

Nickle Galleries | October 3 - December 14, 2019

# Paul Seesequasis

## TURNING THE LENS: Indigenous Archive Project



*Turning the Lens* is now touring across the country and the Gilliat photos are being augmented by additional photos which Paul researches at the respective locations on the tour. Through his research for Nickle Galleries at the University of Calgary, Paul sourced a selection of Arnold Lupson photos from the Glenbow Museum, which date from 1919 to 1949, and “are rich in views of First Nations personalities and activities, including the Sarcee (Tsuut’ina), Blood, Peigan, Blackfoot (Siksika) and Stoney peoples of southern Alberta” (Glenbow). The importance of acknowledging the history, landscape and people of each given place is an essential component of this exhibition tour, as is maintaining the social media call-and-response facet of information exchange between the viewers of the photos and what is on view.

The photos that make up *Turning the Lens* are powerful because they reflect an unscripted truth, illustrating people and places that deserve to be acknowledged; candid and authentic views of the lives of people connected to land, family, community and culture. The photos and what they represent are an important key to the best way forward, which is not in forgetting the past, but in naming one’s truth and carrying hope forward.

Arin Fay, Curator, 2019

We would like to thank the British Columbia Arts Council and Canada Council for their generous support of the research residency and touring facets of the *Turning the Lens: Indigenous Archive Project*.

*Paul Seesequasis - Turning the Lens: Indigenous Archive Project* is organized and circulated by Touchstones Nelson: Museum of Art and History, and curated by Arin Fay and supported by the Canada Council, British Columbia Arts Council and Library and Archives Canada. Coordinated for Nickle Galleries, University of Calgary by Michele Hardy. Nickle Galleries acknowledges the contributions of Glenbow Archives/ Glenbow Western Research Centre at the University of Calgary.

#### Cover

Young girl and boy standing on grass, between a teepee and a dirt road, Ghost River, Alberta, ca. 1962

© Library and Archives Canada. Reproduced with the permission of Library and Archives Canada. Source: Library and Archives Canada/Credit: Rosemary Gilliat Eaton/Rosemary Gilliat Eaton fonds/e010975108

#### Inside cover (from top)

Tom Big Plume outside cabin  
Courtesy Glenbow Archives, na-667-307os

Feast at Oscar Otter’s place  
Courtesy Glenbow Archives, na-667-568-os

Teenagers Violet and James Starlight  
Courtesy Glenbow Archives, na-667-535-os

#### Inside back cover (from top left, clockwise)

Joe Big Plume by ravine  
Courtesy Glenbow Archives, na-667-411a-os

Alice Crow and son, Harry Bull Bear  
Courtesy Glenbow Archives, na-667-132d-os

Harry Red Gun and children  
Courtesy Glenbow Archives, na-667-127os

#### Back cover (from left, clockwise)

Calf Robe and family with dog  
Courtesy Glenbow Archives, na-667-979os

Alice Crowchild (glasses)  
Courtesy Glenbow Archives, na-667-425-os

Bessie (Little Bear) Crowchild  
Courtesy Glenbow Archives, na-667-470-os

OPENING RECEPTION | October 10, 2019 | 5-8pm

PAUL SEESEQUASIS: ARTIST TALK | October 10, 2019 | 12-1pm

ART AFTER THE TRC: PANEL DISCUSSION with Adrian Stimson,  
Judy Anderson and guests | October 31, 2019 | 12-1pm

## Artist Statement

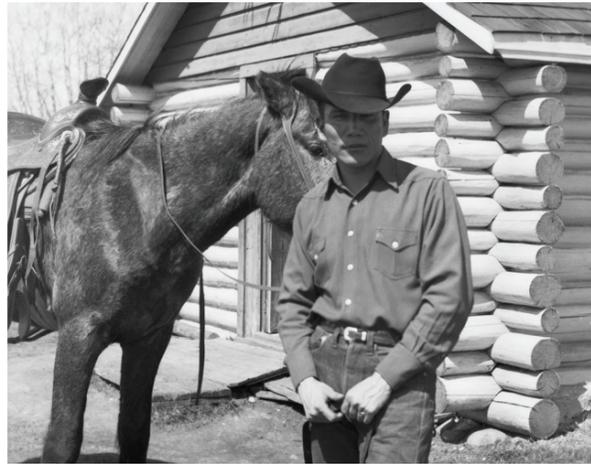
Newly arrived in Canada, Arnold Lupson (c 1895-1951) first saw Indigenous people in regalia during The Stampede Parade. This incident sparked a life-long fascination with Indigenous peoples and Lupson soon became a recognized fixture at Indigenous gatherings and on reserves, his camera always in tow. Eventually he befriended then Tsuut'ina Chief, Joe Big Plume. He was also romantically attracted to Big Plume's sister, Maggie Big Belly (*Natidah* – Searching Woman), who was recently widowed. With Big Plume's approval, Lupson married Maggie and was later adopted into the family and given the name Eagle Tail.

