhibited in *Silver Drum* were made by Robin Armour, a darkroom technician working with archival material in the Yukon, while the original images remained within the community.[72]

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[67] Richard Hill, "Photography's Next Era," *Silver Drum: Five Native Photographers,* 20.
[68] Ibid, 20-21.
[69] Sandra Semchuk, "The Silver Drum," *Silver Drum: Five Native Photographers,* 33.
[70] Richard Hill, "Photography's Next Era," *Silver Drum: Five Native Photographers,* 20.
[71] Sandra Semchuk, "The Silver Drum," *Silver Drum: Five Native Photographers,* 34.
[72] Ibid, 35.

The four contemporary photographers selected for the exhibition, Dorothy Chocolate, Richard Hill, Murray McKenzie, and Jolene Rickard, echo what Semchuk describes as Johnson's "intense personal concern with the communal."[73] Their images, depicting friends and family cooking, tanning caribou hide, and embracing their children, equally demonstrate the photographers' close relationships to both their subjects and their communities. What connects the five photographers is not an artistic technique or style but is rather, as Hill writes, the understanding that "the Indian behind the camera is connected to the Indian in front of the camera."[74] In this way the contemporary images in *Silver Drum* operate similarly to Johnson's.

When I travelled with my father to Lethbridge, Alberta to see *#nofilterneeded: Shining Light on the Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association (1986-1992)* in November 2019, he immediately recognized names and places from within his community of Six Nations (fig. 9). The images upon our viewing of them, while not having been passed hand-to-hand, became similar to that of a family photo album. These photographs, representing material manifestations of our relations, work to weave together past, present, and future generations. The connections made by Indigenous photographers while taking photographs and the connections made by the community when sharing, viewing, and discussing them, were at the heart of NIIPA and the reason for the publication of their first newsletter in 1986.

## Our Portrayals: NIIPA's Newsletter

[73] Ibid, 33.
[74] Richard Hill, "Photography's Next Era," *Silver Drum: Five Native Photographers,* 20.

The purpose of NIIPA's newsletter, temporarily titled "Our Portrayals" from 1986-1987 (later titled "Crossroads" in 1988-1989 and "NIIPA" in 1990-2006) was to inform NIIPA members on current events, calls for submissions, and articles concerning the emerging world of Indigenous photography, in addition to creating a network for readers by encouraging "Native photographers to submit manuscripts, reviews, and glossy, black & white photographs for possible publication."[75] The newsletter was published quarterly and sent to "all NIIPA members; local, regional and national Indian Friendship Centres; photography galleries; funding agencies; federal and political representatives; and limited distribution to locations in the United States"[76] until NIIPA's closure in 2005/2006. The Director's Reports (later titled "News from Management" in 1994-2003) included in each newsletter called readers to action by encouraging photographers to join the dialogue and better establish a sense of community amongst Indigenous photographers:

> Take full advantage of this and write to us about your concerns, new photographic techniques, native issues, or your beefs. All letters will be recorded and responded to. But remember, we need you to make this newsletter a communication vehicle to provide information to those who feel that they may be working in isolation.[77]

While I had access to almost all issues of the newsletter published between 1988-1996 through the holdings of the Toronto Reference Library, there were fewer newsletters published between 1997-2001 on record, and I was unable to locate any issues published after 2002.

Annual Conferences: 1986, 1987

Shortly after the opening of *Silver Drum,* NIIPA held their second annual conference "Four Corners" at the National Exhibition Centre/Centre in for Indian Art in Thunder Bay, Ontario. Speakers included some of NIIPA's newest members – Larry McNeil and Victor Massesyesva

[75] Richard Hill, "News about NIIPA," *Portrayals,* 1986, 1.
[76] Rhéanne Chartrand, *#nofilterneeded,* 17.
[77] Yvonne Maracle, "Director's Report," *Crossroads,* January/February 1989, 4.

Jr., along with several of NIIPA's founding members – Murray McKenzie, Martin Akwiranoron Loft, Joel Johnson, and Yvonne Maracle.[78] It was here that Tim Johnson introduced the idea of a member directory to better facilitate communications between galleries and NIIPA photographers. The directory provided cultural and technical information including the "national heritage, educational background, artistic accomplishments, recent exhibition listings, referral interests, photographic approach, and samples of each photographer's work"[79] and was distributed to art galleries, cultural centres, government agencies and Native organizations that contacted the photographers for a variety of projects.[80] Although not completed until 1988 (and later updated in 1996), Chartrand argues the directory's creation demonstrates – in addition to the organization's newsletter – NIIPA's goal of fostering connections between Indigenous photographers and the broader artistic community, demonstrating NIIPA's commitment to finding work for their members both internally and externally. [81] For example, in a 1989 issue of the newsletter NIIPA member Patricia Deadman (Six Nations) wrote:

> On a personal note, due to the distribution of the newsletter, I have graciously accepted an offer for a solo exhibition to include my prints and paintings, to be held next March/April 1990, in Thunder Bay. Thank-you NIIPA for the exposure![82]

It was also at this time that NIIPA began hosting regular photography workshops at their office in Hamilton, facilitated by their more experienced members: Murray McKenzie, Joel Johnson, Tim Johnston, and Shelley Niro (fig. 10).[83] These practical workshops became a key offering demonstrating NIIPA's willingness to include amateur photographers in their mission to

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[78] "History," Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association.
[79] Yvonne Maracle, "About the Directory," *NIIPA Professional Directory,* edited by Tim Johnson (Hamilton, ON: The Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association, 1988), 3.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Rhéanne Chartrand, *#nofilterneeded,* 22.
[82] Patricia Deadman, "Opinion," *Crossroads,* September/October 1989, 11.
[83] Richard Hill, "News about NIIPA," 1.

increase the visibility of Indigenous photography.[84] It is for this reason that their third annual conference, held at the University of Lethbridge, included hands-on workshops with topics ranging from hand-tinting to photo collage.[85] This conference was held in conjunction with the Native Artists Symposium organized by the Society for Canadian Artists of Native Ancestry (SCANA), giving conference attendees the opportunity to connect with leading Indigenous artists including Carl Beam, David General (Mohawk/Oneida), Robert Houle, Alex Janvier (Dene/Sautleayx), and Daphne Odjig (Odawa/Potawatomi), who were participating in the symposium.[86] Richard Hill's inclusion in the "International Connections – Realities of Native Art in the U.S.A."[87] panel is emblematic of the dialogue NIIPA intended to facilitate within the broader Indigenous arts scene. NIIPA was committed to "[establishing] direct contact with other collections, galleries, educational institutions, museums and Native communities"[88] in order to affirm photography's place within the Indigenous fine arts landscape.

