

Dancing for my tribe

Potawatomi tradition in the new millennium

Sharon Hoogstraten

My photographic portrait project of Potawatomi Indians in regalia is the story of wholly modern people (originally inhabitants of the Great Lakes region) preserving the traditional dress of their ancestors while also making it relevant to contemporary living and their own personal stories. My intention is to create images so compelling that they become the record for our place on the timeline of Potawatomi and American history. I am portraying the evolution of our ancestral dress interpreted by descendants who live in a world of sewing machines, duct tape, acrylics, hairdos and manicures, favorite sports teams, and service to our country. Indian regalia is not a re-enactment or artifact of the past but uniquely expressed designs informing our future.

Photographing formally on a seamless sweep using studio lighting, I strip away all distractions, maximize detail, and also create a look reminiscent of the Indian Country studio portraits of a century ago. We peer into those old portraits looking for details of the culture, but even more compulsively, for clues about that *particular* human being. I also strive for that honest, revealing, enduring revelation of each individual I photograph—sometimes conveyed in stillness, or by a delayed recognition of motion, ranging to outright exuberant dance. I've titled this body of work *Dancing for my tribe: Potawatomi tradition in the new millennium* because photography is my dance. It is my mission to preserve the current Potawatomi interpretation of regalia and to remind all citizens that we are still here. For ourselves, and our children's children, we experience striking symbolism, artistry, and techniques of our time, just as we honor the dress and demeanor of the ancestors who have walked on. Furthermore, we have the handwritten reflections of each person who posed, a priceless addition to each portrait.¹ Presenting the faces, stories, and regalia of modern Potawatomis will contribute to a better understanding of their transformed place in the diverse life of America.

1 Editors' note: The text accompanying each portrait is transcribed from handwritten originals. We have opted to preserve the original syntax. For full-color photos, see <https://hoogstratenphotography.com/dancing-for-my-tribe>.



Amelia, Citizen Potawatomi, 2011 – Shawnee, Oklahoma

It was important to follow my Indian Heritage by wearing a traditional regalia dress. My dress was made by my great aunt and grandmother. I chose the color turquoise since I am the oldest. It connects thoughts of my grandmother. It is also my favorite stone.

My beaded hairpiece and feather was handmade and worn by my cousin in her wedding, but after was passed down to me.

The beaded chest piece was assembled by family members.

My earrings were also handmade by my great aunt.

I am a descendant from the Krapp family. Two of their pictures are displayed on the veterans' wall.

I am thankful for everything that my family members have done for me. I hope

to make them proud when I dance proudly around the arena!

Calvin Ballew, Pokagon Band of Potawatomi, 2015 – Dowagiac, Michigan

I'm 17 years old. I have been dancing since I began to walk. The style of dance I perform is called the Grass Dance. The responsibilities of the Grass Dance is that when our people would move to new areas we would send them to pat down the grass and drive away the bugs and snakes and small animals. We pay homage to the grass by putting ribbons on our regalia to symbolize the grass we are destroying.

The hoop I carry symbolizes the circle of life. Most people put otter fur in the hoop, but I chose to put ermine to symbolize the changing of seasons because in the summer and spring time its fur is brown and in the winter it changes to white to blend into the snow.

I come from Ballew, Quigno, White Pigeon, and Graverette families and I am enrolled in the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi tribal nation.





**Cypress Kewayoshi-Deleary, 2016 –
Walpole Island First Nation**

Cypress “Jojo”’s Anishinaabe name is Nee-gahn Binayshees which means “leading little bird” and she is of the Mawng Clan (Loon Clan). She is 8 years old and has been dancing since she could walk in ceremonies and powwows. She wears a contemporary jingle dress regalia. Her mom (Daintry Kewayosh) makes all of her regalia. Jojo has Potawatomi lineage on both her mother’s and father’s side.

