

FILM AT REDCAT PRESENTS

Sat April 17 | 8:00 PM PST |

ONLINE

Jack H. Skirball Series

\$10 [members \$8]

For tickets, please visit: [Sky Hopinka](#)

Sky Hopinka: *małni—towards the ocean, towards the shore*

Presented in collaboration with the Herb Alpert Award in the Arts.

REDCAT is proud to be part of a cluster of screenings celebrating the nationwide release of Sky Hopinka's captivating debut feature, *małni – towards the ocean, towards the shore*. **The REDCAT screening will be followed by a live discussion (on Zoom) with Sky Hopinka.** Spectators are invited to participate in the discussion.

This program is geo-blocked. Ticket holders in the US will have 72 hours to view the program once the screening has started.

Film at REDCAT is proud to welcome the 2020 recipient of The Herb Alpert Award in the Arts in Film/Video, Sky Hopinka, to introduce his debut feature, *małni – towards the ocean, towards the shore* (80:21 min), which world premiered at the Sundance Festival. Circling the origin of the death myth from the Chinookan people in the Pacific Northwest, Hopinka adopts unconventional documentary techniques (such as an oblique, non-frontal glance) to follow Sweetwater Sahme and Jordan Mercier as they wander through the splendid nature that surrounds them, shifting back and forth between English and Chinuk Wawa (both languages being subtitled). Sweetwater is pregnant, and Jordan a family man; the separate paths they take to contemplate the afterlife, rebirth and death hauntingly echo each other.

In person via Zoom: Sky Hopinka

"... rivals in visual and linguistic beauty any new art I've seen in some time."
– *The New York Times*

"Lensed with an intimacy informed by Hopinka's rapport with the natural landscape and marked by moments of visual grace and ingenuity, this quietly moving dual portrait is pieced together from conversations about language, family, addiction, and spirituality." – *Artforum*

"Deftly employing piecemeal accounts of the origin-of-death myth of Lilu and T'alap'as, Hopinka uses the tale as a clever framing device for contemporary considerations of mortality and growth, reminding us, time and again, that all will eventually return to the ocean." – *Film Comment*

"... a circularity of gazes, a fluidity of linguistic situations, permeability between the landscape and its inhabitants, and the eternal cycle of birth, death and yet another birth." – *Senses of Cinema*

"[Hopinka's] films become more beautiful with his artistic use of language... [This] intimate film unfolds in ourselves to something so large you'll be thinking (and dreaming) about it long after." – Sundance Film Festival

małni—towards the ocean, towards the shore

2020/ 80:21 minutes / HD video, stereo, color

małni (pronounced: moth-nee) follows Sweetwater Sahme and Jordan Mercier's wanderings through each other's worlds as they move through and contemplate the afterlife, rebirth, and the place in-between. Spoken mostly in Chinuk Wawa, their stories are departures from the Chinookan origin-of-death myth, with its distant beginning and circular shape.

Director's Statement

małni centers on the Chinookan origin-of-death myth, in which two figures decide whether or not someone's spirit comes back after they die. It's the beginning of a longer cycle of myths that tell of a journey to the spirit world. As these stories tend to do, the cycle provides a model of understanding our own existence in this world.

I was born in northern Washington, and after spending my teens and early twenties in Southern California, I moved to Portland, Oregon, to go to school. There, I learned Chinuk Wawa and began to get involved in Indigenous language revitalization, which offered me a framework for thinking about my place in this country and this region as an Indigenous person. The Pacific Northwest landscape is familiar to me: it's my home, but not my homeland, as my tribes are from Wisconsin and Southern California. I find it deeply fascinating that there are so many ways to look at where belonging and its tensions come from, what these places represent. Jordan Mercier acted in my only narrative short, *huyhuy* (2013), or "trade" in Chinuk Wawa. That project helped us speak this language in an unspectacular way, where it's just the way that we talk. When I felt ready to make a feature, it felt intuitive to return to the Northwest and see what we could do in this language and landscape.

I first met Sweetwater Sahme in 2006 as part of the Native student group at Portland State University. A few years ago I was doing some location scouting and shooting tests, and she happened to be in Portland. Before we started shooting together, she shared with me that she was pregnant, and that really guided the direction of the film - to frame the portraits around these moments of change and transition in their lives, and how those moments could respond to the origin-of-death myth. Similarly, Jordan and his wife Amanda had their daughter Ila five years earlier, and while I was filming, Amanda gave birth to their son Vincent. Nonfiction feels more natural to me than working with something scripted. I knew early on that I didn't want to learn a whole new way to make films, and instead wanted to see how well my short filmmaking practice scaled up to a longer form. The work is primarily self-funded; I served as cinematographer, sound designer, and editor.

The amount of footage was about 13 hours for *matni* - much more than what I'm used to working with, which varies from less than an hour to about 6. And so I started assembling the movie the way that I would a short, constructing sections for the beginning, middle, and end. Those blocks introduced structure, but it was figuring out how to get to and depart from those scenes that proved most difficult. I decided to employ a few visual interludes of dancing, singing, and of moving through these landscapes as points of departure from the narrative, and as opportunities to ease the burden that is placed on Sweetwater and Jordan to carry the story. Allowing them generous breathing room as characters was important to me,

especially since there aren't any postproduction effects like what I've employed in the past. Almost everything that has a more visually abstract element to it was done in-camera with a slow shutter speed, and then fleshed out further in post. When I was editing, I never felt the impulse to affect anything for the sake of it - I was reluctant to overdetermine the visual language of the film. Instead, I tried to trust the image and montage to create a lexicon of understanding for the viewer.

(first published in Artforum)

Director's Bio

Sky Hopinka (Ho-Chunk/Pechanga) is the 2020 recipient of The Herb Alpert Award in the Arts in Film/Video and a 2020 Guggenheim Fellow. Born and raised in Washington, he spent a number of years in California and Oregon. In Portland, he studied and taught Chinuk Wawa, a language indigenous to the Columbia River Basin. He received his BA from Portland State University in liberal arts and his MFA in film, video, animation, and new genres from the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. He currently teaches at Bard College.

Hopinka makes films, videos, installations and photographs that have been viewed in cinema, museum and electronic spaces; his first feature-length work, *maṭni – towards the ocean, towards the shore*, premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 2020. His book of collected writings and text-based art, *Around the Edge of Encircling Lake* was published in 2018. Recognizing the indivisibility of the aesthetic and the political, personal and mythic storytelling, and cosmological and visceral worlds, Hopinka investigates how words, image, sound and montage construct worldviews and create a space for poetry and understanding. He looks at ecology, place, dispossession, language, identity, and family through the formal possibilities of moving-image processes. Serving as instigators of dialogue, his art rests on the understanding that process is more powerful than certainty and proposes what Indigenous cinema can be.

I try to use formal tactics, cultural context, tribal context, and the abandonment of didactics to try and make stories and experiences coalesce, while being for a specific audience but not turning anyone away. (SH)

(adapted from the web site of the Herb Alpert Award in the Arts; for more information visit

<https://herbalpertawards.org/artist/2020/sky-hopinka>)

(see also: <http://www.skyhopinka.com/>)

Selected Filmography

Lore (2019)

When you're lost in the rain (2018)

Fainting Spells (2018)

Dislocation Blues (2017)

Anti-Objects, or Space Without Path or Boundary (2017)

I'll remember You as You Were, not as What You'll Become (2016)

Vision of an Island (2016)

Venite et Loquamur (2015)

Jáaji Approx. (2015)

Kunikaga Remembers Red Banks, Kunikaga Remembers the Welcome Song
(2014)

wawa (2014)

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