OAC Advisory Feedback

In 1988 NIIPA was presented was two significant challenges. Firstly, Co-Founder/Co-Director Brenda Mitten took a leave of absence from the organization and later resigned, leaving Yvonne Maracle as the sole director. Secondly, NIIPA was denied funding from the Ontario Arts Council (OAC) based on their request for $15,000 to support their operational costs on the grounds that

[84] "Mandate," Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association, last modified August 10, 2003.
[85] Rhéanne Chartrand, *#nofilterneeded,* 24.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Alfred Young Man, ed., *Networking: Proceedings from National Native Indian Artists' Symposium IV* (Society for Canadian Artists of Native Ancestry, 1987), 52.
[88] "Mandate," Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association.

their work was deemed "totally unsophisticated"[89] by the OAC advisors. The feedback came in the form of a one and a half page letter, which stated in part:

> NIIPA's application attempts to put a brave front on a desperate situation. The task it has set out for itself is far beyond its means to achieve. […] The board is a reflection of an interested, but totally unsophisticated community. Most of the exhibitions are documentary or journalistic work, which is valid, but there appear to be few resources within the community to bring critical assessments to their own work. This is still very much a development effort. […] There seems to be so much yet to do in terms of discovering themselves, learning to use a medium which is much distrusted. It is a long-term proposition. … This is not an organization which is ready for operations support from the OAC.[90]

This feedback reveals the OAC's inability to understand the need for a self-determinant Indigenous photography: while much of NIIPA's members' work was documentary, it was necessarily so in order to establish the groundwork for future photographic experimentation. As evidenced by the planning of NIIPA's first conference "VISIONS," the primary issue the organization was working to address was the lack of grandfather photographers. As Maracle writes, "unlike the history of photography which has been around for over 150 years, Native people have only been using the medium for the past 60 to 70 years."[91]

Maracle decided to bring the OAC's feedback with her to NIIPA's fourth annual conference, held in Hamilton, Ontario.[92] The goal of the conference was to re-examine NIIPA's mandate set in 1985 in response to the feedback they had received. Maracle invited David Craig, a representative from the OAC, to sit in and listen to the members discuss the rejection of their request for funding.[93] They wanted to facilitate a discussion on how to grow as an organization

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[89] Lisa Celotto, "Thanks For the Advice: O.A.C. Denies Operations Funding to NIIPA," *Fuse Magazine,* November/December 1988, 11.
[90] "Advisory Comments (from OAC report)," *Conference Summary Report of the 4th Annual Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association Photography Conference* (Hamilton, ON: Native/Indian Inuit Photographers' Association, 1989), 7.
[91] Yvonne Maracle, "Historical Overview II," 13.
[92] "History," Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association, last modified November 23, 2003.
[93] Ibid.

and what to change in order to secure future funding in addition to emphasizing the importance of documentary photography within their communities. Various members stated:

> I really feel there are some of us who really realize what this organization means to us as a people… So it is critical right now that we deal with ourselves, our life, through the camera, through video, through all of these expressions and when we do come together as a community, we have all of these visual voices clamouring about on the back of the turtle. The next generation that comes, they will now have a visual dialogue that we put into place for them.[94]

> I have seen so many changes in the lives of our Native people. Along with the enjoyment of photographing children in their natural environment, I feel it is important for our future to document the every day life of our people.[95]

Other members echoed their agreement with the OAC's comments and their desire to demarcate senior photographers from NIIPA's less experienced members:

> I am thinking the first few years of the organization has really been a starting point to network photographers. We have taken anybody who wants to be a member. When they come in, if you're Native, if you're a photographer, we will try to get you an exhibit – trying to give you something for joining the group. And I think, that has created a perception or standard problem because when we came up with a catalogue, we have mixed with the photographers like [Pena Bonita], who has been doing it for years, with people who are just starting out.[96]

Future Directions

The conference concluded with both NIIPA and the OAC better understanding each other's positions, resulting in a more positive relationship between the organizations. A new set of priorities was established by NIIPA members detailing their strategies to grow the organization, including increasing the number of travelling exhibitions and increasing publication of the

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[94] Jolene Rickard, "Day One – Morning: O.A.C. Constructive Criticism," *Conference Summary Report of the 4th Annual Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association Photography Conference*, 10.
[95] Bernice Morrison, "Artists Statement," *Conference Summary Report of the 4th Annual Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association Photography Conference,* 17.
[96] Tim Johnson, "Day Two – Morning: Future Directions," *Conference Summary Report of the 4th Annual Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association Photography Conference,* 23.

newsletter from quarterly to bimonthly.[97] These changes led the organization to successfully obtain three-year funding from the Canada Council for the Arts (CCA), allowing them to purchase a computer and grow their staff with the addition of a Photo-Technician and Researcher who together implemented a Slide Library and Resource Centre.[98]

[97] "Day Two – Afternoon: Setting Priorities," *Conference Summary Report of the 4th Annual Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association Photography Conference,* 24-25.
[98] "History," Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association.

