



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Elisa Harkins is a Native American (Cherokee/Muscogee) artist and composer based in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Her work is concerned with translation, language preservation, and Indigenous musicology. Harkins uses the Cherokee and Mvskoke languages, electronic music, sculpture, and the body as her tools. Harkins received a BA from Columbia College, Chicago and an MFA from CALARTS. She has since continued her education at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. She has exhibited her work at Crystal Bridges, documenta 14, The Hammer Museum, The Heard Museum, and Vancouver Art Gallery. She created an online Indigenous concert series called *6 Moons*, and published a CD of Creek/Seminole Hymns. She is also the DJ of Mvhayv Radio, an Indigenous radio show on 91.1FM in Tulsa, OK and 99.1FM in Indianapolis, IN. *Radio III / ᏍᏍᏅᏅ KT* is a dance performance that features music and choreography by Harkins. With support from PICA and Western Front, songs from the performance have been collected into a limited edition double-LP which can be found on Harkins' Bandcamp. Harkins resides on the Muscogee (Creek) Reservation and is an enrolled member of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pablo de Ocampo is the director and curator of moving image at Walker Arts Center, Minneapolis. From 2014 to 2020, de Ocampo was exhibitions curator at the artist-run center Western Front in Vancouver, British Columbia. He has curated screenings, exhibitions, and performances at galleries, cinemas, and festivals internationally. From 2006 to 2014, de Ocampo was artistic director of the Images Festival in Toronto, Ontario, and in 2013, he served as the programmer of the 59th Robert Flaherty Film Seminar, History is What's Happening. He was a founding member of the collective screening series Cinema Project in Portland, Oregon.

Teach Me a Song is organized in collaboration with the Crisp-Ellert Art Museum at Flagler College in St. Augustine, FL and The New Gallery at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, TN.

RELATED EVENTS

Events are free and open to the public, unless noted. Check halsey.cofc.edu for up-to-date information.

OPENING RECEPTION

Friday, April 5, 6:30 - 8:00 PM
Free for Halsey Institute Members, suggested \$5 donation for not-yet members

WGS INTERSECTIONS PANEL

Tuesday, April 9, 4:00 PM

CURATOR COFFEE CLUB

Friday, April 26, 9:00 - 11:00 AM
Open to Halsey Institute Members
Sponsored by blūm in Charleston

HALSEY AFTER HOURS

Friday, May 3, 5:00 - 7:00 PM
Free for Halsey Institute Members, suggested \$10 donation for not-yet members

ARTIST TALK

Saturday, June 1, 2:00 PM

PERFORMANCE

Monday, June 3 &
Tuesday, June 4, 6:00 PM
Wampum / DSW JSJ
Presented with Spoleto Festival USA.
Charleston Music Hall.
Visit spoletousa.org for tickets.

FILM SCREENING

Wednesday, July 10, 7:00 PM *Rumble: The Indians Who Rocked the World (2017)*

FAMILY DAY!

Sunday, July 14, 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM

THE HALSEY INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART

at the College of Charleston School of the Arts

LOCATION

The Marion and Wayland H. Cato Jr. Center for the Arts
College of Charleston
161 Calhoun Street, Charleston, SC 29401
halsey.cofc.edu

PARKING

Available in the St. Philip St. and George St. garages

GALLERY HOURS

During exhibitions
Monday - Saturday, 11:00 AM - 4:00 PM
Open until 7:00 PM on Thursdays
FREE FOR ALL

CONTACT

(843) 953-4422 or halsey@cofc.edu

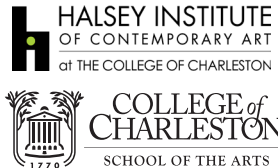
IMAGE CREDITS:

cover: Elisa Harkins, *Alice Sweat, Emma Fish, Vtvsv Lavatta, Jewel Lavatta, Reina Micco, and Rita Gopher* (Seminole). 2020. Photograph. 15 7/8 x 12 11/16 inches
this side, left: Elisa Harkins, *Hold Her Pillow Tight*. 2023. Fabric, ribbon, jingles, chainette fringe. 29 x 70 inches
reverse side, left: Elisa Harkins, *American Indian Movement Song*. 2023. Musical score. 15 7/8 x 12 11/16 inches
reverse side, center: Elisa Harkins, *AIM Song*. 2023. American flag, fringe, and patch. 29 x 47 1/2 inches
reverse side, right: Elisa Harkins, *Louis Grey* (Osage). 2019. Photograph. 15 7/8 x 12 11/16 inches

