# Re-Riding History From the Southern Plains to the Matanzas Bay

Exhibition Curated by

Emily Arthur, Marwin Begay, and John Hitchock

Essays by

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Edited by

Phillip Earenfight

## THE TROUT GALLERY

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## Contents

Re-Riding History

Emily Arthur Marwin Begaye John Hitchock

### **Essays**

- 8 From the Southern Plains to the Matanzas Bay: An Artistic and Historical Point of Reference
  - Phillip Earenfight
- Re-Riding History: From the Southern Plains to the Matanzas Bay, 2008–2018 Emily Arthur
- 30 "The Great Hurt": Pathways to Survival
  Nancy Marie Mithlo
- 38 Buffalo Meat's *Price Current* and *Re-Riding History*Phillip Earenfight
- 48 Catalogue
- 122 Contributors
- 123 Acknowledgements

G36840\_Re-Riding Text\_9.25.18\_Edit.indd 5



G36840\_Re-Riding Text\_9.25.18\_Edit.indd 30 9/26/18 1:16 PM

# "The Great Hurt": Pathways to Survival

#### Nancy Marie Mithlo

Not so long ago, one of my favorite relatives visited me in Santa Fe, New Mexico. She had traveled from a small town outside Lawton, Oklahoma, site of the Fort Sill Army post, where many of my Apache relatives live and work. I planned a special outing for us, and we drove into the Sangre de Cristo Mountains to board a local attraction near Chama, the historic coal-powered train known as the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad. It was one of those crisp, sunny, northern New Mexico days in the early fall with the aspens turning gold and the currents rushing along the Rio Grande River. Everything about the scene spoke to the magic that makes the high desert Southwest a mecca for artists and tourists.

I was so excited about the beauty of the scenery that I failed to notice my cousin's nervousness while boarding the train or her quiet withdrawal once we were on our way. It was not until late morning, after hours on the train, that she finally opened up and asked shyly if there was any way we might return by car rather than reboard the train. All the time she had been on board, her thoughts were filled with stories our grandfather had told her about how difficult it was for our people when we were forcibly taken from our home in Arizona and sent by rail to Fort Marion (Castillo de San Marcos), St. Augustine, Florida. Grandfather Watson was born at Fort Marion, a political prisoner held until he was in his early twenties. His mother would have been taken on a similar coal-powered locomotive from Arizona to Florida, a grueling journey for a pregnant woman, along with hundreds of other family and tribal members. My cousin's memories of this trauma were four generations old, but for her they were just as visceral as the first telling by our great-grandmother Tahtziltoey

and her sister Tsistone (Tzistohn), both whom experienced the forced removal from our homelands.

Oral histories are powerful testaments, yet many scholars are still suspect of their veracity. A cynic might claim that these experiences—what some term "embodied memories"—are not credible.<sup>2</sup> Yet scholarship demonstrates that "intergenerational trauma" can be experienced generations after a violent event.<sup>3</sup> I want to explore the meaning of these memories in light of the *Re-Riding History* exhibition and the curators' desire to understand the powerful experience of imprisonment. It is important to note that I am examining this experience as a person who has inherited this language of knowing—a person whose core identity is named after that imprisonment, after a fort. My ancestors, who voluntarily surrendered to the US military, did so to ensure their culture would continue into the future. How could they have known what that future might bring?

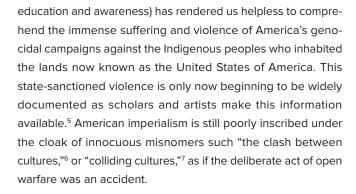
Our tribe is named after one of the historic garrisons where we were imprisoned—the Fort Sill Chiricahua Warm Springs Apache tribe. Forts and army bases define our collective lives. Our tribe is known for the twenty-eight years of imprisonment as "Geromino's band"—from our 1886 surrender and incarceration at Fort Marion, Florida, to Mount Vernon Barracks, Alabama, and ultimately to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, where we were released from 1913 to 1914. Even today, as a Fort Sill Apache tribal member, I could be buried in the Fort Sill Cemetery, a location listed on the National Register of Historic Places as "Apache Prisoner of War Cemeteries." These historic sites are rarely understood in their original context of harm. Our collective amnesia (due to a lack of

 Shan Goshorn, Educational Genocide,
 Woven basket: ink and digital pigment on paper. Montclair Art Museum, Montclair,
 Museum purchase, acquisition fund;
 Photo: Peter Jacobs (cat. 26).