Lupson, from 1919 to 1949, took hundreds of photographs of Tsuut'ina, Siksika, Kainai, Piikáni and Stoney peoples. Though he was reported to have been briefly a photographer for the London *Daily Mirror*, this is unsubstantiated, and it is as probable he was a self-taught photographer whose skills with the camera improved over the thirty years of picture taking. Whatever cameras he used are lost to history but fortunately the more than 800 photographs he took have survived and the majority are digitized and available to the public through the Glenbow Museum.

Lupson spent much time on the Tsuut'ina reserve, eventually building a cabin for Maggie, but given the laws of the Indian Act, he could not live there; though after his death he was buried there. Lupson's job as a tanner enabled him the funds to travel around southern Alberta, taking photos of not only the Tsuut'ina but the Stoney Nakoda, Kainai, and Piikáni. Much of his photographic gaze was directed to capturing camp life, cultural and spiritual ceremonies, and Indigenous people in regalia; a not uncommon affliction and fascination for western photographers. In 1999, Key Porter Books published "With Eagle Tail", a collection of Lupson's photographs, co-authored by Colin F. Taylor and Hugh Dempsey; however the book is almost entirely comprised of ceremonial, camp and regalia photos which was, an 'outside eye,' revealing Lupson's fascination with traditional regalia and ceremony. But, like his American contemporary, Walter McClintock, who spend years photographing the Blackfeet in Montana and shared Lupson's often romanticized framing of Indigenous peoples, Lupson did take other kinds of photos that portrayed people in normal clothes, at non-ceremonial events and going about everyday things.

In selecting the photographs for this exhibition, I have taken a different tack, choosing to focus on the Lupson images of day-to-day life on the reserves of the time, of people dressed as they would be on an average day, of community gatherings that were not ceremony, and of portraits of family life. These are photos that resonate with the 'ordinary' and it is that normalcy that puts them outside of the outsider's static gaze and, most importantly, preserves a legacy for descendants of the people in the photos; the families and the nations. It enables a process of visual reclamation, a testament to the dignity of its subjects and a permanent record for community historians and researchers. It says, 'this is how people were, this was how daily life was.'

PAUL SEESEQUASIS, 2019



Captioning is often a fraught process that increases with the age of the photo. Turn of the century photographs, in particular, often have original captions that are generic in the least, 'Indians in a canoe' for instance, or non-existent. Sometimes, the terminology of the time is archaic and offensive to contemporary eyes.

Old captions provide a challenge for historians, museum collections and archivists of Indigenous photography. Is the right nation attributed? If a family name is written, is it correct or is it misspelled?

The act of naming is a political act of decolonization and one of reclamation. It is an ongoing dialogue between the image and the viewer. From an archival and historical perspective, it is best to be receptive to what may be differing opinions on captioning, dating and of attribution. It is not a closed door but an open window that allows for fresh and changing interpretations.

We encourage feedback regarding the photographs and captions that are exhibited here as a means of researching and challenging captions that may be inaccurate. This sort of response and criticism is essential in the process of re-naming archival images and an important part of the Indigenous Archival Photo Project.

P.S.



## Curator's Statement

The images sit, thousands of them, taken over decades and filed in tidy white envelopes, boxes and drawers, in archival repositories, private collections and museums across the country. The photos are in myriad form: negatives, colour and black-and-white prints, glass plate, daguerreotypes and tintypes. And while the digitization process has made a number of these images more accessible, they are only truly brought to life when they are seen. The efforts of Paul Seesequasis and his *Indigenous Archival Photo Project* have played an essential role in bringing these images into the light of day, and the hearts and minds of people across the country.

I have often been struck by how the photos that Paul posts online are the most beautiful and affecting images that I see in a given day, especially amid so much scripted and agenda-driven content. The astounding and somewhat disarming simplicity of Paul's project is compounded by the open-hearted intention of its delivery, and backed by years of inquiry and advocacy of Indigenous issues.

The notion to transition Paul's social media project to the gallery space at Touchstones Nelson Museum of Art and History in 2018 was an obvious one, and had surprisingly not been done before. As part of the inaugural exhibition *Turning the Lens: Indigenous Archival Photo Project* Paul was able to source archival photos of Sinixt, Ktunaxa and Arrow Lakes people for the exhibition in Nelson, British Columbia, from a number of regional archives, in order to ground the exhibition to place and the landscape and history upon which the gallery stands. The decision to add place-specific content to the Rosemary (nee Gilliat) Eaton images that Paul had sourced from Library and Archives Canada, and which represent the core content of the exhibition, was an important one.