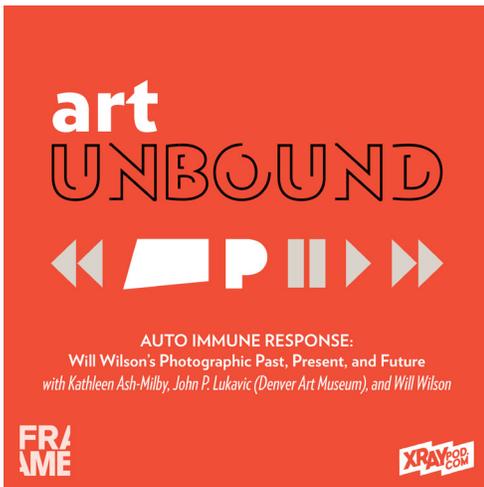


# ART UNBOUND EPISODE 26 TRANSCRIPT



## KATHLEEN ASH-MILBY

This is Art Unbound, a podcast brought to you by the Portland Art Museum and Northwest Film Center. My name is Kathleen Ash-Milby and I'm the curator of Native American Art at the Portland Art Museum. On this episode of the podcast, I have a conversation with John Lukavic, The Andrew W. Mellon Curator of Native Arts at the Denver Art Museum in Denver, Colorado, and the Diné artist Will Wilson in Santa Fe, New Mexico. One thing that connects the Portland Art Museum and the Denver Art Museum is that we are members of FRAME, the French American Museum Exchange, which has a rich history of connecting museums in its network through exhibitions and education programs for over 20 years. FRAME provided grant funding for a series of podcast episodes, and we are thrilled to be able to tell these stories with FRAME's assistance. Relevant links can be found in this episode's description and at [PortlandArtMuseum.org/podcast](https://PortlandArtMuseum.org/podcast), where you will also be able to find a full episode transcript. John, thank you for joining me today.

## JOHN P. LUKAVIC

Thanks for having me, Kathleen. This is a great opportunity to socially distance while working together on a particular project.

## KATHLEEN ASH-MILBY

Great. Well, you know what, I think our audience might be interested in knowing what our connection is, because it does seem that the project is based on these collaborative relationships between museum professionals in the FRAME network. So can you even remember the first time we met?

## JOHN P. LUKAVIC

Oh, well, yeah, actually, it was in 2012 officially. Certainly, we've had exchanges probably before that. But in 2012, when I started at the Denver Art Museum, we were planning to be the host organization for the Native American Art Studies Association for the 2013 conference. And that's the opportunity where you and I had, we were able to come together and kind of like work on the program together and over an extended period of time.

## KATHLEEN ASH-MILBY

Right. So our connection has primarily been through NAASA, which is the Native American Art Studies Association, that has a conference every two years where people in our field get to gather and present papers and catch up on each other's research and it's a really fantastic professional network for people interested in Native American Art. I think this is a great time to introduce our other guest who's on the line, Will Wilson. Will is an amazing artist who is primarily known as a photographer, but his work also encompasses installation, mixed media, and digital media. And we both had the privilege of working with him over the years. And his incredible photographs and mixed media works can be found in both of our collections. Will, thank you for speaking with us on the podcast.

## WILL WILSON

Sure. Yeah. Thanks for having me. It's a great opportunity to have a great discussion while we're physically distant.

## KATHLEEN ASH-MILBY

Yeah. And we've known each other for a long while too. I was just talking to my kids about how long I've, I've known you and it the reason I can pinpoint it is because when I met you, I was introduced to you by Jaune Quick-to-See Smith I think shortly after you were finishing your, your education at the University of New Mexico. Was that your MFA?

## WILL WILSON

Yeah, I did my MFA there and had that show in 1997.

## KATHLEEN ASH-MILBY

I think I met you a little bit later than that because my son was a toddler. And he is now 21.

## WILL WILSON

So well we did that show

## KATHLEEN ASH-MILBY

That makes us old.

## WILL WILSON

There was the show with Doug Miles that you curated at the Community House in New York City.