G36840 Re-Riding Text 9.25.18 Edit.indd 31

2. Shan Goshorn, Emily Arthur, and Barbara Landis at the Carlisle Cemetery, May 2016. Photo: Neosha Pendergraft.

3. Shan Goshorn at the Carlisle Cemetery, May 2016. Photo: Neosha Pendergraft.





Our global fascination with travel and the exotic does little to alleviate the lack of perspective or even the recognition of a basic humanrights consciousness. The internet, while enabling tribal nations to host their own historic narratives, also provides a platform where human suffering can be casually chronicled alongside hotel and restaurant ratings. A Trip Advisor rating from "Vanessa d" in 2017 gave her visit to the Apache Prisoner of War Cemetery at Fort Sill a rating of four

stars out of five: "This was truly a peaceful place....There are several graves, including recent interments, and it was interesting to walk among the stones and see the family groupings, the graves of Apaches that fought with Geronimo and the veterans that served in the US armed forces. Sobering. It brought acuity. I wish I had brought tissue to make etchings."8 I wish she had brought tissue to cry into.

A five-star review from Bedford, Texas, titled "Sobering but Beautiful" noted the emotional pull of the Apache Indian Cemetery: "Indian burial cemetery with multiple graves of Caucasian/ Native American marriages/children. Also a unique gravesite for Geronimo. Be sure to read about Geronimo before you go. It's beautiful, striking. The setting is beautiful, restful and we were the only ones around. So glad we made the effort to go there."9

A three-star reviewer from Benton, Tennessee, was less moved: "For some reason it's not what I expected. Plenty of mementos scattered around the grave: Cigarettes, lighters, some change, other odd items. In an unimpressive place, difficult to find."10 The "odd items" are typical offerings to Native gravesites and indicate how tobacco and coins are used in sacred religious ceremonial rites. Artist Shan Goshorn (fig. 1) has made similar symbolic gestures in her artistic practice (figs. 2, 3). While on a research trip in the spring of 2016 with artist Emily Arthur and historian Barbara Landis, Goshorn enacted the tradition of paying honor to the deceased by placing small offerings of tobacco to the children who died at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania. This "laborious" process of laying tobacco ties on headstones is described by scholar Sherry Farrell Racette as an act "focusing on intent": "Because she shares her forays into archival collections through social media, posting photographs, invites participation, and mobilizes actions on behalf of communities of interest, Goshorn's weaving begins before the research, focusing on intent.... [T]he meaning of [her] stunningly beautiful and technically proficient works is amplified by [her] creative processes and the power of the acts of creation (weaving, stitching, gathering), which inspire, provoke, and support actions to change the world beyond the gallery or museum walls."11

Goshorn's series Resisting the Mission; Filling the Silence was created out of a desire to "overcome the silence that has been suffered for too long" about the devastating effects of the Carlisle Indian School assimilation policies (fig. 4). Her visit to the graves and her honoring of the estimated 180 children who died there are essential components of her total artistic practice. In addition to these symbolic and spiritual actions, Goshorn asked descendants of the survivors and advocates to interact with the historic photographs she encountered in her research by writing their thoughts and reactions on the large prints that would eventually become the intricate woven vessels she is so well-known for (figs. 4, 5). These interventions are the "actions to change the world beyond the gallery or museum walls" that Racette describes. Goshorn explains her practice in the following passage: "Over the course of one year,





Re-Riding History: From the Southern Plains to the Matanzas Bay

I alternately carried the printed images with me as I traveled or shipped them to willing venues to encourage varied community interaction, asking people to write their comments directly on the surface of these reproductions before they were cut into splints and woven into Cherokee style single-weave baskets. The remarks were heartfelt and poetically beautiful, ranging from family stories of tribal members who attended this iconic institution to remorse about the way these children were treated during this ugly part of American history."<sup>12</sup>

The ties between our Apache imprisonment at Fort Marion (1886-87) and the educational "experiment" at Carlisle Indian School are very close. According to Carlisle historian Barbara Landis, "Of all the children buried in this [Carlisle] graveyard, the Apache represent the greatest number." Noted as the first off-reservation boarding school, Carlisle was initiated in 1879 by Richard Henry Pratt, who had also served as the jailer for Plains tribal leaders at Fort Marion, Florida (1875–78). It was at Fort Marion that Pratt adopted the practice of assimilation, the erasure of cultural knowledge and even family and community connections. Assimilation became a federal policy that would forcibly prohibit all traces of Native language, values, religion, and appearance. Ultimately, this state-sanctioned alternative to outright genocide would have far-reaching consequences, with over 100,000 Native children subjected to similar off-reservation school facilities across the US over the next hundred years. Their children and grandchildren are the inheritors of what the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition (NABS) terms "the many forms of lateral violence, substance abuse, high rates of imprisonment, disproportionate removal of Indigenous children from their homes, and mental and physical illnesses."14