# *No Borders*: Losing Focus (1990-1999)

## Expanding NIIPA

To accommodate NIIPA's increase in staff in 1990, the organization moved to a larger facility at 134 James Street South, just two doors down from their original office.[99] Here they had access to a ground level suite with large windows. They renovated the front area to house the gallery, with hardwood floors and track lighting, while the remainder of the rooms were used as office space. Volunteers converted the basement into a darkroom, allowing them to expand their services to include darkroom workshops and rentals. It was at this time that members elected a new Board of Directors: Patricia Deadman, Shelley Niro, Russell Hill, Larry McNeil, Millicent Knapp, Harry Tonemah, and Larry Gus.[100] These individuals "contributed their expertise in the field of photography"[101] and Maracle felt it was a good time to expand their mandate, adding the following organizational objectives on August 12th, 1991:

1. To provide a forum for greater public exposure of Native photography on a national level.
2. To foster greater public appreciation of Native photography and artistic talent.
3. To raise the artistic standards of Native photography for the benefit of the entire community.
4. To broaden non-Native understanding of Native culture through photography.
5. To host an annual Native Indian/Inuit photography conference for all members and non-members to share ideas and knowledge of photography through the use of slide presentations, exhibits, formal discussions and analysis.
6. To link the network with a newsletter to encourage and develop critical writing skills among members of the Native/Indian Inuit photographic community and others.
7. To produce the newsletter publication on a regular basis to provide up-to-date information regarding photography so as to expose Native Indian/Inuit photography to Native photographers, to members of the organization and to members of the community at large.[102]

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[99] Yvonne Maracle, "Historical Overview II," 11.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Yvonne Maracle, "NIIPA…the 90's," *NIIPA*, Winter/Spring 1994-1995, 11.
[102] "Mandate," Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association.

No Borders: Works by Four North American Native Photographers

NIIPA introduced their third touring exhibition, *No Borders,* which featured the work of Indigenous photographers Pena Bonita, Patricia Deadman, Joe Shebagegit (Ojibwe), and Richard Ray Whitman (Yuchi-Muscogee Creek) in the summer of 1991. Similarly to *Visions* and *Silver Drum*, a catalogue was produced to accompany the exhibition, bringing attention to NIIPA photographers whose work dealt with experimental and mixed media image-making. In the catalogue, Maracle wrote, "The concept of 'No Borders' came from the idea of relaxed restrictions. The freedom of expression for Native photographers to experiment with the medium of photography with ease. To compliment photography with added medias to enhance the original photograph or idea."[103] Another key feature of the exhibition was the refusal of colonial borders, with two of the artists (Bonita and Whitman) being American-based. The inclusion of these photographers demonstrates NIIPA's commitment to addressing the image of Indigenous peoples across all of Turtle Island, not just within their communities.

Annual Conferences: 1991, 1992

NIIPA's seventh annual conference took place at their new facility at 134 James Street South in the fall of 1991, giving the organization the opportunity to showcase their new space. Maracle writes, "Many of our old members were pleasantly surprised and congratulated the staff for the fine job. This was a burst of positive energy directed at the conference proceedings and things began with a blast."[104] Conference attendees discussed many aspects of Indigenous photography, including the important role NIIPA had in its development since their founding. Maracle notes,

[103] Yvonne Maracle, "No Borders," *No Borders: Works by Four North American Native Photographers* (Hamilton, ON: Native/Indian Inuit Photographers' Association, 1991), 5.
[104] Ibid.

"Not only has the organization grown with time, but the photographers themselves have progressed tremendously. They are exhibiting more work on creative aspects in relation to the subject matter but always hold, the documentary component close to the heart."[105] Echoing the theme of *No Borders* and following the recommendations of several conference attendees, NIIPA decided to broaden its scope by introducing a video department as well as take on shows in their in-house gallery featuring the work of other mediums, including an exhibition of 40 sculptures by Indigenous artists in the fall of 1991.[106]

It was also at this conference that Carol Hill (Mohawk), who was hired as NIIPA's Project Co-Ordinator, announced that they would be coordinating a photographic book/exhibition project to be published in response to the Columbus Quincentenary the following year. The project, *See Through Our Eyes: First Nations Perspectives*, would be "the biggest photographic book on First Nation people of today […] designed to illustrate how Native Americans see themselves 500 years after contact with the European culture."[107] Hill adds that, "up to 30,000 submissions are expected, from which a jury of respective Native photographers and curators will select the book and exhibition material."[108] The book and exhibition were scheduled to launch on Columbus Day in 1992, but were delayed for several years due to the project's scope:

> When we had agreed to take on this project in 1992, I didn't realize that it would be such a large undertaking. Every aspect within the project has been a long process. Whether it was getting slide film for the photographers, getting appropriate quotes and descriptions or just making the final selections of the images to be used, all seemed to be an endless task.[109]

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[105] Yvonne Maracle, "6th Annual Native Conference," *NIIPA*, Winter 1991, 6.
[106] Edwina Hylton, "NIIPA Sculpture Show," *NIIPA,* Fall 1991, 1.
[107] Carol Hill, "Update," *NIIPA,* Fall 1991, 4.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Yvonne Maracle, "See Through Our Eyes: Project Update," *NIIPA,* Summer 1995, 22.

NIIPA's eighth annual conference, "Reclaiming Our Past, Promoting Our Present, Controlling Our Future*,"* took place from September 25-27, 1992, at the Museum of Civilization in Gatineau, Quebec. The conference focused on artist presentations and discussions around the theme of "Documentary Photography vs. Fine Art Photography."[110] The conference coincided with two landmark Indigenous art exhibitions mounted at the same time, *INDIGENA* at the Canadian Museum of Civilization and *Land, Spirit, Power* at the National Gallery of Canada.[111] Tours of these exhibitions were provided to interested NIIPA members, increasing their exposure to other mediums within contemporary Indigenous art.

In the years following the 1991 and 1992 conferences, NIIPA expanded their programming to include training in a variety of career fields relating to the arts: computer programming, graphics and design, writing, video production, and arts administration. Maracle writes, "These programs served dual purposes because [they] helped NIIPA complete projects and trainees were provided practical work opportunities."[112] At their height, NIIPA employed a total of fifteen people, the majority of which were largely dedicated to the *See Through Our Eyes: First Nations Perspectives* book project.