## KATHLEEN ASH-MILBY

That's right. That's right. We Yeah, that was one of my earliest exhibitions that I organized at the American Indian Community House in New York City. And that was basically the studio visit where I learned about your work and was really excited to work with you, and put that together. And then we had another exhibition that was originally organized by the Heard Museum that came to the National Museum of the American Indian. And that one was titled *Auto Immune Response*. And it was the series that we're going to be talking about today. What about you, John? When did you meet Will?

## JOHN P. LUKAVIC

So it's not quite as far in the past as that, however, it was in the summer of 2012 when Will, I believe you did your first *CIPX* project during Indian Market in Santa Fe and that's the *Critical Indigenous Photographic Exchange*. Could you talk a little bit about that project?

## WILL WILSON

Sure. Yeah, during the Santa Fe Indian Market in August of 2012, I produced this thing that I now call the "Critical Indigenous Photographic Exchange" or *CIPX* at the New Mexico Museum of Art, and I essentially set up a photo booth, but I used a historic photographic process called wet plate collodion, that was pretty much the process from about 1850 to about 1880. And I think one of the reasons that I was drawn to this, this historic photographic process in kind of a digital age is that it's such a hand made photographic process. So kind of bringing it back, thinking about kind of the history of technology, but also maybe also thinking about that specific history in terms of kind of Federal Indian policy and what was going on in Native nations during that time. For example, the first known images of Navajo / Diné people were when they were essentially prisoners of war, after the Long Walk when they were at the Bosque Redondo, or Fort Sumner, in New Mexico, so kind of linkages between kind of histories of technology and histories of colonialism, essentially.

## JOHN P. LUKAVIC

Yeah. And it was that, that first series that you did that brought my attention, and then I invited you to be an artist in residence in 2013, at the Denver Art Museum where you continue that series. You know, one thing that really was interesting to me in that process is, you know, seeing how, when the sitter sits in front of you, and seeing what they look like at that moment, and then when you when you process, the wet plate, there's some things that come out on the wet plate that you don't see in person. Looking at some people who appear, you know, more light skinned in person came out incredibly dark in some of your images. And it got me thinking about like, when we look at historical photos, what are we truly seeing and how are we interpreting that? And are these historic photos actually giving us a, like a, maybe a false sense of what the past was and who the people were in the past, and then potentially even influencing how we're seeing people today in the present.

### **WILL WILSON**

Hmm yeah, I think that for sure that's something that that series is trying to explore. Thinking about a technology that normally we think of as kind of being neutral or not having, you know, specific kind of social or historical, you know, specificity like or resonance like, photography is not neutral. You know, the way that that emulsion represents skin tone. If you have reds, browns, or yellows in your skin, you do come out a lot darker and your skin almost looks like leather, like like a, like an aged or a worked leather. And I guess when I first recognized that was at the artist in residence at Denver, because there was a woman, Cory Van Zytveld, I think she still works there at the Denver Art Museum. But she came in and you know, a pretty light complected woman, a redhead. And you couldn't really see her freckles in normal light. But when I made the tintype and it resolved in front of us, you know, because part of the process is to bring people in to watch the processing, she became this leopard woman because the orange freckles in her face just they didn't expose the emulsion, and so they were very, very dark. And you know, in that instance, I think, you know, it clicked like, this is a very interesting kind of way to transform the way that we think about representation and skin tone, I guess.

### **JOHN P. LUKAVIC**

Absolutely. There was another sitter for you at that particular time named Deb Emhoolah is a Kiowa and Arapaho and I wouldn't consider her to have dark skin. I mean, certainly she has darker skin than I do. But, um, but she came out incredibly dark in that photo, and I think it shocked her when she saw it.

### **WILL WILSON**

Yeah, I've had a lot of sitters actually, who I mean at some level that, you know, the project was also about thinking about this mythic image of what Native America, Native Americans look like. And I think for a lot of people, you know, they go back to the Edward Curtis photographs. And they think about that kind of history of what, you know, "real Indians" look like. But I think that, you know, the technology, and the way that he worked without technology very much kind of shaped that representation. And I think, you know, just doing this very simple kind of process of sharing an old photographic kind of exchange, it reveals that in a really kind of interesting and significant way.

