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Oral history interview with Wendy Red Star, 2021 June 10-11

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Wendy Red Star on June 10 and June 11, 2021. The interview took place in artist's studio and was conducted by Josh T Franco for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Wendy Red Star and Josh T. Franco have reviewed the transcript. Their corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

JOSH T. FRANCO: Ok, let's start. This is Josh T. Franco interviewing Wendy Red Star at the artist's studio in Portland, Oregon, on June 10th, for the Archives of American Art, June 10th, 2021, Smithsonian. Number—card number 1. Here we go.

So, Wendy, here we are for your oral history. Uh, we're going to start with a very basic question, and we'll go, see where we go from there. But when and where were you born?

WENDY RED STAR: I was born in 1981 in Billings, Montana.

JOSH T. FRANCO: That's great. So, can you tell me about your family? What your parents were doing at the time? More about Billings?

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah. So my, uh, mom is Irish, of Irish descent, and she actually grew up in Colorado. And then she went into nursing, uh, through the Army, and that took her to Korea, and she was stationed there for a while. She adopted my sister there, and then came back to the States and started her nursing career, and decided that she wanted to work on a Native American reservation. So she looked into, um, definitely the Crow Reservation and um, I think Pine Ridge, a Lakota reservation in South Dakota, and I think one other one—and she chose to go the Indian Health Service in Crow Agency, which is where my reservation is [laughs].

JOSH T FRANCO: [Laughs.] So she adopted your sister before she met your father.

WENDY RED STAR: Yes. Yeah. She was young. I think she was 25, something like that. So I would describe my mom as being, really adventurous. I could not imagine myself, um, at that age being in a foreign country and deciding to adopt a child. And also, her decision to work on a Native American reservation and Indian Health Service was also kinda—very progressive [laughs].

Yeah, so my father, he's from the Crow Indian Reservation, and I think at that time he was working for the tribe as a game warden. And they met just because everybody ends up going to Indian Health Service at some point. I think one of his cousins was working with, with my Mom, and then introduced them.

JOSH T FRANCO: That's great. So was it love at first sight?

WENDY RED STAR: I have no idea. [Laughs.] I have no idea. My Dad at that point, I think he had been married twice. My parents never got married. And I have—three half-siblings from my father, and he was 40 when I was born, and my mom I think was 29.

JOSH T FRANCO: So your household growing up, was it you and your mom and your sister?

WENDY RED STAR: It was a mix. Sort of, I would describe my childhood—to me, your childhood is your normal. But I realized when I would talk to other people that they were like, "That's not normal." [Laughs.] Um, so I would say it kind of was like a divorce-type situation, but not really, because my parents are actually even still together now, but my father would sort of um come in and out, and my mom was where my sister and I stayed—so it was the three of us. But I have a very special bond with my father, and he was able to get my grandfather's land out of uh non-

Indian lease. It was leased by this white family for over 50 years, and he was able to get my grandfather's land out of lease, and then I would go with him, like, on the weekends, or all summer, while he ranched that land.

JOSH T FRANCO: That's amazing. So your mom is not Crow, but she always lived on the reservation since you knew her, and were born—

WENDY RED STAR: Correct.

JOSH T FRANCO: —and still does?

WENDY RED STAR: No. So then, she retired—I think she retired pretty young, in her fifties, and then she moved back to Colorado to help take care of my grandparents. And my grandparents have passed away, and now she's back and she's staying with my dad, kind of taking care of him. He's got a lot of health complications.

[00:05:11]

JOSH T FRANCO: Uh, was it, how many other kids did you know who had a Crow parent and a non-Crow parent? Was that unusual?

WENDY RED STAR: Well, in my actual Red Star family, a lot of my dad's siblings had white partners, so there were a lot in my own family. And then, um, one of my best friends, her mom was white and her dad was Crow. So it's—it's pretty common. But you were— If you were half-white or if you were, like—for instance, the northern Cheyenne Reservation is right next to the Crow—if you were half Northern Cheyenne, you were made very much aware of that by your peers and Crow community. And even white rancher kids, you know, you'd be made aware.

JOSH T FRANCO: Hm, So kind of from both sides?

WENDY RED STAR: Yes.

JOSH T FRANCO: "Ni de aquí, ni de allá," as we would say in Spanish.

WENDY RED STAR: [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: That's interesting. Can you tell me more about what it means to be Red Star?

WENDY RED STAR: Um, there's a lot of pride in it. Like, the Red Star name—A lot of my cousins have Red Star tattoos, including my sister has a Red Star tattoo. And there was always a saying in my family, like, we didn't want to tarnish the Red Star name, so don't do anything that would bring down the Red Star name. Which is ironic, because there's been a lot of drama within the family and there has been a lot of difficult things with cousins or family members that, you know, have—could diminish the ideal of that name. But then, the name itself has a very interesting history, and it ties into all the Crows on the reservation. I carry that name. Red Star is my—he's my great-grandfather. So his name was just Red Star. So when they were allotting up the land at that time, he was of that generation where he was a head of household. And so all his family members that were in his household were then given his name as a last name. And so that's how I get my last name, and that's how everybody else—like uh, there's the White Arms, and there's the Plain Feathers—and it can all be traced to one individual.

JOSH T FRANCO: Oh, wow, so that would have been, like, early 1900s?

WENDY RED STAR: Exactly. I'd say around 1907.

JOSH T FRANCO: Right, and then what was the kind of national dynamic at the time motivating this—breaking-up of land?

WENDY RED STAR: Oh, there's a long, long history. [Laughs.] I'd say dating from the late 1800s, where Crow chiefs were asked to define what their territory was. And during that original Fort Laramie Treaty, one of our chiefs named Sits In the Middle Of The Land defined our territory, and it was 38.5 million acres. And then, throughout history, the train settlers wanting access to our land— Our current reservation is like 2.25 million acres, something around that. But then within that, there's a lot of leasing of land, and there was land that was taken out of trust status and sold. So it's almost like a checkerboard, if you could look at it. It's owned by Crow and non-Crow. So I think the allotting of land was really to—for the Crows to kind of preserve their land-holdings, because if they didn't, then, um, it would be a threat that it could be owned by non-

native people.

JOSH T FRANCO: Mm-hmm, yeah. We're already jumping around in time, which I think is great [laughs].

WENDY RED STAR: [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: I'm sure we'll come back to that deeper history. But I want to ask about, you know, early childhood memories, whether that's when you started school and what school was like. But if you have anything before that, maybe around art.

WENDY RED STAR: I think for me, I, what I remember doing a lot and I find so important in my practice now—it's like a necessary action—is I daydreamed and had a very vivid imagination. And I also was able to really just entertain and occupy myself and spent a lot of time alone as a kid. So, um, I was having to fill that space, uh, with creation, or creative ideas, or fantasies. And so, now, it's really important for me to walk out in the woods. All my ideas kind of either come to me or, if I'm stuck, I find solutions, and it's just so important to have that time and head-space. And I, when I think about it, I've just been doing that since I was a little—little kid.

[00:10:35]

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah. Did you have imaginary friends?

WENDY RED STAR: I didn't, but I—also Nature was really important to me, so, like, when we'd visit my grandparents in Colorado, they live kind of in this mountainous area—and I had a tree named Wilbur. [Laughs.] And so, I would climb up Wilbur and hang out with Wilbur, and so, um, yeah, Nature was important to me, specific trees, things like that, were things that were—I guess I would consider, like, my friends. And animals. Animals were hugely important to me.

JOSH T FRANCO: Well, when did you start loving horses? Was it very early?

WENDY RED STAR: Really early in—my mom tells this story that really freaked her out, that she would catch me, like, hugging a horse, but with my feet dangling off the ground like I was its necklace, and the horse was totally cool with it. But horses I would consider to be—an essential part of my identity and who I am. I don't have horses now—but they actually, I would say, saved my life as a teenager.

JOSH T FRANCO: Whoa.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah.

JOSH T FRANCO: Ok, I'm going to remember that and ask about it, because that's a big deal. So do you remember early school and like being with other kids? What was it—did you go to school on the reservation?

WENDY RED STAR: I went to school in Hardin, Montana, which—it was part of the reservation, but then it got—I might be saying this completely wrong. But it's just off the reservation. It's actually surrounded by the Crow Reservation. But I think it got incorporated. Can a town get incorporated?

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah.

WENDY RED STAR: And I think I just read a book that said the reason why it got incorporated is because our reservation is a dry reservation, meaning we can't have any alcohol on our reservation.

JOSH T FRANCO: Oh.

WENDY RED STAR: It really is crazy to me when I encounter other Native people and their reservations aren't dry. [Laughs.] I'm like, "What? You have, like, bars and stuff on your reservation?" So ours is dry. So Hardin is like 12 miles away from the reservation border, and the reason why they wanted to remove Hardin is because they wanted to sell alcohol to Crows, and that was a big profit for them. I found that to be really fascinating, because my dad remembers going to Hardin. Hardin is super racist. And there would be like "No Indians allowed" or "No Indians allowed in the bar" or whatever sign—signage, and actually segregated places for them to use the bathroom and stuff. It's just crazy to talk to somebody, you know, actually talk to my dad, who has had that experience.

Um, so that's where I ended up going to school. And it's a super small community situation, a mix of, like, white rancher kids, and uh, mixed kids like myself, and Crow kids, and you end up going to school with them until you graduate. [Laughs.] So I just remember being really good friends with somebody, and then like three years, like, we're not friends, and I'm—like, you just cycle through all these sort of friendships with everyone, which was interesting.

But I had a really hard time, um, difficulty in school with learning, and I was actually held back in first grade. I went to this special one-and-a-half. I remember being on the playground, and there was this white kid, and he was really making fun of me and everybody who was in one-and-a-half. And that was, like, so damaging—for me.

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WENDY RED STAR: I felt just really inferior and I felt like—yeah, I just felt like I wasn't smart. So I had, like, a really big hangup of, like, never thinking that I was smart. But the truly amazing thing was the teacher, Mr. Wagner, for one-and-a-half, was the best teacher. And he had this amazing, like, tree loft in his classroom. And if you did really well, you got to have—spend your whole day up in the tree loft and do stuff there. But the thing that made him so special was, um, he told me what he loved about me was, like, that I was so curious and I asked so many questions, and I just really kind of like, um, bloomed in his classroom setting. He encouraged, like, me to write stories. I was really into writing stories. And when I think about that regarding, like, my art, it's all about just being curious and asking questions. And so it was really great. I'm actually really happy I got to have that experience.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah, do you remember any of the stories you wrote?

WENDY RED STAR: I still have them.

JOSH T FRANCO: That's amazing.

WENDY RED STAR: Usually some two friends, like a pig and a bird. And of course, something happens to one of them where the friend has to come and help them out. So there's some drama in it [laughs]. And I think there's one about like a girl and horses, that kind of thing. But I was really into it.

JOSH T FRANCO: Did you illustrate them?

WENDY RED STAR: They were totally illustrated.

JOSH T FRANCO: Amazing.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah. I think you posted some of these before. I think I've seen them.

WENDY RED STAR: Yes, yeah, I think I have. I've posted a lot of my childhood drawings. Because—they're exactly what I do now—or not what I do now, but the same interest I had when I was a kid—and I think that's really interesting. And I'd love to know if other artists have the same thing happening with them.

JOSH T FRANCO: Mm-hmm, that's what you find out in oral history. [Laughs.]

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah! [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: Uh, do you recall—so this teacher gave you a lot of space for making art. that? Was art formalized in your schooling at any point? And did you participate?

WENDY RED STAR: Um. Yeah, we had art classes. I—you know, it's so interesting because I have my daughter Beatrice and—here in Portland—and when we were looking at, like, middle schools, there were some sacrifices. Like, some schools didn't have like a music program, but they had an art program. Or some had something, but they were missing another thing. Well, actually, in my school in Hardin, we had band, we had chorus, we had art, we had, like, shop, we had home-ecs. [Laughs.] And so I was like, wow, I got that at a school which I don't feel, like, really did a great job educating me, and I'm in Portland here, and they're missing some of these things that my school had all of that, plus like a swimming pool that we could go to and swim during the

winter.

But I actually had another real—another great teacher. Her name was—Miss Alvarez, I think. But I think she's divorced. So I don't know what her maiden name is. But she was fantastic. And I loved her class. This is in middle school. And I was super psyched about her class, because her husband was the high school art teacher, so I thought it would be the same deal. And she reeked of cigarettes and mint gum [laughs], but the mint gum, like never covered the cigarettes, and she would like get down next to you and you could just smell the cigarettes and the mint gum. And she had this, like, smoker voice. And she was just great. Like, she really just let us kind of—she would give us things to do, but then it was totally open and you could explore.

So I was expecting that when I went to high school and I—Mister—no, it was [snaps] Mister Alvarado. Alvarado. He hated me, or at least I felt like he hated me, and he made me sit right next to him, because I guess I was too much of a talker—and I almost failed. And, um, he really focused on, like, realistic drawing, and I just didn't excel in that at all. And this is when in the art dynamic, which you continue to see, the people who are able to realistic-draw in the art class are like the art stars in that scenario. So I was like, I'm not a good artist. Like, I can't draw realistically, there's so-and-so, and it's boring as fuck. But they can shade whatever. [Laughs.]

[00:05:27]

JOSH T FRANCO: Uh, huh [affirmative]. Yeah. [Laughs.]

WENDY RED STAR: And so, yeah, I think I took like one, um, I don't know what we were on—like, semester and then I was out. I never took an art class after that, and I wasn't going to go into art.

JOSH T FRANCO: And that was high school?

WENDY RED STAR: That was high school.

JOSH T FRANCO: Wow.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah.

JOSH T FRANCO: So what did you do the rest of high school?

WENDY RED STAR: So I found this other teacher who was totally wacky. I wish I could remember her name. She bred miniature poodles, and uh, she wanted to take me on the road with her to a poodle show—and thank God I didn't. Because [laughs] she was like, really intense. But she ran the computer class. And, um, I know you're younger than me, but that's when I think, like, freshman and sophomore year is when I got my first email address. It was like Hotmail or something like that. And—

JOSH T FRANCO: —I'm only a couple of years younger. [Laughs.] I had the same—

WENDY RED STAR: [Laughs.] Technology, I think, moves so quickly.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah, yeah, yeah [laughs].

WENDY RED STAR: But I remember, me and my friend would get to school early, because the computers took forever to boot up at that time, like 15 minutes or something crazy. So we would like boot that up. And we were doing like some sort of instant messaging, probably with like, uh, old men that were posing as teenagers, you know. [Laughs.] And so— The thing about that class—I really wish I could remember her name—was she taught us like just different programs on the computer, but the big thing she focused on was video editing. So we were totally pirating, like, movies. We'd bring in our VHS. She would, like, copy. We could copy parts and then we could splice them together. And I was, like, having a blast. And she called this—she called this whole process graphic design. So I was like—that's what I'm doing. I'm going to be a graphic designer. But I was editing video.

JOSH T FRANCO: This is like late '90s?

WENDY RED STAR: Um, yes. Because I graduated in 2000. So, I actually ended up going to Montana State University in Bozeman, which is about a three-hour drive from the reservation, and enrolled in graphic design as my major. And that was a very rude awakening because it's not editing video. [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: [Laughs.] Was that more like poster design?

WENDY RED STAR: Exactly.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

WENDY RED STAR: And working with different fonts, and kerning and—I was like, "What the hell is this?" I soon realized that my high school teacher was totally misusing "graphic design."
[Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: I have two questions about—one, why did she want to take you to the poodle show? And two, I wonder if you remember one of those video projects you worked on.

WENDY RED STAR: So, yeah, this I know—this is going to be in the archives forever. [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: [Laughs.]

WENDY RED STAR: We got along really well and we were super tight. I was a student who was always really good, because I never wanted to stick out. And part of the reason why I never wanted to stick out was because I had that sort of self-esteem issue of not feeling smart. So I just never wanted to cause any attention to myself. And the other reason is in April, that's my birthday, as you know, we're Aries—and that was just one month of school left after— I would have my birthday and I would be older than the kids in my class. And so, I would want to keep that like a secret, because I got teased that I was so old compared to them. Which is like nothing in hindsight, but devastating as a kid. So to this day, I still don't like my birthday. Like, I don't it's—it's crazy. But she—we got along so well that we sort of had a bond, and I think that's why she wanted to take me to the poodle show. [Laughs.] So that was one.

[00:10:18]

WENDY RED STAR: And then, uh, as far as editing, this is—now, this is embarrassing, but I think it's okay; it's for the Archives. Do you know that movie with Patrick Swayze and Keanu Reeves, *Point Break*?

JOSH T FRANCO: Absolutely.

WENDY RED STAR: [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: Absolutely.

WENDY RED STAR: I can't believe she let me bring in, like, *Point Break*. So, like, there's a skydiving scene. And so I would edit that out, and then I would edit that with, like—I was really big into 311 eleven at the time—so 311. And I even had some video footage of them, and it would be this sort of music video with *Point Break* skydiving. [Laughs.] Oh my God, I wish I could see that.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah, that's amazing.

WENDY RED STAR: Like, that is lost forever. Maybe Hardin High School has an archive—that's in there. But yeah, so that was one of the projects.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah. But it has—it has such deep resonance with, like, just the whole history of collage, just in that kind of very '90s specific medium.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah. [Laughs.] Oh my gosh, it's like a time capsule.

JOSH T FRANCO: What was your relationship with your sister like during childhood and high school?

WENDY RED STAR: So my sister—uh, she actually was just visiting me this last week, and she's got two daughters, so I have these great nieces. We're very, very close. Very close. But during that time, since she's like four and a half years older than me, I was very annoying to her when she was in high school and I was in middle school—and I was actually a spy for my mom. So I would spy on her, and my mom would actually pay me some money to go, like, and, like, see what she was doing. So I think I was like very annoying sister to her. Like, she also, like, cheerlead for like a season. And I would—me and my friend would go sit right in the front just to make fun of her while she cheered. But now, um, she's—I just can't imagine. Like, I think

about my kid, she's an only child, and how—how important my sister is for me in just getting through life. She's helped me out tremendously. She's a judge. She went to law school. So her type of thinking is very, like, logical, straightforward. I'm a very emotional person and reactionary person. So I think we balance each other out with just our difference in personality.

JOSH T FRANCO: What's her sign?

WENDY RED STAR: Oh, Sagittarius. Yes. [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: Still fire. Um, that's great. You mentioned—so that school year you're in Hardin, and you said summers Colorado and with your dad ranching? Is that—?

WENDY RED STAR: Yes. So my dad would get me on the weekends, and my sister never came. And part of the reason why is because, um, what bonded me and my dad was horses. So my sister wasn't really into horses, so she would stay with my mom on the weekends. It's almost like we were living two separate lives. Because I'll have conversations, and she'll talk about going to Billings with my mom. So Billings is where I was born, and that's about a 45-minute drive from Hardin. My mom had a house in Hardin, and then she would commute to Crow Agency, which is 12 miles away on the reservation. And um, yeah, I would talk to her about sort of her, like, life during the weekends and the summers with my mom. My sister also was had a great relationship with my grandparents—so did I. But she would often spend some of her summers in Colorado with them. And um, my experience was going out to the land, and I would just ride horses all day long while my dad would be on a tractor for like 8-10 hours.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah, that's amazing. And alone, riding horses.

WENDY RED STAR: It's amazing, um, but, yeah, I was alone—

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WENDY RED STAR: I was alone. I didn't care, though, because I had my imagination and I had my horses and baloney sandwiches. But— And there was a herd of horses, so I actually became kind of like a horse.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah, I was just thinking maybe it's disrespectful to the horses to say you were alone.

WENDY RED STAR: [Laughs.] I know. Yeah, yes. So, yeah, I even—I got to know this herd because—the acreage out there is immense, and it butts up to a mountain, and so our horses just roamed free like wild horses. So I would do everything that they did, and I knew when they took their nap, and I knew like when they went and got their water, and then pretty soon they would follow me and I would take them to, "we're going to eat over here." And I really learned the language of the horse.

JOSH T FRANCO: Amazing.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah.

JOSH T FRANCO: That's—and now, like, how do you ask questions about the world of horses?

WENDY RED STAR: [Laughs.] The world of horses—you know, for me, the other thing, too, and I think a lot of rez kids and maybe even the white rancher kids—you deal with a lot of animal deaths. So, like, we'd have dogs, and my dog would get run over, um, or, like, with horses, we had some baby horses that didn't survive. We had a mountain lion attack our herd and almost kill a couple of horses. So, like, you're sort of around, like—or learn about mortality through—and, like, deep loss, devastating loss.

And then the other thing, too, just growing up on the reservation—that's one of my earliest memories with my dad. I remember him saying, "Okay, we're going to go into this place and, like, you might see, like, people crying, but it's okay." And that was a funeral. People—so much death, like, all the time. It's like almost normalized in a way. It's the culture.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah. I'm writing down one question before I forget, because I have another one. Did you—can you talk about what processing death looks like in the reservation for Apsáalooke?

