

ASLE FILM FEST: PROGRAM II INDIGENOUS ECOCINEMA

Curatorial Blurb

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Indigenous cinema is underground cinema. Termed Fourth Cinema by Maori filmmaker Barry Barclay, it rises to protest representations imposed on indigenous people by mainstream First (Euro-American) Cinema; and it does so, most often from the margins, with minimal budgets and with grassroots chutzpah. What does it mean to resist centuries of hegemonic stereotyping and marginalization? What stories are Fourth Cinema filmmakers telling, and how do they do so in ways that blur indigenous cinema into ecocinema?

This program, put together with the help of many individuals, all interested in cinema's possibilities, attempts to answer these questions. Constrained by length and time, the program nonetheless showcases some of the astounding diversity in contemporary indigenous film's eco-imaginaries, bringing together four short pieces by filmmakers with ties to the Northwest. From classic documentary mode, to lyrical cinema, sci-fi fantasy, and animated memoir, the arrangement of the four pieces explores a breadth of genre aesthetics, which together pursue a single narrative thread—that of indigenous survivance* in the framework of cyclic time. Each film joins past to present to future, echoing Nez Perce Hattie Kauffman's words, "our history is long and is still being written every day."

To honor the tribes whose ancestral lands we are on, the program begins with the trailer of *ná·qc timíne wisí·x: Of One Heart*. Narrated by Hattie Kauffman and including the voices of many of her Nez Perce community, *ná·qc timíne wisí·x's* trailer provides a taste of the 20-minute documentary made as a collaboration between the Nez Perce National Historical Park and North Shore Productions. It grounds the Nimípuu people (as the Nez Perce call themselves) and their culture in this land, highlighting too how colonial society's broken treaties attempted to sever the ties. Despite these atrocities of land theft, Kauffman affirms Nimípuu cultural revival today, "We know our past; we know where we came from."

In his experimental and lyrical works, Métis artist and filmmaker, Tyler Hagan seeks to uncover his past, to know where he comes from. *In the Similkameen* is located across the U.S. border in the lands of the Lower Similkameen First Nations Bands. Documenting a peaceful day, *In the Similkameen* centers both land and church, leaving us to reflect on the invisible violence undergirding the region's serene beauty, and to wonder at the area's continuing legacy as contact zone for colonizer and colonized, natures and cultures, and the affect of place. Hagan explains, "While the church and its relationship to its surroundings represent the larger history of conflict between the sməlqmix people of the syilx (Okanagan) nation and Canadian settlers, *In the Similkameen* focuses on the visceral impact that it [the church] has as a part of the landscape."

We encounter what looks like the Northwest landscape only fleetingly on the screens that serve as backdrop to the human exhibits who live in Erin Li's *Kepler X-47*. A sci-fi dystopian fantasy set on a distant planet in the future, *Kepler X-47* is

grounded in Li's anti-capitalist conceptual exploration of human zoos as allegory for how, as she describes, "most of us accept life as it is, without question, and are willingly chained by the pursuit of a tainted American Dream." Co-produced by Kaz Kipp (Nez Perce/Umatilla) and screened at festivals such as ImagineNATIVE, it also speaks to the madness of colonial hubris that blatantly exhibited indigenous people, and as allegory of the Indian residential school legacy, which followed in the wake of missionary influence we see reflected in Hagan's *In the Similkameen*.

From *Kepler X-47's* allusions to the residential school system, we face its explicit mention in Lisa Jackson's *Suckerfish*. Animation, childhood photographs, and stylized recreations generate a quirky yet moving portrayal of the director's relationship with her mother, a woman broken by the Indian residential school system. *Suckerfish* eschews the sweeping vistas of environment encountered in the earlier films, and concentrates instead on enclosed indoor and urban spaces. Yet, in this redirected focus on the small spaces, including the bodies and identities of herself and her mother, Jackson expresses a grounded eco-materiality in what it means to reclaim her native heritage.

Jackson's reclamation brings us full circle to *ná·qc timíne wisí·x: Of One Heart's* statements of resilience. In its own chosen way, each film of the program takes us backwards so we might move forward, better equipped to understand not only the deep injustice of colonial legacies but also indigenous survivance. Survivance is a baton these films offer its indigenous and non-indigenous viewers in an age of global environmental crises that often seem all too overwhelming.

*[Survivance is Anishnaabe cultural theorist, Gerald Vizenor's call to re-think the more passive idea of "survival" as a more active engagement of resistance.]

THE FILMS, FILMMAKER BIOS, AND MORE:

ná·qc timíne wisí·x: Of One Heart (Trailer). Dir. Rory Banyard. Nez Perce National Historical Park in collaboration with North Shore Productions, 2014. [Duration: 2.19 minutes.]

ná·qc timíne wisí·x: Of One Heart is a theater film produced for Nez Perce National Historical Park in Spalding, Idaho. North Shore worked with Nez Perce people from three different reservations to craft the film, however; "ná·qc timíne wisí·x" means "of one heart" and the film highlights the core values that are shared by Nez Perce or Nimípuu everywhere.

By touching lightly on the history for which the Nez Perce are famous, and focusing primarily on Nimípuu life and culture in the present, the film creates a portrait of a people who are very much future-focused and in control of their destiny. In this way the film is designed to break through stereotypes that may be held, and allow Park visitors to connect to Nimípuu people and culture as they are today.