### **KATHLEEN ASH-MILBY**

There was an exhibition here at the Portland Art Museum A few years ago, a photography exhibition that you participated in. Will, can you tell us a little bit about that?

### **WILL WILSON**

Yeah, it was a kind of, I guess response to Edward Curtis and, you know, it was this interesting curatorial process where Wendy Red Star, Zig Jackson, and myself were brought on or brought in to kind of, I guess, dialogue or talk about photography, and Native Americans and the other kind of person in that group was Edward Curtis. I love how Wendy Red Star also referred to him as Edgar. "Our friend Edgar that we're having this show with." I think that when most people think about what Native Americans look like, they think about those images, even if they don't know the Curtis work, it's just, you know, it's part of this mythologized kind of representation in people's minds. And it was an interesting time trying to negotiate that. Because I think on a lot of levels, we were just trying to be contemporary artists who are interested in the various mediums that we're, you know, engaged in, primarily photography in this case,

but, you know, it was always framed as this response to this person, Edward Curtis, and, uh, hopefully we moved a little past that, you know, I mean, one of the things in the early negotiations was just the simple fact of having our names in the title of the exhibition, you know, rather than Native American photographers respond to Edward Curtis. It became Wendy Red Star, Zig Jackson, and Will Wilson, and Edward Curtis. So, I don't know, I it's just, uh, you know, it's part of that ongoing work. I mean, I think a lot of people think that that's already a foregone kind of conclusion or movement kind of just, you know, stop worrying about Curtis.

### KATHLEEN ASH-MILBY

Well, let's talk about another type of mythology in a way or storytelling. When we look at your series, *Auto Immune Response*, it was a series that I really thought would be relevant to talk about today because it's a post-apocalyptic look at the world and looking back of that series now, it's 14 years later, but in some ways, it seems like it's more relevant than ever. So Will, can you describe this work for our listeners?

### WILL WILSON

Sure. The idea of the *Auto Immune Response* series, I think, you know, is just about meditation on being Indigenous today and trying to reconcile what, you know, colonialism and kind of a history of genocide has meant for Native peoples and our relationship to landscape and space. So I was thinking about autoimmune disease, which in some ways disproportionately affect Indigenous cultures throughout the world really. And one thing that that's been associated with is rapid change in kind of foodways, lifeways, economies, and and as a result, our bodies are attacking themselves. So I was trying to think about how to represent Indigenous folk in this way in the landscape, but also trying to think about the response, right? So how do we claim agency in relation to this situation and move forward? And so that's where the response comes in. So *Auto Immune Response* is about, you know, trying to navigate this situation.

### JOHN P. LUKAVIC

Will, question for you, and it's really about about that response. You know, one thing that I find really compelling when you look at this entire series as a whole, it almost seems to be kind of like a timeline or like, you know, storyboarding the story where the protagonist in this story is walking in a landscape, but then slowly starts to rebuild the world. But what they're doing- what this protagonist is doing is drawing upon Indigenous knowledge from the past to, in the present, to then build a future. And so this idea of kind of looking back and using Indigenous knowledge as a way to heal ourselves in the land, in our communities is something really strong and powerful to me. Like is Indigenous knowledge something that you're thinking about as you're moving the story forward?

### WILL WILSON

Yeah, for sure. I mean, I think in the, you know, in the first iteration of that exhibition, you know, we see the protagonist, he's dealing with a situation and then he finds shelter, he finds a hogan, which is a customary kind of Navajo architecture. And then by the end of that series, you know, he's created his own version of the hogan, which is this kind of metal framework and inside of it, there's a bed. And then after that first series, the hogan becomes a greenhouse because you have to, you know, you have to subsist in this new reality. And so I actually got to work with an organization called Native Seeds Search in Tucson, Arizona, and they're kind of a seed bank for heirloom variety seed from the southwest. Right? And so they've collected actually a lot of seed, which I think in some ways is kind of you could think about it as technology, right? A kind of technology that is developed in collaboration with light, fray, and with the earth and that, you know, there's a reason Hopis are able to cultivate corn in very, very arid environments. You know, and you know, I remember my grandfather having these amazing fields just you know, below- to the city and the, the Moenkopi Wash. It was almost a paradise, you know, there was corn, he had grape vines. Had peach trees, you know, just this really lush kind of environment and, and that seed was something that had been developed over generations, you know. So for sure, I've been thinking about that. And more and more I'm trying to think about how to extend that that series and it's always been kind of this desire to grab the best of like contemporary technology and marry it with, you know, Indigenous ways of knowing.