NIIPA's 10-Year Anniversary

In 1995, NIIPA celebrated their tenth anniversary, releasing a series of newsletters that chronicled the history of the organization and scheduling a conference titled "10 Years in the Making" to reflect this milestone. However, in the 1995 Fall/Winter issue of NIIPA's newsletter, Maracle announced that the Ontario Arts Council (OAC) received an overall cut of 10% in their

[110] Yvonne Maracle, "NIIPA's 8th Annual Conference," *NIIPA,* Fall 1992, 4.
[111] Rhéanne Chartrand, *#nofilterneeded,* 33-34.
[112] Yvonne Maracle, "NIIPA…the 90's," 13.

funding, forcing them to reduce the number of organizations they supported.[113] While NIIPA did not receive any cuts through the OAC, NIIPA made the decision to concentrate on new initiatives that could generate revenue for the organization in the future.[114] Maracle also announced that the 10-year anniversary conference would be postponed to early 1996 to coincide with the opening of the *See Through Our Eyes* exhibition at the Hamilton Art Gallery. The *See Through Our Eyes* book was never published as a result of limited human and financial resources.[115] This year marked a change in NIIPA's tone as the newsletter began to reflect the organization's exhaustion brought on by their ever-expanding programming. To fundraise, NIIPA began vending photographs and posters at local Hamilton events such as National Aboriginal Day, powwows, art markets, and even the World Cycling Championship in 2003.[116] They also began selling calling cards through their newsletter, with each subsequent issue updating members on the financial strains the organization was facing.

Cuts to Operational Funding and the Resignation of Yvonne Maracle

In 1996, NIIPA lost $11,000 in funding from the Canada Council and received just $20,000 to support their operational budget in 1997. Maracle announced this in the 1997 Spring/Summer issue of the newsletter, writing:

> We appear to be heading backwards instead of forward. This represents a loss of $26,000 from Council over the past two years. As we strive to develop new programming that meets the needs of our today's photographers, we seem to be beating our heads against a wall and not receiving the recognition for much of our hard work. I find it hard maintaining a positive outlook for NIIPA to have a bright future with the cuts and the current deficit in which we have been operating in. How can we manage

[113] Yvonne Maracle, "News from Management," *NIIPA,* Fall/Winter 1995, 4.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Rhéanne Chartrand, *#nofilterneeded,* 34.
[116] Carol Hill, "Update from Administrative Director," *NIIPA,* Winter/Spring 2002/2003, 22.

> to expand? All our creative energy is being used up trying to operate with little funds.[117]

In order to offset costs, Maracle announced that NIIPA would have to move into a smaller space, resulting in limited facilities and programming for their members. On this move, Maracle wrote, "We will not be able to offer immediate darkroom space, there will be some limitations as to video and editing, and a shortage of resource and working space,"[118] adding that NIIPA would have to rely more heavily on volunteers to keep the organization open and that she herself would have to be laid off for a three month period. Maracle began her Director's report "Greetings to all from the 'laid off' Director of NIIPA"[119] in the following issue, writing:

> "To cut or not to cut" this is always the question being asked these days. As a result, it has been a difficult time for the Arts. As an artist and administrator, I must admit, I am continually preparing myself for the time when cuts will direct me to prospect for another job: but are there any real jobs out there? The market for artists are changing drastically. It is an economical trying time for us.[120]

Two years later on May 1st, 1999, Yvonne Maracle officially resigned from her position as Director of NIIPA. Carol Hill announced this change in the Spring/Summer 1999 newsletter, and announced the board's implementation of Steven Loft as Program Director and herself as Administrative Director.[121] On Maracle's departure, Loft wrote:

> As an artist, Yvonne broke new ground and earned the respect of her peers. She was an outspoken administrator, co-founder of this organization and a strong leader in the Native community here in Hamilton. She led this Organization through the good times and the bad. Watched it grow and guided it as it became a dynamic and important centre for Native artists and artistic production. In many ways, Yvonne was NIIPA, and it is hard even now to think of the organization without thinking about Yvonne.[122]

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[117] Yvonne Maracle, "News from Management," *NIIPA*, Spring/Summer 1997, 5.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Yvonne Maracle, "News from Management," *NIIPA*, Fall 1997, 4.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Carol Hill, "News from Management," *NIIPA*, Spring/Summer 1999, 4.
[122] Steven Loft, "View from the Edge," *NIIPA*, Spring/Summer 1999, 6.

# *Reminiscing*: Final Reflections (2000-2005/2006)

> *"What used to amaze me was attending the Longhouse on the reserve: I would dance in the morning, jump on a plane and all of a sudden be in New York City at some kind of museum meeting. The ability to bridge those worlds amazes me. I think what Native photography deals with is, rather than being victims of two worlds, we become survivors."*
>
> – Richard Hill[123]

## NIIPA's Closure

Following Yvonne Maracle's resignation from her position as Director of NIIPA in 1999, it was the job of Carol Hill (Administrative Director) and Steven Loft (Program Director) to keep the organization afloat. The two thanked readers in their first newsletter without Maracle in the spring of 2000, "for [their] dedicated support towards the organization throughout the years,"[124] and announced they had submitted numerous applications to various funding agencies in order to commemorate and celebrate NIIPA's 15-year anniversary. This resulted in the publication of a catalogue titled *Reminiscing* later that year. The catalogue featured images and guest essays on the work of NIIPA and its photographers from former staff and members, including Maracle herself, Richard Hill, Murray McKenzie, and Larry McNeil. *Reminiscing* provided an important pause for reflection during a period of great challenge for the organization. Maracle had just resigned, and the group was finding themselves in immense financial strain from which they would never recover.

