



Matika Wilbur

Matika Wilbur (Swinomish and Tulalip) is one of the nation's leading photographers, based in the Pacific Northwest. She earned her BFA from Brooks Institute of Photography where she double majored in Advertising and Digital Imaging. Before focusing on photography as a tool for social justice, Matika received her teaching certification and worked in primary education at The Tulalip Tribe tribal school for 5 years. There, she experienced firsthand the lack of educational resources to teach indigenous intelligence and and dismay with a the curriculum that being taught did not provide Native youths with positive imagery and understanding. This work inspired Project 562.

Project 562 is Matika's fourth major creative project elevating featuring Native American identity and culture. She captured portraits of Coast Salish elders for "We Are One People" (2004, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, Washington and The Royal British Columbia Museum of Fine Arts, Victoria, British Columbia); "We Emerge", featuring Native people in contemporary urban and traditional settings (2008, Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture,

Seattle, Washington); and "Save the Indian and Kill the Man", addressing the forced cultural assimilation of Natives from 1880 to 1980 (2012, Tacoma Art Museum, Tacoma, Washington).

To capture the spirit and essence of her portrait sitters, Matika spends several hours or even days with a participant, often even residing in their homes. She honors traditional potlatch protocol, bringing gifts to honor traditional trade culture, and shares songs and prayers. Sitters choose their portrait locations, most frequently geographically remote reservations, but also urban settings. An oral history accompanies each portrait, capturing the subject's unique experience, and fully bringing an individual to life. These relationships and approaches reveal an intimacy in her portraits unlike popular street photography or classic journalism, an approach Matika describes as "an indigenous photography method."

Photographs are captured on traditional black and white film and shot in the zone system. Once developed, they are printed on silver gelatin fiber and hand-colored by Matika with oil paints. The craftsmanship of each image is a time-honored process that, in keeping with her shooting method, honors the traditional artisanship of black and white photography.