### JOHN P. LUKAVIC

The Portland Art Museum has some photographic works from the *Auto Immune Response* series. I've also seen you've done installation work, you know, so that that's another way that this storyline has been presented to the public. But at the Denver Art Museum, we have a series of four beaded panels that, collectively are titled *Weaving the Sacred Mountains*. And in them, there are like they're, I don't remember, I don't have the dimensions in front of me, so I can't remember how big exactly they are

### WILL WILSON

16 inches square.

### JOHN P. LUKAVIC

Yeah, it's this big everyone. Everyone on the other podcast can see my hands right now. So yes. So at the Denver Art Museum, we have these four beaded panels that are titled collectively *Weaving the Sacred Mountains* from the *Auto Immune Response* series. And within each one, are beaded QR scan codes, or codes that you can scan with your phone to then access a video of your protagonist in these four sacred landscapes related to the four sacred mountains of the Diné people. Could you talk about how you're choosing the media in which you're bringing forth the series, whether it's photograph, or installation, or you know, in this case, it kind of a merge between the the physical you know, beaded panels and the technological aspect with the digital video recordings.

### WILL WILSON

Yeah, I mean, I grew up being around weavers. My aunt and my grandmother, you know, they had probably four or 500 head of sheep. Um, you know, we would share them and I would help them do this amazing process, you know, you share the wool, you take that wool, you wash it, you card it, you clean it again, you dye it, you spin it by hand. And then you start this process of weaving. So this customary practice, I think, has just always been, you know, it's something I've been around and experienced, and wanted to participate in. But, you know, to bring my own, I guess, ideas and language to it. And so, I really think about them as functioning as storytelling devices. And again, you know, the the QR code or the quick response code was always something that kind of fascinated me, because of its potential for, you know, accessing or being a portal to to other kind of types of media. Right? And so, the four sacred mountains of the Navajo, you know, it defines Diné'tah or, you know, our kind of basic landscape, or universe. So I got to travel to each one of those those sites, and kind of don the garb of the *Auto Immune Response* protagonists to kind of further that story. As a photographer, I think there's something kind of intrinsic about that media that always keeps you on your toes in terms of, you know, technologies, story technologies.

### KATHLEEN ASH-MILBY

Well, *Auto Immune Response* to me, has always seemed very cinematic, and very epic in its storytelling. They're very large works that are actually composite images. And you actually are the protagonist in this series that appears in each iteration over and over again. And you can follow that story from the beginning, which is *Auto Immune Response* number one, which I believe is the only image in the series where you're not wearing a gas mask. And that gas mask becomes a really powerful symbol and icon throughout the work. Can you talk about your choice to use that and how that might relate to some of what's happening today?

### WILL WILSON

Yeah, sure. I've been thinking a lot about that, particularly at this moment where there's, it's like a scab has been torn off a wound and I've been thinking a lot about the Black Lives Matter movement. And you know what happened to George Floyd and what happened to so many other African American folk and one of the mantras that's come out of that that kind of awareness and movement is the idea of "I Can't Breathe." Right? And I think that's pretty central to my kind of thinking about kind of what's going on in Indian country, on the Navajo Nation in particular, especially in relation to the history of extraction, and uranium, and the uranium mines, and people who worked in them. So I was talking to my daughter about this kind of slow form genocide. I think that Native people have experienced historically, and kind of an offshoot of the *Auto Immune Response* series is something that I've started and it's tentatively called *Connecting the Dots*, although I'm not sure about that name. But I have this map that was developed by the Navajo