WENDY RED STAR: Oh, my gosh—

JOSH T FRANCO: Or do you remember one particular funeral?

WENDY RED STAR: Deep, deep, guttural emotion. People just wailing and—uh, actually a typical scene is like pulling people off of the body. Like, I saw my grandma do that with my grandpa. Just like the deepest guttural mourning. But this is where the sense of humor comes in. [Laughs.] And I think, like, this is where, like, the survival comes in. So I just remember within that, like, guttural pain, someone would say something funny and, like, it would just be like this laughter, this like—flood of relief. In talking to you about this, how weird an experience to be in that much pain and then to have just this releasing. And so I think, you know, for me, I think that humor is so ingrained within me, and I definitely do use it. Like, it will probably come up in this interview where I might say something that is really sad, but then I'll be laughing while I'm saying it. And I realize that's just me, helping myself get through or talk about something that has a lot of pain with it. It's laughing or whatever. And it's not that I don't take it—I take it deeply serious. But it's just I—that's kind of the culture in which I grew up.

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JOSH T FRANCO: Everything we create for the Archives, it's just implied that this is planning for death, for, like, your legacy after you're not here as a body anymore. So it's always interesting to hear that.

WENDY RED STAR: Well, in contrast to that, I've gone to like a white funeral, and it's not like that! [Laughs.] It's almost like no one's really crying out, you know. Like, they might be softly crying. The contrast between that is so different.

JOSH T FRANCO: Well, we can talk about Mexican funerals later. Oh, the horses—it's just so interesting to hear how you learned to live their way. And I wonder if you learned any creative techniques from the horses that, you know, might have impacted your practice as an artist. Like, do horses have creativity? I assume all animals do. But what does it mean to ask that?

WENDY RED STAR: That's a great question. You know, what I love about animals is that they all have personalities. And sometimes I think it's easy—like, you see a herd of cows and you're like, "Oh, it's just a herd of cows." But then, like, if you really got to know that herd, you would get to know the personality of each of those animals. And for me, that—to be led into that world and to have the deepest trust from that herd of horses—I don't know if it applies to creativity, but I guess for me it was just kind of this window into the perception of nature. They really told me, like— They could hear things or sense things. And to be in tune with nature or— just that's the way that they live. So they knew— Like, if a storm was coming, they would go under this batch of—grove of trees. And so I just picked up a lot of sort of, kind of being in tune and just really paying attention to nature in a way that if I didn't have them, I would not.

JOSH T FRANCO: That's fascinating. Do you remember any particularly strong personalities among your horse friends?

WENDY RED STAR: Oh, yeah. Well, my best horse, I almost considered him to be a brother to me, I called him Cisco. This is embarrassing because that name comes from the movie *Dances With Wolves*, Kevin Costner. And it was his buckskin horse that he rode, was Cisco. So that's my horse. But he had the most amazing sort of mischievous personality. And like we—for instance, my grandma, she would have these folding chairs because she'd like to bead in the shade around the trailer, and so she would kind of move with the shade. And her folding chair would be missing, and we'd find it in the middle of the field. It's because he carried it. He would carry it away. He just was so smart, but— He kind of knew the ways of humans, which was interesting, and—but he just had that kind of personality. Mischievous. And then there was another horse my dad called Strikes Going, which is actually an ancestor of ours. And my father for the longest time thought Strikes Going was male, and then we did some research and that's actually a woman—and the horse was a male. And he was super, like, spooky. And he was kind of a brat. And you knew, like, if you rode him that he would be spooking at things left and right, and he'd be dodgy, and he just never really wanted to trust a human. So you had these two kind of polar opposites. But he was a great horse.

JOSH T FRANCO: Cisco and the lawn chair, that sounds like play for play's sake.

WENDY RED STAR: Yes.

JOSH T FRANCO: That's the mischievous, I guess.

WENDY RED STAR: He was just like loving to play. He could figure out how to open gates. He knew how to escape. But you couldn't even get mad at him because he would just stick around, but he would be out. Like, okay [laughs].

[00:10:01]

JOSH T FRANCO: [Laughs.] That's amazing. So your father's parents were on the reservation. The Colorado grandparents were your mother's parents?

WENDY RED STAR: Yes.

JOSH T FRANCO: So what was Colorado like when you went to visit?

WENDY RED STAR: Just so much fun, because you know, when we would visit, it was Christmas, so my memories were attached to Christmas or Easter, and a lot of eating. Like, that's pretty much all we did, was just eat food. So there were specific things that I really looked forward to. Like, there was this green chile burrito that my grandma made. Um, they did a version of Indian tacos [laughs], which was killer. There was scalloped potatoes and ham. My grandfather used to make us roast beef sandwiches when we would, um, drive home, because it was like a eight to nine hour drive, and so it was just like roast beef on bakery bread with like slabs of butter and like salt— I mean, it's simple, but like— My sister and I were just talking about. It's like this is the best sandwich in the world! You know [laughs].

So, yeah, my memories— And just, like, my grandmother was, so loving and kind, and I feel like—they were from the Depression era, so they had all these interesting ways of like saving money or like saving items. Like, they would save the meat Styrofoam trays and wash them off. And I never—and then they would use them for like scraps of food. Like, they had all these sort of interesting things. But she was really into poetry. She loved, like, Emily Dickinson and loved classical music and opera. But she was a housewife of her generation. But I have this feeling like if she was my generation, she would have been like a Rhodes Scholar or something like that. I think. Yeah, I knew she sort of had this desire. She loved academics and everything. And my grandpa was, um, an aerospace engineer. He did work for NASA at one point, and then he put up some of the dams that are in this area and he—

JOSH T FRANCO: In the Portland area or Colorado area?

WENDY RED STAR: No. Like in Washington. And he had—he was super funny. He was hilarious, mainly because he was very inappropriate [Laughs.], and he came up with these funny phrases, which I'm not going to put on the record here [laughs], but they were totally his things to say. But he was also very, I would say, very critical and could be very harsh and like— If you messed up on something, he would say— Well, I'll say this one. He'd say, "Well, you sure dummed up on that one." So I think he kind of laid down the law, and his children, therefore, sort of picked up that kind of—a little bit of a militant side in that respect.

JOSH T FRANCO: Well, your mother sounds incredibly disciplined to be—because of the nurse training, to do her— It's a very hard job.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah. And I think that was kind of a push from him. You know, she'd made decisions where, like her—she's a twinher twin went to Notre Dame and they had to pay for it. So she was like, "I don't want them to pay for it, so I'll go the army route."

JOSH T FRANCO: Wow. Did your grandparents have thoughts, opinions expressed about the Crow and the white of your parents?

WENDY RED STAR: So my mom, she used to play Cowboys and Indians with her brother, and she was always the Indian and her Indian name was White Cloud, which my dad relentlessly makes fun of her because there's White Cloud toilet paper—[Laughs.] And the reason why they did that is because my grandma had a fascination with Native Americans. So she would read books about them. And, um, I think her sister, my grandma's sister, can recite the—

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WENDY RED STAR: Longfellow's *Hiawatha* and *Minnehaha* poem—I think that's what that is. And so I think my grandma had a very romanticized picture of Native people. And when my mom—

My mom also, she just, I think brought in people of color into the family. Because my aunt was like, "Your mom used to ride around on a motorcycle with this black guy, and like we were so used to her, just like being around, like, you know, people of color and other cultures." [Laughs] You know. And so, my grandma, she came to the Crow reservation, and I think it was like, uh, a total shock for her. She's, like, Native people driving around in trucks and they're living in these government houses and so it wasn't this like romanticized notion. Um, so that was interesting for me to hear. But then beyond that, they're just loving. They were very loving.

JOSH T FRANCO: And what about your father's parents?

WENDY RED STAR: So my dad—my grandpa, his name was Wallace. My father's name is Wallace as well. So he was Wallace Red Star, Senior. He was born in 1907. And I—my memories of him are that he liked to tinker around in this little shop in the back of his house, and he would go to the dump and just like kind of scavenge around for things that people threw out, and then he would bring them back and make them work. And um, I just remember him eating breakfast, because oftentimes my dad would take me to my grandma's house in Lodge Grass, which was maybe 40 minutes away from Hardin, and she made breakfast, lunch and dinner. And when we'd get in for breakfast, my grandpa would be sitting there—and he really didn't talk. I don't ever remember him talking. The one memory that I have, and my sister shares the same memory, is he had this cane, and he would tap it and he would sing old Crow songs. And they were super short. And we remember him doing that. And then he would always be in his bedroom. And the bedroom was—they had two twin beds on opposite side, and a TV [laughs], and he would always be watching something on TV. But he died in the early '90s, so I can't— I must have been in middle school when he died.

Now my grandma, she was the matriarch. Her name was Amy Bright Wings Red Star, and she made magic happen. So when I think about, like, a studio practice, she had a studio practice every day. Not only did she do all, like, kind of the housewife things, but then she would be sewing. She was an incredible seamstress. She would bead. She would— The community would come to her to make things for cultural events. And then, I think there were like 9-10 of us cousins, and come Crow Fair time, this cultural event that happens every year in August for our community, she would have us all dressed. She'd make all our outfits. She would have us all parading. So yeah, she just had this sort of— She could make that kind of magic happen.

JOSH T FRANCO: I mean, that's really apparent in your practice with the costuming. And I did want to ask about beading. You mentioned it earlier. I know you pay attention to beads. There's beads sitting on the table right now [laughs]. What is the context for beading in Crow culture?

WENDY RED STAR: Here's something important to say. I was so obsessed with horses at that time that, you know, she would get me dressed—and my mom was actually a huge proponent of me participating in the culture. My dad, that was just his—the way it is in life. So um, he didn't have that ability to step outside and say, like, "this is unique and important for my kid to participate." And so my mom was really important in that aspect of me participating in cultural events.

[00:05:12]

So I didn't really pay attention. My grandma would be beading, and that's just what she did. The things that we wore, that's just what we wore for those certain time periods. But what I realize now is I was really internalizing and soaking all of that in. But that's so much a part of Crow learning, is that nobody says, "sit down, I'm going to teach you how to do this step by step." What you do is you're just around it and you're supposed to just kind of observe.

And I didn't grow up sewing or anything. So when I had my kid in 2007, I got this urge to want to make her clothing, and Portland here has this amazing sewing community and they have all these incredible sewing shops. So I just got this bug that I needed to sew. And so, I picked up like a sewing machine, took a few, like, one-on-one classes, and then just started sewing and became very obsessed. Every time I create anything regarding fabric or material, it feels like magic to me, because it comes from somewhere. And I think it comes from her, and I think it comes from those years of just observing and soaking things in.

And that's the same with beadwork. Like, I don't really do a lot of beading. The thing that you're seeing on my table is actually something my cousin made. It's like called a peyote stitch. But—the beading actually relates to when I have the opportunity to look at historical beadwork in collections. I can look and I can see the finesse of each beader, because they'll have these really

subtle, like, changes in color; like, one bead line will be a slightly different color and then the other pink. And it speaks volumes about that person, and sort of their finesse and their bead style.

JOSH T FRANCO: Could you describe your own—I mean, of course, you'd be able to identify your own work. Could you?

WENDY RED STAR: Actually, I know what you're saying, and it's interesting because there's this—he passed away. His name was James Takes Enemy. And he beaded my belt in my Crow woman wear beaded leggings and moccasins. So he beaded the set. Crows like to match. So everything has to match. So your belts, anything beaded has to match, and be the same geometric design. Or if it's floral, if you're wearing this mix match, that's like a faux pas [laughs]. Or that was like, mmm, you know, they'll say something about that. But I ran into some of his bead work in—I think it was at the Natural History Museum in the Smithsonian, in their collection. The drawer was opened, and I was like, “That's James Takes Enemy” [snaps].

JOSH T FRANCO: Amazing.

WENDY RED STAR: So I knew right away. And they said, “Yeah, that's right.” So when I was looking at the historical stuff, I was like, “Damn.” People would be able to open these and they'd say, that's so-and-so's and that's so-and-so's. Because they are distinct. Even if it's a geometric pattern, there's that essence and finesse that's within it. And that kind of breaks my heart, you know?

JOSH T FRANCO: That they're there.

WENDY RED STAR: No. To know that that knowledge was once there and it's gone. Like the fact that I can recognize that's James Takes Enemy's beadwork, you know—all of those things were once known.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah. It's interesting because, you know, of course, you're in a Crow context and legacy always, but you're also, as a professional artist, in an American art context. That's um, there's no risk of losing the knowledge that helps you distinguish between a Rothko and a Frankenthaler. Those are abstract things. But you know, even though it's just fields of color arranged differently ways. So that's interesting.

I'll just note, too, that you're a Smithsonian Artist Research Fellow, and that's what brought you to the Smithsonian. And I'm sure we'll get there to talk about it. Um yeah, I'm sure we'll come back to more childhood stuff, too, but you started mentioning college, so I wonder about that. So first of all, how did you decide where you would go?

[00:10:07]

WENDY RED STAR: [Laughs.] Again, my mom sort of being very practical, and she really was like “once you're out, you're out, and you've got to be an adult and make it work.” So both my sister and I chose the colleges based on, like, making that work. So I was able to get a few scholarships for Montana State University, Bozeman. And because I—So I did really struggle in school, but I was like an A and B student, but I wasn't—didn't, like, for the SATs and what's the other one you do?

JOSH T FRANCO: ACT. WENDY RED STAR: ACT. I didn't get the score that you're supposed to get. But MSU-Bozeman had some other requirements that you could get in for. And I had, like, some dyslexia. My mom got me tested and everything. So my learning, my problems learning in a standard way I think were really affected by that. So anyways, it was just a practical decision. And the other thing was, like, everybody else in my grade was going to go to Missoula, which is also in Montana, and I was like, “I do not want to see these people ever again” [laughs].

JOSH T FRANCO: Did you have any like best friends? Do you keep in touch with anyone?

WENDY RED STAR: I had, yeah, and I still know them. Two best friends. One Eva White Man and one Andra Lammers. And Andra Lammers, the Lammers, they actually have a trading post in Hardin that is all Crow stuff. So she has an amazing knowledge of Crow beadwork, which I didn't even realize until I became interested in it myself. And I talk to her, it's like: Oh my God, she's almost like in an archive herself. And she was my best friend the whole time [laughs]. And we actually roomed in college together. So we went to college together.

So that was the decision. And then from there, just, like, made it work. I worked— I brought my horses to college with me and stabled them at Deborah Butterfield's barn, because I rode dressage and she's a big dressage person. She's the artist that does the driftwood horses.

JOSH T FRANCO: Oh, right. Of course. Yeah. That's amazing.

WENDY RED STAR: So, yeah, I worked cleaning and grooming horses there. And then I also worked at a veterinary clinic, where I would clean up all the surgery rooms and do any cleaning there. So those were kind of my jobs.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah. Did you get to know Deborah Butterfield?

WENDY RED STAR: I did, yeah. Yeah. I got to know her and I got to ride her horses and I think I even house-sat once. And she's married to John Buck, who is also an artist, and he had his studio—in his studio—seeing his studio was really important for me, just because it was super bizarre. [Laughs.] And he had all these, like tchotchkes. He had these like—these frogs, stuffed frogs and alligators that were playing like little instruments and carrying suitcases. [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah. [Laughs.]

WENDY RED STAR: Like, he had like all these weird things. And his studio was so different from hers, which was like basically just like boxes of different types of sticks and welding equipment. So it was interesting to have—like, to see those two kind of studios.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah. That's so interesting that you have that connection with her, because I have thought about Susan Rothenberg when I see your horses sometimes, too, and just thinking of other artists who depict horses. It seems to be its own kind of strain in art.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah, yeah. And it's very popular. Yeah. People like horses.

JOSH T FRANCO: [Laughing] People like horses. Yeah, exactly. Oh that's great about Butterfield. And then you worked at the veterinary clinic, so that sounds like more kind of involved in the life-death cycle of animals.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah, I actually worked in high school. That was my job in high school. I worked for the Sugar Factory Veterinary Clinic, and they were so good to me. But I did. I cleaned up the surgery rooms and then I think they wanted—they like enjoyed me and they wanted me to be—

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WENDY RED STAR: —more involved, so then they invited me to like go see a surgery. And it was this dog, who was actually my science teacher's dog, that had eaten roadkill and impacted his guts. So they let me in that surgery, and they cut the dog open, and then they took out all of his intestines and milk them, just pile, and I almost fainted. I had to walk out. I literally was going to faint. And then they realized, like, "Oh, I don't think she can do—"[Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: So you didn't consider being a veterinarian, even though you loved animals.

WENDY RED STAR: I did. That was kind of like what I wanted to be until I actually worked for veterinary clinics. And it's just, you're on call all the time. It's like that's your whole kind of life situation. Yeah, so I think it was good that I worked for a veterinary clinic.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah, especially early you knew.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah.

JOSH T FRANCO: You didn't like spend a lot of money on vet school [laughs].

WENDY RED STAR: But it was fun. I saw all sorts of wild things there. One of the rarest things I saw was, they brought in a cow who was having a hard time having calving. And they—this is brutal, especially me having a child. There's like no way! But they put chains on the calf's foot while it was still in the mom, and we were pulling and pulling, and I was helping to pull out. The calf comes out. It's completely born inside out. So all the fur is on the inside and all the internal organs were on the outside, and it's like 1 percent of whatever has this certain situation— It was crazy. I mean, you could cut the cow open and then all the fur was in the inside.

JOSH T FRANCO: It doesn't live, I assume.

WENDY RED STAR: No. It was dead.

JOSH T FRANCO: Wow, I've never heard of that.

WENDY RED STAR: Yes. those are the kind of like weird things that I was like seeing—

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah, you have to really be a particular person to want to follow that career. Good for them.

WENDY RED STAR: [Laughs.] Yeah. And they were fun because they were like large animal and small. And then, where I worked in Bozeman—it was actually in Belgrade, a town just outside of Bozeman—was all equine, all horses.

JOSH T FRANCO: Have you ever read James Herriot novels?

WENDY RED STAR: I have not.

JOSH T FRANCO: He's—I think British. Yeah. And they're really pastoral. It's like an English countryside veterinarian, And just tales about his—each chapter is just like a different little mini drama. You would love them.

WENDY RED STAR: Oh.

JOSH T FRANCO: They're really nice.

WENDY RED STAR: What is that called again?

JOSH T FRANCO: James Herriot. H-E-R-R-I-O-T is the author. They're really lovely. They give a very picturesque view. It's fun to read. Wow, I just can't—the inside-out calf is sticking in my head.

WENDY RED STAR: [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: So, college [laughs]. Do you remember like your first year? Do you remember choosing courses and dorm situations and things like that?

WENDY RED STAR: Yes. I do. I think one thing that's really important for me that I haven't actually really shared, but it's really kind of the foundation of who I am and things that are—I mean, I do—I love therapy and I see a therapist like every other week. She's amazing. But when I was around 14, my daughter's age—this is interesting. I was actually shunned by my Red Star family, and actually felt like—like, I wanted to commit suicide. Like, the shunning was bad. And I was actually treated like I didn't exist, like I was a ghost. So they would—I would be in a room and it was like I was invisible. They would walk around me. They wouldn't talk to me. And it was all over the land that my dad had gotten out of lease. And there was this person who came in who was white, who sort of built this big dream for the family that we were going to be wealthy and use the land for this, and it was a big con. But that's why I say horses saved my life, is because there was a threat from that white man that he was going to take all of my horses and release them into the mountains.

And so I ended up, um—I actually cussed him out, and then my family is just, like, I'm out, I'm done. And so my mom, like, really came through for me and then I—like my dad, he—we actually started to kind of rebuild our relationship back. But I ended up taking my horses from Pryor. That's where my dad got the land back. Pryor, Montana, which is a town on our reservation.

[00:05:20]

And so I had my horses in high school and I, um—we found a place in Hardin for them, and um I'd see them every morning and after school. And I ended up like winning like a dressage regional competition with my mustang, Cisco—Cisco was a mustang from Pryor. Pryor mustang. And then slowly, you know, getting that relationship back with my dad. My dad to me was always a hero. So he was like my hero and to be rejected by him—it's still a scar.

JOSH T FRANCO: Mhm-hmm, so all of your Crow family, including your dad, was shunning you at that point?

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah.

JOSH T FRANCO: Wow.

WENDY RED STAR: I mean, my dad only for like maybe a month, and then the rest of the family, it's still— Like, even some of my cousins—well, actually, they still treat me kind of weird. And then it was mainly my aunts. Not really my uncles except for one, but—yeah. That was a very interesting experience.

JOSH T FRANCO: At 14, yeah.

WENDY RED STAR: At 14. Shunning is powerful. It's a really powerful thing to do to somebody. It's just devastating. So, um—yeah, so I slowly kind of rebuilt connections with my aunts. Some of them, I'm realizing, like, now that I'm 40, just because they're family doesn't mean you have to have them in your life. And I wish I would have—somebody could have told me that much sooner, because I feel like it's just been kind of re-traumatizing myself every time I go back to the reservation by, um, trying to extend myself and then feeling like the burden of sort of the past.

