

Matika Wilbur @ CASA Magazine

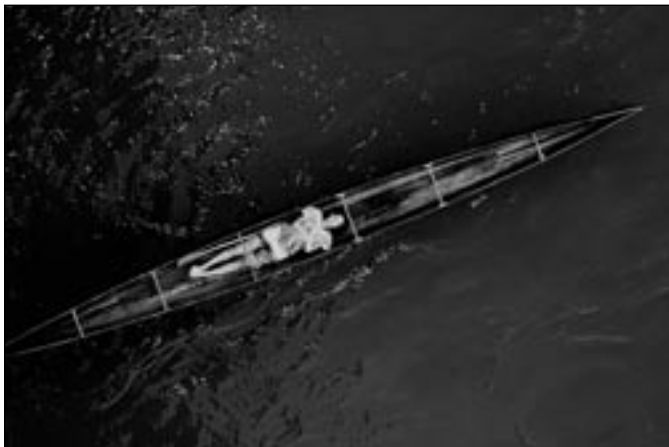
# Through Brown Eyes

By ERIN J. SMITH / CASA

**W**ITH A DESIRE TO CREATE EXCHANGES BETWEEN IDENTITIES AND CULTURES, photographer

Matika Wilbur uses personal portraiture as a medium to explore both the contemporary Native American experience and a shared human identity. A self-curated selection of her photographs can be seen at CASA Magazine through the month of December.

“Curators always separate my work, because they believe the combination of Native subjects and nudes sends a mixed message,” said Wilbur, whose name means



Chenoa by Matika Wilbur

“the messenger”, which is symbolized by the butterfly in Native American mythology. “A study of what makes us human doesn’t belong on separate walls.”

Raised in the Swinomish and Tulalip Tribal

Community in Washington State, Wilbur decided to become a photographer at the age of 17 after being given an extra ticket to attend a seminar. There she heard landscape photographer Craig Tanner debunk the myth of talent. “I remember it very clearly. He said that talent is nothing more than a

dedicated interest. Our passion and desire to do something creates our talent. Anyone can become a master if they give it enough time,” she said. “I became a photographer because there wasn’t anything else I wanted to do more.”

She attended a summer program at the Rocky Mountain School of Photography and went on to earn a BFA from Brooks Institute of



Matika Wilbur

Photography where she double majored in Advertising and Digital Imaging. “Brooks and Santa Barbara were very nurturing for me. I left a somewhat harsh reality and found

very lovely people here who became like a family,” she said. Following graduation, Wilbur journeyed to South America to photograph indigenous people in Peru and Ecuador. She now works full-time as a fine art and commercial photographer from her studio in Seattle.

The current exhibit at CASA Magazine is a culmination of Wilbur’s favorite photographs from several exhibits, including projects entitled *We are One*

*People, We Emerge*, and *i-Human*. Her work has been featured in exhibits at The Seattle Art Museum, The Burke Museum of Natural History, and The Royal British Columbia Museum. She is also working on several projects with the Smithsonian, including a collaborative effort with Longhouse Media entitled *To sing is To pray*. The photograph *The Way* is currently showcased in France at the Nantes Museum of Art. “I like my freedom to express myself, and I love that I get to travel for my job,” she said. “With my indigenous pieces, I hope viewers recognize that Native Americans are thriving in contemporary society, but that we live in duality, merging traditional ways of life with contemporary culture.”

She is currently at work on a new project entitled *Save the Indian & Kill the Man*. The project addresses the forced cultural assimilation of Native people during the



It Was A Gift by Matika Wilbur

years 1880 to 1980 when U.S. Governmental Agencies took Native children from their homes and placed them in residential schools.

“America’s First Peoples have been on the road to recovery for several years and have recently seen a tremendous revitalization of culture, language, and art,” wrote Wilbur in an artist statement. “I aim to capture both the stories and unspoken nuances of being a Native American person in today’s culture. It has been prophesied that the seventh generation will re-vitalize Native America. We are the Seventh Generation; these are our stories.”

CASA Magazine is located at 23 E Canon Perdido. Hours are 9am-5:30pm, daily. For more information, call 965-6448 or visit [www.matikawilbur.com](http://www.matikawilbur.com).