Nation EPA, in association with the US EPA and it kind of pinpoints 521 abandoned uranium mines that are present on the Navajo Nation. And, you know, with the radioactivity that that toxicity is, is going to be around for a very long time. You know, the the men and women who worked in those mines and were exposed to the the uranium dust a lot off from lung cancers. And, you know, they were doing it, I think, kind of as good citizens thinking about it as a way to kind of support our country that hasn't always been, you know, great to Native folks, but they really wanted to support this effort during the Cold War. And, you know, now we're dealing with the kind of negative externalities of that- the history of this and so, you know, I think that *Auto Immune Response* characters is also kind of thinking about some of that history. And I don't know how, how the intersection between this kind of, you know, fictionalized character on landscape is going to is going to work with this real world situation, but I'm kind of doing a photographic survey of these mines. And I'm now using drone technology because I think it's a really interesting way to image landscape and kind of image environmental injustice. So that was kind of a long answer. But you know, I think that artists are good people at imagining interesting solutions to complex situations. And, you know, that's what I'm trying to work on.

### JOHN P. LUKAVIC

Following that line, the- there's a very strong connection between kind of overt forms of racism and structural racism, but also in the in the case that you're talking about there in Navajo Nation with uranium mines, environmental racism, and all the challenges that you just mentioned, but also thinking about kind of the current situation with like, COVID-19 and the extreme challenges that Navajo people are experiencing currently with the situation. And everything from getting shipments of faulty materials or like, you know, protective materials to just even, you know, tourism in the state where you know, that crosses the reservation there that is bringing a lot of challenges to the people. Kathleen even mentioned to me just the other day, we were talking about the the face shields that you've recently created. Can you talk a little bit about like that? I mean, not that it's necessarily viewed as an art project, but that, you know, you're doing something to actually try to help the community.

### WILL WILSON

Uh, yeah, I mean, I think you know, like so many people and some of the amazing kind of mutual aid organizations that have happened that sprung up in response to the coronavirus and what's going on the Navajo Nation in particular, I've wanted to do something and- but I also felt like probably best for me to stay home and be a good citizen and listen to all of the important kind of restrictions that we're supposed to adhere to to combat this. But yeah, I started to make face-shields. I run the photo program at the Santa Fe Community College, and I'm also kind of interested in this technology called rapid prototyping. So we have 3d printers and we have laser cutters. And pretty quickly, I saw that people were posting designs for face-shields and face masks online. So yeah, I mean, I have, you know, relatives who work with the senior centers in Tuba City, and they were putting a call out for PPE. They hadn't gotten, you know, adequate protection from people and so I wanted to make sure that they had stuff and then a friend of mine saw my post on Facebook and she organized a concert. And in one evening, we raised a couple thousand dollars. So I've got enough material to make face-shields all summer long. So I'll continue to do that. And hopefully there won't be a second wave or people will be ready for that second wave when it does come.

### JOHN P. LUKAVIC

Will, earlier you were talking about 'customary arts' rather than say, you know what, a lot of people might be more familiar with the terms 'traditional art' or 'contemporary art', but we know that that binary is so problematic, because everything that you know is contemporary now may become traditional later. And, you know, it's a it's a problematic way of classifying things. But I've heard you talk about your art as being trans-customary, which brings in elements of the past and but also allows a lot of room for the future. Can you talk about that aspect of your work and then perhaps, give us a sense of, you know, some of the current projects you're working on that, that relate to this trans-customary way of making art?

### WILL WILSON

Yeah. Imagine you're a photographer who's interested in photographing Native folks. And you have the opportunity to make images with this really cool historic photographic process of actors wearing the *Dances with Wolves* costumes,

blended with costumes produced by the folks who worked on *Alien* and *Predator*. So in a nutshell, it was a you know, it was a dream come true for me, and for you know, some of the ideas that I've been kind of thinking about and playing with. There's a- I'm not sure what it's gonna be. But I had the opportunity to collaborate with Ben MacPherson. He's an artist and a filmmaker who's working on our tentatively titled *Black Moon Rising*, which kind of tells the story of a kind of apocalyptic past where instead of white folks colonizing the Americas, an alien race does and how do you know the protagonists, in this case Indigenous folks from the Americas, deal with this? How do they negotiate this? How do they survive in the face of this strange new force that's arriving? So I'm excited about that and what it might become and what role I might play in it, but it's still kind of pretty tentative at this point.

### JOHN P. LUKAVIC

And for those who are unfamiliar with the term, could you explain what you mean by trans-customary and how it applies to your work?

