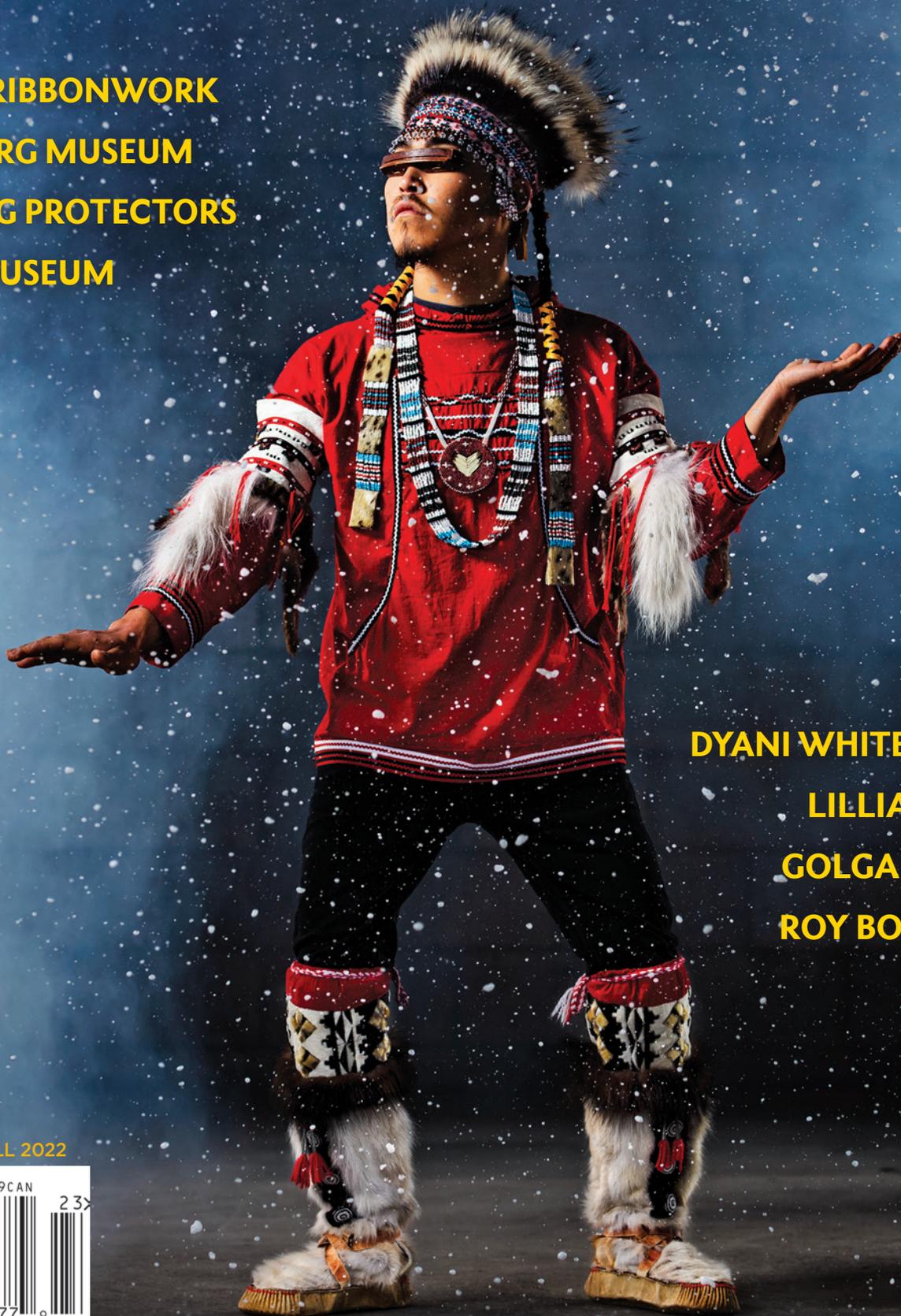


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WEST BEND, WISCONSIN

Tom Jones: *Here We Stand*

Museum of Wisconsin Art

FROM ACROSS THE ROOM, the oversize portrait of Raymond Goodbear by Ho-Chunk photographer Tom Jones shimmers brilliantly in the gallery light. The Ho-Chunk Nation citizen is dressed in dance regalia, well adorned with a variety of colored and textural detailing. He holds an eagle-feather fan and decorated war club and stares beyond his frame at passersby, challenging them to understand and, perhaps, embrace his Ho-Chunk culture. His image is surrounded by a web of intricate white beads, rhinestones, and shells, stitched by Jones himself, that represent the spirit world that embraces us all.