Landis describes how the Chiricahua Apache children were forcibly removed from their parents after arriving in Fort Marion as prisoners: "In 1886, Pratt traveled to the fort and chose 62 of the older Apache children to be removed to Carlisle. Many of these children were sent to Pennsylvania against the wishes of their grieving parents, who protested their departure, trying to hide them.... One-fourth of the graves in the Carlisle Indian School cemetery hold the remains of these Apache children." <sup>15</sup>



The Carlisle graveyard, like our prisoner of war graveyard in Oklahoma, provides a space where the traumas of the past may be revisited and where hopefully healing may start to take place. Before healing, however, there must be recognition of harm. NABS states, "the U.S. has never accepted responsibility for its Boarding School experiment—the forced removal of our children, the prohibition of our language and culture, and the violation of our human, civil, and Indigenous rights." Similarly, a 2016 National Congress of American Indians Resolution, titled "Call for the United States to Acknowledge its Role in the U.S. Boarding School Policy and to Account for the American Indian and Alaska Native Children Who did not Survive as a Result," cites principles of international human rights law regarding enforced and involuntary disappearances. These standards



4. Shan Goshorn, *Alaskan Students*, from *Resisting the Mission: Filling the Silence*, 2016. One of seven pairs of before-and-after woven baskets: ink and digital pigment on paper. Artist's collection.

5. *Alaska Students* with visitor commentary prior to cutting into splints for weaving. Photo: Peter Philbin.

"The Great Hurt": Pathways to Survival

9/26/18 1:16 PM



6. Nancy Marie Mithlo and Harry Mithlo at the *Re-Riding History* Symposium, panel 1, Flagler College, St. Augustine, Florida, February 12, 2015.

require governments to account for the fate of all persons "taken into governmental custody who have not yet been returned to their families and communities." Today scholars suggest that instead of prisoners of war, the incarcerated Apaches should be known as people who suffered "indefinite imprisonment without trial."

These histories, from Fort Sill, Oklahoma, to Fort Marion, Florida, to the Carlisle Indian School (now the US Army War College) inform us about the entwined narratives of American Indians and the US military, narratives that continue today yet that are often overlooked or ignored. The Re-Riding History exhibition and associated programming have, against all odds and with the fearless leadership of Native artists, curators, and their allies, brought these histories forward to be honored, shared, and debated as we continue the task of educating others about "the great hurt" of our collective past. 19 This commemoration year of 2018, 100 years after the closing of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, will be remembered as the beginning of a process whereby the children's remains will finally be returned to tribal descendants. Following repeated requests by tribal nations that demanded their right to be reunited with their children who died at Carlisle, the US Army has initiated a comprehensive study and is responding to family requests for exhumation and reburial.<sup>20</sup>

This process of reconciling the brutal histories of war crimes with our own personal narratives is a difficult journey that requires more than a singular direction or outcome. In fact, what is needed is a continual revisiting of our own embodied memories in tandem with broader conversations among artists, elected representatives, health care professionals, advocates of restorative justice, and other Indigenous peoples similarly affected globally. I want to investigate this imperfect process of remembering by incorporating the historical narratives of Chiricahua Apache survival into a larger conversation about how to reach a place of balance and health for our collective sustainability. Remembrance takes many forms—from commemoration at gravesites to the active process of creating new narratives through ceremony and oral history.

As a part of *Re-Riding History* in its initial manifestation in St. Augustine, Florida, at Flagler College in 2015, I was asked to present at a public symposium with other artists and scholars. It was my honor to read aloud the writings of my uncle Harry Mithlo, who has authored an account of our imprisonment from oral histories he gathered over decades of site visits and conversations with elders (fig. 6). At one of his early site visits to Fort Marion in 2009, Harry interacted with the physical space and its memories by singing an Apache song. His desire was to let any spirits that might still be lingering in that location move on. As he conveyed to me in the telling of this story, it was a challenging process. At one point he felt a heaviness come over him that seemed insurmountable. He persisted, and gradually this feeling left his body and he was able to complete his song, his honoring (fig. 7).