ASLE has collaborated with the [Nez Perce National Historical Park](#) to organize a [conference field trip](#) if you are interested in learning more about the

Nimípuu. You can also learn more about the film, as well as other [North Shore productions at their website](#).

In the Similkameen. Dir. Tyler Hagan (Métis). Single Channel 16mm on HD Video; Distributor, VTape. 2013. [Duration 5.39 minutes].

Tyler Hagan is a filmmaker, photographer, and historian based in Vancouver, B.C. whose work engages ideas of landscape, place, and identity. His work has shown at Berlinale, Montreal World Film Festival, ImagineNATIVE Film and Media Arts Festival, as well as online with the Canadian Broadcast Corporation, and the National Screen Institute of Canada.

Hagan describes his work: "*In the Similkameen* is originally a single channel video loop that accompanies an exhibition of photographs, and the interactive documentary [Similkameen Crossroads](#), produced by the National Film Board of Canada. However, it can be screened as a stand-alone piece as well.

"It interrogates ideas of *landscape* and *place* by placing the viewer in the position to engage with the experience of *being*. ... Set on the Lower Similkameen Indian Reserve lands in the Southern Okanagan, the central conflict of the work subtly exists between the 'natural' landscape and 'man-made' incursions – namely a turn of the 20th Century missionary chapel, St. Ann's. As Upper Similkameen Elder Ramona Allison related to me what her father had told her as a child, 'We used to pray under the trees. Then the white man came, cut 'em all down, and now we pray *in* the trees.' This perspective reminds us that the dichotomy of 'natural' and 'man-made' is a construct of western thought, and encourages us to think, and experience our world as whole – as an ecosystem. *In the Similkameen* is the expression of attempting to embody such a perspective. It is an invitation to look, to listen, and to reflect."

You can learn more about Hagan's work at his [website](#).

Kepler X-47. Director, Erin Li. Producers, Kaz Kipp (Nez Perce/Umatillo), Gregory Chou and Erin Li. Distributor, American Film Institute. 2014. [Duration: 14.48 minutes].

Based in Los Angeles, Kepler X-47's film crew are at the cutting edge of an up-and-coming film generation. Kepler X-47 has made the film festival circuit and received accolades such as the Best Short Film Nominee at The Geekie Awards and Grand Jury Golden Reel Nominee – Excellence in Short Film at the Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Fest. SHOOT named Li as an up-and-coming helmer to watch in their 2015 worldwide search for the next generation of film and commercial directors. Li's work was also curated for SourceECreative's The Scout, which showcases unsigned auteurs. Li has directed branded content for General Electric, and her work has been commissioned by Film Independent and featured on Upworthy, Huffington Post, and Voto Latino. Her films have also screened at Slamdance, LACMA Young Directors Night, Los Angeles Film Festival, American Cinematheque, the Academy for Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, and been recognized as a Vimeo Staff Pick and Hammer-to-Nail Finalist.

Li describes her inspiration for the film: “The concept behind *Kepler X-47* was initially sparked by the Museum of Contemporary Art’s ‘Under the Big Black Sun’ exhibit featuring California art from 1974-1981. In 1978, conceptual artist Lowell Darling ran for governor of California using a tongue-in-cheek campaign. One of Darling’s proposals was to create a ‘Human Zoo’ – all animals would be returned to their original habitats and the government would hire the unemployed, who would wear animal costumes and get paid from the zoo’s proceeds.”

You can sign up to watch KEPLER X-47 [here](#).

Suckerfish. Dir. Lisa Jackson (Anishinaabe). Distributor, [Moving Images Distribution](#), 2004. [Duration: 8.12 minutes].

Lisa Jackson has been making films since 2000 and has accrued numerous awards for her innovative treatment of indigenous issues. *Suckerfish*, one of her earlier films, has screened at over 50 film festivals as well as on Canada’s Aboriginal Peoples Television Network and Canadian Broadcasting Corporation channels.

From realist documentary (*Reservation Soldiers* and *Hidden Legacies*) to ironic biographies (e.g., *Suckerfish* and *Intemperance*) and performance-based public announcements (*Snare*, which was commissioned by ImagineNATIVE as part of the Stolen Sisters program, an initiative to draw attention to violence towards aboriginal women), Jackson continues to experiment with cinema as a medium that uncovers social issues. Of her many different approaches Jackson says there’s one thing that holds them together, “I’ve always been social issues oriented – I think, as I go on, the social issues are there but they’re less literal though maybe more powerful.”

Jackson is part of Canada’s current vanguard of indigenous women filmmakers. You can learn more about her work at her [website](#), and in the scholarly engagements of scholars such as Kristin Dowell’s [Sovereign Screens: Aboriginal Media on the Canadian West Coast](#) (2013).

Acknowledgments to the Nimíipuu people for hosting us on their ancestral lands. Many thanks also to the all the filmmakers and their distributors for generously agreeing to share their films for this inaugural film festival. Thanks too to the ASLE Executive Council and Idaho site collaborators for including the film festival in the conference agenda, Rochelle Smith at the University of Idaho library for her immense patience with helping procure the films’ screening rights, Dr. Jan Johnson for her invaluable help with contacting local Nez Perce collaborators, the Kenworthy Theater folks, and to Amy McKintyre, ASLE’s Managing Director.