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ELISA HARKINS

Teach Me A Song

April 5 - July 20, 2024



American Indian Movement Song

Sung by Louis Gray (Osage)

Solo



hi yah hey yo yah hey hi yah hey yo yah hey hi yah hey yo yah hey

Solo



hi yah hey yo yah hey hi yah ho way o hey yah hey yo im

Solo



hi yah hey hi yah hey yo yah hey hi yah hey yo yah

Teach Me A Song

by Pablo de Ocampo

Over the last several years, Elisa Harkins' practice has explored Indigenous language and song. For Harkins, the revitalization of native languages and circulation of Indigenous song traditions are gestures that speak to notions of sovereignty and Indigenous futurisms. In her 2017 video *The Plains Indian Sign Language* (made with Nathan Young) Harkins performs for the camera, telling a story using a signing language that has its roots in early Indigenous Nations in North America. In her performances, *Wampum* and *Radio III*, Harkins sings in a combination of Cherokee, English, and Muscogee (Creek) to her electronic dance music compositions, some of which are inspired by sheet music of Indigenous music notated by musicologist Daniel Chazanoff. Another project, *Hymn*, focuses on a song that was sung on the Trail of Tears and continues to be sung in the Muscogee (Creek) language in Christian churches today.

Growing out of these contexts, Elisa Harkins' exhibition *Teach Me a Song* (2019-ongoing) is a project which critically points to the history of ethnomusicology, and more broadly the ways Indigenous culture and knowledge are learned and shared. As a specific area of study under the broader field of anthropology, ethnomusicology—its methods, frameworks, and philosophies—has largely been developed from a colonial position. Though it broadly aims to cultivate and develop knowledge around both cultural practices as well as musical form and theory, its practices are often oriented in an acquisitive way, where an individual from a settler position is recording, transcribing, or otherwise collecting the music of another culture.



Consisting of video, photographs, notated sheet music, and handmade textiles, *Teach Me a Song* documents an ongoing series of encounters in which Harkins asks a counterpart to teach her a song. Where ethnomusicology often centers a settler position, Harkins' approach in this project centers relationships between Indigenous peoples. Harkins' work here is wider than a simple critique, instead standing as an example of "doing sovereignty," a proposal for new and different ways to be in relation.

The first segment in the video is also the starting point for the project and came when Harkins met Osage elder Louis Gray. Gray, along with his sister, the artist Gina Gray, hitchhiked from the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe in 1973 to join the occupation of Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation where he connected with members of the American Indian Movement (AIM). Here, Gray learned "The AIM Song," an intertribal song that was adopted as the anthem for the movement. As Gray introduces the song, he notes the different variations he's heard, and says, "I couldn't tell you which one is the correct way, I just know how I learned it."

Here, the practice of learning in Harkins' work stands apart from more authoritative methodologies which might characterize traditional musicological study. *Teach Me a Song* is based on a peer-to-peer exchange, echoing the same spirit of nation-to-nation sharing and exchange through which the AIM song itself was developed and disseminated. In this scenario, the impulses of collecting or acquiring are eschewed in favor of reciprocal relationships and dialogue.

From here, Harkins' video continues to develop, with this iteration including nine segments. Harkins' project does not gravitate towards impulses for taxonomic classification, Harkins isn't setting out to document song tradition from a specific Nation or style. Rather, she is assembling sessions with performers from different locales, representing several different Indigenous Nations, and singing songs that range from traditional to contemporary.



Following her exchange with Gray, Harkins films similar encounters with Cherokee, Seminole, Cree, and Blackfoot musicians across the continent. For each of these filmed segments, the songs have a corresponding grouping of objects in the gallery: a notation of the score, a photograph from the recording session, and a custom-made shawl reflecting themes and ideas from the song and the performer. Inspired by Harkins' collaborations, they are a material translation of the music being shared. Together, all these components offer a kind of study kit for learning these songs: the recording of the performance, the sheet music notation, and the shawl as a visual reference for the spirit of the music.

Across these encounters, the contexts and connections don't subscribe to a more conventional methodology of research. Harkins gathers these exchanges across several locations, filming people on their home territory and away from their home territory, sharing both new and traditional songs. It is a different approach from ethnomusicology, with a different set of goals. In many of these instances, the teaching gesture facilitated by Harkins is mirroring and repeating a continuous cycle of knowledge transmission. In that sense, *Teach Me a Song* is a prompt and an invitation for a form of continual study, one where the problematic structures of power and hierarchy that are at the foundation of ethnomusicology are recalibrated, making space for intergenerational and intertribal dialogue and collaboration to lead the work.