### WILL WILSON

Yeah, so the term trans-customary, I believe it was developed by a professor, a theoretician, a Māori man named Robert Jahnke from New Zealand and he basically had a problem with this kind of age old binary, the kind of historic or traditional, and the modern, right? Or progressive. And, you know, he said, essentially we don't need either or we can be both. And so this idea of the trans-customary is, when you're looking at tried and true kind of historical practice, that has been termed traditional, and blending it with, you know, the best of whatever the modern kind of day offers, then that space is a trans-customary space. It's this kind of hybrid place where those two things get to merge, and it's certainly something that I've done. I mean, I see it is definitely a strange binary, right? I mean, it's just design, you know, and people kind of engaging with technology, because it went through this weird ethnographic lens. Like for us it got termed 'traditional arts' and 'contemporary art', anyway, trans-customary is a useful term, I think.

### KATHLEEN ASH-MILBY

Will, do you consider your work part of a movement that people refer to now as Indigenous Futurisms?

### WILL WILSON

Sure, I like that term. I think that it's a it's a destabilizing term because people don't usually think of Native folks or Indians and then the future in the same breath. And, you know, it's got a nice ring to it. Indigenous Futurisms. Yeah, and I think, yes, we are here and we are making exciting, interesting work and, you know, on into the future we go.

### KATHLEEN ASH-MILBY

Great.

### WILL WILSON

I had an opportunity A long time ago to have a group of students from the Institute of American Indian Arts come to my studio when I was a grad student at the University of New Mexico. There's a woman named Melanie Yazzie who's a printmaking instructor. Now, she's

### JOHN P. LUKAVIC

one of my favorite people ever.

### WILL WILSON

Yeah. So now, Melanie is, you know, at the University of Colorado-Boulder, but she brought her students down and I had no idea that this was going to happen. And I turned around and all of a sudden the room is filled with all of these like, like Indian art kids. And we had a great discussion. But one of the things that one of the students talked about was they said they were thinking about 'remembering the future', and that that was their kind of like, practice as a contemporary Native artist, and that always stuck with me. And you know, it's something that, that I've always wanted to kind of include or think about my work, this idea of Native folk remembering the future.

## JOHN P. LUKAVIC

That actually brings up an interesting idea that I'd love to explore if we just have a second is that you mentioned working with Melanie Yazzie and her students and I'm really curious about what you've done as an established artist to reach out and mentor, a younger generation of artists and encourage them to move forward with their work and to bring new ideas into the future.

## WILL WILSON

Yeah, I mean, I think it's, you know, it's one of our jobs. It's one of our responsibilities as folks who are who are creative and professional. You know, it's a lot of hard work to get an MFA and then, you know, to get a job at an institution. And then I think I've always taken that responsibility very seriously and, and tried to find folks to reach out to and mentor particularly Native folks. I mean, I count now as collaborators and artists but former students, like Erica Lord was somebody that I worked with early on at the Institute of American Indian Arts. And then more recently at the community college, this young woman, Kali Spitzer, who's Kaska Diné, kind of from the Yukon Territory up there. She approached me a few years ago and said, Hey, I really want to learn this process, this tintype process and I'm really interested in how you're using it to kind have question, you know, the myth of of the image of Native folks and, and she's kind of taken that on and made a name for herself. And recently, Kali and I had a two person show at the Hood Museum, which is at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire. And so we got to manifest this new *CIPX* project that was that was more collaborative, and she made images and I made images and we had this wonderful two person show. She's interested, particularly in kind of imaging, I think, like her generation's negotiation with, you know, ideas of race, gender, and sexuality and kind of how those all intersect. So a lot of the images that she's making of, you know, mixed race folks, who don't define themselves, you know, binarily, that's a term in terms of gender or sexuality. And yeah, I mean, she's taken it in a completely different direction than how I was working with it. And I think it's really strong, powerful work.

## JOHN P. LUKAVIC

You mentioned the younger generation of artists and how they're bringing forth kind of new and creative ideas into their work. Who do you have your eye on? Who should we be paying attention to?