*Reminiscing*, to the best of my knowledge, is the last major document NIIPA produced, honouring and chronicling for one last time, the contributions the organization had made to the field of contemporary Indigenous photography. Following the publication of *Reminiscing*, I was

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[123] Richard Hill, "Rick Hill," in *Reminiscing* (Hamilton, ON: The Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association, 2000) 18.
[124] Carol Hill, "News from Administration Director," *NIIPA,* Spring 2000, 7.

only able to locate two issues of the newsletter, Winter-Spring 2000-2001 and Winter-Spring 2002-2003, both of which only further reiterated the financial insecurity the organization was facing. Due to the lack of textual and visual materials past the year 2000, I will be addressing *Reminiscing* as the final project in NIIPA's history although the organization continued their operational activities, albeit at a smaller, more local scale, until their official closure six years later.

Reminiscing: Reflections from Yvonne Maracle

*Reminiscing* begins with a five-page report from Maracle where she reflects on her time as NIIPA's Director, detailing the continuous problems they faced with funding and the many reasons she felt it was her time to move on from the organization. She begins her report by stating:

> When I think of NIIPA, I think about the many people who have passed through its doors and those who have contributed much to the overall growth of the agency […] I feel that I have contributed much to the efforts of training approximately 50 people over my 14 years and that thought brings me some peace of mind. I find it reassuring that I have worked with many people to reach their own individual aspirations, at the same time producing qualified cultural workers who continue to contribute to the arts in some way. Of all the accomplishments that I have been involved with through NIIPA, it has been the "hands on training" approach that I value most of all. To know people in the early years, when they too were growing and developing, all of this gives me strength and knowledge that I too have accomplished something by bringing additional Native artists to mainstream.[125]

When Maracle first became involved in photography in the mid-1980s she was "amazed that there were so few role models or well known Contemporary Native Photographers that [she] could look up to for guidance and support,"[126] making it difficult to organize the first Indigenous photography conference in 1985. "VISIONS" made it clear that there was an interest among

[125] Yvonne Maracle, "Yvonne Maracle," *Reminiscing*, 11.
[126] Ibid, 11.

Indigenous image-makers to form a network to support and encourage each other's work. The first battle they had at hand was to counter this lack of awareness of well-known Indigenous photographers. Training and resource support quickly became NIIPA's focus as they worked to create opportunities for their members to not only learn the medium, but to display their work on a local, national, and international scale.

As Tim Johnson stated in 1988: "We have taken anybody who wants to be a member. When they come in, if you're Native, if you're a photographer, we will try to get you an exhibit."[127] NIIPA's member directory, in-house and travelling exhibitions, annual conferences, and the frequent calls for submissions scattered throughout their newsletters made it clear that concern for success of their members was at the heart of the organization. Maracle truly wanted to see NIIPA members succeed in the field of contemporary art. Once they began achieving such recognition, she also advocated for them to move on and flourish in their individual careers, writing that "Management had taken the approach of 'community involvement' and always looked at NIIPA as a 'Stepping Stone' for emerging Native Artists who needed a culturally appropriate environment in which to grow and develop before immersing themselves fully into mainstream art."[128]

Reminiscing: Reflections from Murray McKenzie and Richard Hill

Murray McKenzie was one of NIIPA's more established members in the early years, and *Reminiscing* pays tribute to his many contributions to the organization as both a member photographer and Board of Directors member. He writes that he remembered receiving an

[127] Tim Johnson, "Day Two – Morning: Future Directions," *Conference Summary Report of the 4th Annual Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association Photography Conference,* 23.
[128] Yvonne Maracle, "Yvonne Maracle," *Reminiscing*, 13.

invitation to "VISIONS," and thinking "I knew something good was going from the start. Yvonne and Brenda were so enthusiastic and sincere."[129] McKenzie's exhibitions have since been viewed extensively around the world, and his images have been included in numerous publications such as *Photo Life Magazine*, *US Camera*, *Toronto Star*, and *Manitoba Nature Magazine*.[130] Despite the attention he received, McKenzie maintained humble connections to his community, stating that: "It's really thrilling for me, not for myself personally, but for the Native people that I've been trying to show. Because these are the people you never hear about, and they are the backbone of the Native people."[131]

Richard Hill's reflection on NIIPA and the state of Indigenous photography echoes McKenzie's concern with maintaining a balance between community advocacy and artistic success:

> I am very pleased on one hand that Native photographers are finally getting recognition. There have been several major exhibitions and programs in the last ten years that have pushed it to the forefront. I am disappointed by the fact that success sometimes seems to ruin us. See, I am not a fan of the artist as elitist, that because I am an artist I am better than you. But it happens: people get an exhibition, they get written about, their work starts to sell. Pretty soon they don't like hanging out with the "low life" Indians. I still think that Native art, whether it's photography, or whatever, is only as good as the people in the community believe it to be. […] The big issue in my mind is trying to define who we are as real people today. We are not romanticized stereotypes of the past. We have a lot of difficult issues to face. We are trying to explore the issues of contemporary reality verses perceived reality. Even though I believe a camera can lie, in our case sometimes we are trying to show the other side of the story.[132]

Hill goes on to note that his attention to NIIPA "has really dropped off in the past few years"[133] as he too had been busy with other opportunities and projects, including consultant and curatorial

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[129] "Murray McKenzie," *Reminiscing,* 33.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Richard Hill, "Rick Hill," *Reminiscing*, 18-19.
[133] Ibid.

work that he found to be "stronger than the egotistical need to produce art."[134] Since his time with NIIPA, Hill has continued to be an outspoken advocate for Indigenous rights, speaking at numerous schools and events on Haudenosaunee culture and teachings, namely that of the wampum, and working for many years as the Senior Project Coordinator of the Deyohahá:ge Indigenous Knowledge Centre at Six Nations Polytechnic (Ohsweken, ON).[135] Hill went on to receive an honourary doctorate from McMaster University in 2016 for his immense contributions to "the resurgence of Indigenous knowledge at home and abroad, as a practicing artist, cultural historian, teaching elder, researcher, community leader, curator, art historian and speaker,"[136] honouring Hill's lifelong dedication to research and learning.