JOSH T FRANCO: Do they welcome your daughter, or do they give her—?

WENDY RED STAR: Oh, yeah. Yeah, they do. But I'm very protective. I'm very protective. And I love—like, I have to say it. I really love my dad, and he's the main reason why, you know, I will put myself through some of the toxic situations that are around there. But that—I just wanted to state that, because it's really important to the chemistry of who I am.

JOSH T FRANCO: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah. Thank you for sharing that.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah.

JOSH T FRANCO: Had your dad—was it one of those things that gradually he just came back to communicating with you? Or did he acknowledge it at some point?

WENDY RED STAR: He's never acknowledged it. So that's really painful still, and I think you can hear it in my voice. But I've realized now, like, he's not capable of doing that. And I realized, like, my aunts and my cousins will never be capable of accountability, anything like that. And that's a hard lesson to learn and come to realize. But I can have some—I can have empathy for them because my dad grew up in a very volatile childhood. Like, my grandfather was an alcoholic. And I think that was a very just turbulent situation for them, not to mention we're Crows [laughs] and the history of oppression just around that, and living on a reservation.

JOSH T FRANCO: Well, it sounds like the—when did the dressage and the competing start? It sounded like it was pretty early.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah, so I—my dad, he used to—well, he did—up until just a few years ago, we had these hayfields and then so he would sell alfalfa and bales of hay. And there was this white guy named Irvin Atchison, and he lived in Billings, which is about a 45-minute drive from Pryor, and he came to get some hay. And I was actually riding out in the field with my cousin. We were both riding bareback and there was a loose herd of horses, and she ended up falling off her horse and her horse took off.

[00:10:15]

And so Irvin was there, picking up bales, and I just, like, herded all the horses into this corral, like running full speed, and he looked at my dad and he was like, Does she ride English?" My dad was like, "She's never seen an English saddle in her life." And so he invited me to ride his horses. And he raised Arabian horses and he had like several stallions. And he put me on this Arabian called Wayward Wind. [Laughs.] And it was kind of tricky of Irvin, because that was sort of his testing horse. And this horse was notorious for bucking the first ride with everybody. And it did. And I actually didn't know what bucking was. I had never encountered that.

JOSH T FRANCO: Because you were hanging on horses as a little girl. Yeah.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah. And so he did it, and I didn't fall off and I thought it was just running weird, but it was full on bucking [laughs] and—

JOSH T FRANCO: And you didn't fall.

WENDY RED STAR: No, I was just like, "Why is he like-?" Because I didn't even know what that was. So I passed the test, and then I started showing his horses in an equitation saddle seat, which was super fun because you got to wear top hats and full-on, like, tailcoats and patent leather shoes. That was just super fun. And I actually had to get a special permission slip, because I was—I think I was like 12 or something, riding stallions, and little girls just don't ride stallions. You know? [Laughs.] And then the horse that I was showing, his name was Nickelodeon, and he was beautiful. He was like this dapple grey horse. And he ended up dying. He ended up slipping on concrete and breaking his hind leg above the joint. And there's nothing you can do. So he had to be put down. And that sort of was the end. But I was really interested in English. And so I ended up getting hooked up with this dressage instructor from a barn in Billings, and started taking lessons from her. And dressage is an Olympic event. And it's basically very, like, technical balance riding skills on a horse. It's not interesting.

It's not like jumping or anything like that. It's really kind of a solitary horsemanship ultimate horsemanship thing. And I—it was perfect for me. That's exactly who I am. I can be very militant. Maybe this is the Aries thing. And it required accuracy, and lots of patience, and just really zeroing, focusing in. And so I ended up doing that. And that took me to, like, intern in Colorado at different dressage barns and, you know, that's how I stayed with Deborah Butterfield. But I was so into it that—like, several years ago, my dad still has all my stuff—like, opened up my tack box and it was like a little time capsule, I had all the leg wraps wrapped, I had my bridle done up, and it was so precise and so orderly. And I was like, "Wow, I was intense"; I was like an intense kid. And I carry that through into my art practice. I'm very intense about it. And I have this very sort of militant, intense side.

JOSH T FRANCO: I think that you can see that hinted, because you know, you let everyone into your process so much on like Instagram and especially when you're doing printmaking. I think you can see that, because it's such a demanding medium, especially with multiple layers in the registry and that kind of thing.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah. Yeah. So that was—The end of me and my horses was when I went to graduate school, and then I haven't been with a horse since.

JOSH T FRANCO: Wow. But college, though, you did this through, in Bozeman?

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah, I didn't show, but I just brought my horses and had access to them.

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JOSH T FRANCO: What did you major in?

WENDY RED STAR: Well, I started out as graphic design.

JOSH T FRANCO: Right,

WENDY RED STAR: And then I went into minor in Native American Studies. So that was like super-important, uh, sort of like a revelation [laughs], to take Native Studies classes. At first I thought it was a joke. It's kind of like when somebody takes a language course and they already know how to speak the language. [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: [Laughs] You thought you were going to get an A.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah. I was like, "Oh, I'll take Native Studies classes." And what I soon found out was I knew nothing. Like I didn't even question why there was a reservation. It was just that's where I grew up. You know?

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah, right.

WENDY RED STAR: And so then I started learning, and it just blew my mind because that was not taught at all in my history classes. We never touched on anything near what I was learning in Native Studies classes. Um, so that was like a mind explosion.

JOSH T FRANCO: Do you have a sense of the history of that department there? Because usually those are pretty dramatic stories, or one kind of passionate, charismatic figure. So at Bozeman, where did the Native Studies department start? Was it in, like, the '70s?

WENDY RED STAR: You know, I don't know. But there was also a Native student— I forgot what they called it, but it was like a center, Native student center. And that's where I would go to be

around other Native people, and that was kind of like my first time being around other Native tribes that were in Montana.

JOSH T FRANCO: Oh, yeah.

WENDY RED STAR: Montana actually has, I think, seven federally recognized tribes. But yeah, I was just like totally Crow-centric.

JOSH T FRANCO: Is Crow the biggest in Montana?

WENDY RED STAR: I think we have the biggest reservation. Yeah. But I don't know that we have—I don't know if we're—what population status. I think—that's a great question. I'm not sure. But, yeah—because when I walked around the campus, I never saw another Native person, and if you wanted to see Native people, you needed to go to the Native student center. And when I took Native Studies classes, sometimes there were other Native students there, but primarily it was non-Native students. And talk about awkward. Because they would know I'm Native, and we'd be talking about like a massacre or something, and then I'd feel like I had burning hot eyes staring at me to see, like, what my reaction would be or how they should react to it. Um, so that was interesting.

And then, there are a lot of phonies. I think this is when I encountered phonies around Native academics. And there was a phony white woman professor who lied about all of her things that she got published. I don't think she had any of those things were published. [Laughs.] And I did not like her. And I would sit right in the front because I thought she was really phony. And she had like a Cheyenne guy she was dating—and she had a daughter who was half-Lakota, so she was with a Lakota guy. And um, I would like speak up in her class, and I knew she didn't like it. But she brought in this Cheyenne guy who I would see at the Native Student Center. He wasn't a student, though. And she's like, "And now I brought him in and he's going to pray for all of us," and do this praying—I was like, "This is fucking bullshit." And I was like looking at him. I was like, "Are you really going to degrade yourself this way?" And so he started smudging. She wanted everyone to step up and he would smudge them. And I refused. And he was kind of taken aback and she was like, real like, "Fuck you, Wendy." [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: Ew. So many layers of ew [laughs].

WENDY RED STAR: And then it came out like I think the next semester or whatever, that she was this giant phony and he was her boyfriend, the Cheyenne guy, and was in the Native student center—and he apologized to me. He's like, "Yeah, I didn't know all of this; yeah, I'm sorry."

JOSH T FRANCO: And they had a daughter.

WENDY RED STAR: No.

JOSH T FRANCO: Oh, different.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah, she has a half-Lakota daughter. Um, I feel sorry for her daughter.

JOSH T FRANCO: So he was duped. But the student guy, the prayer—

[00:05:03]

WENDY RED STAR: Um, the Cheyenne guy. I don't think he was a student, but he hung out. Yeah, but I was like, whatever. You see that happening all the time.

JOSH T FRANCO: Were there any Native faculty in the department?

WENDY RED STAR: There was. There was a Crow guy. I think his name, his last name was Doyle. But I never got to take any classes with him. And I think there was one other Native faculty. But yeah, there were people—and I have no problem if you're not Native and you're teaching Native Studies classes. The problem I have is just be up front, and state who you are. You don't have to—we're all just learning here.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah, we're all just learning here. So what was the art program like at Bozeman? What did you—what classes did you take? Did you discover new mediums there that you were really into?

WENDY RED STAR: Oh, yeah. So like I said, I went in for graphic design—

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah [laughs].

WENDY RED STAR: —and graphic design was in the Art Department. And I was like, "I'm not an artist. I'm terrified of art." And so when I learned that to fulfill your graphic design requirements you had to take basic art classes for the first two years, and there was drawing—"Oh, my God." And 3D. I actually ended up having, like, a really wonderful time in my drawing 2D classes. The instructor was this artist named Willem Volkersz. He does a lot of neon work. And um, yeah, I realized, "oh, we don't have to realistic-draw." But I still was like, "I'm like not good in 2D," is what I felt. And then I took this 3D course, and the instructor was a woman. Her name was Denise. I wish I could remember her last name. Because she was so important to my trajectory.

JOSH T FRANCO: You can fill that in, actually, in the editing phase.

WENDY RED STAR: I think it's Carter. Denise Carter. And she said to me, like, "I really feel like you need to switch your major to sculpture." And so I did. As a sophomore, I switched over to sculpture, which was quite funny because the graphic design people had this air about them, that the art students were all dumbasses who were never going to make any money, and that they were going to make money and get to be creative.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

WENDY RED STAR: And so we'd have to line up to register for classes and the graphic design lined up on the opposite side of us. [Laughs] And they were just sort of kind of like, "you guys are dumbasses." So when I, like switched over, they were like, "oh, my God, you're going to just be a loser." [Laughs.] And I— it was really terrifying. It was terrifying to make that call to my mom and be like, "Really, I'm going to switch." And she was super supportive. She was like, "I just want you to get an education and, you know, go from there."

JOSH T FRANCO: Do you remember any things you made, any semester projects?

WENDY RED STAR: Oh yeah. I mean, I still have a lot of my undergraduate work, and it was—I was in sculpture, so it was very sculpture-orientated. And um, like, I have a red horse, I made a 3D red horse. I made a lot of found objects. And I think this is when my love for, like, going to vintage and antique stores started. Because there was an assignment where you had to find objects and then create a sculpture. And I still do that today. I still go to antique stores and like get a lot of inspiration.

Then a really important piece I made, that I like to share in my lectures, is this place, this piece called *My Home Is Where My Tipi Sits*, because that piece basically is like a foundational piece for just the way that I work today, in that I learned about an important chief of ours called Sits In The Middle Of The Land. And he's the one who told the U.S. Government where our territory was, basically, and he's the one that said we had over 30 million acres. But he used this beautiful metaphor of the foundation of the way that we set up our tepee, which is with the four poles. And he said, "My home is where my tipi sits," and then he placed each of those four poles on the major sort of seasonal migration stops that we would camp at.

JOSH T FRANCO: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:10:02]

WENDY RED STAR: To me, that was kind of the first time of really thinking about a Crow perspective, and how beautiful that was, and how much that takes me out of a Western thinking. Like, the home is where the tipi sits, and the tipi actually is a female. It's, um, it's sort of like the interior is the womb and you're being hugged by your mother, and to think the Earth is your mother. So it's really interesting to have him illustrate that in this, like, really interesting way, and then to have the U.S. Government be like, "Okay, let's draw a line 30 million acres" you know, reduce it down. And so that inspired me, because when I looked within that land base, Bozeman was actually Crow territory. And I was shocked. Because my reservation was about 2.25 million acres, three hours away. And I harvested lodge poles, and my dad and mom came and helped me set up tipis around campus. And so that was like this research project that was inspired by a photo, because I saw a photo of him and I was like, "Who's this guy?" Then from that, found out, you know, his speeches and from there, produced a work.

JOSH T FRANCO: How was it received by campus administration, students, faculty?

WENDY RED STAR: That was an interesting time. There was a Visiting Professor for Sculpture

who got his Masters at Yale. And so, we're like, 'oh, you know, this guy is exotic; he's from the East Coast.' [Laughs.] And he had this, like, way about him. His name was Eric Hongisto. I think he follows me on Instagram. [Laughs.] I think he even wrote me a letter to get into UCLA. But he—I was putting this up, and it was—yeah, it was like a social experiment.

Because I wanted to see—They didn't have the canvas on them. A lot of them were just the four-pole structure. And I would just scout out pieces of prime real estate that students used to cut across [laughs], and I would put them right on the prime real estate to see if they would go through it, go around it—and you know, it was like kind of split. But what ended up happening was, they would—one particular site, which was next to this coed dorm behind the Art and Architecture building, they were being knocked down. And I thought, well, maybe it was the wind, and then soon realized—like, I spent all day putting them up—that actually somebody was knocking them down. Um, which then prompted me to, like, put them on the 50-yard line in the football field [laughs], and that was the end of the project. They're all documented through photo. But to me, it was very much a sculpture, you know—but it's sort of like a performance, a sculpture and a photo. But I was really discounting photo; like, that's just the documentation of it. [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: Right, right, right. Yeah. I was going to ask about that. Yeah.

WENDY RED STAR: And so, the thing about Eric Hongisto was, he said, "Wow, you really like to make political work." And I think for me, just in, like, my childhood and not wanting to stick out, I, like, internalized political as being sort of bad. So, um, I was like kind of really put off by that. And then years later, I realized I was like digging in, kind of drilling down to that feeling like when he said that to me, and what I realized was, like, to me, I was just stating the truth. Which that was our territory. There was nothing political about it. It's the truth.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah.

WENDY RED STAR: And so to have him say it's political was actually him coming from this Western point of view of, like, "Wow, you're kind of standing up." You know? And so that was fascinating to me to hear that—have that— Because it was coming from the most sincere space. And I think a lot of my work, people tend to think of it as political, and I'm not offended by that. But really, it's it's just a fact. And if that fact is political to you, then that's interesting.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah. It's—I mean, is it a—

[00:15:00]

[END OF TRACK redstas21_1of2_sd_track06.]

JOSH T FRANCO: I mean, well, I just think that spatial play is so sophisticated for an undergrad [laughs], it's kind of remarkable, but it's like—it makes me think of like the Situationists or something, in which—they would call themselves political. This is: We are doing this on purpose to play with power as it plays out in space. But they are, you know, French white people.

WENDY RED STAR: Uh-huh.

JOSH T FRANCO: So like, is it a privilege to be able to identify artwork is political? I don't know what I'm like trying—

WENDY RED STAR: I think in Eric's case, yeah, and I think maybe my reaction to him saying that was probably very perplexing, you know, like "Why would she be upset?" Because I was very confused. I internalized that as being bad or something.

JOSH T FRANCO: I think the other idea there is sensation. Sensational.

WENDY RED STAR: Yes. Exactly. There is something really interesting I wanted to say in that moment about that. It's gone. [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: I said Situationist. Privilege. Political space.

WENDY RED STAR: Mmm-hmm.

JOSH T FRANCO: Maybe it'll come back.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah, maybe.

JOSH T FRANCO: I broke the rule. I cut you off.

WENDY RED STAR: Oh. That—yeah, I think that work, too—so interesting. I've had the privilege of getting to know Carrie Mae Weems, and I met her because I had an exhibition at Light Space in Syracuse—I think her husband is like the founder or director of Light Space. But I was sitting there and talking to her. And she said, like, we are the vessel. She's talking about the work is channeled through us and we are this sort of vessel, almost like—we're just kind of like the tool for this work that is going to be beyond us. And that work was definitely channeled through me. Because, like you said it, it is—I think that's why I got into UCLA. Because I also got accepted into Yale and Cal Arts. Because undergrads weren't making something that was that conceptual and uh, something as sort of like monumental as that—a work like that. And all my other work was like really bad. It was like a red horse—[Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: What was the red horse made of? I wanted to ask that before.

WENDY RED STAR: It was just made out of foam core that was then sprayed with, like, texture, and I think there was even glitter [laughs], you know—Like, it was like shocking to have that and then this, like, amazing piece that was—

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah. Yeah.

WENDY RED STAR: —oh, that's—I've got it now. Yeah. It was about: You see so many of these works now by Native artists that are talking about Native land, or even the land acknowledgments now that everyone's doing. And I was doing that.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah, that was a land acknowledgment. Absolutely.

WENDY RED STAR: 100 percent. So, yeah, it's just kind of interesting to think about that work and then now, like, everybody is starting to like recognize what communities, land—or that they're recognizing the different Native nations that they are housed on.

JOSH T FRANCO: Uh, did other Native students or faculty have responses?

WENDY RED STAR: Oh, I had this super funny thing happen. because I was interning in the architecture department. There was a professor there that has some Crow lineage, and he was doing things on our reservation, building straw bale houses. And he had—he was working with an architecture student who was Blackfeet. His name was Brian Still Smoking.

JOSH T FRANCO: Uh-huh.

WENDY RED STAR: [Laughs.] It was super-funny, because it's like "STILL Smoking?" —you know, with my name, Red Star or whatever. It was like—you know, Blackfeet and Crow—Crow, we were hated by everybody. So everybody hated our asses [laughs] historically. And so it's like, goddamn, we must have been like super hot and or, like, just super annoying. [Laughs.]

[00:05:01]

JOSH T FRANCO: [Laughs.]

WENDY RED STAR: There was some jealousy happening there. But, so yeah, Blackfeet were like—and you could still feel some of that tension.

I actually remember going to like a basketball game with some of the Native Student Center people. I actually went with a Cheyenne guy, who also, like, they hated Crows! And we walked in to see this high school basketball game, because it was the Blackfeet playing, and all the Blackfeet were, like, so mean to me. [Laughs.] And it was amazing because all the Blackfeet kids for the basketball game came out in war bonnets and ran around, and it was like epic. But I just remember, like, well, they don't like me and I'm here to cheer them on.

But he was so funny, because he said he was driving in the car with another Blackfeet woman. I don't know if she was a student. She's like, "God, I hate that bullshit."

JOSH T FRANCO: About your project?

WENDY RED STAR: —when she walked by the tipis, because she thought it was a white person doing that, and she was like—It was so funny, and he was telling me that, and he was sort of kind of like trying to get a rise out of me, too.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

WENDY RED STAR: But that, like, really stuck with me. But yeah, I want to say, like, that was kind of my only Native input in there. I don't think anybody else from the Native Student Center really made a comment on it. So, yeah, just this Brian Still Smoking and other Blackfeet women were like—

JOSH T FRANCO: And what year of college was that project?

WENDY RED STAR: I want to say it was either like the beginning of my senior year or end of my junior year.

JOSH T FRANCO: So you were you thinking about grad school at that point?

WENDY RED STAR: You know, so my mom—I wanted, I wanted to go to like an equestrian school, and so that didn't happen. So I was able to bring my horses to Bozeman, and that was kind of like a compromise. Plus, I had to do it on my own. And so, like, my junior year, my mom was like, I really think it's important that you go to graduate school. And my whole plan was like, I'm going to be done with school, fulfill my mom's wishes, and then just be like a horse trainer the rest of my life. And so I just decided I would apply to the top schools for sculpture; therefore, I would not get in—

[Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: But your mom would be happy.

WENDY RED STAR: She would be happy, and then I would like ride horses. And so this is like a very—just a very just super cool, kind of an amazing experience. I applied to all of the top schools at that time, and then I did a study abroad in Italy for three months. And I was getting my acceptance letters. Like my mom would be, "You got into Yale." "Oh my God!" While I was in Italy. And I had to do my interviews while I was in Italy with the time difference. And that was just, like, amazing. It was like, what the hell? How am I getting into these schools? Like, okay—

JOSH T FRANCO: Because you channeled an amazing project. [Laughs.]

WENDY RED STAR: [Laughs.] And I chose UCLA. I got to speak with Nancy Rubins on the phone, and it was just like, this is where I'm going.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah. What were the other conversations like?

WENDY RED STAR: I actually got to talk to uh, Jessica Stockholder—is that her name? So that was cool, because she was at Yale, and she was fantastic and great. But then it was like it came down to the money situation like, and um, UCLA just offered me a better deal. And UCLA was just, like, an experience. Yeah.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah, yeah, yeah. How are you feeling—before we get into that—energy wise right now?

WENDY RED STAR: I need [a break].

[Audio break.]

JOSH T FRANCO: Ok, so we took a little break, and now we back, and Udon is his little nest—Udon the chihuahua.

WENDY RED STAR: Yes.