Goodbear, who is Jones's cousin, is part of the photographer's *Strong Unrelenting Spirits* series, a group of fine art portraits that also includes a similar

ABOVE Tom Jones (Ho-Chunk), *Raymond Goodbear*, from the *Strong Unrelenting Spirits* series, 2019, archival digital print with beadwork, 40 × 60 in.

OPPOSITE Installation view of *Here, Now and Always* at the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture. ACONAV gown worn by Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland (Laguna), designed and created by Loren Aragon (Acoma Pueblo). Photo: Tira Howard. Image courtesy of the New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs.

portrait of Elizah Leonard. Earlier this year, that work captured second-place honors in the Smithsonian's Outwin Boochever Portrait Competition and hangs on display at the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, DC. Although the Leonard portrait is currently on loan, Goodbear and other similar portrait subjects serve as a cornerstone of *Tom Jones: Here We Stand*, a retrospective of the photographer's work that opened July 23 at the Museum of Wisconsin Art (MOWA) in West Bend, just north of Milwaukee.

The comprehensive exhibition includes 140 photographic works by Jones, a photography professor at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, that cover 16 different series spanning 25 years of Jones's career. "All my work deals with Native American issues," Jones told me. "It's Indian first, and then art comes second."

This comprehensive, retrospective gallery exhibition for Jones embraces numerous approaches, from photojournalism to fine art. But all the works are designed to tell the story of Native Americans, with a particular emphasis on the Ho-Chunk people. Some series feature beautifully conceived portraiture, such as the one Goodbear's portrait is from. Other series, such as *Encountering Cultures* (2008), *Ho-Chunk Veterans Memorials* (1999–present), and *Ho-Chunk Warrior* (2002–03) serve as cultural mirrors of contemporary Ho-Chunk life. Still others, including *Identity Genocide* (2012), offer visual commentary on the Ho-Chunk's place in the modern, commercialized world.

Jones, whose Ho-Chunk name Caxšepska translates to "White Eagle," started out as a painter. He became a photographer and was drawn to the greater immediacy of the medium. He

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lets his artistic nature come through in several photo series, most notably *Remnants* (2017–18), a series of images coupled with carpet patterns from various tribal casinos, and *Studies in Cultural Appropriations* (2019), a series of 19 of the same water-stained, 1920s-era illustration of a white couple in which the man's suit is beaded and decorated with different tribal patterns.

One of the most controversial series, *Dear America* (2002), delves deeper into the past as well as racial themes. In one piece, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, an historic sepia-toned photo of a group of Native people commemorates the execution of 38 Dakota men who were hanged south of Mankato, Minnesota, in 1862 under the orders of then-President Abraham Lincoln. A contemporary photo of a white trapper holding up a dead beaver is superimposed on the image.

In another historic photo from the series, *Our Fathers' God to Thee*, a large group of Native American children are shown standing in front of the Bethany Indian Mission in Wittenberg, Wisconsin. A dozen white faculty members stand on the building's balcony above the children. Corresponding text mentions the punishment the children received for speaking their own languages.

Among the most evocative pieces, however, are simple shots of contemporary tribal members who support one of the credos of Jones's work: that the Ho-Chunk and other tribal members are alive and well, have not disappeared, nor have they been full assimilated into mainstream society. They maintain their own unique identities and culture, something that Jones's photography is meant to exemplify.

Bill "Beaver Head" (Potawatomi) (2008), part of the *Encountering Cultures* series, sits outside his tent, cane in hand, wearing a top hat and leather leggings and looking slightly askance and a little skeptical. Eye contact is a central part of the photographer's techniques to bring subject and audience closer together.

In *Elliott and Edward Littlejohn* (2003) Elliot, a uniformed Vietnam-era veteran, stands next to a homemade memorial and photo of his late father Edward, dressed in World War II military garb. Part of the *Honoring the Ho-Chunk Warrior* series, the memorial is a photo nailed to a painted post accompanied by a basket of cigarettes so that visitors may honor Edward's memory by sharing a smoke. The photo within a photo is another of Jones's favorite techniques.

And in *Bill O'Brian* (2000), part of the *Ho-Chunk People* series, an aging tribal member sits quietly in his parlor chair. Behind him a painting of what could be a much younger O'Brian clutching a single-shot carbine rifle and wearing a bone-handled knife in a sheath on a US military belt looks out wistfully from a much earlier century.

There is no end to the breadth and depth of Jones's iconic images, something that prompted MOWA's Graeme Reid, who curated the exhibition, to reflect on the importance of the photographer's art form.

"Jones and his photography act as a conduit for better understanding and knowledge of the role and place of the Ho-Chunk in modern society. He is, after all, an educator," Reid told me. "We just felt it was time to do a retrospective before someone else did."
—Michael Muckian

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