NIIPA's Legacy and Member Biographies

Since participating in NIIPA, like Hill and McKenzie, many members have gone on to pursue professional careers in the arts. Yvonne Maracle has continued to use art and advocacy as tools for telling the stories of Indigenous peoples in Hamilton. After serving as NIIPA's Director, she briefly operated her own Native Art Gallery, "Sleeping Bear's Hollow,"[137] before working with the De dwa da dehs nye>s Aboriginal Health Centre and later with the Social Planning Research Council in Hamilton.[138] Maracle continues to be an active artist, and has maintained involvement on various art juries for both the Canada Council and Ontario Arts Council as well as serving on numerous Boards, including the Hamilton Regional Indian Centre, the Mohawk College Arts

[134] Ibid.
[135] "Speakers," Six Nations Polytechnic, accessed March 23, 2020, https://www.snpolytechnic.com/c4c/speakers.
[136] "Hamilton-Born Media Stars Among Honourary Degree Recipients," McMaster University, accessed March 23, 2020, https://dailynews.mcmaster.ca/articles/hamilton-born-media-stars-among-honorary-degree-recipients/.
[137] Carol Hill, "News from Administration Director," 7.
[138] "Yvonne Maracle," Hamilton Public Library, accessed March 23, 2020, https://www.hpl.ca/inductee/yvonne-maracle.

Committee, and the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction.[139] In 2018, Maracle was inducted into the Hamilton Public Library's Gallery of Distinction for the honour and value her service has brought the city. Here she was described as "a primary figure in improving life for Indigenous people in Hamilton."[140]

Jolene Rickard, who was involved with NIIPA in their early years, went on to receive her Ph.D. at the University of Buffalo in 1996, and now teaches in both the American Studies Program and the History of Art and Visual Studies department at Cornell University.[141] In 2004 she curated the exhibition *Our Peoples: Giving Voice to Our Histories* (September 21, 2004 – January 5, 2014) at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian (Washington, DC). The exhibition brought together works of art from diverse Indigenous nations across North America, focusing on the arrival of settlers and how this history is "not entirely a story of destruction," but about how Indigenous people "intentionally and strategically kept their cultures alive."[142] To this day Rickard continues to create images and write on the importance of visual sovereignty in Indigenous visual culture, and has published numerous books and articles that discuss the importance of self-determination for Indigenous peoples.

Larry McNeil became a professor of photography at Boise State University and Steven Loft, who assumed the position of Program Director upon Maracle's resignation, currently holds the position of Director of the Creating, Knowing, Sharing: The Arts and Cultures of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis program at the Canada Council. In the 2018/2019 fiscal year alone, this program was responsible for awarding $12.2 million dollars towards Indigenous artists and

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[139] "Hamilton Heroes #3," Hamilton Community Legal Clinic, accessed March 23, 2020, https://www.hamiltonjustice.ca/blog?post=Hamilton+Heroes+%233&id=297.
[140] "Yvonne Maracle," Hamilton Public Library.
[141] "Jolene K. Rickard," The Department of The History of Art & Visual Studies, accessed March 23, 2020, https://arthistory.cornell.edu/jolene-k-rickard.
[142] "Our Peoples: Giving Voice to Our Histories," National Museum of the American Indian, accessed March 23, 2020, https://americanindian.si.edu/explore/exhibitions/item?id=828.

Indigenous organizations across Canada.[143] Other NIIPA members, including Shelley Niro, Greg Staats, Jeff Thomas and Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie (Seminole/Muscogree/Navajo) went on to pursue professional careers as artists, gaining national and international recognition from their inclusion in exhibitions and permanent art collections around the world. Notably, Shelley Niro went on to be awarded the Scotiabank Photography Award (2017), and Jeff Thomas, the REVEAL Indigenous Art Award (2017).[144]

Undoubtedly, the organization had a pioneering role in the lives of their members, as they carried with them the lessons and skills NIIPA had taught them into their respective careers. The biographies of even just a handful of NIIPA alumni are enough to deem the organization immensely successful in finding opportunities for their members and demonstrating the incredibly talented and widespread achievements of those involved in the organization.

## The Rise and Fall of NIIPA

In 1985, NIIPA represented a disparate group of Indigenous image-makers looking for community in a bleak art landscape. By 1988, NIIPA's membership had reached over thirty photographers, and by 1996, nearly seventy. It makes sense that in their later years, NIIPA necessarily had to expand their mandate to include video and mixed media departments to maintain member interest and participation. Many members had in fact achieved recognition and were being included in exhibitions outside of NIIPA's walls, no longer requiring their services. The late 1990s saw a rush of national and international exhibitions that featured the work of

[143] "Larry McNeil," Department of Art, Design & Visual Studies, accessed March 23, 2020, https://www.boisestate.edu/art/faculty/larry-mcneil/. "Creating, Knowing and Sharing: The Arts and Cultures of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples Funding Overview," Canada Council for the Arts, accessed March 23, 2020, https://canadacouncil.ca/research/stats-and-stories/creating-knowing-and-sharing.
[144] "Scotiabank Photography Award: Shelley Niro," Ryerson Image Centre, accessed March 23, 2020, https://ryersonimagecentre.ca/exhibition/scotiabank-photography-award-shelley-niro/. "Curriculum Vitae," Jeff Thomas, accessed March 23, 2020, https://jeff-thomas.ca/curriculum-vitae/.