JOSH T FRANCO: So we were going to kind of bridge from college to grad school. Did you take any time in between?

WENDY RED STAR: No, I did not. So I didn't get to participate in my graduation ceremony for undergrad because I was in Italy. And then, I ended up having to do, like, one summer class. And then I went straight to UCLA.

[00:10:13]

JOSH T FRANCO: Actually, could we pause in Italy? Because that's, like, some deep sculpture

[laughs]. Let's talk about Italy.

WENDY RED STAR: Oh, wow. Italy was incredible. We landed in Venice and that was like a cartoon town. So that was crazy to see that first. It was just very surreal. And so we went with the ceramics professor, and we just toured all sorts of museums, and the emphasis was on ceramics, which I don't have a background [laughs]. And I think drawing too. And we ended up going to Rome, to Florence, and then we stayed in Perugia, which happens to be that place where Amanda [Knox] was accused of murdering another woman—I can't remember the victim's name—so that was kind of weird to be, like, in Perugia—that's before that happened. But we stayed at a villa there, and we would take these, like, day trips. So that's when I had my first, like, wine tasting. [Laughs.] They took us to like a vineyard and we tried multiple wines. We also ended up going to this really cool ceramics factory that did a particular type of, like, painting, design painting, and participated in that. That was like very—I wish I would have had an appreciation for how cool that was. But yes, that was interesting just to see the whole process of how that particular ceramics item was made. Very much all handmade, too.

JOSH T FRANCO: Did you—do you feel the influence of seeing those studios and spending time with artworks there. You know, it's interesting that Italy—so many artists whose lives—I think it's just the weight of the Western canon. But there's also—there's you know, there's beauty in it, too, even if it's a kind of—

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah. You know what comes to mind, is like you can't get away from racism. [Laughs.] Because the woman that we were staying with, she was an artist, and I guess she was kind of a known artist in the area, for whatever that means. And she was super nice. But we ended up having this sort of party dinner with a lot of people that she knew, plus the—I don't know how many there were—15 students—it was her friend's birthday, and she asked me if I could do like a little—like, an Indian ceremony, like a fake one, like a Warrior rain ceremony. And I just remember being, like—I've been put in these types of situations all the time, where I'm just completely dumbfounded, and I don't know even how to react, I know some people are much better at reacting. Me, I'm like, “Is this really happening?” And so then, they sing birthday song, and then they expected me to do something Indian. I can't remember what I did. I did something. But it was totally cringey. It was like really cringeworthy. And that was interesting, to be in Italy, and an Italian woman also stereotyping you. [Laughs.] Um, so that was interesting.

I think for me personally, I didn't really connect too much with the—I mean, it was incredible, all the artwork and the sculptures. There was this amazing sculpture near Pompey's Pillar, um, in Sicily, where the person who had carved it—it was Mary and I think Jesus, and I think Jesus had like a sheet over him, but it looked like his—you could see all the details of his body under the sheet. And we were like trying to figure out how you could even do that in stone.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah, yeah.

WENDY RED STAR: It was wild. But I just don't feel like I connected, but it was so important for me, who had only been to like—

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WENDY RED STAR: —Denver and the reservation, and then Bozeman, to go abroad. That was my first time going abroad. Yeah.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah. Uh, that was three months, right?

WENDY RED STAR: Three months. Yes.

JOSH T FRANCO: Right. So maybe we'll end up coming back to it. But so you're there, and then is the summer between end of college and grad school?

WENDY RED STAR: No —Yes. Yes. So it was the last semester of my last year of undergrad.

JOSH T FRANCO: And then you came back and you—

WENDY RED STAR: I had to take one—I had to take like a geology class. And I realized, like, I should have just taken all summer classes, because they're super short. The professors don't really want to be there [laughs], and it would have been like a breeze. But this geology class was, again, like just like this great class. Because we went to Yellowstone Park, and the professor was having us just like look at a hill, and then he would say, “Do you notice the slump of this hill?”

That's because this glacier went down it." And then it just made me, like, look at the landscape completely differently, like these different scars of time that I was not even aware of. And like the way that the glacier went down the hill, and then it created this sort of like flat land base, just like—that was super great. And that didn't—when it happened during the regular school year, he wasn't taking you out on this field trip. Something about it being summer and, like, "Let's just go out on this field trip to Yellowstone Park." So that was a good experience.

But yeah. So I had, like, one more thing to finish up.

JOSH T FRANCO: And what were your parents' reactions to you getting into UCLA?

WENDY RED STAR: I think they were proud. Yeah, they just seemed to—my dad really wanted me to go to the West Coast. He was like, "you won't like the East Coast." And I think the reason why he wanted me to go to the West Coast, because that's where he did his basic training for the Marine Corps, was in San Diego. And so I think he was just really familiar with the West Coast and California. He's like, "You don't want to be in the snow anymore. You want to go where it's like warm—" So he actually was the one who drove with me from Montana to Los Angeles.

JOSH T FRANCO: What was your first impression of LA?

WENDY RED STAR: I was scared shitless. [Laughs.] I was like, "I can't drive here. I'm afraid." And that was the time when people were using MapQuest, you know, and so you'd print out the MapQuest, and everybody—like, you'd get in their cars that have all old MapQuest printouts. And so I was actually staying with a family friend who was the technician, the photo tech at UCLA. And they lived in Beverly Glen, which was like this really cute canyon, and you actually kind of felt like you were in the woods and not in the city. Um, but LA was totally different from what my like Hollywood stereotype was of it, and so much more diverse in different, like, areas of the city. And it didn't quite make sense to me either, because the way that—for grad students, we had our grad buildings in Culver City, and the campus was in Westwood. So it was real confusing, like, figuring out where to live. Do you live near the grad buildings, the studios, or do you live in Westwood where you're taking some classes and things like that? So I ended up staying in this place, just like a few blocks away from the graduate studios in Culver City.

JOSH T FRANCO: Did you have roommates?

WENDY RED STAR: I didn't. I'm like big on solo living. [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: Oh, and what about the first day when you showed up, you know, to class?

WENDY RED STAR: Um, so, the feeling, in a sense, was like this is like a very cutthroat program to get into. I think actually, statistically, when you look at like for the art, for sculpture, they only let three or four students each year. It was much harder to get into than like the medical school or whatever.

[00:05:04]

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah.

WENDY RED STAR: So I remember they had all of us sitting at this conference table, everyone who got in in the different mediums —because you had to select a medium, still. And I remember we were all like side-eyeing each other, like, "This person must be like, really good." You know? And also, like, who in here is going to really, like, blow us away? And so we were, I think, feeling like we were going to cut each other's throats. You know? [Laughs.]

And then what ended up happening, it was like the most low-key program ever.

JOSH T FRANCO: Oh, nice.

WENDY RED STAR: Like, they really just wanted you to make work. You didn't write a thesis. You could submit a binder of things that inspired you, or things you were reading [laughs], which was unheard of. When I would talk to other artists who went to grad school, they're like, "Are you kidding me? I wrote this giant paper with citations and everything." In one way, I think all that would have been valuable, but I'm just really happy that we were encouraged just to really make work. And they said—another important thing was, like, you got in in this medium, but you could do whatever you want. You don't have to make a single sculpture. So I remember there was a guy in photography who just did drawings the whole time. And that was like, so important. I

think that whole concept of a medium is so old-school.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah, yeah. Can you just name some of the people in your cohort?

WENDY RED STAR: Yes. So there's Roya Falahi. there is Amir Fallah. There was Brenna Youngblood, Elliot Hundley or Huddle-Hundley. This is horrible. This is all archived. I'm like butchering people's names. Um, uh —Vishal [Vishal Jugdeo -WRS]—I can't remember his last name. There was this guy—we had this crazy thing happen, and now I'm totally blanking on his name, but he sort of like shifted, kind of made our year notorious. I wish I could remember his name. But he played Russian roulette in a performance art seminar in class—[Joe Deutch -JTF]

JOSH T FRANCO: Like actual Russian roulette?

WENDY RED STAR: Yes, but with, like, a weird gun. And then Nancy Rubins' and Chris Burden's clique, because he was a New Genres kid under Chris Burden—and that made like lots of news. And I don't know—do you know that TV show called *The L Word*?

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah.

WENDY RED STAR: One of their seasons was totally, uh, about that whole situation.

JOSH T FRANCO: I watched it. It was a long time ago, but yeah—

WENDY RED STAR: And that cracked me up, because I had graduated, and I was doing a residency at Provincetown Fine Arts Workshop, feeling super depressed because it was winter there. And I went to the video store and just got like *The L Word*. I didn't know what it was. And got to, I think it was like the second season, and I was like floored. I was like, "this is my grad program; my year" [laughs]. So it was so funny. And totally dramatized in, like, ways in which it wasn't. So that was kind of amazing.

Then, we just had amazing professors. Nancy Rubins. Chris Burden. Cathy Opie. Jim Welling. In sculpture there was Charles Ray. Just like really incredible people. But then, like, the people that I was really into, and most of the grad students, was this painter named Don Suggs. He was just the best professor at—so popular. Everybody wanted him. We also had that conceptual artist. This is going to make me sound so stupid, but I'm totally blanking on his name. Um, he looks like Father Time and we'd call him Father Time.

JOSH T FRANCO: Oh—did he just pass away?

WENDY RED STAR: Yes.

JOSH T FRANCO: Now I'm forgetting. Such a brilliant—

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah, and he was in interdisciplinary. We had Mary Kelly in Interdisciplinary. Why can't I—?

[00:10:02]

JOSH T FRANCO: Baldessari.

WENDY RED STAR: Yes, John Baldessari. I never got to meet with him because he was so popular, but people always raved about, like, doing studio visits with him.

So, yeah, we just had, like, crazy access to these huge, like monumental artists, some who were really great, some who you could tell were just like collecting a check and like gone and busy.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Did you get assigned, like, advisors, or how does that work?

WENDY RED STAR: You got to select your folks. So I had Nancy Rubins my first quarter, and she was just like—I love her. I literally love her and I want to get back in contact with her because she was so generous and she really kind of took me under her wing. And she invited all of the students to go out to her house in Topanga Canyon. And they have like an avocado orchard. They had like three dogs that were like following us around, eating avocados off the tree. And um, we got to see her studio and Chris Burden's studio. And there were like little train tracks all around the property. [Laughs.] Chris was like having a train go all—it was like really intense. And then, because of the Russian roulette thing, they left, and I just really felt cheated out of, like,

getting to know her. But she said such important things to me. Like, I remember when the sculpture came in, it was three years, but that quarter there, they told us that they were changing it to two years, and just being really afraid and talking to her about that. And she's like: "Why? Live your life. Get out of here. Get out of here and start your life." And I remember that being super scary, but now, in hindsight, I'm like: "Totally. Yeah, get out of there." And being around some of the students who were in three years, I really saw a lot of them didn't utilize the second year as well as they should have. Maybe like two-and-a-half years would be perfect, I think.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah. Yeah. What was one of the things she told you?

WENDY RED STAR: Well, she what happened with her was—she just had this, like, real solid belief in me. And I was really a fish out of water, because in my undergrad, we didn't learn anything about contemporary art. So I was like contemporary art is Salvador Dalí. [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: [Laughs.]

WENDY RED STAR: It was so bad. So I remember walking around—they housed all their grad students in one building. Some of my grad peers had full-on art monograph libraries. And I was like, "I don't know any of these artists." So I was severely lacking. And going to UCLA was like this very steep learning curve. One of the professors I took a seminar with was Ron Athey, and I did not know who he was. And the first day, he's like, "I'm going to show you my work." I went from like, Salvador Dalí to like pearls coming out of an anus with the sun tattooed around it. [Laughs] So I was like, "What?"

So she actually invited me—even after she left, she invited me to be in a group show at the Cartier Foundation. So the Cartier Foundation in Paris, France, invited a lot of their past artists who had exhibited there to select a young artist who they had mentored to show in this group show, and then they would all come. So my summer, after my first year of grad school, I ended up flying to Paris, France, with the photos of the tipi series. And it was like beyond amazing. This is all these young students who were so excited to be showing in like this amazing institution. And two of my grad school friends came with me. And we had the big opening and Nancy was in France.

[END OF TRACK redstas21_1of2_sd_track08.]

WENDY RED STAR: But she didn't go to the opening because she had an install she was doing in Nancy, France. [Laughs.] And so, the opening was a big party, and I remember Murakami was there and he had like this entourage of young people, and I met the artists like that he—She did like anime. And then Nan Goldin was there. [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: Oh cool.

WENDY RED STAR: And we got to go up on the roof of the Cartier, and the Eiffel Tower was like sparkling.

JOSH T FRANCO: It's magic.

WENDY RED STAR: And I just remember sitting there with my friends, who are also going to UCLA—like, this is part of being an artist. You can do shit like this? I was like, "I will never attain this level ever again; this is it for me; this is like so incredible." There was also another artist that was in the show. Thomas Burr. Bower—Bower? [Thomas Burr - WRS] I think he was like a studio assistant for Julie Mehretu? Is that how you say it—

JOSH T FRANCO: Mehretu.

WENDY RED STAR: So, um, and he was going to school at Yale. And he told me about the Pit. Which is this like hardcore critique pit, that sounded terrifying, and that they said that like they all had to go to therapy.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah, I think this shows up in a few oral histories —the Pit.

WENDY RED STAR: And I was like [laughs], "I made the right choice. I made the right choice."

But yeah, just to have the revelation that, like, this is a weird dimension of the art world, that was not in undergrad. This was not even fathomable or something I could imagine, that could be part of being an artist, that art could take you here and meet these types of folks. Um, and so

when that was done, we then —me and my friends went to Nancy to see her installing one of her epic plane sculptures. And she had a studio assistant—she wore this like red lipstick. It was like her signature. And she —so generous—she, like, spent the day with us, with her—I think it was her studio assistant. We went and ate, and she was all about like bread and cheese and like certain wines, and just super fun and delightful. And that was it. I think that was the last time I saw her.

JOSH T FRANCO: Oh wow.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah.

JOSH T FRANCO: What a transformative experience. So that was the first summer after your first year.

WENDY RED STAR: Yes.

JOSH T FRANCO: Do you feel like you've had experiences that matched that since?

WENDY RED STAR: [Laughs.] I think I have, but that was such —so carefree. There wasn't a pressure there at all, and I could just fully enjoy a real magical moment. Now, it's like I'm an adult. [Laughs.] Yeah. I think it was it like 2019 when I had my mid-career exhibition at the Newark. I was also like giving a lecture at the Brooklyn Art Museum, and I had, like, co-curated a show at the Met and doing something at the Met, and then I was also in a group show at the Ford Building, all within like several days of each other. And I brought my family with me, my mom and my aunts and my sister, and we were just going through the back doors of these institutions right up. They were, like, just dumbfounded. Like, we walked through like the Met when it was closed, the back way to this private event, and they were walking past all these like ancient sculptures, and they were—they had never had that kind of experience. So it was like really good for them to kind of see some of the things that I do and experience.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah. Um, I'm sure we'll get back to that more. But I want to go back to the fact that you showed the photographs, the tipi project. And you said that in college, they were just the documentation. But did this give you a different sense of what photography's role would be?

WENDY RED STAR: No, I still was really struggling with being in that category of sculpture, especially since Nancy was bringing me in as—well, it's like documentation of the sculpture project I did. And I think I left there still really like wanting to have that as my label.

[00:05:18]

JOSH T FRANCO: Sculpture.

WENDY RED STAR: Yes. Even though I was super influenced by the Photography Department and hung out with the photo kids the whole time.

JOSH T FRANCO: But Nancy must have seen something in the photographs to say these are the works that will come.

WENDY RED STAR: No, they actually left that up to us to choose.

JOSH T FRANCO: Oh! And so, did you consider everything you'd made in your first year of grad school?

WENDY RED STAR: I was making shit. [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: Talk about it.

WENDY RED STAR: I was having such a hard time, and I was getting so many different, like, suggestions, like a rotating door of people telling me to do this, or do less of that, do more of that —conflicting opinions. And it really kind of like made me get into the space, which I think a lot of grad students get into, where you talk yourself out of so many ideas, when you should just be making those ideas. So I think I really was stifled. But I also know this now, that I can't— It's hard for me to make work if I'm not settled in a space, I don't do good at artist residencies. I actually need to be living there to create work. And so being there for two years and being challenged to be creative was really hard.

JOSH T FRANCO: Did you make time to go see shows while you were in LA?

WENDY RED STAR: That's all we did. That was the beauty of being in Los Angeles, was—my friend and I, we had like these blazers. Like, that was our art opening—

JOSH T FRANCO: They were black?

WENDY RED STAR: [Laughs.] So we would like put on our, like, blazers, like have them in the trunk and, like, put them on and then go into these openings. So, yeah, just tons of shows. UCLA was linked to the Hammer, and we were required to go to all the artist lectures there, which there were incredible lectures happening all the time. It was just like a really great way to soak up so much art, contemporary art.

I have to tell you about this fantastic seminar I took, which I took for granted. It was—I don't even know who the guy is, but it was a class where we got to see private collections, and we looked at—we went to some museums and stuff like that. What I didn't realize is that we would be driving to, like, people's actual houses and going in and seeing like Rothkos and like Turrell—privately made James Turrell pieces [laughs].

JOSH T FRANCO: Isn't that a crazy experience?

WENDY RED STAR: It was wild to me. It was kind of like the Cartier thing where it was like this whole other playing field of the art world that I had no idea about, or that art could be such an investment in that kind of way. So that was like a phenomenal class. And I actually did some studio visits with UCLA students, and they were like, "We don't have that class." I was like, "Oh, that's—that's really unfortunate," because that was so important to see—just see that aspect of the art world.

JOSH T FRANCO: Did you interact with the collectors?

WENDY RED STAR: We did. There was like a family, a husband and wife called the Einsteins, and they lived on the back side of the Getty, and they had like a key to like walk up privately to the Getty. And they made their house like a museum. So it was white walls, hardwood floors, and like you'd have all the crazy art in there—and they lived with the art. Like, I don't even know where their bedrooms were. They didn't even have, like, couches. It was just like a museum when you walk in.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah, and did you—and did you immediately envision your work being in those environments, or—

WENDY RED STAR: Hell no. I remember going to LACMA—and this is how intense the grad school—just the way that we were trained to, like, analyze. I remember walking in and looking at the artwork and thinking about the artists, like, "These guys made it; if you get in the museum, you've made it; you're living this glorious, fancy life." [Laughs.] And we were like looking around and there was this like stack of folded chairs, like a big stack, I don't know, maybe like 12 feet long by like 4 feet high, and me and this other grad student, we're like sitting there, like walking around looking at it for like a good five minutes. The other students were like looking at other things. Then we looked at each other and we're like, "This is just like a stack of chairs for some event." [Laughs.]

[00:10:35]

JOSH T FRANCO: Like a facilities thing? [Laughs.] Amazing.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah! [Laughs.] And I was like, "Wow, we really went there." We were really, like, trying to, like, make that work.

JOSH T FRANCO: That's amazing.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah, it was pretty funny.

JOSH T FRANCO: Because, like, contemporary art was such a revelation at that point, do you have any—did it give you any names or bodies of work that became touch-points over a long time?

WENDY RED STAR: Oh. You know, that's such a—one of those questions where everything empties out of my brain when you ask me. But I think I took from everything. But the thing that really turned me on were people do doing identity-based artwork, so like Fred Wilson and Adrian Piper and—I think that they were so important to me—like Kara Walker. Because there were

maybe two other artists in the program.

I was the only Native student. There were other artists of color there, which was awesome. But we were the only ones that were doing work based on identity. And we were, I felt, in my opinion, like kind of very ridiculed for it and always told that we need to kind of just get over it, like we were being didactic. And especially the work that I made and the content I made, I think, really intimidated people, I didn't realize it. I just really felt like I was being—like I wasn't with it, and if I wanted to be in the dialogue, then I needed not to make the work that I was making. Now, what I realize is that the work just made people really uncomfortable because it really pointed to sort of the missing spaces in their, like, knowledge.

And that was hard for me. And I talk to other Native students who are in, you know, art programs, and they're still feeling the same feelings that I felt. It would be really hard to hear, like, you know, a studio visit in the next studio going so well with somebody who is doing like abstract painting, and then—and a white student, and then to have that same professor come in and I would get like: "Uh—can you, like, fill me in, like give me a little history lesson?" Or the other thing I would get was just totally tearing down, like just "You need to completely not do that."

I think that's why Don Suggs was so important, is he met every artist where they were. He was really trying to understand and then work from there. Also not like in that same way of like, "Give me a history lesson." It was really like—if he couldn't grapple with that, it was about composition, and then starting there, and then could get into the conceptual nuances of a work. So, yeah, I think that's why artists who were doing identity-based works or historical references were so important.

JOSH T FRANCO: With the other artists, the people of color in your program, did you end up becoming aware of your own sort of gaps around their histories?

