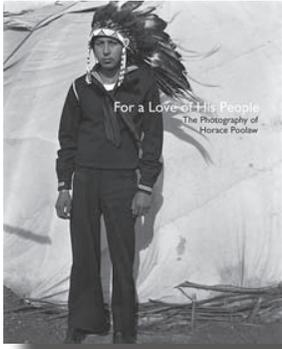


## BOOK REVIEW

### For a Love of His People: The Photography of Horace Poolaw

Edited by Nancy Marie Mithlo  
Yale University Press, 2014  
184 pp./\$49.95 (hb)



A new book brings a comprehensive look at the photography of Horace Poolaw (Kiowa, 1906–84) to a wide audience for the first time. From the late 1920s to the 1960s, Poolaw made over two thousand photographs, most showing life among Native American communities on the Southern Plains of Oklahoma. This was a time of profound change in the daily lives of Native peoples, in the figure

of the Native American artist, and in the principles of federal Indian policy. *For a Love of His People: The Photography of Horace Poolaw* includes photographs of dancers performing at fairgrounds, young women adorned in buckskin finery parading on automobiles, and families grieving at military funerals. For decades, Poolaw's relatives and friends engaged his camera with varying degrees of distance and nonchalance, formality and familiarity. The pictures reproduced in *For a Love of His People*, taken along with their detailed captions, convey a sense of the intimacy that sustained close community relationships during decades of intense social change.

The essays—written by museum professionals, academics, contemporary Native photographers, and Poolaw's descendants—address a significant lacuna in the study of indigenous modernisms. While Native American photography has received increased attention, especially in the past ten years, *For a Love of His People* is one of the first monographs devoted to the work of a historic Native American photographer. Sixteen essays make up the text. These range greatly in length and scope, from the personal to the art historical. Some of the most effective essays are the shortest. For example, the book concludes with a brief reflection written by Poolaw's great-grandson Dane Poolaw. Initially drafted in the Kiowa language and translated to English (with both versions in the text), the essay identifies a few of the author's family members in Poolaw's photographs. This essay demonstrates how Poolaw made visible Kiowa relations in the mid-twentieth century.

Considered together, the catalog essays provide a rich and multivocal conversation on Poolaw's work. Longer essays include historian Ned Blackhawk's introduction to the dynamics of race and visual representation in American history, Linda Poolaw's biography of her father, and an analysis by art historian David W. Penney of the ways Poolaw pictured Native performers. Penney focuses on Poolaw's inclusion of pictorial ground in portraits of dancers and parade queens, offering the sole comparison between Poolaw's photography and the contemporary, groundbreaking work of the "Kiowa Six" painters. While similar paintings by Stephen Mopope and

Spencer Asah tended to isolate the dancer and therefore remove the figure from a particular time, Poolaw's photographs include contextualizing traces that help to show how Native people understood and occupied the modern world. As Penney's comparison suggests, Poolaw's work has strong connections to other forms of imagemaking on the Plains, both historical and contemporary. Many essayists link Poolaw's work to other forms of photography, especially those of the so-called documentary genre.

Indigenous experiences of modernity often included knowledge of photography.<sup>1</sup> This knowledge extended beyond the technical and aesthetic work of indigenous photographers to include the savvy of photographic subjects. Indeed, by the mid-twentieth century, many Native people had been photographed repeatedly over the course of their entire lives. Poolaw frequently photographed his relatives at home, creating pictures in a style that many Americans might recognize from their own family albums. Poolaw also documented events such as the American Indian Exposition and parade at Anadarko, Oklahoma, and other gatherings of Native performers in the Plains and Southwest. Many of his images, then, depict Native people in ceremonial and formal dress. Poolaw shows performers interacting with their families or posing for crowds. This contrasts greatly with the figural isolation preferred by white American photographers such as Edward S. Curtis. Facing Poolaw's lens, Native peoples convey a sense of calm familiarity with photography. In a picture of the 1950 American Indian Expo in Anadarko, Poolaw shows a view of the grandstand, a field of observers overwhelming a small group of Native children at right. Surrounded by cameras, the children perform with seeming ease.