## WILL WILSON

I think we should be paying attention to like an amazing cohort of kind of next generation artists, you know, a couple people that that I've had the pleasure of working with are like, we were talking about Kali Spitzer. I think her work is amazing. Cannupa, you know, he's not so much up and coming anymore as he is pretty well established. So Cannupa Hanska Luger's work is really powerful and strong. There's a young Navajo artist who's doing a lot of kind of performance, and then it's installation. That's kind of residual performance that's leftover. Eric Riege I think is his name. You know, his work? He was in the [SITE] Santa Fe triennial recently. Demian Dinéyazhi', I think his work is pretty remarkable and powerful. I also like to think about how like Jaune Quick-to-See Smith with somebody who like, you know, mentored me and like, encouraged me and like the work that she did enabled, like, kind of the practice that I was able to enjoy. Just, you know, someone like Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie, who was like forcing her way into these institutions and saying, "no, we have to make like space for, you know, Native photographers or queer photographers," you know, I mean, it's really cool to see that kind of like, evolution as we move forward. I mean, like Nick Galanin and Jeffrey Gibson are like, you know, they're some of the most important artists in the world right now.

## JOHN P. LUKAVIC

Yeah, they're killing it.

## WILL WILSON

And they're Indigenous Yeah.

## JOHN P. LUKAVIC

Yeah, no, and I really appreciate how you reference kind of the older generation as well because you know, Kathleen

and I have had this conversation many times where how, over the course of even the 20th century into this century, it seems like every decade or so, or every two decades, there's a moment in Indigenous art where people start paying attention. And then for whatever reason, it just wanes. And there are moments in time where important artists, Indigenous artists have been making work, but they happen to be doing work at a time when the majority of the population of the US or the world were not actually paying attention to its arts. Kathleen worked on a project of Kay WalkingStick's work. I mean, Kay's been doing incredible work for decades and decades and decades. But you know, she just got her first major retrospective in the show that Kathleen and David Penney curated. So there's a lot of artists who are from a generation or even two generations before you that have been creating incredible work, and many of them are still making great work today, but just because of when they were doing it, and who was paying attention at that time, you know, maybe they haven't gotten the, the recognition and the due that they deserve. So I sincerely appreciate you referencing is Jaune's work and Hulleah's work.

### **KATHLEEN ASH-MILBY**

So Will, do you have any questions for me or John?

### **WILL WILSON**

Yeah, I guess like how- and this is part of the response, right? You're creating podcasts and stuff, but it seems like, you know, we've all been forced to make this shift. And I've been thinking about it for a while, but there's this strange term called a, it's an economist term. It's called disintermediation. And the idea is basically you're taking the middleman out, right? So producers are us. We can make our own content now and get it out there. We don't- we're not kind of beholden to this, this distributor and I guess I just wonder what you think about this new time and space for exhibition and for kind of cultural engagement because, you know, museums are these brick and mortar institutions with these objects and collection- like, more and more, it seems like to be relevant, you have to make the shift to the, to the ether that we're all kind of struggling with. And I guess, I don't know, do you have any predictions about what this moment means? Like, are we all being forced to get into gear and turn on our Instagram and Twitter and Tiktok?

### **KATHLEEN ASH-MILBY**

Well, I think that we're definitely all being forced to learn new technology and to get comfortable with technology. And I think that is going to be a good thing, no matter what. You know, a year from now, two years from now, I think that this moment is taking away some of the fear and reluctance people have had to really leverage the technology that was already in place. So I think that's a really good thing. I think it's great that the arts are really making a statement on these different platforms and people are looking at art as part of an essential part of life. You know that this is something that gets us through adversity. And this is something that helps us see things differently. Art can tell us so much more, you know, than just words. But I do think that, you know, museums aren't going to go away. And I don't think that experiencing art in person is ever going to go away. Because I think that this is also a moment when we're realizing that it's not a substitute for being with the real thing. You know, your work reproduces really wonderfully digitally, Will, you know, and it's beautiful. But when you see these monumental photographs in person, they're just awe inspiring.