WENDY RED STAR: Oh, yeah. You know, growing up on the reservation, it's not diverse at all. It's just Crows and white people. And there were no Black people. My sister was the only Korean. [Laughs.] And so that was actually my first time—going to MSU, I wasn't around Black people. So that was my first time being around Black people. And I could see my shortcomings there, you know. And I just realized a lot of these stereotypes are human nature. And it's just really from not having access—

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WENDY RED STAR: You think about trans people, and if you don't have access, you know, there can be a lot of ignorance around that. But once you get to know people from different backgrounds and cultures personally, then it's hard. It's hard to discriminate. You know?

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah, yeah. There's moments—

WENDY RED STAR: Or to have somebody do it to me, like a person of color.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah. Exactly.

WENDY RED STAR: And I'm like, "Well but you're also a person of color; I feel like you should understand this."

JOSH T FRANCO: Those are the interesting moments. Because you know what to expect from white people. Right? [Laughs.]

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah.

JOSH T FRANCO: It's like when it's somebody else of color, or when you realize, like, a day later and feel horrible, like, "Oh, I did it."

WENDY RED STAR: Oh my gosh, yeah.

JOSH T FRANCO: I think those are the interesting—really interesting things to think about.

WENDY RED STAR: That actually happened—Brenna Youngblood, she's this amazing—She was in photography and she's transitioned into painting. But she was a year above us. But she had this mentor of hers. He's Black and he—I'm not going to say his name, but he was a professor at Long Beach, and that's where she did her undergrad, and he came to be a visiting professor.

And me and my friend were so excited, my friend Roya, and she's—Oh, my gosh—she's Iranian. And we're like, "Yes! Finally!" Brenna's like—so into him. So he gave us a slideshow of him, and it was, to me, like all about identity. Or, like, how could you not read some of the work as being about identity? And he devastated us in our studios. We were, like, devastated. Like he was not wanting us to do anything based on identity. It was devastating. I think we still can't grapple with [laughs], like, working with him, because it was it was so wild. So that was an interesting experience.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Was feminism part of the conversation in grad school?

WENDY RED STAR: Not at all. Not at all.

JOSH T FRANCO: This is like early 2000s.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah, I mean, I think feminism could have been. Like, I think Mary Kelly and of course, Cathy Opie—um, but yeah, no, it wasn't. Unfortunately, it wasn't. Feminism in Portland, when I was out—yes. Big time. But definitely not in graduate school.

JOSH T FRANCO: But so what about second year of graduate school?

WENDY RED STAR: Actually, I've just got to say, it was about even being gender-less, more like not being a woman, was kind of the goal.

JOSH T FRANCO: Don't be of color, don't be a woman.

WENDY RED STAR: I had a professor, who, a visiting professor who was Korean, a Korean woman. And she said that was her goal, that when people looked at her work, they would not know her gender or her identity. So that's kind of where I was at. Like, me doing work about my culture [laughs] and being a Crow woman was, like, so not the deal. [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: [Laughs.] I guess things are different now than what you're describing.

WENDY RED STAR: It is different. Because having the opportunity, just like last year or maybe it was early this year, it's all running together, where I got to be a visiting artist and do a lecture and studio visits virtually with UCLA grad students. They're having such a different experience than what I did.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah. Do you find yourself—When I do studio visits and artist talks now, I'm always like, "that shit's an asset, all of it. It's all an asset. Don't let anybody tell you it's a liability. It means you have backup." That's one of the things I feel and that I always tell people. All of that means you have backup, that you have support. It's not, like, an anchor. So let anybody tell you that.

WENDY RED STAR: Uh-huh. Yes.

JOSH T FRANCO: I just got on the soap box for a moment. So second year of grad school, did you make anything you liked? And what was the structure? Did you take courses, or were you just studio-ing? Because it's just two years, right?

WENDY RED STAR: It's just two years. So, yeah, you had to take seminars. And then you had to take, I think, one or two outside classes, outside of the art department. So I took a Native law class. Wow, did I feel like really not smart. [Laughs.]

[00:05:10]

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

WENDY RED STAR: Because they were all, you know, studying to be lawyers. And they just like really flattered me and they were—the professor was super gracious. She's like, "Well, she's an art student." [Laughs.] They were using all this legal jargon. And then the homework was like a million pages of reading. I was like, "What is this?"

JOSH T FRANCO: But you have a strong reading and research practice now. Did you have it before that, or did that class bolster it?

WENDY RED STAR: That class did not bolster it. [Laughs.] That class was like, "I am way out of my league here." But that actually I think helped me, because though—What I do in my practice

is, I work with people who are experts in different fields. And so having the ability to talk to a Native law student and ask them things, that I don't have to do the deep research on, was very beneficial. So definitely that came out of it for sure.

And I made one of the most important works of my career, *The Four Seasons*, in graduate school. And that was everything. I didn't really make a lot of work. I think I made maybe five bodies of work out of that two years. And I think—And they were all really photo-based works. And I didn't think of *The Four Seasons* as a photo at all. It was a document of an installation.

JOSH T FRANCO: So the work was the installation and the performance of you.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah, and then I was like, "Well, wait a minute, I can't do this; I don't want to remake this at other places or drag all this stuff around. It's a photo now." [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: Did you talk to, like, Cathy Opie about that?

WENDY RED STAR: I was so intimidated by her. She scared me so bad.

JOSH T FRANCO: This is right up her alley.

WENDY RED STAR: I had one studio visit with her and Robert Gober, which was a dream because, I was obsessed with Robert Gober's work.

JOSH T FRANCO: He's brilliant.

WENDY RED STAR: And I was like, "Robert Gober and Cathy Opie are in my studio." [Laughs.] And I think they did talk about *The Four Seasons*, and that's the first time I heard the word "tableau." I was like, "Mhm, I like this tableau." But that's that's kind of what I remember about it, just being kind of like awestruck by them and the word "tableau" coming up. And that's about it.

JOSH T FRANCO: Was *The Four Seasons* something—was your experience more like a sudden vision and then you worked to execute, or was it something you slowly built?

WENDY RED STAR: No. I'm a very—my production time is so quick. I spend a lot of time in my head. So, this is something that I think for my grad school experience, I really wish I had a professor who would have told me, like, that's just as important as somebody who is in their, like, studio making something every day, like 20-30 things. But I felt like those were the students who were getting the praise, and I was just struggling. So I would go drive and I'd go like to a vintage store or something—and I really needed someone to say, actually, "That's your practice; that's how you make work; and think time is also part of your practice." And then when it comes to the actual making, it's so quick.

JOSH T FRANCO: That's great. I like the idea of finding words, so just as an exercise: What words were you given or did you identify during that time that describe your practice? "Tableau" is one.

WENDY RED STAR: Tableau—now, I'm, like, one of those—like, it's the negative words. So "didactic" always came up, and I was like, "Ugh," you know, and it was like a few of us who were like always told we were being didactic and we just kind of—we raged against that word, "didactic." Um, that's fascinating that you ask me that question, because I don't think there were a lot of words to describe what I was doing. So "tableau" was the one that really sticks out. I think for me—I think it really made people uncomfortable to talk about the work.

JOSH T FRANCO: *Four Seasons*, it has—is it fair to say tongue-in-cheek, a little? The plastic and the—

[00:10:06]

WENDY RED STAR: Oh, yeah. I was watching a lot of John Waters' movies. [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: Oh, that makes total sense.

WENDY RED STAR: I was really interested in sets, and I found out that, like, these objects that I was so interested in at the vintage stores that cost way too much money that I didn't have, that I could actually rent all of them, because that's just the way that it worked for movie sets. And they're like, "oh, yeah, you can totally rent this." I was like, "What?" So I was really kind of into this idea of creating sets and scenes.

And then there was a lot of influence of other grad students. So there was a grad student who had these '70s photo mural backdrops, and I was like, "these are incredible." So he showed me, like, where you get them—he was one of those students making like 50 things a day, and you would just go in a studio, it changed every day. That's the first time that I also learned that I could actually just buy something and not have to create it, you know? And I was actually told by the sculpture tech, like, "If you can't make it, someone in LA can." I was, like, "Whoa! Really? Okay." There's somebody who can do it who is an expert in it. And that was important for me to learn.

JOSH T FRANCO: Who was the student with the backdrops?

WENDY RED STAR: Brian Bress. Yeah. Yeah. And he actually gave me like a real hard time. That was like one of my grad school fights. Because all of the backdrops—so I went and I bought like two backdrops, and they weren't anything close to his, but he was also like working with backdrops, and he told me I could not show my backdrops during our open studio. And that was, like, you know, I only made like five things. And he was like, "I'm going to—" "Poor Brian. I don't feel like... I'm totally fine with Brian. I actually think his work is fine. I think we were just like young. But he was, like—wanted to sabotage, like, if you make it—So I remember like talking to Jennifer Bolande, who was my mentor, and she was wonderful. She was a feminist. Talk about a feminist. But I just didn't even know. And I was like, "Brian's like really upset; he doesn't want me to use it." She's like, "Are you kidding me? It's just a tool. Like, if two people are painting, one can't say, 'you can't use these paints because I'm using them.'" And she was like, "I'm going to give you an F if you don't display this." I was like, "oh, my God!"

JOSH T FRANCO: What a teacher. That's an awesome move.

WENDY RED STAR: I was like, "oh, God, Brian is going to do this, but she's going to give me an F." Then I just I showed it. But yeah, that was like one of those interesting, like, student fighting, you know, over like, over authenticity or whatever. [Laughs.] I don't know what was—what was going on.

JOSH T FRANCO: Do you still have any strong relationships from grad school?

WENDY RED STAR: Oh, yes, My best friend is Roya Falahi. And Amir Fallah, he's still doing amazing work, and he's so business. He created *Beautiful Decay*, the magazine. He was doing that during grad school. So seeing him, like, have his own business—he was like leagues ahead of us [laughs] when it came to like understanding that side of a practice. So I definitely will talk to him when it comes to like, you know, business type things. He just gives such great advice. And we have opposite careers. He's like really shown in the commercial gallery world, and I'm shown mainly in non-profits and museums and university galleries. So we'll swap kind of our knowledge of those two areas. And then, yeah, I just have a lot of tender feelings. Like occasionally somebody will reach out to me on social media, or I'll reach out to them because I saw them in something. It was really—grad school was great—for building really strong friendships.

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JOSH T FRANCO: Was UCLA one of those setups where dealers would come?

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah.

JOSH T FRANCO: So did you—you started—

WENDY RED STAR: Oh. No. I was terrified. So that was also, like, when it was open studios—they even had like sort of legendary stories of grad students of the past, would have like dealers and galleries come in and—and I hid. Like, I could not stand having people come in my studio and like—because they would be aggressive about it. They would poke their head in, and if they didn't like it, they would like peace out. So all of those sort of students who felt social anxiety around that, we would just like go somewhere else. But we would also like be so fascinated with the grad students who were so comfortable with that, and they would have like 20 people in there and they would just be talking about all their stuff. And they really did end up getting some gallery connections through that.

JOSH T FRANCO: Um, is there anything I'm not asking about grad school? Any stories that are important to share?

WENDY RED STAR: It was, I have to say, a very important time for me; like, a pivotal time for me. It was the launching pad for me. And, um, I made *The Four Seasons*, which has just been this gateway artwork for my career. It's the work that got me into Skowhegan and Provincetown Fine Art Work Center, and it's the work that got me the Eiteljorg Fellowship, that like the highest contemporary art fellowship, you could get. And then it just continues.

At one point it was showing, I think, like eight times simultaneously in different institutions. I can't remember if it was 2016 or 2017. It, to me, is like its own entity. It's like its own deal. And I will find out about it. I'm like, "Oh, you're over there doing that. Okay!" I'm like in a really good relationship with it now, but I had complicated feelings about it, because I felt like that's it. That's all I could do. Or that's all people wanted, like people—or worried that people wouldn't want to see other things that were completely different than *The Four Seasons*.

JOSH T FRANCO: I'm trying to think the first time I saw it—was it at the Smithsonian American Art Museum at any point?

WENDY RED STAR: They have it in—the National Museum of the American Indian owns.

JOSH T FRANCO: I like the scale. I just really like the size of that photograph.

WENDY RED STAR: Oh, thank you.

JOSH T FRANCO: I like a lot of it—that just seems like the very right size for a tableau.

WENDY RED STAR: Well, there you go.

JOSH T FRANCO: Because it's somewhere near painting—it's just like, yeah, this is the right size for this. And then you get into all the details. That's great. So we got through grad school.

WENDY RED STAR: Okay. We got through grad school [laughs]

JOSH T FRANCO: Here's a fun cool-down question. Do your rings mean anything?

WENDY RED STAR: No. I posted this one, and I got all these messages. Because I just posted a shot of my hand, and it's on my ring finger and they were like, "Did you get married? Are you engaged?" I was like, "oh my God." Like, no; no, I didn't. It's just like really both of these—Well, actually, there is a meaning. This is from the '70s. And I think I have a thing for '70s rings. But yeah, this actually has a lot of meaning. This is a ring that my dad proposed to my mom with, and she rejected him. [Laughs.] And so I got it. But it's like this cool opal, this big stone's opal, sapphires and diamonds—and it's also from the '70s.

JOSH T FRANCO: It's a beautiful ring.

WENDY RED STAR: I love it. And I guess he wore it on his pinky for like months and then—

JOSH T FRANCO: After your mom rejected it?

WENDY RED STAR: No, no, no. Before. I think she said that's the reason why, because she felt like it was just a ring—

JOSH T FRANCO: —because he was just using it [laughs]?

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah. [Laughs.] And this is not at all like my dad. My dad is like—well, my dad is interesting. He was a Vietnam Marine. And then he—as a child, he was a classically trained guitarist. And he played in a band in the Marines called The Maniacs, and then when he came out back home from the Marines, he started an all-Indian Crow rock band called The Maniacs.

[00:05:15]

And I didn't know he was like this rock star until I was like a teenager, and I discovered these photos of him in my aunt's album, and there are amazing photographs.

JOSH T FRANCO: So Wendy is, just for the future person listening, she's holding up a pillow with—my brain is—what do you call it when you put a photo on a pillow, on a fabric?

WENDY RED STAR: I have no idea.

JOSH T FRANCO: Anyway, yeah, it's the Maniacs. So which one's your dad?

WENDY RED STAR: This is my dad, my uncle Kevin, and then one of their friends, Kenneth Toineeta. They were called the Maniacs, and then their sub was, "We're Not The Best, But We're Better Than The Rest."

JOSH T FRANCO: Did you make this pillow?

WENDY RED STAR: I made it. I made it because I did a whole exhibition that documented the history of the Maniacs. Then I had a little store where fans could buy like pillows and T-shirts.

Um, but yes, so my dad, I guess I'm just saying that he has these aspects of his life that have surprised me. And when I say, "oh, I wouldn't see him wearing this ring"—well, he did that. He would do that. But me, growing up with him, knew him as a rancher.

JOSH T FRANCO: It's a rock star ring.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah. [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: Does this feel like a good stopping point for today?

WENDY RED STAR: I think so. Yeah.

JOSH T FRANCO: All right. We'll pick up tomorrow and catch up.

WENDY RED STAR: Okay.

[END OF TRACK redstas21_1of2_sd_track11.]

JOSH T FRANCO: This is Josh T. Franco interviewing Wendy Red Star at her studio in Portland, Oregon, on June 11, 2021, the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Okay, I got through that. Wendy, we just got tattoos.

WENDY RED STAR: We did.

JOSH T FRANCO: [Laughs.]

WENDY RED STAR: We just got tattoos like ten minutes ago.

JOSH T FRANCO: How are you feeling, before we talk about what your tattoo is. How do you feel about getting a tattoo right now? How is your body feeling?

WENDY RED STAR: I have like a like a big kind of grin on my face. Like my cheek muscles hurt from that. And feeling a little bit in shock because I don't have any tattoos. This is my first tattoo. And, um, it's kind of my karma, I think, because I was talking bad about my relatives for getting a Red Star tattoo, and that's exactly what I got. [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: [Laughs.] I don't know. Were you talking bad about it? You were just kind of—

WENDY RED STAR: I was making fun of them for being cliché. So I just joined the cliché train.

JOSH T FRANCO: Oh yeah. You got it. You got it on your left inner elbow.

WENDY RED STAR: Yes.

JOSH T FRANCO: It looks great. It's the perfect iconic Red Star.

WENDY RED STAR: It's just very straightforward. Red Star.

JOSH T FRANCO: And it's from your neighbor. It's from your tattoo artist neighbors here in your Portland neighborhood.

WENDY RED STAR: Yes. Yeah. It's—I really love where my studio is at, and the little neighborhood, and it's from a neighborhood shop. It's trans owned. There are tons of female tattooers in there. And they had a cancellation, and we just walked in and we got it. And it was magical.

JOSH T FRANCO: [Laughs.] Yeah. It was great.

WENDY RED STAR: Not to mention that, like, we spent the morning looking at waterfalls and eating mochi donuts. So it's just been like, perfect.

JOSH T FRANCO: Exactly. [Laughs.] Yeah. So we're just going to be giddy, I think, through this whole thing.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah, I think so.

JOSH T FRANCO: And then sleepy or something. Well, yeah, the tattoo, I'm sure we'll mention it again, but let's talk about the morning. Thank you for taking me to the gorge, to hike and see waterfalls. That was amazing. Um, I mean, you talked about what it means to be in nature and walk around yesterday a lot, but that was really like about Montana a lot. So now that I've experienced it—yeah, I mean, you've said like the walking of the being-in-nature is part of your practice. What does that mean? And what has this particular Portland area brought to it?

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah, I think, number one, it's one of my favorite things to do, is to bring people out to see the gorge and also to experience the waterfalls, and then just be in the woods and smell. It's like all your senses. My dogs are wrestling right now.

JOSH T FRANCO: [Laughs.]

WENDY RED STAR: But for me, I realize that it's so important that I connect with nature, because that's sort of my download and the way that I work through sort of blockages in, like, making work. Or often what happens is work comes to me while I'm out there walking. So it's like an essential part of being—my ability to make work, is to just be out and just have all this space for me to sort of daydream and fantasize.

JOSH T FRANCO: Well, we heard a lot of birds. As you mentioned—if you want to talk about it—you're thinking about a new project with birds.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah, I am really interested in doing something with birds, particularly making bird houses that are, um, the HUD houses on the reservation for birds. [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: Oh, what's the—the HUD housing? The housing? The—yeah.

WENDY RED STAR: Yes. The thing that really kind of caught me the last time I went to Montana was just the incredible morning sort of bird orchestra that happens and just hearing birds constantly. Even here in the city, when you walk around, that's sort of a soundtrack that we take for granted. So walking out in the woods today. [Snaps.] That was really something that I am very in tune with right now. So I'm looking forward to joining like the Audubon Society, and really digging deep into some nerd territory regarding learning about birds.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah. You didn't mention house—bird houses, though, when we were walking.

[00:05:01]

WENDY RED STAR: No.

JOSH T FRANCO: I mean, that's a deep tie to your undergrad project, too. The architecture.

WENDY RED STAR: It is. And I'm really thinking, too, a lot about—and you might have noticed here in Portland—the houseless problem that we have. And I think that's—somewhere in that project, that's an influence that I think is just kind of at the forefront of my thinking right now, because it's—you can't ignore it here. It's in my neighborhood. It's everywhere. And um, so, yeah, I'm actually very excited to get started on it. I don't have a place for it to show or anything like that. But that's the project I really want to start getting into.

JOSH T FRANCO: That's exciting. How are your endorphins doing?

WENDY RED STAR: Like you said, I do have an endorphin high right now. It's really interesting. I've never experienced it. Yeah, it's kind of like I'm not present—

JOSH T FRANCO: [Laughs.] Yeah, exactly.

WENDY RED STAR: —and trying to be present. [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: We're trying to make a serious record here! Yeah, so the walk was great and

today has been unexpected and awesome. And I do want to pick up where we were yesterday, to—we got through grad school. We talked about it a little bit in the car; what came after was Skowhegan. Is that what immediately came after grad school? Do you want to talk about applying to that, or?

WENDY RED STAR: Yes. So you know, in graduate school, when it was nearing the end, all of my peers, we were all trying to figure out like what direction we wanted to move. Like, some of my friends were going to stay in Los Angeles and work with—as like, assistants for artists. Some were going to be preparators. Some were going to get adjunct positions. And I was trying to think of, like, a way that I could just be sustained, and residencies came to mind. So I applied for Skowhegan. I got in. So that was the plan immediately after graduate school. And I also got into Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center. And they happened one right after the other. So I was just going to be on this residency kick and see what happens. But I ended up getting pregnant, and so that ended [laughs], that ended my time at Provincetown.

But it was great. I would have to say, about—when I went to Skowhegan, it was in the summer of 2006. And it was like an oasis in the sense that it was the first time that I'd been around so many artists of color who were working on identity-based artwork. A huge contrast from what I was presented at UCLA, like a shying away from that type of work. And that gave me a real faith that there were other artists out there. There was a community for me from all different backgrounds and cultures. And I still know some folks—and my ex-husband came from Skowhegan. So, yeah, it was a really important residency.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yep. So can you just say some of the other people that were there at the same time as you?

