

Heid E. Erdrich: *(About that) Water is Life*

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*Heid E. Erdrich is a collaborative artist and the author of five collections of poetry, most recently *Curator of Ephemera* at the New Museum for Archaic Media from Michigan State University Press. She has curated many exhibitions of contemporary Native American art since 2007.*

*Guest curator Erdrich gathers Native American voices in *(About that) Water is Life* during the Minnesota Center for Book Arts (MCBA) Book Art Biennial Exhibition June 9 – August 13. Free and open to the public! For more information go to BookArtBiennial.org.*

How have you amplified individual and collective voice through your art?

It is for others to say if I have succeeded, but my years as a teacher, curator, editor, and collaborator and as a woman expressing an indigenous and Ojibwe worldview, I hope I have amplified the collective voice.

How does the MCBA Book Art Biennial theme “Shout Out: Community Intervention, Independent Publishing, and Alternative Distribution” inform your work?

In terms of my curatorial work, I think I have always been interested in work that is inherently political because being Native American (I am Ojibwe) is inherently political. Since 2013, and the *Idle No More* movement which featured dance and song as protest, much political work has been done through art. Indigenous people in Canada and the U.S. are unfairly impacted and often illegally trespassed in extraction industry projects. Next stop? Minnesota. It will be a huge fight.

How do you define success?

Honestly, I do not think much about success. I just keep pushing into the next thing. I like feedback, but I move fast and rarely look back or hold regrets. Having a next thing might be success for me.

What is the biggest lesson you’ve learned as an artist?

Humility is an Ojibwe virtue and one artists learn or stop growing. I am always amazed at how art can touch people’s lives and help make change happen. I am in awe of the power of art and that makes me humble to it, to those who make art, and to the experience of those who receive the work.

Can mistakes lead to creative success?

No doubt. Mistakes speak to me, if I ask them: why did this happen? What am I not seeing? What am I doing wrong?

What is your greatest success as an artist?

This is uncomfortable to answer—perhaps my greatest success has not happened, yet. My pride is around how those I have worked with have developed and grown as artists.

As an artist, what keeps you up at night?

What keeps me up at night are the details, the sense that there's one more thing I need to do, the responsibility of representing Native or Ojibwe people, the fear that an audience will co-opt the work.

What called you to the book arts as a profession?

There was never a time that I can recall that I did not know about art and writing, but what called me to engage my work must be obsession, because I never stop it. Also, it is fun. We don't say that enough because we are afraid we won't be taken seriously, but art is fun!

What traits are you personally most proud of and what traits do you admire in other creative people?

Personally, in my heart I am in my head--an unabashed intellectual who needs to remember to feel and deal with feelings. As for other creative people, I admire honesty, humility, commitment to technique and a sense of humor and of the absurd.

Who do you admire and why?

My sisters are amazing women – actually, they are astounding women, capable of anything. I am meek compared to them. The Native women in the arts in Minnesota are some of the most dynamic people I've ever met and their personal integrity challenges me to be my best. They are a force with which I reckon.

What quotation inspires you to follow your passion?

"Water is Life."

If you could travel through time to discuss a socio/political issue close to your heart, who would you reach out to and what issue would you discuss?

Egads, could I go back and make sure white women did not vote for Trump? Could I convince Bill Clinton that playing to Wall Street would doom the planet? Or could I get Obama to push through a Supreme Court nomination somehow? Would I beg our ancestors to push harder on treaties? Or would I just tell myself not to worry about anything until my kids came along because there is nothing else left to do but worry now? I dunno.

BIO:

Heid E. Erdrich's collaborative poem films have been selected for screening at festivals internationally including ImagineNative, Native Film Festival, Vision Maker, and at the Santa Fe Indian Market film festival, Class-X. These poem videos have won Best of Fest, and a Best Experimental Short awards in 2014 and 2015. Heid grew up in Wahpeton, North Dakota and is Ojibwe enrolled at Turtle Mountain. She teaches the MFA Creative Writing low-residency program of Augsburg College.