Sky Hopinka (Ho-Chunk Nation/Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians, born 1984, Ferndale, Washington) layers imagery and poetic prose to foreground relationships between communities, landscape, and language. His artwork intermingles English and Indigenous dialects such as Chinuk Wawa, a revived Chinookan creole of the Pacific Northwest, to consider how language shapes perception of place and acts as a container of culture. Centering personal and political notions of Indigenous homeland, this presentation features four of the artist’s recent films and a new suite of photographs.

Growing up in Washington State, far from his ancestral tribal lands in Wisconsin and Southern California, Hopinka traveled the western powwow circuit with his parents. These early experiences of itinerancy and, as the artist describes it, making a “home nonetheless” continue to influence his artistic practice. The films in *Subterranean Ceremonies* revolve around transit and life on the road, a liminal zone Hopinka embraces as a space of community and knowledge production. For instance, *Mnemonics of Shape and Reason* (2021) interweaves scattered landscapes filmed from a moving car to ruminate on the spiritual implications of colonial plunder.

The photographs in the exhibition offer glimpses of disparate locations linked through the artist’s travels. Drawing from stories, songs, and his own poetry, he etched phrases on the photographic prints using a rotary tool. Together, the works reflect an ethos of wandering—an approach that allows Hopinka’s work to resist static depictions of Indigenous cultures and move fluidly between past and present.

The Frye Art Museum commissioned the following writing by Dylan Robinson, a Stó:lō scholar and artist and member of the Skwah First Nation. His curatorial work includes *Soundings*, a touring exhibition that features an ever-growing number of art-scores by Indigenous artists. Other work includes “Caring for Our Ancestors,” a project that seeks to reconnect kinship with Indigenous life incarcerated in museums. His book *Hungry Listening* examines Indigenous and settler colonial practices of listening. Robinson notes:

> The text seeks to translate the temporality of *sqwálewel*—*thought-feeling*—in response to Sky Hopinka’s work. The text traces attention. Its moments oscillate focus. It seeks parallel materialities. It desires direct, galvanized kinds of sense. Occupying space between Halq’emeylem—Salishan cousin-dialect, language spoken by xwélmexw (Stó:lō)—and xwelítemqel English, it plays. It interrupts, to convey its terms.
1. It's you and me, come closer. Look at it, as you might look out a window. How does it feel? How did it feel?

2. I'm looking at the form, unburdening it, it hangs in the air, awaiting response. It's for me, it's assembling a distance between love and alienation, I'm practicing a kind of refusal without refusing, I'm practicing ways of feeling your lines, I'm practicing ways to unravel the terms.

3. And for me, or if you, with an expectation of formal anchors, of text as an anchoring point telling you the context, yet perceptual orientations are only as good as the wanderings that beget them.

4. Are you looking at it? Look harder. Do you see it?

5. Would you see it, if you, lying on the ground? Listening to your breath? To the whisperings? To the morning dew?

6. You can't see it, your sight. So they say.

7. If you or if you, if you, if you
8. lachexw selchí:m
welámexw t’ó:kw?
selchímomex,
welámexw t’ó:kw?

how are you going home?
what does it look like
when you go home?

9. tsel ts’èqw’
tsél ts’èqw’
tsél ts’èqw’tsel
t’ts’èqw’tsel
t’ts’èqw’sél

it hit me
I was struck
I’m shot
I was poked into

ts’èqw’tsel
I was wounded

ts’èqw’tsel
I’ve overcame
pleasurable feelings,
after eating great salmon
after a great meal

10. if I told you
to stop looking
with starvation,
would you know how?

if I told you
you need to do some work
before looking further,
would you do it?

11. kw’eststset

our wild, restless habits
prevail; and our
necessities interfere
against your efforts
to hold our attention;
we go off to winter
grounds for weeks
together,
and when we return,
we begin again

12. Sky, tsel
ts’its’lhámethámë
li te Lummi temexw
chexw thiyéltxwem tetha
chexw yéqwelchep tetha
ts’lhámë t’a xét’kw’els
t’it’ëm

t’l’osuw t’s’lhâmë te
tsel ts’lhâmë

të théxwelqep
liu jyô’lem kw’es
kw’étslexwtset
liu jyô’lem kw’es
kw’étslexws s’éhlte

13. settler colonial attention
seeks to compel sensory
engagement through
practiced, “settled” focus
—the sense of
coming to rest;
becoming calm.

14. qwà:l li kw’e qëx
méstiyëxw;

I interrupt you
with the words
“the feeling of
my fingertips
on the land”
and ask you then,
again,

li chexw p’átl’et?
15. listen
to where
the language comes from
where exactly in the river,
in the grasses,
in the winds
listen to the sense these
words transfer

16. you offer your attention
you give time
to be fallow,
then slow
the germination
we tend it together
work through it in
branches

17. if I ask you
are you trying to go away,
would you tell me?

18. look out the window
and back
look toward the land
and back
when the walls continue
what will you use
as your window?

19. lhó:yel
kw’a’s là:m áyel?
yú:wqwlha

20. to oscillate between
strata of attentional
positionality is not
entirely up to you
these words
interrupt,
they try to stop your
sense
I’m using my words
to tell you
you can’t get too close
I’m also telling you,
you can’t change this
you can’t change my
words into other words
even though they mean
different things
this road,
is not a road
I feel underfoot
your road,
winding its way through,
it says
what you see
is written around an
direction
asks that we look
around

21. te xálh, tetha
ta’ xálh
ewe tel xálh
tsel sasetáléqep

22. after everything,
after all the words,
imperatives,
interruptions,
after all the distant sound
carried by the wind
after this time
I began to feel it change
23. it displaces me and draws me in
I’m placed alongside powwow temporality alongside this sense sometimes used as a mark and measure, that measures Indigenous knowing
then I’m reminded of a gathering I’m reminded of a room and a Nish poet speaking about powwow I’m reminded of Anishinaabe kwe and Haudenosaunee laughter overflowing the room, spilling through in that room, with that laughter I had no way finding through the crass poetics of powwow grounds

24. naming aspects of positionality is a way to notice our noticing to noticing how we notice the work of positionality—as the work we do to reflect on our habits and biases of noticing—is undertaken with the hope of moving us toward different, non-normative forms of noticing we learn to see, hear and sense police orders that structure how we perceive, orders that are often not felt through an authoritative sense of restriction but instead as sense’s smoothing out of sensate abrasion noticing otherwise involves more than attending to the punctum’s singular prick, or glancing awry giving and taking notice, together, are practices that shift the normative time and terms of your attention

25. xwlalá: sqwalewel
“t’o tem wiyóthtset” - LumlameLut WeelLaq
what I heard what I felt-thought was a moment of pulling away, then pushing up against “Indian time”—“Indian time” written twice like this with scare quotes, removed, then replaced— I felt an awkwardness of relation I felt a sense of I’d rather not
Sky Hopinka: Subterranean Ceremonies is co-organized by Georgia Erger, Associate Curator, and Amanda Donnan, Chief Curator and Director of Exhibitions.

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All works by Sky Hopinka and all images of those works courtesy of the artist. Cover: Mnemonics of Shape and Reason (still, detail), 2021. Digital video (color, sound); 4:12 min. Interior right panel: Kicking the Clouds (still), 2021. 16mm film transferred to digital video (color, sound); 15:36 min.