### **JOHN P. LUKAVIC**

And to that, I would add that yeah, being in person is a different experience than being online. And so we are currently adjusting to the current situation. But to me, I think it's more that we're being pushed to think creatively. And we're responding to it in this particular way right now, but the creativity that it's actually spurring I think will actually maybe integrate into our work moving forward into the future. What that looks like yet, I don't really know. We haven't even had the opportunity to take some of the things that we're learning from this and putting it into action in our galleries, you know, we are learning, I think, you know, in the process of by putting out digital content, you know, how people are using the content, and how it may be different than they would use the content in a gallery setting. And also talking about kind of like the democratization of putting information out there, you know, like, we're in a world now where everyone's a curator, you know, curators on Pinterest, you know, the secondhand clothing store down the street, you know, has curated a selection of clothing. You know, what that means, you know, I'm not sure. But as people

who are professional curators or working in an institutional setting, I think it's interesting to see how other people are engaging in aspects of the work we do, not the totality of the work we do. And I, you know, I consider myself to be kind of a cultural observer and you know, a lifelong learner and I'm looking at what other people are doing. And, you know, some of it is very inspiring. And I think moving forward, I think we can take kind of the best of this experience, and just see where we can go with it.

### KATHLEEN ASH-MILBY

Great. Well, this has been a lot of fun. It's been great to hear your voices and reconnect with you. Will, it's been a while since we've been- certainly a while since we've been face to face. John, I always enjoy talking to you. And we've got ongoing projects all the time. One of the best things about my job is the people that I get to work with and being able to work in this great community of artists and scholars of Native art. So I want to thank you both for joining us today. John, is there anything you'd like to promote for the Denver Art Museum? It's my understanding that the Museum has already reopened.

### JOHN P. LUKAVIC

Just like every other institution, we're adapting to the ongoing situation with COVID-19, social distancing, you know, comfort levels of people and, you know, and general safety. So we have opened one of our, our museum buildings to the public with timed tickets, so that way we're able to limit the number of people that are getting into the, into the institution at a given time. But we've got some, you know, great programs, you know, across the board. My personal projects, we're in the process of finishing up the reinstallation of our Northwest Coast and Alaska Native galleries and we're deep into the planning for the reinstallation of our Indigenous Arts of North America floor. You know, we're incredibly blessed at the Denver Art Museum for having over 20,000 square feet just for Indigenous Arts. I have a few other exhibitions that are coming up in the near future, but we haven't officially announced them yet, so stay tuned and keep checking out the Denver Art Museum's website, [DenverArtMuseum.org](http://DenverArtMuseum.org) and keep up with what we're doing.

### KATHLEEN ASH-MILBY

And Will, thank you for your time and telling us how this time in history has impacted you and your work. Is there anything else you'd like to tell our audience? I'm sure they'd love to know how or where they can see your work in person once it's safe.

### WILL WILSON

Yeah, so I guess you can check out my work always on the website, and I should get busy updating that. But there's some new work there. I'm really excited about this kind of tentatively titled *Connecting the Dots* project. Boy, you know, there's been so many cancellations and stuff I was the Yale University Art Galleries Artist in Residence this year, and I haven't been. I haven't been this year yet. But we may still do that. It depends on what's going to happen in the fall, but the plan was to do the *CIPX* project there and, oh what else? Keep an eye out for *Black Moon Rising*. So that's all I'll say about that. But if you do a little digital sleuthing, you'll come across some really cool stuff, hopefully.

### KATHLEEN ASH-MILBY

Okay, great. Thank you for listening to Art Unbound. Be sure to subscribe to the podcast so you can be alerted when the next episode is released. I'd like to thank John Lukavic and Will Wilson for joining me in our conversation about the impact of the current state of the world as it relates to Native American art. I'd also like to thank FRAME, the French American Museum Exchange, for providing the funds to make this series possible. Thanks also to Mark Orton for providing music for this episode, and for our producer Jon Richardson. Be sure to visit [PortlandArtMuseum.org](http://PortlandArtMuseum.org) and [nwfilm.org](http://nwfilm.org) to learn about our exhibitions, learning and community partnership programs, Film Center opportunities, ways to support our organizations, and more. If you have an idea for an episode of the podcast, fill out the online form at [pam.to/podcastidea](http://pam.to/podcastidea) and someone from our team will work with you to incorporate your suggestion.