Indigenous artists, and photography too was beginning to find its spot in the mainstream light of the art world. Indigenous photographers were being granted far more opportunities than there were available before the creation of NIIPA. In his final report in *Reminiscing*, Hill attests that this was always his favourite part of the organization: "The thing I have always appreciated here is the connection agency, it helps you connect to publishers, people willing to give into that good service."[145]

The networking mandate of NIIPA is all the more noteworthy given that the organization was working and creating community in a time well before the Internet. NIIPA did not have a website, *www.creative-spirit.com*, until well into the 1990s, yet were incredibly successful before then at connecting their membership across Turtle Island through their newsletters and annual conferences. The community they were able to form was massive considering their regional and community-based location in Hamilton, Ontario. Maracle noted the importance of such community-based initiatives in the Fall 1994, writing to NIIPA's out of town members that:

> I know many of you wish that you had a NIIPA in your own town so that you could use our facilities too, but unfortunately you have to do the next best thing. Contact your local gallery and see what type of activities it has that you can take part in. If it's Native people you seek in your endeavours, check out your local Friendship Centre and maybe they can assist you in setting up classes or maybe even a darkroom. You would be pleasantly surprised at the response. As for us at NIIPA, we will assist you in any way that we can.[146]

NIIPA was ambitious from day one, setting up a national artist-run centre in the hands of two young Indigenous Photo Union employees, Yvonne Maracle and Brenda Mitten. As noted in the dedication pages in *Reminiscing*, between NIIPA's origins in 1985 and the publication of *Reminiscing* in 2000, forty-six staff and fifty-six volunteers had contributed to NIIPA's operations. Maracle signed-off her report in *Reminiscing* by stating, "like anything that evolves

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[145] Richard Hill, "Rick Hill," *Reminiscing,* 27.
[146] Yvonne Maracle, "Director's Comment," NIIPA, Fall 1994, 4.

over the years, change must happen, whether good or bad, it is a part of the life cycle,"[147] accepting that NIIPA had run its course and understanding and honouring the success and various pathways of their members.

[147] Yvonne Maracle, "Yvonne Maracle," *Reminiscing*, 15.

# Conclusion

> *"My job with NIIPA began a career I am happy to say that I am still deeply passionate about, committed to, and involved in. […] What I learned was that when members of a community assert control over their own lives and culture politically, socially, and artistically, they go beyond oppression. Thus, control of our "image" becomes not only an act of subversion, but of resistance and ultimately liberation."*
>
> – Steven Loft[148]

I first became aware of the Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association through an article by Jolene Rickard titled "Diversifying Sovereignty and the Reception of Indigenous Art" (2017). The article made mention of a artist-run centre based out of Hamilton, Ontario in the 1980s that "drew together Native photographers who were making expressive photographic works and consciously deconstructing the colonizing gaze."[149] I had intended to write a paper that discussed contemporary Indigenous artists who refused to exhibit in settler-run arts institutions. At the earliest stages of my research, I believed this was the only way that Indigenous artists, curators, and cultural producers could maintain control over the reception and production of their work. I had been sceptical of the ways the language around decolonization had entered mainstream museums and galleries, and feared these buzzwords would be used as a bandage to reconcile relations with Indigenous art and artists without the necessary labour and action from the settler-state, the museum, and its administrators.

What I learnt while researching NIIPA, however, was that there is a history of Indigenous photographic practice that sought to do exactly that. The images of the photographers who formed NIIPA do not only work to dispel colonial stereotypes and educate a non-Indigenous audience of their contemporary experience, but as Morgan Bell in her article "Some Thoughts on

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[148] Steven Loft, "Reflections on 20 Years of Aboriginal Art" (lecture, University of Victoria, Victoria, BC, February 8, 2012).
[149] Jolene Rickard, "Diversifying Sovereignty and the Reception of Indigenous Art," 81.

'Taking' Pictures: Imaging 'Indians' and the Counter-Narrative of Visual Sovereignty" (2011) states:

> Rather, they often intend a Native audience and contain deeper levels of meaning than may be apparent to non-Native viewers. […] Renouncing declarations of authentic "Indianness" avoids adding more layers to the hermeneutical problem resulting from the convoluted and controversial historiographic that has developed from attempts to image the "Indian."[150]

The photographs produced by NIIPA photographers did not seek to replicate what Edward Curtis and his contemporaries believed to be an ultimate image of "Indianness," but rather constructed narratives of their individual lived realities, serving their communities, and reinforcing what Rickard came to articulate as, "visual sovereignty […] one of the most dominant expressions of self-determination."[151]

When I began my research into NIIPA, I was shocked by the lack of information available – even more so when I found out the key figures involved. I discovered the work Rhéanne Chartrand was doing to uncover NIIPA's history in an issue of Canadian Art, where she wrote, "I feel a sense of accountability to the members, who received little recognition at the time, and a responsibility to share NIIPA's history,"[152] on her curatorial work with *#nofilterneeded: Shining Light on the Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association, 1985-1992.* As a scholar I feel the same responsibility, and I hope through the researching and writing of this history I have honoured NIIPA's legacy, and its foundational influence for some of the most renowned contemporary Indigenous photographers who stepped through NIIPA's doors. I felt it necessary to lay NIIPA's history before I could even begin to consider the role refusal has

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[150] Morgan F. Bell, "Some Thought on "Taking" Pictures: Imaging "Indians" and the Counter-Narratives of Visual Sovereignty," *Great Plains Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (2011): 101, www.jstor.org/stable/23534587.
[151] Jolene Rickard, "Diversifying Sovereignty and the Reception of Indigenous Art," 82.
[152] Rhéanne Chartrand, "#nofilterneeded: Shining Light on the Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association, 1985-1992," *Canadian Art* (Spring 2019): 29.

in the work of contemporary Indigenous artists. By taking control of their images, NIIPA not only narrated their own histories, but also set a precedent for future image-makers to follow suit. It is my hope that in writing this history of NIIPA, my work will allow for further investigation into the organization. In my chronicle of NIIPA, I have made every effort to include the perspectives of those involved through prioritizing their writings at the time of their original publication. While I would have also liked to have had the time and resources to interview the members of NIIPA, this second stage of investigation lay beyond the scope of my archival inquiry for this paper. In future iterations of this work, I intend to continue and enhance my archival research and also conduct interviews.