WENDY RED STAR: I'm going to butcher names.

JOSH T FRANCO: [Laughs.]

WENDY RED STAR: So it's so funny that this is going to go into the archives. But there was Kambui [Olujimi - WRS], and I can't pronounce his last name. And there was Maya Freelon. I'm totally blanking on her name. She made this really great work where she would throw herself at men; and literally, she would throw herself at men and be photographed. Her first name's Lilly [McElroy]. And I'm just going to end there because it's getting bad [laughs] with the names. But it was great.

There was an opportunity that I missed out on to go visit Fred Wilson, because I think he has a place there in Maine. So that was—I felt so terrible for not being able to actually get an opportunity to see where he lives and works.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah. Do you want to talk about meeting your ex-husband at all in that context, or? Because he's an artist too, so.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah, he's an artist. His name's Harrell Fletcher, and, um, he does social practice. He's like [snaps] one of the founding folks for social practice.

[00:10:10]

Actually, he sort of opened up a whole new world of art practice for me, I think in a sense there were some things that he was doing in his practice that were just sort of innately things that I was doing that are very common for, like, Indigenous communities to work collaboratively. And I work inter-generationally. But, yeah, just the whole mode of practice was so different than anything that I had learned or been introduced to in graduate school. So, yeah, I think—I think that was a really important part of my sort of education, and then a very—an extremely important and amazing thing is that my daughter came from that union.

JOSH T FRANCO: Mhm-hmm, yeah. I'm sure we'll talk about your daughter more. But out of Skowhegan and Provincetown, are there particular bodies of work you associate with those? Or were they more about thinking, exploring?

WENDY RED STAR: So, I was so burnt-out after grad school [laughs] that I just went there and swam and did laundry and ate sandwiches at lunchtime. [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: That's great [laughs].

WENDY RED STAR: And um, they were very supportive there. They totally said, "That's fine." I just realized about myself that it's really hard for me to make art work at residencies, and the value for me is just being around creative, like-minded people.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yep. So then you found out you were pregnant? [Laughs.]

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah! [Laughs.] I found out I was pregnant when I was in Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center, so I didn't get to do the full round. And then I came to Portland, because Harold was—is—a professor at Portland State University. And that was very first time that I'd ever been to Portland, spent time in Oregon. I had no clue what a weird little town this is. [Laughs.] At first, I just really did not know what to make of Portland, but I've really grown to love it for the experience we had this morning, of being able to get to nature really quickly, and then, the basically, textile community here is super strong. I love to sew; started sewing here. And the food. The food is amazing. So it's just kind of a great place for me to come and return from travels. Like, I feel very comfortable here.

JOSH T FRANCO: So you've been here like 15 years or 16 years?

WENDY RED STAR: I think so. 15, yeah.

JOSH T FRANCO: A place you didn't know before at all. I mean, yeah. Because of life. [Laughs.]

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah, because of life.

JOSH T FRANCO: So, how were you negotiating that, when you envisioned yourself doing this residency string and then this disruption, welcome disruption. I think a lot of artists, it's interesting how they incorporate motherhood in their practice. Or how they don't. Some choose not to. I'm curious how you think about that now. But for this, I wonder how those first few moments were.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah. I felt really lost. I was so young. I was 26 when I had Beatrice, and I was adjuncting at PSU and Portland Community College, and I thought that's what I was going to do. I thought that's why I got my Masters, was to be a professor. And it was just super cutthroat. And in the time that I was teaching, I taught for about seven years—and you just don't make any money. It's really terrible. I felt like some sense of performance anxiety, too, that I didn't realize was happening until later. But, yeah, it just didn't feel good. I'm going to say it didn't feel good. I don't think teaching—and I will say this. It was what the university was offering me to teach, was their sort of core intro to art classes. And I think where I would excel is some sort of specialized—

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WENDY RED STAR: My own topic kind of class. So, yeah, I just felt kind of generic and—I liked the students. But, yeah, it was a kind of sad existence to make so little money and work so hard and then, yeah, just not be adequately paid for it.

JOSH T FRANCO: Do you remember any—do any students stand out?

WENDY RED STAR: Um, I had like one—two Native students, so that was cool. There's a woman named Shilo George. She wasn't actually an art major, and sometimes I think those are the best, because they're so open. And the thing that I also kind of sensed is that it's rare to find someone in an art practice that you can see is going to have some longevity. A lot of times, I would just see people who I knew weren't going to be around much longer, probably even right after they graduated.

JOSH T FRANCO: And has she had longevity? Have you seen her—

WENDY RED STAR: She's more gone into social work. But I just really valued having her in my classes for her sort of outsider perspective, and just to have like a local Indigenous person was great.

JOSH T FRANCO: Did having a child change your understanding of what creativity is?

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah [laughs].

WENDY RED STAR: I mean, I am going to say all the cliché things, but it really gave me a real

sense of purpose and a reason for doing everything that I do. So. And you don't even realize it until you actually have a kid and then you're like, "Oh!" And you also value your time, because when they're tiny you see your single friends and how they're just wasting so much time [laughs], and you like have literally no time. But I made some—actually my divorce—I got divorced in 2013, I believe, but I was separated for like a year—that actually really kicked me. That's when I said "I'm going to say yes to art," was 2013.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah. So you were teaching,

WENDY RED STAR: I was teaching—

JOSH T FRANCO: Raising a new baby. Yeah.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah. She was around five when we got divorced.

JOSH T FRANCO: Are there any bodies of work from that time, or was it really about like—

WENDY RED STAR: No.

JOSH T FRANCO: —surviving and raising a child and teaching?

WENDY RED STAR: It was surviving, raising a child— Yeah. And I think that was one of the things. Like the teaching—I don't know how professors do it that are artists and showing, because it eats up a lot of time. But they do it.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah, um, you mentioned—we were talking before, with the separation—You also moved to the reservation for a while.

WENDY RED STAR: I did. Yeah, that was such a turbulent time in my life. Because my dad had colon cancer and I was going through this divorce. I was also grappling with the fact that I'm not going to be able to see my daughter every day, and that was devastating. Really hard to, like, work through. And there had been a job opening at Chief Plenty Coups State Park, which is five miles away from where my dad lives on the reservation, and he was like, "Why don't you apply? You'll have like actual benefits and stuff, and then you can, like, get a custody agreement where she comes with you." And I actually had to, because I think I was making \$15,000 a year from all the three adjunct positions, and like no one can survive on that. And so I applied and I got it. And I was a park manager [laughs], no background whatsoever. It almost felt like a weird artist residency kind of experience. And that time, I will say, was probably one of the most lowest, depressing times in my life. And I equate that to—because I didn't make any artwork at all. And I realized that it's actually for my survival. I actually have to create works. Something that biologically is necessary for me to do. And I didn't realize that until I was going through that part of my life.

[00:05:04]

Yeah, so, when I was being a park manager—I was only a park manager for like a year. And I was also able to really help my dad out through cancer treatments and things like that. I got a message out of the blue, and this is so important—I think it's so important when artists pop into your lives and they sometimes kind of save your life. And Duane Linklater contacted me. I didn't know who he was at all. He's a First Nations artist from Canada. He's Cree. And he was doing like a teaching—residency at the Banff Center. And he said, "Do you want to come be a visiting artist for like a week at the Banff Center?" I was like, "I don't know you at all." [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: How did he know you?

WENDY RED STAR: He's just on top of, like, wanting to know what Indigenous artists are out there. So he found my work and I was like, this is kind of nuts, kind of like getting tattoos out of the blue one day— [Laughs.] I was like, "Yes, I want to do it." So I used some unpaid time off or something like that, and I went. And that fired me up. I was around Native artists, First Nations artists. Um, I was talking about art again. I was seeing what they were doing in their studios. Banff—have you been there?

JOSH T FRANCO: No, but I've—I've heard amazing things.

WENDY RED STAR: It's amazing. I should actually go there again [laughs]. And I got to know Duane and his amazing practice, his important practice. And then that was it, I was just like, "I need to be with my daughter; I can't be this far away from her. I don't care if I come back to

Portland and I have to work any job. I will do it. And I am going to say yes to art." And that's what happened. I moved back here and—Jasper's trying to bark—. Yeah, I think just having that mindset really helped push me forward

JOSH T FRANCO: That's amazing. The moment you told me yesterday about being on the rooftop in Paris, and then this low moment—they're so interesting together.

WENDY RED STAR: In what way?

JOSH T FRANCO: As far as both being part of an artist's journey and—the first one really affirmed your identity as artist; the second one really challenged it. And then you found your way back. I'm really buzzing from the tattoo.

WENDY RED STAR: [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: [Laughs.]

WENDY RED STAR: But also, I was thinking about our yesterday talk and I was like, wow, what a weird entry point into becoming an artist. It was like trying not to become an artist and ride horses. You know? [Laughs.] And then just kind of like—I really do feel like flying by the seat of my pants a lot of the time until now.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yep. So you come back to Portland after a year on the reservation doing the park job. What job did you get, just like when you landed here?

WENDY RED STAR: So amazingly, when I was going through my divorce proceedings [laughs], a job popped up for a native arts nonprofit, and I was like, "Oh, I'm going to apply to this." This, again, something that I had no experience and it was like—I can't remember—some administrative position there. And I got it. So I had a job. I found a cute little house to rent and I was here.

And then from there, I just started saying yes to any sort of art opportunity that would come my way. I took all my vacation time and sick leave, and then it got so intense that I started taking unpaid time off to do art things. And eventually I got laid off. [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah [laughs].

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah, I got laid off at like December of 2015, and that was like the biggest blow because I really thought that I needed that job. I was taking, like, art gigs and not really caring at all how much they paid me because I was like, I've got this steady check coming in that's going to cover rent. So I wasn't really taking the time to calculate like actually how much I was making through all the art opportunities.

[00:10:07]

And when they laid me off, um, it was totally out of the blue. I was crushed. They said I could like take the rest of the day off, but then I had to come back for like as long as it took for me to get things in order. So I went directly out into the woods, and I just like bawled. Because I thought I was going to be destitute. That's exactly where my mind went. And then I just powered through. I just like went and I got all the things that I needed to get done in two days. I had my, like, box of shit, walked out the door, and I got a phone call from the Joan Mitchell Foundation saying I got the Emerging Artist Grant for \$12,000. [Laughs.] I was like, "I can live for like X amount of months now."

JOSH T FRANCO: That's amazing timing. Woah.

WENDY RED STAR: It was. It was literally like out of a movie. Right when I walked out, I got the call. I just was like, "I can't believe this." And the other great thing about Joan Mitchell is that they flew us all to New Orleans for just like an orientation workshop, and it was all about professional development. At that point I was like, "I'm going to give it a go. I'm going to see if I can just sustain myself just through my art practice." And the workshop that they gave us was through Creative Capital. And they gave such good information. So it just felt like it was meant to be.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah. Well, those two organizations are amazing.

WENDY RED STAR: Kind of like these tattoos we got today.

JOSH T FRANCO: [Laughs.] Yeah. Because we walked in and they just were booked, but had cancellations last minute.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah. It was like a magical unicorn like moment.

JOSH T FRANCO: Well we are Aries, things work out for us. [Laughs.] So I want to stay in that moment a little bit, where you are working the job. What were the kind of things you were saying yes to? Were they very local Portlandy things? Or like, how were you finding them? Or how were they finding you?

WENDY RED STAR: You know, I love Portland, but I feel like Portland really wasn't paying any attention to me. That was not totally true. But, um, it was a lot of outside things and it was universities. So the universities have always come through for me and it was, you know, professors that had university galleries. They would invite me to show my work. And then oftentimes that would come with, like, giving a lecture and doing studio visits. So I just started ending up on this sort of university gig. And uh, that's been really great. And I kinda—I don't take it for granted, but I— My friend Amir [ph], who I talked about yesterday, he's like, "How did you get in that sort of routine with the universities?" It's like, oh, wow, yeah—"Because you're that's not what you're doing. You're like in the commercial gallery world." And yeah, I can't really say how.

JOSH T FRANCO: Who were some of the professors that were reaching out? Where were they?

WENDY RED STAR: They were all over the place. Like Minneapolis to—Oh my gosh, I've been so many places, it's really hard for me to recall. I mean, I've done so many. And during the pandemic, virtually, I was doing like every lecture possible. I think I did almost all the Ivy League schools, which was amazing. It feels surreal, like, to have students contact me and say, like, "You were a question on our test." I'm like, "What? Okay, that's incredible." But yeah, the university system has been very generous to me.

JOSH T FRANCO: Are they also acquiring things in these processes? Or is it more about the intellectual contribution you would make?

WENDY RED STAR: That—yeah, mainly what the offer was from a lot of the universities was a show and a lecture, and sometimes studio visits. So there were a few times where my work was acquired in conjunction with that.

JOSH T FRANCO: Um, so you have Joan Mitchell—

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JOSH T FRANCO: I mean, what, yeah—so it sounds like it's been a few years since a significant, like, body of work that you identified and made. So what was the next one after this period?

WENDY RED STAR: Oh, I think what really kind of kicked through was in 2014, I made the *1880 Crow Peace Delegation*, and I also made a series called *White Squaw*. So that body of work. And *White Squaw* was in a group show at the Art Gym which is no longer in existence here in Portland. And then I had a solo show at the Portland Art Museum. And I made *Medicine Crow* in the *1880 Crow Peace Delegation*, which has—something that I find interesting about my work is it's sort of a slow burn, where, you know, I made *The 1880 Crow Peace Delegation* in 2014, and it really seems to have—I mean, it's been consistent, but it seems to have really kind of caught fire, like, in 2016. It was showing and collected in a lot of different collections. And that's just kind of interesting to me.

JOSH T FRANCO: Can you describe it?

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah. *The 1880 Crow Peace Delegation* is a set of 10 portraits that were taken of Crow Chiefs in 1880 by Charles Milton Bell, and they are delegation portraits from a trip that they took to Washington, D.C. to meet with the President of the time, and they went there because the U.S. Government was going to put a train through a large tract of our hunting territory. That was the first time that I, by investigating this one chief—Because his image—his name was Medicine Crow—had been used commercially a lot, like on Honest Tea, and kind of reproduced by tons of—a very popular image of him. It was the first time that I actually just was like, "What is going on with this photo?" And that body of work really introduced me to archives and to museum collections. and actually looking at the Portland Art Museum's collection of Crow objects that they have. Yeah, and then it got me into SARF [Smithsonian Artist Research

Fellowship], for looking at more photos in that collection, and Crow objects.

JOSH T FRANCO: Well, I think it's important, too, to describe what you did to the photograph, to the portrait.

WENDY RED STAR: Oh yeah. What did I do to them?

JOSH T FRANCO: How you Wendied it up.

WENDY RED STAR: Well, with just asking that question—what's going on in this photo? What happened that day when he sat down to take that photo? Just asking those questions and doing a quick Google search, it was just like information came pouring out. And then, I would follow the leads of that information. It would take me to like interesting different archives, like at Montana State University in Billings—they have all these amazing drawings of circus animals that Medicine Crow drew that's in relation to that trip.

I'm going to tell you what I did [laughs] with that work—but, yeah, I just always knew about the Medicine Crow image. But when I looked into who took the photo, you know, then all the other Crow Chiefs that actually went on that same trip and sat down during that same photo session popped up that I had no idea that they went and were photographed and had the same experience. So I started researching each of those individual chiefs. And through that, then I was like: I want people, when they look at this photo, to actually have a sense of what is trying to be conveyed from my culture in this image. Um, and so, I started outlining their outfits. Partly for myself to really look. It really helps me to look at all the tiny details. I started to realize like that they all wore brass rings on their fingers. And I started to notice the details, of like the conch shells, and that one of them has like an Eagle Claw bracelet. And all of that was just stuff that I wasn't picking up from not, like, outlining.

JOSH T FRANCO: And I just want to point out: You mean literally outlining in red ink on the image.

WENDY RED STAR: In red ink, yes. And then through that, I would then start telling people like, "Oh, this is ermine" and "this is an eagle feather that is part of a coup that he had done to acquire chief status."

[00:05:19]

And then I would look into census records and learn more about them and try to pinpoint their age. Then also, if I could find their name written in the Crow language, I would write that on there. And if they had any descendants, I would try to include just interesting facts about them, and, more importantly, gossip that I heard [laughs] about them as well from the community.

JOSH T FRANCO: I just love them, because it's annotation, and it's like watching, you know—it's the kind of document that results from, like, an art history student studying in their textbook and writing on it.

WENDY RED STAR: Mhm-hmm.

JOSH T FRANCO: That's as someone, you know, who's been through that process [laughs] of training as an art historian. They are so uncanny for that reason. It's like —there's something just really spectacular about seeing that very intimate act of study. And like anybody who's taken art history and is okay to write in their textbooks—which isn't everybody, but a lot of people are—seeing it transformed into this, you know, artwork on a wall is really powerful.

WENDY RED STAR: That's so great to hear. Um, that's—I really want to humanize, and part of that is like getting to see my really terrible handwriting [laughs], and you know, some of some of my spelling errors, and just relating, like a physical relating to these people that are in the portraits. Um, it was so important to me. So it's great to hear you say that.

JOSH T FRANCO: And does it give you—but also, because it's presented as art and not like just reproductions in a textbook, it feels very you're breaking a rule. Because you're like marking on art. You know? It's—it's photography. Have you thought about that?

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah, I'm marking on art. Yes, I love that. But I'm also marking on history. And red, to me, I always think about like school and failing papers and getting that red mark on your paper. And so I just wanted that red mark on history.

JOSH T FRANCO: Oh that's great. I hadn't thought of that. In Chicano art, there's so much significance to red and black, and they're black-and-white photographs, so the red and black is like immediately apparent. Because in Náhuatl, the red and black—it's called *tilli* and *tlapalli*, the red ink and the black ink. It's the—those are the colors of ink that the wise men used to write knowledge. So that also came to my mind. And red and black is just an ancient color pair that Donald Judd calls a—he calls it a dual color monochrome, or something like that. That's fascinating. So anyway, I really love that series and I'm glad we talked about it a little more. [Laughs.]

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah. Thank you.

JOSH T FRANCO: Oh, so when did you make that? 2016?

WENDY RED STAR: 2014.

JOSH T FRANCO: So that was that was right after Joan Mitchell.

WENDY RED STAR: Yes. That was an important body of work. And then I think it's important to talk about *White Squaw*, because that that work is—I have so many complicated feelings around it, and I think those feelings that still linger today. And I was just—it came about because I was wanting to understand the origin of the word "squaw," because I had heard that it was an Indigenous word that then was turned into a derogatory word. So I was like hunting that down in Google, and then all of a sudden "white squaw" popped up, and I was like, "What's a white squaw?"

It was a movie that was made in 1950. The posters for that movie are incredible. They're like completely stereotypical and racist. But the premise behind it is that there is a Native woman that's half-white and half-Native. And she sort of works with the cowboys to get the Native people in line is the general gist of it. So I started looking into that movie and then a book called *The White Squaw* started popping up. And they are these trashy romance, romance, pulp fiction style books, and there were 24 of them. And they had these outrageous titles with like subtexts in them that were very, like, sexual, and they always had like "White Squaw. Her name's Rebecca. Becky for short." [Laughs.]

[00:10:13]

JOSH T FRANCO: Why is Becky always the name? [Laughs.]

WENDY RED STAR: It was like a large image of her looking very like, you know, the same; basically kind of lustful and the same. Then it would have like these little kind of figures below her, like doing things, and then like a subtext. They were just so over-the-top and crude, and I just—it was like a train wreck. I just could not, like, look away. And then I was like, I think I went to bed. I was like, "I've got to do something. I cannot not do something."

So I ended up purchasing all the books on eBay from different, like, used bookstores. Then, when I got the books, I scanned the covers of the books and I then myself went to Target and got—it was around Halloween—their Indian Princess costume. I just wanted to feel—it was really more for me about feeling that. And so, I wore the costume. And um, there's a choker in there, but I put the choker as a headband. [Laughs.] I bought these like fake turkey feathers that were different colors. And then I just would read the title, and then I would act out the title, you know, the face matched the title, whereas in the artwork it was just kind of the same pose, same image, the same time. And then I replaced her image with my image. I remember I shared one on Facebook, and this Native guy was like, "You know, that's a choker and it belongs on your neck. [Laughs.]" I was like, "That's what you're picking up?"

JOSH T FRANCO: About the Target thing?

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah! I was like, "That's what you're picking up on that?" I was like, "Okay." [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: There's also something—That's a weird move. [Laughs.]