A photograph taken at the 1957 American Indian Expo depicts a young dancer in a field. This image approaches Curtis's typical style. The natural environment is bare and expansive. The figure stands close enough that the photograph registers the intricate beadwork on his regalia. Key details indicate Poolaw's distance, however, from Curtis. As the book's editor Nancy Marie Mithlo describes in her essay, the dancer makes eye contact with the camera to show his own recognition of the photographer. This exchange between photographer and subject brings a strong sense of reflexivity into the frame. Poolaw's works thus furnish an antidote to the romanticizing and historicizing work of photographers such as Curtis. Yet more than intervening in the photographic depiction of Native Americans, Poolaw's images interrogate a broad set of relations between indigenous experience and representation. For example, as the dancer and photographer engage each other, at back looms a 1956 Pontiac Star Chief (Pontiac automobiles take the name of an eighteenth-century leader of the Odawa [Anishinaabe] peoples). As the dancer asserts his presence and returns the scrutiny of the photographer, he becomes suspended between the camera and the car. Poolaw shows us the shifting ground of mid-twentieth-century visual culture and, crucially, he suggests how Native peoples made themselves at home there.

*For a Love of His People* accompanies an impressive exhibition of Poolaw's work. From August 9, 2014, to February 16, 2015, Poolaw's photography filled the West Gallery of the National Museum of the American Indian's George Gustav Heye Center in New York City. Large

prints overtook viewers, allowing for visual immersion and detailed looking. Though Poolaw's photographs and name may be unfamiliar to many readers, museums have displayed Poolaw's work for decades, including multiple exhibitions in Oklahoma and a widely traveled exhibition that opened at Stanford University in 1989, in which the photographer's daughter Linda Poolaw played a key role.<sup>2</sup> *For a Love of His People* presents over 130 high-quality reproductions of Poolaw's photographs, many appearing in print for the first time. Preparing the works for publication required assiduous restoration. The photographer Tom Jones (Ho-Chunk, b. 1964) teamed up with students to scan fourteen hundred of Poolaw's negatives and then repair them digitally. The restored pictures are clear and detailed, and a photograph printed in the catalog does, happily, often fill an entire page. This scale echoes the large size of pictures in the New York exhibition.

A steady line of research coalesces in the restored images and their captions. As an exhibition panel stated, after Linda Poolaw's work in 1989, the Poolaw family has continued the work of identifying individuals in Horace Poolaw's photographs. In one c. 1930 picture, for example, two women stand in front of a tipi, facing the camera. They wear similar hide dresses, although the older woman wears her hair long while the younger has cut hers in a bob. The

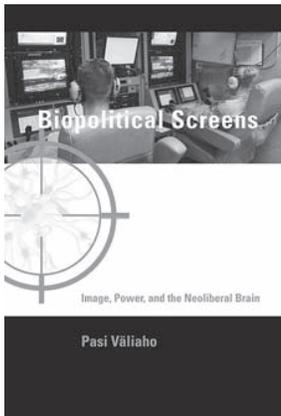
caption shares their names: Sindy Libby Keahbone (Kiowa) and Hannah Keahbone (Kiowa). Based on knowledge of their identities, Poolaw scholar Laura E. Smith was able to conduct interviews and learn more about the elder Keahbone and her daughter, the "bold and beautiful" Hannah.<sup>3</sup> Given long-standing interest in Poolaw's work and its relative inaccessibility, the photographic reproductions in *For a Love of His People* constitute indispensable resources. For wide and diverse readerships, from academic researchers to Native students to general audiences, *For a Love of His People* contributes a much-needed visual account of mid-twentieth century indigenous agency and artistry on the Southern Plains.

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NOTES 1. See, for example, Shamooin Zamir, "Native Agency and the Making of *The North American Indian*," Alexander B. Upshaw and Edward S. Curtis, *American Indian Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (Fall 2007): 613–53. 2. Linda Poolaw, *War Bonnets, Tin Lizzies, and Patent Leather Pumps: Kiowa Culture in Transition 1925–1955; The Photographs of Horace Poolaw*, exh. cat. (Stanford, CA: Horace Poolaw Photography Project, 1990). 3. Vanessa Jennings, qtd. in Laura E. Smith, "Beaded Buckskins and Bad-Girl Bobs: Kiowa Female Identity, Industry, and Activism in Horace Poolaw's Portraits," in *For a Love of His People*, ed. Nancy Marie Mithlo (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 80.