In closing, I want to emphasize that the visual sovereignty that NIIPA asserted, was and *is* not an isolated case. As Chartrand writes, "much like their kin working in other media, [NIIPA] sought to liberate themselves from the ethnographic prison of colonial portraiture, and instead, sought to imprint and to capture their postindian reality."[153] Their message of self-determination continues to move through the Canadian and International art scene through the legacy of their members. As Steven Loft articulated in 2012, at the forefront of conversations surrounding Indigenous visual sovereignty and Indigenous survivance, *has*, and always *will* be, artists:

> The struggle for Indigenous rights and sovereignty continues, even as politics of assimilation and extinction still dominate government ideology. In our communities, in this country, and around the world, Indigenous peoples will continue to assert their inherent, treaty, and constitutional rights. And all along the way, accompanying them in their resistance, in their survival, and into their future will be the artists.[154]

[153] Rhéanne Chartrand, *#nofilterneeded,* 35.
[154] Steven Loft, "Reflections on 20 Years of Aboriginal Art," 33.

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# Appendix A: Figures


*Figure 1: Jeff Thomas, Strong Hearts – Plenty Chief, 1981. 39 x 49 cm. Photograph courtesy of the artist.*


*Figure 2: Attendees of the "VISIONS" conference gathered around a television screen, March 1985. Photograph courtesy of Cees van Gemerden.*

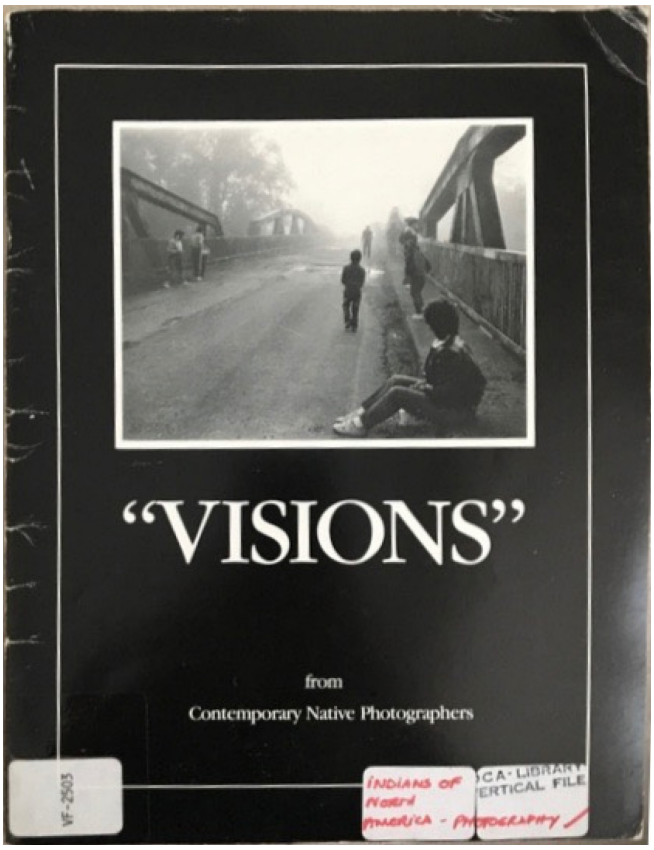


*Figure 3: Cover of Visions: From Contemporary Native Photographers exhibition catalogue.*


*Figure 4: NIIPA sign on Main Street West, Hamilton, Canada, n.d. Photograph courtesy of Cees van Gemerden.*

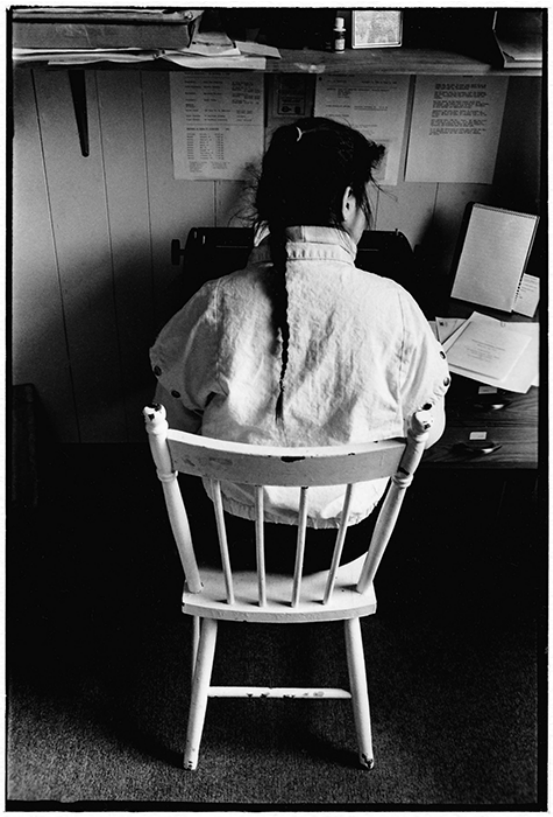

*Figure 5: Yvonne – "Visions," n.d. Photograph courtesy of Cees van Gemerden.*


*Figure 6: Drum circle at the "VISIONS" Conference, March 1985. Photograph courtesy of Cees van Gemerden.*


*Figure 7: Cover of Silver Drum: Five Native Photographers exhibition catalogue.*

*Figure 8: George Johnson, Teslin July 1, c.1940s. Black and white nitrate negative, 9 x 14.8 cm. Image Credit: Yukon Archives, George A. Johnson collection, 82/428, #49.*

*Figure 9: Installation view of the south wall of #nofilterneeded: Shining Light on the Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association, 1985-1992, curated by Rhéanne Chartrand. Photo taken by Erin Szikora at the University of Lethbridge Art Gallery, Lethbridge, AB.*

*Figure 10: Lennie, Shelley and Brenda – NIIPA workshop at our studio, n.d. Photograph courtesy of Cees van Gemerden.*