**Candace Painter, 2016 – Citizen
Potawatomi Nation**

Fabric is symbolic of family, each stitch is an act of love and each pattern is a chapter of a family’s story. It was my passion that the story of my family live on. The patterns are from my great great grandmother’s family,

the Vieux family. Through old photos and help from the tribal research department I was able to locate my family patterns. I decided to choose traditional colors in nature. Colors that would be true to nature and colors that would have been used by our people. From my father and aunt I was able to find out that my family is bear clan from my great grandfather’s side. To honor my great grandfather’s side I have bear claws to represent the Potawatomi families I am a descendant of. The skirt is made of broadcloth, which represents the broadcloth given to our people on the Trail of Death. I dyed the fringe to represent fire that represents the origin of our people and a brooch is the shape of flames on the top of the ribbon on my back. I wanted something I can pass on to my children, so our culture and our way of life continues for future generations. In my heart, I wanted to design something that would honor my family and honor our people. So, with my hands I used fabrics along with the colors and patterns of my ancestors to keep the story of our family alive, and in doing so, honor those who gave gone before me.





Georgia Potts, 2015 – Prairie Band Potawatomi

My name is Nazwin, I am fish clan and my color is red. My misho was an original allottee on the Prairie Band Reservation in Mayetta, Kansas. His name is Charles Nozackum and my grandma Annie.

My regalia is called a traditional sa-chen and is my color. I proudly wear it to represent my ancestors and the love of being a traditional nature woman.

My medallion is of a prairie rose.

Tony Wahweotten, 2018 – Prairie Band Potawatomi

I am of the Wahweotten, Wahwasuck, Thomas, & Shopteese families. They gave me the name Hite pē kwaki (chita pu quakee), Prairie Magic.

I used to dance as a youngster. I would dance for the Elders at doings, and was encouraged by my relatives and friend, George Allen.

There was a fire at my home, and it destroyed my regalia. I didn't dance for many years.

My uncle, Badger Wahwasuck, requested I dance in some beadwork he was ready to retire. I was brought back into the arena in Chicago and have been dancing ever since.





Margaret Zientek, Citizen Potawatomi Nation, 2010 – Shawnee, Oklahoma

My grandfather Autwin Blaze Pecore served as tribal chairman. To carry on the tradition of our tribe is an honor.

Studying pictures of late 1800s—artist renditions of the tribal dress, I have incorporated some of the styles and applique designs in my sewing. I started sewing tribal dress for my daughter about ten years ago. Today I sew for several members of the tribe.

Each year I help the Potawatomi Leadership Program Students start to build their regalia. To tell them the names of the different applique and what it represents always makes me feel honored. How one part of applique faces upward, one faces down-

ward to represent the reflector—the water, to identify the patterns—oak leaf, butterfly, violet, water lily—woodland star—is to give living history, to identify who created some of the patterns I use—to me—is to give honor to their art. The crane applique my daughter designed. The heat pattern my friend Jason Hawk created for his wife. The “scrolling” pattern, Carrol Clay allows me to replicate that her mother, Nona Clay (Chickasaw), created.

Last night as we did grand entry I kept seeing people who were wearing regalia I created for them. I lost count at 20 in full regalia.

Tesia Zientek, Self-Governance Office, Citizen Potawatomi Nation, June 2012 – Shawnee, Oklahoma

My mother, Margaret Zientek, named me Jejakwi, which means “like a crane.” She chose the name to reflect the way that I dance traditionally as well as my affinity for travel. My mother and I worked together to design the crane icon represented in my regalia.

The colors were chosen to represent the sheen and shimmer of the water in which a crane stands.

She spent hours constructing the dress and labored over each detail. I am extremely proud of her work and will wear the regalia with immense pride. She is a wonderful Potawatomi role model.

**Logan Spence, 2015 – Pokagon
Band Potawatomi**

My dad helped me to pick my beads.

The belt says “Nektosha” which means “young horse,” the name given to me by my grandfather at my birth.



About the photographer

A photographer, animator, and graphic designer, Sharon Hoogstraten is best known for her portraits of Potawatomi Indians in regalia and for her Emmy award-winning animated openings for television news programs. She received a BS in Professional Photography from Rochester Institute of Technology and an MFA from University of Illinois at Chicago, where she taught Graphic Communication at UIC as an adjunct associate professor. Hoogstraten’s large-format canvas portraits of Potawatomi Indians have been exhibited in numerous museums and institutions, including AMBS, and are included in the permanent collection of the Citizens Band Potawatomi Cultural Center in Shawnee, Oklahoma. Her work can also be seen at the Smithsonian Institute’s National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC.