

Conversation XVII: Photographic Memory

Exhibition dates: December 20, 2013-May 18, 2014

Curator-led gallery talk: February 2, 2014

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LAWRENCE, KS, December 20, 2013— In a society built on cultural encounters, what do we mean by *authenticity* as it relates to race, history, and ethnicity? This question, in all its complexity, lies at the heart of a small exhibition of never-before-displayed photographs at the Spencer Museum of Art.

The eve of the 20th century was marked by ambition, curiosity, and change. Technological advances allowed photographers to document new the landscapes and cultures that surrounded them. Most of the photographs displayed in *Conversation XVII: Photographic Memory* date back to the turn of the 20th century and highlight intersections between early photography, historical memory, and Native American identity. Some portraits show important historical figures while others capture but a single moment in the lives of now-unknown individuals.

“Cabinet cards,” or commercial studio photographs from the 19th century mounted on cardstock, are commissioned portraits; studio backdrops situate the subjects in particular settings, often Victorian home interiors. This exhibition includes several cabinet cards depicting Native American sitters who visited the studios to have their photographs taken. Documentary photographs from the same time period depict Native American subjects outside the studio. Alongside these historic images are nuanced works by modern and contemporary photographers.

Among the contemporary selections is a series titled *An Indian from India* by photographer Annu Palakunnathu Matthew. As an immigrant to the United States, Matthew answers question about her ethnicity by stating that she is Indian. She has been intrigued by frequent requests for verification that she is an Indian from India. “It seems strange that all this confusion started because Christopher Columbus thought he had found the Indies,” she writes. Matthew explores the resulting relationship between these two cultures by pairing reprinted 19th-century portraits of Native Americans with self-portraits in which she poses in similar scenarios. She uses modern digital technologies and materials in recreating historic photographic processes to uncanny effect.

Conversation VXII: Photographic Memory is on view through May 18, 2014. *Up Close With Cassandra Mesick: Photographic Memory*, a free curatorial tour of the exhibition, takes place on Sunday, February 2 from 1-2 PM at the Spencer Museum of Art, 1301 Mississippi Street in Lawrence Kansas.

[The Spencer Museum of Art](#) houses an internationally known collection that is deep and diverse, currently numbering approximately 36,500 artworks and artifacts in all media. The collection spans the history of European and American art from ancient to contemporary, and includes broad and significant holdings of East Asian art. Areas of special strength include medieval panel painting and religious sculpture; the Kress Study Collection of early modern Italian painting; 19th-century American art and material culture; old master prints; photography; European, East Asian, and Indian textiles; American Indian pottery, beadwork, and jewelry; African sculpture; Japanese Edo-period prints; and 20th-century Chinese painting.

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Spencer Museum of Art

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Gallery Hours

Tues. 10 AM – 4 PM
Wed. & Thurs. 10AM – 8PM
Fri., & Sat. 10 AM – 4PM
Sun. Noon – 4PM
Closed Monday