WENDY RED STAR: It's so funny. [Laughs.] I was like, "Right on. Yeah." I didn't even, like, entertain it. I just thought it was, like, perfect. But yeah. So the work exists as these prints of 24, and then the books also display with the work. Because oftentimes people think that I made up the titles and the, like, subtexts, so it's really important for me to have the books on display. The

other thing about these books was that—I think the last one was copyrighted in, like, 1997 or something like that, so it really shocked me. It's one thing to see like *White Squaw* in the '50s, but to have it like end in the '90s was just really kind of intense.

JOSH T FRANCO: [Yawns] Yeah, yeah. The buzz from the tattoo is going away. [Laughs.]

WENDY RED STAR: It's going down. Now you're in relax-mode. [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: Oh, um. so who was the author?

WENDY RED STAR: Oh, that's a great question. It's on—

JOSH T FRANCO: Did you research them?

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah, I did. And I almost got this feeling like it was a ghostwriter.

JOSH T FRANCO: This is just pulp.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah, totally ghostwriter. Um, yeah. And I wasn't quite interested in any of that. I was just very interested in the artwork, the concept of a white squaw, me being half-white and half-Apsáalooke, um, and just the portrayal of Native women, which is either white squaw or just frumpy old, like, silent back character.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah, I mean, this kind of deep research and historicizing is definitely what got you to the SARF, the Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship, which was 2018?

WENDY RED STAR: I believe so.

JOSH T FRANCO: So is there anything between those couple of years we should stop on first?

WENDY RED STAR: Yes. I think it's important for me to talk about my collaboration with Beatrice.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yes. Definitely.

WENDY RED STAR: That actually happened during my solo show at the Portland Art Museum. She actually made a body of work, um, where I had all these photocopies of the delegation portraits and she colored over the top of them, and I included those in the exhibition. And when we went to the opening on the way there, she asked if she could talk about her work. And she was seven at the time.

JOSH T FRANCO: Amazing.

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WENDY RED STAR: And, um, I said, "Yes." I allowed her to do that. And she really surprised me, because she can speak publicly very well. And then from there, I realized that I was thinking that—she couldn't—I was compartmentalizing her away from my art practice, and I realized with that exhibition that we could work together and she could see what I do and she could also enhance, and actually I could learn a lot from her. And so we collaborated, um, I can't remember, up until 2016—well, we ended when she was 11 at the Pulitzer in St. Louis.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah. But yeah, we did some incredible works where we went to museums and gave tours of their collections, and started with—first with me saying that, "Hey, I'm going to collaborate with my child [laughs]; you have to be okay with it," to institutions contacting us to come and do a project with them.

JOSH T FRANCO: What did it change for your audiences? And did she end up building her own audiences? Like how did audiences, you know, understand this?

WENDY RED STAR: I think what it was really important for, more so, was the institution. And the institutions recognizing that a collaboration of this nature can work, and not only can it work, it can be powerful and successful. I think that is very much because of Beatrice and how, um, just she's—She's just mature and she can just take on, like, the sort of public aspect very well. She has no problem gathering people to come and do activities. And so I think at the Denver Art Museum, she gave tours, three tours to children of the Native galleries and the Western art

galleries, and they were blown away. Because they had never seen little children pay so much attention to a tour [laughs].

JOSH T FRANCO: Awesome. Yeah. Yeah.

WENDY RED STAR: And they—I think they were like, this is how we connect with the future generations, you know; it would have to be through that generation's perspective. So I think that was something that was like really important for an institution to be open to and see, like, the power and the potential.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah, and you sewed her outfit for that, right?

WENDY RED STAR: I did. She really got into the whole tour guide aspect and persona, and she would draw up, like, outfits that then I would sew. We even did, like, a lecture outfit, so when we did dual lectures together, like she would want one. Then we did—yeah, she had like lecture outfit and tour guide outfits, and then there was one other outfit for some sort of thing she did.

JOSH T FRANCO: It's amazing. Yeah, so we're in this kind of mid-teens, twenty-teens—And uh what's your studio situation in those years?

WENDY RED STAR: Yes, since I left graduate school, I didn't actually have like a separate studio space. My studio space was my entire 800 square foot house. I mean, it was supposed to be the living room, then it would turn into the kitchen and the bathroom and my bedroom, and my daughter's room was like off-limits [laughs]. But she grew up, like, the house would explode, come around exhibition time. It was just all over the place.

JOSH T FRANCO: It's amazing. Um, yeah—should we talk about your SARF? Is there a little more in there?

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah, there's one other thing that Beatrice and I made together, which is *Apsáalooke Feminist*, which was, um, self-portraits of us in our living room, on our IKEA couch, in our elk tooth dresses, that we did all with self-timer and jumping on back and forth in position. That's an important work for us. Um, Beatrice will be getting the artist proofs for all of my work, whether she likes it or not [laughs]. So yeah, she'll have my collection, should anything happen.

[00:05:17]

JOSH T FRANCO: And she retired, right?

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah, she retired at age 11. Like I said, we were like on a roll, and then she said she, like, wanted to have the Pulitzer be her last thing. And I was okay with it, because it was intense for me as well, because not only did we have to do a project and have it be successful, but I also had to really shelter her from the sort of business side of things so that she could be a child, which she was and just kind of enjoy the moment and the time together.

JOSH T FRANCO: Did it—yes, it's a special circumstance. She's your daughter. But did it open you up to collaborating with other artists in the future, or have you?

WENDY RED STAR: I haven't. Um, I've done a few collaborative works, yeah. But I think for me, collaboration—I do a lot of collaborating with my family. But, yeah, it would take a special project that would just have to make a lot of sense.

JOSH T FRANCO: That's great, and you're living in Portland. How is your relationship to the city going in those years?

WENDY RED STAR: I think at that time I was—that was a crazy time, because I just really like threw myself into it and I have to say, like—yeah, 20—I feel like I'm getting some of these dates wrong. Yeah, I was laid off at the end of 2015. Got the Joan Mitchell. So I was still working when I did the solo show at the Portland Art Museum in 2014. Um, but when I became self-employed in 2016, it was a crazy time. I was traveling, like, multiple times during the month, and um, I was just making a ton of work. It was like an explosion of art-making. So the city, to me, was just like a place to come back and just be comforted.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah, that's great. So the Smithsonian—should we talk about it?'

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah!

JOSH T FRANCO: Because I was on that committee at that time, so I definitely looked at your application, and was part of that.

WENDY RED STAR: I think it's important. I think I need to tell you about a patron of mine.

JOSH T FRANCO: Sure. Please. We haven't talked about collectors, and there definitely are.

WENDY RED STAR: He really helped me out. His name was Loren Lipson. And he came into my life, like, 2016. He was incredible. I think—I'll have to count, but I think he got my work into 25 different institutions and he—that was just what he was about. He was one hundred percent about supporting the artist and purchasing the work. And the work never went to him. It went directly into museum collections. And so he was like a firestorm. [Laughs.] He was so intense; and everybody that knew him was like, "He's intense." And he would always say, like, "I don't have time; I don't have much time." And I was like, "Come on." And he had like a crazy good sense of humor, like mine. So we were very bad together. [Laughs.] And he passed away. I think he passed away in 2018. So it was a super short, but very fiery, bright time where he just changed so much for me.

JOSH T FRANCO: How did he find you? How did that happen?

WENDY RED STAR: So we met because I was on a Committee for Native Women show that was opening in Minneapolis, and he was invited to be, like, a potential funder for the exhibition. And I saw him at a dinner. They invited—there was like 10 native women artists, and there he was, and I was like, "What's this white guy, old white guy doing here?" [Laughs.] You know?

[00:10:20]

And he was like, very crass. And he would say things to get people to kind of like, look at him, you know? And I was like, well, if I sit by him, then me being my introvert self, like, I won't have to talk. [Laughs.] He'll take up all the space. And I sat down next to him and he proceeded to insult almost every Native woman in there. Because most of them were from—most of them were like, uh, Santa Fe Indian Market artists, and he had a long history of collecting like their families', like work. So it's like generations of people who participated in Santa Fe Indian Market. So he was talking to them, like in a mansplaining way, he knew more about their own family than them [laughs]!

So he offended people so much that they asked him not to come to the Board meeting the next day. But while I was talking to him, I showed him—he kept saying he buys artists' work, and I thought he was full of it. So I was like, "Well here's some of my work," real flippant. And he reached out to me out of the blue. I was like, "Who is this guy?" I talked to one of the curators at the Denver Museum because I knew they had a connection. I was like, "Is this guy legit?" And he said, "Yes, he is legit." He just had one of those, like, personalities. He was crass, but not—and it was to be kidding, in a kidding way, but, like, if you're not in the mood for it, you're not in the mood for it. [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah [laughs].

WENDY RED STAR: But he was so important. And it's amazing to think of that sort of patron-to-artist relationship, and amazing to actually have that happen, I don't know if that will ever happen again for me. But that was incredible. But he knew he was going to die. And he called me, I think, the day he died. He knew he was going to die—it was crazy.

We were working on getting my work in a few collections. And he said to me, like, "Boy, I know when you do this that I know I did everything I needed to do, and I'll feel good." And then the next thing I heard was he died.

JOSH T FRANCO: That's an incredible connection to just kind of emerge out of nowhere. Did he have this kind of relationship with other artists?

WENDY RED STAR: He did. Do you know the artist Shan Goshorn? She is Native. I think she's Cherokee. And she would weave historic photos into baskets. And so he supported her. He supported several primarily Native women artists, and before that, I think a lot of Santa Fe market artists. So I was a totally new territory for contemporary art for him.

JOSH T FRANCO: And what's the background of why this is the area he was interested in?

WENDY RED STAR: He's Jewish. And he would always say like that he just really resonated within Indigenous people and our histories and his tribe—he would say his tribe's history. [Laughs.] Yeah. He was just a very interesting person.

JOSH T FRANCO: Sounds like it.

WENDY RED STAR: And he would be thrilled that we were talking about him and that he's going to be archived. [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: [Laughs.] Sounds like he was—did he have family or partner or anybody who—?

WENDY RED STAR: Oh yeah. Once you knew him, like, you got to know every single thing about him. So he had sons, and divorced. But I got the sense that he wasn't particularly close with his sons.

JOSH T FRANCO: That's fascinating. Yeah, that's huge. What a big part of your—yeah, I'm glad you mentioned him.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah, I can't forget Loren.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah. And then you have the collectors—it's easy for the public to know, like, what institutions have supported artists. It's all very public. But those relationships are often so hidden to the public.

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WENDY RED STAR: That's my only—you know, I have one, but nothing like Loren. It's just somebody who, you know, bought my work and is a private collector person. But the majority of my work is in institutions. And Loren, like, knew that was something that is important to me. It's important to me because I really feel like I want the public to have access to my work.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah. Yeah. And yesterday I think it was when we weren't recording, you were talking about projects having like a life of their own, some of them now and just like—I think that's interesting, just that they are doing things that you're not always aware of now, because they're just circulating, because they got into institutions.

WENDY RED STAR: They are. Yeah, very much so. I would say *The 1880 Crow Peace Delegation* is starting to do what *Four Seasons* did. *Apsáalooke Feminist* is circulating in that way, too. So it is interesting.

JOSH T FRANCO: What's your relationship with scholars writing about your work?

WENDY RED STAR: I think that relationship is so important, especially for me to find somebody who is not intimidated to take on writing about my work, but also, like, not pigeonholing me in a category that is stereotypical, I hate the word "stereotype," by the way, and I really hate it if somebody writes about my work and says "stereotype." Really it's like, that's a hate. [Laughs.]

JOHN T FRANCO: [Laughs.] Everyone note.

WENDY RED STAR: Everyone knows now. And part of that is because then I think it's just a way to sort of easily disregard instead of really thinking about what the work is trying to say. Yeah.

JOSH T FRANCO: Who are some scholars that have been successful?

WENDY RED STAR: Well, I mentioned Jordan Amirkhani, who does a phenomenal job of like writing about my work, putting me in context, in an art historical context which is so important. Shannon Vittoria from the Met; she did a great job. We co-wrote a paper for *The 1880 Crow Peace Delegation*. I really love—even hearing you talk about some of the work is so important for me, because it's dimensions and aspects of my work that are revealed when people see them through their perspective.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah, yeah. That's great. So now Smithsonian?

WENDY RED STAR: Yes. All right!

JOSH T FRANCO: So the Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship invites artists to spend one or two months at any unit of the Smithsonian. Um, it's kind of a Byzantine process to apply and

select the unit and advisor. Uh, do you remember that application process?

WENDY RED STAR: I do. I remember Shan Goshorn. She was dying of cancer. And I saw her in Tulsa. Um, and she had this sort of sense of urgency. Like, she was on top of me. She got it. And she was like, "I want you to apply." And so she—it's like, you put forth nominations, right?

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah. You have to be nominated by a research staff—

WENDY RED STAR: And so she did that, and then she, like, immediately got on me to do the whole process through. So I did, and then she passed away. It makes me sad. I mean, that's so important what she did. Like I said, when artists show up for other artists, like, out of the blue like that, kind of like Duane and—yeah. So anyways, I got in. And wow. I did. It's so monumental, like every aspect of the Smithsonian. Like, it's not at all what I was expecting. Like, I thought I was going to be at NMAI, at the museum, on the Mall, not realizing that all the things that I wanted to look are in a suburb in what looks to be like a Costco warehouse.

JOSH T FRANCO: Oh, were you out at Suitland?

WENDY RED STAR: Yes.

JOSH T FRANCO: In the storage in Suitland.

WENDY RED STAR: Yes.

JOSH T FRANCO: Oh, that's interesting. So NMAI, that was your host unit, American Indian.

WENDY RED STAR: Yes. And then—

JOSH T FRANCO: Who was your advisor?

WENDY RED STAR: I worked with the photo archive. Oh my gosh. You're asking me names and I feel like a giant jerk.

JOSH T FRANCO: [Laughs.]

[00:05:08]

WENDY RED STAR: Emily Moazami. I also worked with the Natural History Museum as well, and I worked with the National Anthropological Archives, with the archivists there. I think I started out over there, the Natural History Museum and then the National Anthropological Archives. Because you have to state in the application, like, what you're focusing on, and it was going to be about Crow delegations, but when I got there, I was like, "Actually, I just need to see every single thing you have." [Laughs.] I had this amazing experience in the Natural History Museum of looking at Crow objects, just having a really great time, like looking through everything and seeing things that were in the photos and dawning on me, like, some things that I thought were a certain way, but then when you saw it in reality, like, they are totally different. So it was super important for me.

But the other thing that came out of that—I did it in two parts, and part of my thing was delayed because of the shutdown [federal government shutdown of 2018–2019 –Ed.]. But something so important that's come out of that is that I connected with ancestors I never knew I had. So I found out that my fourth great grandfather's name is Green Skin, and that NMAI has like eight of his medicine bundles, and one of those bundles happens to be a horse-stealing bundle [laughs]. And I got to hold my great great grandfather Bear Tail's necklace. And I got to hold my fourth great grandfather Green Skin's like deer ear charms that he would wear when he would go into battle. I mean, how crazy is that? Oftentimes, we'll go to this museum collections that have Crow things, and I'm like, "maybe I'm related to somebody in here, I don't know." But to actually go to a collection and have, like, ancestors that I'm, like, touching something that they—was so important to them was beyond.

JOSH T FRANCO: What does it feel like to have that experience that's so intimate, and is your family, in this institution, in this setting?

WENDY RED STAR: It's fucked up. That's all I can do, is describe it that way. In one way, it's like—It's so hard to say right. Like, if they weren't in the institutions, then would I have ever been able to see the object? But it's all about—it's so complicated. In one way, like, in Washington, D.C., are my ancestors' things. [Laughs.] In another way, like, if colonization never happened, my

ancestors would have their stuff and I would probably, you know, but then I probably would never be born [laughs]. So it's tough.

I will say that I was very impressed with, like, the collections management in NMAI, because they—and I never had this experience in any other collection. They kept telling me, like, "These are your objects." And it would always make me pause, because that's radical. And then the other thing was, like, they told me, I don't have to wear gloves. Like of course, some of these things have chemicals on them that you would want to wear gloves. But the fact that I could bare-hand touch things and actually turn them, and even like—they're like, "You could even put that on." I never did. But I think that was so important on their part, to give that kind of agency to me.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah. I'm glad they say that, too, I say that all the time. "This is yours. Whatever is at the Smithsonian is yours."

WENDY RED STAR: Is that what—does the Smithsonian tell you to say that?

JOSH T FRANCO: No. No, no, no. That's not like a thing we're told to say. It's just the responsibility I feel. It feels like a fact.

WENDY RED STAR: Yes.

JOSH T FRANCO: It just feels like a fact.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah.

[00:10:00]

JOSH T FRANCO: And with you, that's so pointedly clear that it's a fact. It's your family. But I just think anything in the Smithsonian is like, "This is yours; we're caretaking."

WENDY RED STAR: It was very powerful for them to do that. And then just like the excitement of the collections manager; like, when I'm finding things and my mind is being blown, the fact that she shared that same sort wonderment and excitement was so fun.

JOSH T FRANCO: Do you think you provided them with information that—

WENDY RED STAR: Yes, I did. Yeah. There were just things with being in the community that I'm seeing, and I would be able to tell them, like, um, sort of things the—things that they couldn't get, like the character or the mood of a situation which, like, this object or picture is portraying, you know. Things that you just would not know unless you were of the community.

JOSH T FRANCO: What's an example?

WENDY RED STAR: Like, I could tell—it's so funny because we are very critical, Crows are, with our regalia. [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: [Laughs.] Always match, right.

WENDY RED STAR: And I was like, oh yeah, you can tell, like, this person was kind of in a rush here. You can kind of, like, the product of the work. And it was so Crow. It was so Crow personality. Like you could tell, like, a material was being repurposed for something, but kind of done in a way that you knew they had to get it done so that it could be worn. [Laughs.] So just things like that. Or things in the photos that I pick up, you know. Like we have a photo here of Chief Plenty Coup in front of his house [gestures to image]. And like in the card here, it says "House of Crow Chief Plenty Coups at Chief Plenty Coups State Park near Pryor Montana. Pictured here are the Chief in full regalia on horseback. His wife Kills Together on the porch, and three unidentified people. The original house was built in 1884." And I was like, "But there's this lady right there; you know, like there's actually four unidentified people. And that woman is Crow, and she's in the doorway. You can't see her." So just things like that, little tiny things. I would then want to know more, like, "What's up? Why is she in there?" It's his other wife, probably.

JOSH T FRANCO: Do you have a desire to see that those objects returned to—

WENDY RED STAR: Um, I think it's important that they do return, and I think it's important for my community to not be cultural cops. And not to stop their own community from having access to their own objects. I really feel like the politics of the community gets in our own way, and there's

a lot of just ineffective jealousy that happens in the running of the tribe, that that's the only thing. Like, we do need those objects back, um, but we also need healing. And part of that healing is to say, like, "These are all—these are all ours; they are now the community's", and not just like one family can say, like, "you can see it" or "you can't because you're not this family" or "you don't have that right." It's so important that we as a community don't isolate each other in that way. That's how colonization has worked so well.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah. What did you—I'm always curious what people's impressions of the Smithsonian are before and after, you know, a SARF experience, if they ever thought about the Smithsonian.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah, I think about—there's the museums on the Mall, but the cool people are in Suitland. [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: [Laughs.] I'll tell them. They'll love that.

WENDY RED STAR: And where the real stuff goes down is in Suitland. [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: [Laughs.]

WENDY RED STAR: So like, if you want nerd time, like you want to go to the deep underbelly, get yourself on that bus [laughs]. And carve out some time to just sit there and look through the archives.

JOSH T FRANCO: And then did you have thoughts about—

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JOSH T FRANCO: Because the Archives, we don't have tourist traffic in our office, so when I go to meetings at American History or American Indian or Natural History, walking through the lobbies amongst the tourists and getting reminded like, "Oh, yeah, like this is our huge institutional audience and it's just whoever is coming." Um, so do you have thoughts about them observing these things? Because you know, those objects, they're mostly in Suitland, but they get put on display, depending on shows and what curators are doing.

WENDY RED STAR: I'm always surprised by audience, especially when looking at Native objects, because they do stuff that I'm just like, wow, I would never anticipate that happening. I didn't see that at NMAI, I but at the Met, the Diker collection in the American Wing, they had some of the war shirts—and dresses—but the war shirts were the ones being utilized for the public, kind of displayed with the arms out—they were put on like a T [a mount -WRS.] and then rested so the arms were out, and then glass cases over them.

So I kept seeing people go stand behind and act like they were wearing the shirt, and then somebody, their friend would be like posting it to social media. And like me, I would never, ever think of doing something like that, because, um, everything that's represented on that war shirt is something that that individual wearer did that could take their life at any moment. And to see somebody just do that, like it's a t-shirt, is crazy to me. That's where there's a real disconnect with an institution. And actually some of the Met people were there, and they were horrified. [Laughs.] They were horrified, especially in the presence of Native people. They were like horrified. So I'm always kind of like, surprised by certain situations like that.