Like Shan Goshorn's offering of tobacco at the gravesite of the children at Carlisle Indian School, Harry Mithlo's offering of song at Fort Marion was part of a total process of reclamation, of bringing balance where there was continued pain. I wish to place Re-Riding History in this same frame of cemetery visits and honoring songs, for the total process of exhibit planning is a type of ceremony in which many people are led into a shared activity (field research, archival research, production of works, communication with artists, coordination with museum and gallery personnel, fundraising for costs, arranging travel for artists, and handling shipping, insurance, installation, opening, and then travel to other museums) by the curators whose vision inspired the project. Their actions, their thoughts, over an extended period of months, or in this case even years, have the capacity to give honor and respect to these lives that were stolen from us and whose pain continues to influence our lives today.

The National Park Service (NPS) cites the total number of Apache children ultimately sent to Carlisle as 103.<sup>21</sup> The National Trust for Historic Preservation states, "United States officials removed over a hundred Apache youth from Fort Marion to the nascent Carlisle School, breaking the promise made to the captives that families would be kept together. Over a quarter of the children sent to Carlisle would die there of disease." <sup>22</sup>

G36840 Re-Riding Text 9.25.18 Edit.indd 34

Re-Riding History: From the Southern Plains to the Matanzas Bay

Given these stark and tragic facts, how can we now reconcile these complicated histories? This essay suggests that it is in the simple act of engaging the perspectives of those who endured, who chose or were blessed with a pathway to survival, that we can begin to conceive of a proper framework for restoration. As the son of one of those imprisoned, Harry Mithlo's account encompasses this view:

The women and children continued to bawl and cry as the soldiers and scouts lifted them onto the cars. Only a few of us had ever been on a train before or even been this close to one. The interior of the train was gloomy. The windows were covered with dark cloth. We were told to sit with our backs to each other. When the last person was jammed into the car, the soldiers closed the doors. A guard was posted at each door. It was then that the hand and leg irons were removed from the feet and arms of the warriors. The hot morning sun, the oppressive bodies against each other made us uncomfortable. Sweat dripped down our backs and arms. The dogs followed the steel tracks for miles after the train pulled out of Holbrook. They yelped and howled as if they knew they would never see us again. The sound was sad and mournful. It stayed in our hearts for a long time....

Several people died on the train during the long jolting ride from Arizona to Florida. They gave up and let go of their lives. We had to leave their bodies behind and we weren't able to properly honor them. The soldiers thought our condition was funny. They laughed and made cruel jokes. Many of us were still wearing the same clothing when we left Fort Apache.

We hadn't been too long in St. Augustine when the army sent soldiers to round up all the Apache children. Children from age eight to twenty years were taken forcibly from their parents. The parents resisted by holding onto their children as tight as they could. Sometimes it took several soldiers to wrench one child from a mother who clung to the child with all of her strength. Of all the outrages we had to endure, this was the worst, Tsistone said. Our women hid the children by putting them under the dresses of the older women. The soldiers weren't interested

in the older women, they liked to harass the younger women and those with children.

It was the same old story. The White Eyes were not going to permit us to stay together as families. We were too strong that way. We could endure anything as long as we stayed together. It was then that many parents gave up hope of ever returning to the Chiricahua Mountains. Many of the men and women simply laid down and died of a broken heart. The White Eyes did not think we had any feelings. They thought they could do whatever they wanted to do with our children. They did not know that we are a spiritual people who believed in a creator and a supreme being. They thought we were savages incapable of those kinds of feelings. Morning and nights in the confines of the dungeons of San Marcos we prayed to our creator to help us get our children back. Apaches are very close to our children. They love them very deeply. The parents were convinced that the army intended to kill the children and then kill the rest of us. We cried each night for the safety of our children. We prayed that they might be returned to our custody where they belonged.<sup>23</sup>

Compare Harry Mithlo's embodied narrative with the current NPS description: "When they walked off the train that early morning these people did not resemble the proud, fearless men and women who had evaded, fought, and struggled against the American Army. Onlookers undoubtedly had expected to see a spectacle of mighty warriors disembarking on that April day. What they saw instead, was a group of tired, weary, poorly clad people completely exhausted by their long years of fighting and hardship." <sup>24</sup>

An 1887 report by Herbert Welsch, Office of the Indian Rights Association, titled "Report of a Visit to the Chiricahua Apache Indians at Present Confined in Fort Marion, St. Augustine, Florida" reads:

When these children [500 prisoners in 1886], were first put at Carlisle they were wild, untrained, filthy savages. The few months during which they have been under Captain Pratt's quidance and in which they have breathed the civilizing



7. Harry Mithlo Inside Fort Marion (Castillo de San Marcos), St. Augustine, Florida, March 18, 2009. Photo: Andy Wilkinson.

