

Artist Statement: In Defiance

The sexualisation and exploitation of female representation within mainstream society has been consistent over time, disregarding the rich cultural existence Indigenous women have maintained through traditional knowledge, social roles and power. The objectification of women in Western society lacks an understanding and relationship to traditional teachings, and I feel it is time to push the continuum of those teachings forward in the direction of exposing vulnerability and sensuality that will allow eroticism to be reclaimed through the matriarchal body.

The photographic series InDefiance consists of 34 individual photographs of Indigenous women. The motivation for this project is to “seek to create a project to reclaim and empower First Nations women and their capability to express their natural sovereign powers of eroticism, sensuality and vulnerability through their presence over time.” The individual photographs combined create an empowering series that deconstructs and challenges mainstream ideologies of sexuality. This series also dismantles negative stereotypes of First Nations women and portrays a more authentic truth of the diversity, power and respect each woman represents in her photo. This project has given each woman a voice and a platform ensured with safety and trust to express their most private and sensual aspects of themselves.

This series of photographs captures the internal essence and totality of being female and women expressing their personal interpretations of eroticism. In order to recover from the exploitation, mistreatment and abuse of First Nations women; their bodies and sexuality have endured throughout history and well into present day, I have facilitated a process in which each participant of the project have all creative control in terms of where they want to be shot, how they wanted to portray themselves and choosing the image they wanted to submit to the series.

My intention is to initiate the concept relationally so each woman begins a self-examination process and willingness to create an authentic representation of themselves through their participation. Dialogue between the sitter and myself established an environment of trust and safety. By challenging one to look at their bodies in relation to sexuality, body image, historical and personal trauma and eroticism creates an opportunity for transmutation that can be shared positively for others to consider.

We can cease the negative perceptions of the ignorant and extremely offensive image of the "squaw" as a generic term for Native women. We can educate the general public to understand the marvellous diversity of our histories, languages, homelands and cultures, instead of stereotyping all Indians as western Plains warriors in feather headdresses or the timid, stoic Indian Princess in her canoe. This project is important for creating the attitude of InDefiance of the origins of the word squaw. By incorporating an Indigenous perspective through creating these artworks, we ourselves can define and transcend this once discriminating word into powerful images that reflect an internal transformation process. The importance of First Nations women's perceptions of themselves need to be expressed through their own voices, bodies and

environment, rather than having exterior influences defining what it means to be an erotic, sensual, vulnerable Indigenous women. I use the word vulnerability to define these images because it takes an internal self-reflection to express vulnerability as empowerment. Rather than utilizing the external physical aspects of women's body to gain power. This project is created for the individuals participating to seek a relationship with oneself, rather than striving to conform to external images and beliefs outside themselves. We will always fall short from being the perfect ideals of the outside world. The only security we have is within ourselves and anything external is truly designed to be fallible. Through extensive self-examination and expression as First Nations women we can deconstruct old ideas, heal and transform new perceptions through the act of creativity.