JOSH T FRANCO: Uh, is there any—SARF is not about producing anything specific. It's not a requirement. But did any particular body of work come out of that?

WENDY RED STAR: There are some body of works that will come out of that. Well, actually, I did like 101 horses based on ledger drawings, and that came from seeing so many horses depicted on different objects, and also seeing that my fourth great grandfather had a horse-stealing bundle. Yeah, so that project came out of that. But there is going to be some research projects where I collaborate with different writers based on some objects and images within NMAI and the National Anthropological Archives.

JOSH T FRANCO: Can you describe what a bundle is?

WENDY RED STAR: Okay. Yeah, I say it like everybody should know. But for my community and a lot of Plains communities, they would create these different medicines, they were called. And I think like almost everybody—men, women, even some children—had medicine of anything. Sort

of like specializations. Like, we have somebody who would have medicine for earaches and you would go to them. Or we have someone who castrates all the horses. We had the person who has the medicine come and castrate our horses.

And then there would be these other types of medicines that just brought prosperity, and they're called rock medicine bundles. They're usually stored in like—in like a leather parfleche case, rawhide case, and then they're wrapped in material, and you open it up, and there would be certain items in there. Like there might be a rock that has a face on it, that they found out in nature. There will be like different animal parts, so like there might be a bird's head in there, and that particular bird was something that was seen in a vision that then was a part of that medicine. Like, my grandmother has a tobacco society medicine bundle, and her bundle has a Sandhill Crane head in it. So that's a particular medicine and chapter for that society. And so, yeah, everybody would have their bundles and they have taboos.

The community is actually really afraid of them now. I think back in the day, they were just greatly respected because they were actually living beings. You open them up before battle or, like, the first thunder, they're supposed to be opened up. And um, sometimes there is one that's like a family medicine and it will actually have babies. So they're really thought of as powerful.

[00:05:21]

But some of the taboos, like each of them—each bundle has its own songs. So you have to sing the songs, and each bundle has its own smudge. So one bundle, smudge might be sweetgrass or it might be sage or something—that's bundle smudge. And some of the taboos could be—Like they're so random. Like, my grandfather, he had a medicine where nobody in the house could have an extra pair of shoes, or else you die. Like, you literally die [laughs]! Or I read one for a particular bundle that this warrior had, he couldn't—when he put out a fire, he had to leave the ashes in the fire, and one day he took the ashes out and he went blind. So they're like—since we lost a lot of that knowledge, there are all these bundles that everyone's afraid of because they don't know what the taboos are.

JOSH T FRANCO: Right, right. And um, I'm thinking about all the preservation practices, because it's a very complicated, intricate thing, too, that I'm sure all the museum professionals are engaging in these objects when they—what a interesting experiment.

WENDY RED STAR: Mhm-mm. I love to think of them, though, that they have their own songs. Could you imagine hearing the songs of the bundles? And that's gone.

JOSH T FRANCO: So much loss.

WENDY RED STAR: There's a lot of loss, yeah. That's kind of like the thing that I confront every day, with it.

JOSH T FRANCO: That was only a couple of years ago. So really what's been going on since? [Laughs.]

WENDY RED STAR: Well, Aperture. [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah!

WENDY RED STAR: I just feel like it's been a really steady progression, and my career keeps getting more dynamic. I'm getting opportunities that are more and more interesting, and I feel like I actually have some say-so. And I actually feel like I can say no. Um, so, it's also amazing to be able to support myself and my kid with my art.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah. And you—I think you said you just hired an assistant. Is this the first time you've had, like, a staff? Like, a studio?

WENDY RED STAR: This is the first time I've had a person. And um, I've only had her for, like, four days and 16 hours. But she's just the type A personality I need. [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: So what kind of things is she working on for you?

WENDY RED STAR: I think what people might not know about being an artist and working at a certain level is the behind-the-scenes, the administrative side. Yeah. That's what I feel like my time has been dedicated to mostly, and not really making art like I want to. And so she's helping me with all the things that I can't get to, and the administrative sides because I need time to

make work. And so she's that sort of buffer person for me. And creating an archive. Digitizing. Like, I've got all these boxes and boxes of press. Everything in there needs to be digitized. And just building an archive of all my work. Those are just things it's like impossible for me to get to.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah. The question I had just left my mind. So how long do we—where are we? We've done two and a half hours again already.

WENDY RED STAR: No way.

JOSH T FRANCO: That just flew by.

WENDY RED STAR: Wow, I thought that was like 30 minutes. [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: Me too.

WENDY RED STAR: That's crazy.

JOSH T FRANCO: That is crazy. Yeah, so, I'm almost hesitant, because everyone's so tired of talking about it, and you did participate in our Pandemic Oral History Project already [laughs]. But I think it does have to be put on the record more. And that was months ago. So we've just been through the pandemic. [Laughs.]

[00:10:09]

WENDY RED STAR: Yes, it's important.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah [laughs]. How did it impact everything in your world and your practice?

WENDY RED STAR: Well, I think it pushed me to get an actual art studio. So, I think I always pride myself on being a total introvert hermit, and then that went to the most extreme level during the pandemic. [Laughs.] I was like, actually, I think I need to challenge myself and be in a public space. So my studio is actually in an arts nonprofit [Disjecta Contemporary Art Center] that hosts a bunch of exhibitions, and then there are other tenants in here that have galleries, and a little dance studio. So I'm already, like, seeing people on a regular basis that I say hi, to and I'm getting to see—like, they're installing an exhibition now. So like seeing art, and being around artists.

So I think the pandemic really kind of pushed me to do that. And then with that, I think it's also pushed me to get help. Like, I need help. And so hiring this administrative studio assistant is like next level. Like, I'm excited to see what happens next. Because it just feels like everything is coming together. I love this little neighborhood that I'm in. And I just think there's going to be some really powerful things happening.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah. So if you're comfortable talking about it, what do you plan on working on next? Just looking around, there's like a dress form here, a sewing machine, there's a lot of plastic bins behind you. I see textiles.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah, I want to sew. Sewing is my—it's a magical tool. Like, I feel like when I sew, I almost feel like it's my grandmother sewing, because it's like I don't even know how I did that. [Laughs.] And I probably couldn't repeat it. So it just really feels like it's not me. So it's such a fun medium that I feel like I produce and have success in.

But I have things stacked up to 2023. I have a solo exhibition at the Denver Art Museum that's coming up, and just sort of several projects lined up. So I'm definitely going to be sewing. Definitely going to be doing one more self-portrait with me and Bea [laughs]. And sewing our outfits for that. And then I also—like, this is the first time, like when I talked about being excited to do the Bird project—that's the first time that I'm actually making an art that doesn't have like an exhibition or a place to be shown. And I don't think that was possible when I was working out of my home because I just didn't have the space. So I just had to make things that were actually happening.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah. Have you started getting interest from outside the US, like global or international?

WENDY RED STAR: Um, we just made contact with the British Museum. Which I guess is like their equivalent to like the Met. So, yeah, that's kind of like a start. I feel like I have to be really careful, making a move outside of the U.S., like in Europe, I think it's so important that people

and the context is appropriate.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah, it's a lot more to translate.

WENDY RED STAR: Yes, exactly. I've actually done some like lectures over there, and things that get giant laughs—dead silent. And I just realized, with the little knowledge that people know here of Native history, their own history—Europe knows nothing, you know? [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: Even though they're the origin of the colonization.

WENDY RED STAR: I know. Exactly. I was like, "Wow. Wow. Okay."

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah [laughs]. It's always interesting to explain Chicano in Europe. Although I haven't been to Spain, I think—that seems traumatic. I don't want to do that.

WENDY RED STAR: Definitely. Oh wow. Yeah.

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WENDY RED STAR: But I—yeah, I'm interested. I think it could be interesting, yeah.

JOSH T FRANCO: Do you have any Apsáalooke figures you identify with?

WENDY RED STAR: I do. I really identify with Alexander Upshaw. He was the interpreter for Edward S. Curtis when he came and photograph the Crow community in the early 1900s. The reason why I relate to him is because he was the first generation of Crow kid who left the reservation and got an education. Granted, his was forced. He went to the Carlisle Indian School. And um, I just read some of his notes to the Carlisle newspaper, where there's a ton of self-hatred there. And then he kind of went through this transformation, where he came back from the reservation and they wrote about him, like, he went back to the blanket, which is what they would say about Native people who went back to being Apsáalooke. They went back to the blanket. [Laughs.] That would be a great show title, *Back To The Blanket*. [Laughs.]

JOSH T FRANCO: You could sew a lot. [Laughs.]

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah. So, I could sew so much. I just love that, because I feel like I know what he felt. He also married a white woman and got a lot of ridicule for that. And um, I just feel like, wow, to be that kind of first generation, being educated, coming back, being educated, coming back, being ridiculed by the Crow community for like "you're not Apsáalooke any more," and being told by the white people that you're going back to the blanket. And he did a phenomenal—a lot of the historical chronology wouldn't have happened or been documented in the way that it was if it wasn't for him. Ah, so he just resonates with me, as sort of this nerdy archivist. I don't even think he was a nerd. [Laughs.] And I wonder if, like, I met him, like, I would probably not even like him. But I think right now—I just think he's a kindred spirit. But he ended up—I think he was murdered. He ended up dying in a jail cell, because he had a hemorrhage. So they found him in a jail cell, dead, with blood everywhere. And he died in his 30s, like young 30s. But he just had such an accomplished life. Actually, the way that my ears are pierced are the way that his father's ears are pierced. His dad's name was Crazy Pend d' Oreille, which means in French, it's crazy—it's like an ear pendant, Pend d' Oreille. So, yeah, I just really felt like a connection with Alexander.

JOSH T FRANCO: And you're pointing at your right ear, and there's like four studs, evenly spaced.

WENDY RED STAR: It's basically these three studs up here that are pierced like his dad. And my dream is to—like, his dad has these hoops and then he has these conch shells, and it's just like the best look ever [laughs]. So I'm waiting for everything to kind of heal up.

But yeah, I'd I say really resonate with him, and then I resonate with my great, great grandma, Julia Bad Boy, her Apsáalooke name. The literal translation of it is "Her Dreams Are True." And I found her in the archives at NMAI, and I was just like, this name is the best name ever. And she is the mom of William Dust, who's my great grandpa—and he would be my grandma's dad. Bill Dust. His Crow name was Sings In The Camp. And then he gave my dad his Crow name, which is Kind to Everybody. I just was like, I kind of love him for that, because my dad is very kind to everybody, and everybody in the community knows they can come to him and he will do what he can for you. So Báakoosh Kawiiléete, is how you say Kind to Everybody. And Bill's son is named Clive Dust, and I have his Crow name. I asked to have his Crow name, which is, like,

Always Creative. And he was like this very creative person in the family that you would go to, and he would, like, make magic happen. And he was my dad's favorite person. So I was like, "I would love to have his name."

[00:05:16]

JOSH T FRANCO: What does that mean to ask for a name and when did you do that?

WENDY RED STAR: Usually you're given a name when you're a kid. And so your parents go and ask someone that they respect in the community to come up with a name. And that name usually comes from a variety of places. So my first name is, His Shiny Shell, which means basically abalone necklace shell. And the woman who gave it to me, her name is Emma Beads or Emma Coffee, and she wore abalone necklaces when she would do the ceremony called a Sundance, which is a super intense three-day thing where you don't eat or drink water and you dance all day long. [Laughs.] She did, I don't know, over 20 different Sundances. So that is a very powerful name.

But when I got older, I was like, "I want a—I want a second name." I know men—like, Chief Plenty Coup had like four different names. And sometimes men would get a different name if they did something like super badass, or if they were like—also joking, you know, like if they did something that was like notorious, and then they would give them a name. And then women or girls didn't really get a second name. The reason why they would get a second name is if they got really sick and they were going to die; they would give them another name, almost like they're another person. And a lot of times they would get better, and they would just have a new name.

JOSH T FRANCO: That's—I mean, the gender distinction there is interesting,

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah. So for me, I said to my dad, "I really want Clive's name. How can we do this?" He said, "Well, we'll ask his son, Clive Junior." And in Crow culture, when you do something ceremonial, you give stuff to the person, and it's a blanket; it's a piece of material big enough to make like a shirt, like so like three yards, two yards; money; and tobacco. And so we gave that to him, and I said, "Can I please have Clive's name?" [Laughs.]

He was like, "Why would you want that?" I was like, "because—" He didn't do that, but he was like, "Whatever." It was like in the parking lot, so like Crow. And he was like, "yeah." So I have his name, and I'm super happy about that. And you can always—I think the real literal translation of it is Does Things Well, so "does things in a good way" is what it means.

JOSH T FRANCO: Oh are you interested in saying it in Apsáalooke for the record?

WENDY RED STAR: Yes. I want to make sure I see them right. Oh, my sister called. *Baaééitchish* is how you say my name, which is Clive's name. And um, for my shiny shell, it's [aappiiwaaxaaxiish - WRS]] I'm saying that so wrong, but—

JOSH T FRANCO: That's cool. Um, the tattoo vibe is fucking with my bodily sense of time, and I'm like: How much time has passed? Are you feeling that?

WENDY RED STAR: [Laughs.] Yes, I am. And I think the dogs are telling us actually it's been a really long time.

JOSH T FRANCO: It's been a really long time, yeah. Do you want to take a break and come back?

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah. Let's take a break and then.

[Audio break.]

JOSH T FRANCO: All right, we took a little break, and are back for our last session I think of Wendy Red Star's oral history. Um, where's my mic? It's here. We were talking about future projects and things in the works, and this oral history as a result of your monograph that Aperture is writing—is publishing. Aperture reached out and asked if I wanted to interview you for that, and we came back and said, "Why don't we just do Wendy's full, mid-career oral history," and that's what we've been doing. It led to tattoos and—

[Laughs.] I have one more question after that. But Wendy, do you want to talk about what it means to work on this monograph and the other people involved in Aperture?

[00:10:02]

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah, I um, I was actually approached I think it was last year, or maybe even like 2019, the end of 2019, by Michael Famighetti and Brendan Embser, about editing one of their Aperture issues for an issue that was focused on, like, Indigenous America–North America. And so that's sort of how our relationship started. I think that issue was the first issue that they produced fully during the pandemic. It was a great issue to be working on during that time, because it was an opportunity to not feel so isolated and for me to connect with other Native artists, um, and also get a sense of what it means to put together a magazine. I don't know how they do it. It's like a magical small team. It's amazing because not only were they working on mine, but they were working on the one before and doing events for it, and then also working—like, they were working on the next issue, too. Yeah, they just have a lot going on. But after that was finished, then they approached me about this opportunity to have a monograph.

And so I've been working specifically with Brendan on the monograph. And it's been, again, a very new and interesting experience. Like, I'm thinking about books in ways that I've never, ever thought about. I'm talking about papers and textures and just things that I've taken for granted, thinking about people to write about my work. Yeah, just taking a really hard look at my work over my life right now. And it's been really good, and it's also been really hard. It's hard to like, just kind of take a pause and think about the work that I've done, and also pick up on some of the things that are clearly things that are important to me that are reoccurring themes within my work. So, yeah, super excited. And they wanted to do like an interview aspect, and I just thought we did such a—I had such a fun rapport with you for the pandemic oral history, and I think you do such a brilliant job [laughs]. I was like "Let's get Josh to do this portion for the monograph."

JOSH T FRANCO: Well, thank you. I'm honored. Do you want to talk about some of the other people contributing to the book?

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah, so there's a Jordan Amirkhani, who is an art historian. And she will be focused on some specific bodies of work and sort of overall general overview of my practice—will be Julia Bryan-Wilson which I'm super excited about. And we also are just in conversation with a poet, a Native poet, Tiffany Midge. She wrote a book that I think recently came out called *Bury My Heart at Chuck E. Cheese's*. [Laughs.] And we're going to actually get together here in the next couple of weeks to talk about *White Squaw*, and she's going to do a creative writing piece around that. And Annika Johnson, who is a curator at the Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha, Nebraska, just did this body of work for a solo exhibition there at the beginning of this year called *The Indian Congress*, which focused on the photo work of Frank Rinehart that focused on Indian delegations that came for the Trans-Mississippi, an international exposition that happened in 1898 in Omaha—and she'll be writing about that body of work.

JOSH T FRANCO: Um—

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JOSH T FRANCO: Um—I would like to actually talk about that project a little bit, one, just because of the spatial brilliance of it. Because I've been in that space in the Joslyn where it is.

WENDY RED STAR: Oh, you have.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah. Not when your show was up, but before, and it actually was empty when I was there. And it wasn't with Annika. It was another curator—I'm forgetting her name—who is great. [Karin Campbell, Phil Willson Curator of Contemporary Art at Joslyn Art Museum. -JTF] But yeah, she showed it to me as we were walking around, and she showed me that space. I think she knew that this was already slated, your show, and she was like that's happening, and we were just talking about what an unusual space it is. It's kind of a long, skinny hall that's like around the corner from the main big galleries. And it's interesting. But if you want to describe how you filled it, which I thought was like—It makes your body do things. It's great.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah. Annika said that typically that space has just shown, like, 2D things in there. And so there wasn't a lot of like installation or sculptural works. And so for that space, it worked out kind of perfectly. I just recreated some of the Exposition, um, Expo booths that—of the time, from looking at the historical photos of how they displayed fruit—fruit stands. So there are these tiered shelves, one on each side, kind of like you've described the hallway, that you walk through, and then there's like a circular-tiered table in the back that has these velvet curtains and a large photo mural of a sacred place on a reservation called Baáhpuu, Where

They Shoot The Arrows.

And on the shelves, kind of in the hallway, are all these cutouts, over 500 cutouts of the different sitters from over 30 different Native tribes that came and participated in the Indian Congress. And they're all hand cut-out, and they're placed in these grooves, so they stand up on their own, and they create their own shadows and everything on the shelves. And they're grouped in their communities. And I think we even did kind of communities and, like, regions. That was really interesting to kind of confront. Like, how do we display?

But the great thing about Rinehart and the work that he did, photographing the different Native people, was he actually put their names and their tribal affiliations, which is like a gold mine for that time period. [Laughs.]

Annika actually installed everything. So she has a very intimate knowledge, because of the pandemic. I felt so bad [laughs]! She had over 500 tiny little cutouts to put on several different shelves. Yes, so you walk through—you're kind of funneled through all these Indigenous bodies, people who were there at that very space. Um, the Joslyn is like just a few miles from where the original fair was. And it's just like this really interesting record in time. I think it was, for me, I was so attracted to the idea of having all these Indigenous communities together at once, not for the premise of the Fair, which was just to monopolize on like Manifest Destiny, and they were like, you know, the sort of archaic old world, like unsophisticated world—But to think about like how spectacular it must have been for the Indigenous communities to be in one place, a lot of them enemy tribes, and have that opportunity to kind of speak to each other about their experiences of what was happening to each of them at that time period.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah. That's a great description. Annika will write something great.

WENDY RED STAR: She will write something amazing. She's already done such a great job. And the thing, too, is like the person that we mentioned, I connect to, Alexander Upshaw, is actually there. He did some interpretation there as well. But we're just finding with each person, like, so many interesting stories. And it just felt like that project was just the very beginning of so much more research and opportunity to learn about the individuals there and that event. And the Joslyn purchased it—

JOSH T FRANCO: Oh, congrats! That's great.

[00:05:02]

WENDY RED STAR: —so they have it in their permanent collection—and it had to be there.

JOSH T FRANCO: Yeah, that hall. It has to be there.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah. It has to be there. Yeah [laughs].

JOSH T FRANCO: Smart [laughs]. I just realized, like, I feel honored to be like a badass lady in this group. It's so cool [laughs].

WENDY RED STAR: Yes! I know. Like, I really love just everybody that's going to be included in the monograph. I think they're such important voices and it's just—I think it's going to—I don't know. I'm just really looking forward to it.

JOSH T FRANCO: Are you ready for the cooldown question?

WENDY RED STAR: Yes.

JOSH T FRANCO: I think-- this is for the Smithsonian. I think what's always such a privilege thinking about that fact, is that things will last. You know, as much as any institution can say that, we can. So I just want to close with asking: What do you want to tell the artists, the researchers listening to this in one hundred years?

WENDY RED STAR: [Laughs.] Well, you can tell from today that I can be very impulsive. [Laughs.] So that might give you a tinge of, like, my character. And I think it's just important to recognize that I'm human and that I'm—it's so important for me to have the flexibility to be able to not be frozen in time, even though this is like going to be frozen in time, and to realize like that I am ever-evolving and that that's sort of what I seek in life—to have the ability to change and to grow and learn. So I think when we do this again, when like we're 80, and we do this again and we get tattoos for the second time—I think it's just going to be nice to have this on

record and be able to reflect. And I think I'll be really proud of myself when I'm 80 to listen to this, and just be excited to have this captured.

JOSH T FRANCO: Awesome. Well, thanks, Wendy.

WENDY RED STAR: Yeah. Thanks, Josh.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]