"The Great Hurt": Pathways to Survival

atmosphere of the school, have wrought great changes in them. Of course, the miserable rags in which they were clad upon their arrival have disappeared and the children are now clean, neat and decently dressed. But the change effected in them is not of an outward nature only. They have learned, with surprising quickness, the ways of civilized living, and have made remarkable progress in simple studies....<sup>25</sup>

What can we observe in these assessments of government officials from 1886 to 2018, a span of 131 years? First there is the trope of the primitive savage/noble savage that many scholars have noted as a fairly permanent framework for assessment of American Indians through time. Either the Native is despised as in Welsch's 1887 assessment of American Indians as "wild, untrained, filthy"—or pure and emblematic of an American notion of freedom—as in the NPS's 2018 description of them as "proud, fearless" and "mighty." Second, there is a fascination with the Indigenous body and how it appears, as if the viewers somehow owned these bodies themselves: Welsch remarked on the "miserable rags in which they were clad" and the NPS on "tired, weary, poorly clad people." Lastly, all of these comments could lead one to form a sense of the mental facilities of the Apache prisoners. Welsch describes the "surprising quickness" that Apache children learn, obviously negating an expectation of mental slowness or inaptitude. The NPS's transition from "evaded, fought, and struggled" to "completely exhausted by their long years of fighting and hardship" references a supposed miscalculation in the Apache warfare methods, methods we now know were emulated by US troops in ambush tactics. This NPS passage also leads the reader to conclude that the Apaches lost militarily instead of the historic fact that we willingly surrendered.

Maria Brave Heart describes historical unresolved grief as "yearning, pining, preoccupation with thoughts of ancestors lost in massacres, loyalty to ancestors with a focus on their suffering,

as if to not suffer is to not honor them, to forget them." Related but distinct from this definition is the definition of historical trauma, a "cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma. Historical unresolved grief accompanies that trauma."26 One of the major intervention components that Brave Heart advocates is confronting historical trauma and embracing our history. The problem in enacting this intervention is that our histories are often biased, inaccurate, and cloaked. Even the process of identifying the location of the Carlisle students buried at the Carlisle Barracks Post Cemeteries is fraught with a lack of documentation and what the Army calls "haphazard events that followed no system of organization." In fact, "No records were identified that documented the landscape and locations of Carlisle Indian School Cemetery burials during the operation of the Carlisle Indian School."27

Santa Clara historian Dr. Dave Warren has asked, "What are the mechanisms and factors of cultural persistence?"28 Our pathways to survival today depend on careful historical research from all fields including anthropology, archaeology, archival records, and historic photography. But we also need to embrace the lived realities of those who remember in a holistic fashion, with the thoughts, sensations, and emotions of those who suffered. Co-curator Emily Arthur defined this approach with poignancy and clarity at the 2015 opening of Re-Riding History at Flagler College: "Throughout this research, it is such an emotional amount of information. I am always sliding in and out of this heady academic approach to what happened and how to tell the story from a curator's perspective, from an academic perspective, and then I'll find myself moving into this really emotional place, whether it is through the archives or talking with descendants and family members. So, I just want to acknowledge that careful edge that we are riding today with this really great respect for the families and the men and the women and the children who were imprisoned here."29

Re-Riding History: From the Southern Plains to the Matanzas Bay

#### Notes

- The Great Hurt is a play written by retired artist and College of St. Scholastica (Duluth, Minnesota) faculty member Carl Gawboy of the Bois Forte Band of Minnesota Chippewa. It contains eyewitness accounts, both historic and contemporary, of the Indian boarding school experience.
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G36840\_Re-Riding Text\_9.25.18\_Edit.indd 37

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Candy Nartonis, Telling Something, 2014 (cat. 47).

#### Inside covers

St. Augustine and its Environs (detail), from Whitney's Florida Pathfinder for the Tourist and Invalid (New York: John Prescott Whitney, 1876). Special Collections, Florida State University, Tallahassee.

#### Title page

A Group of Plains Indian Prisoners of War on the Terreplein Making Bows, Arrows, and Drawings, c. 1875. Albumen print mounted on stereo view card. Richard Henry Pratt Collection, MSS S-1174, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

#### Frontispiece

Cover of a sketchbook from Fort Marion with drawings by Wohaw, 1876. George W. Fox Collection, MSS S-318, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

124

G36840\_Re-Riding Text\_9.25.18\_Edit.indd 124 9/26/18 12:15 PM