## Biopolitical Screens: Image, Power, and the Neoliberal Brain

By Pasi Väliäho  
MIT Press, 2014  
186 pp./\$35.00 (hb)



In a remarkably succinct manner, Pasi Väliäho's *Biopolitical Screens: Image, Power, and the Neoliberal Brain*, draws together from myriad sources (ranging from art history and film theory to neuroscience, neoliberal economics, anthropology, video gaming, virtual reality technology, and counterinsurgency/military strategy) an increasing convergence in description of our "neoliberal" social and media environment. Väliäho also proposes, remaining within the purview of screen culture, artists' video installations as counter-examples to the reigning types of "biopolitics."

Part of the broader scaffolding to this analysis is Michel Foucault's definition of "biopolitics" as the attempt, beginning toward the end of the eighteenth century, "to rationalize the problems posed to governmental practice by phenomena characteristic of a set of living beings forming a population: health, hygiene, birthrate, life expectancy, race" (qtd. 18). Allied to this is Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's "apparatus of capture" (qtd. 13)—the process of bringing bodies/

individuals in line with the requirements needed for the accumulation of capital at different points in its history. Key to Väliäho's work of synthesis is the fusion of these notions with the current vogue for foregrounding the study and mapping of the brain. Deleuze, for one, had already drawn attention to the neurology of the brain as a new, crucial ground of contestation before his death in 1995; its contemporary versions can constitute forms of self-validation, a kind of circular, self-fulfilling prophecy essential to the neoliberal system of domination. As philosopher Catherine Malabou has written, the brain is "the essential thing, the biological, the sensible, and critical locus of our time, through which pass, one way or another, the political evolutions and revolutions that began in the eighties and opened the twenty-first century" (qtd. 21). Just as the brain is understood to function in a nonlinear, nonhierarchical manner perpetually open to "self-modification," neoliberalism as a socioeconomic system "rests on a redistribution of centers and a major relaxation of hierarchies" (qtd. 21).

Fortified by pervasive and convincing technologies of neuroimaging of the brain, such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and positron emission tomography (PET), visualizations of "neural correlates" are produced that not only "read" current thoughts, perceptions, and actions, but also predict future ones. This capacity for programming the future banks on the notion neuroscientist Chris Frith describes when he says that "we are not aware of the action we are about to perform until the brain has made an unconscious choice about what that action should be" (qtd. 23). This sort of "production of visual truths about who we are or should become within the current biopolitical apparatus," Väliäho writes, is "what characterizes the political ontology of neoliberalism . . . the attempt to rule the whole world by joining together visibility and the

Nancy Marie Mithlo (Chiricahua Apache) is the chair of American Indian studies at the Autry National Center Institute and associate professor of art history and visual arts at Occidental College. Mithlo has served most recently as senior editor for the 2011 publication *Manifestations: New Native Art Criticism* published by the Museum of Contemporary Native Arts. Product details. Publisher : Smithsonian Institution; Illustrated edition (August 12, 2014). I bought this for a housewarming present for a co-worker. They loved it! Read more. One person found this helpful. Organized around the central theme of Poolaw as a man of his community and time, *For a Love of His People* is based on the Poolaw Photography Project, a research initiative established by Poolaw's daughter Linda in 1989 at Stanford University and carried on by Native scholars Nancy Marie Mithlo (Chiricahua Apache) and Tom Jones (Ho-Chunk) of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. This exhibition was also on view at the National Museum of the American Indian in New York, N.Y., August 9, 2014-February 16, 2015. Eula Mae Narcomey Doonkeen (Seminole) in the American Indian Exposition Parade. Anadark Nancy Marie Mithlo, ed. *For a Love of His People: The Photography of Horace Poolaw*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014. 192 pp.; 10 color and 152 duotone illustrations, notes, index. \$49.95. Bill Anthes. Pitzer College, Claremont, California. Search for more articles by this author. Pitzer College, Claremont, California.