



Dugan Aguilar (1949–2018), *Jennifer Bates (Northern Sierra Mewuk)*, *Oakland Big Time*, 1996, reproduction of gelatin silver print, 14 x 11 in. Courtesy of Oakland Museum of California Art. Gift of the family of Dugan Aguilar. 2021.7.878 R

MONTEREY MUSEUM OF ART ANNOUNCES A NEW EXHIBITION CELEBRATING NATIVE CALIFORNIA THROUGH THE LENS OF PHOTOGRAPHER, DUGAN AGUILAR

Born of the Bear Dance: Dugan Aguilar's Photographs of Native California

Presents a look at the Photographer's Archive, Documenting a Recent
Period of Contemporary Life Among Native Communities

This is a special exhibition on loan from Oakland Museum of California (OMCA)

On View September 10, 2026 – December 20, 2026

Public Opening Saturday, September 12, 2026



FINAL FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE JULY 7, 2026

Monterey CA, July 7, 2026 – Monterey Museum of Art (MMA) will open a major exhibition, *Born of the Bear Dance: Dugan Aguilar's Photographs of Native California*, on September 10, 2026. Drawing from the personal archive of Native photographer Dugan Aguilar that was gifted to Oakland Museum of California Art by the artist's family in 2021, the exhibition offers the public an opportunity to see a significant collection that **highlights Indigenous endurance**, and links to a broader conversation around **contemporary Native life**.

From 1982 until his death in 2018, photographer Dugan Aguilar (Mountain Maidu/Pit River/Walker River Paiute) engaged with vibrant Native communities throughout California. The result is an archive of contemporary images crafted in a spirit of mutual generosity and respect.

Dugan Aguilar's photographs convey a wide spectrum of Native Californian culture and lifeways and represent the resilience of generations. They are powerful reminders of ancestral knowledge and contemporary responsibilities. More than simple documents, his photographs radiate a sense of quiet but determined celebration and resistance.

Working closely with Native collaborators, including OMCA's long-standing partnership with the Native Advisory Council, as well as individuals who were photographed by Aguilar, *Born of the Bear Dance* uses video, audio, and quotes from the artist to contextualize his photographs, and demonstrate the diverse and enduring impact of California indigeneity.

"Dugan's photographs demonstrate a living presence of spirit held within the embrace of beliefs, culture, language and ceremony by California Indian people--an embrace that comes from the heart of love and defiance: it took defiance to hold onto what white society often belittled and ridiculed, but which California Indian families treasured," said exhibition collaborator and writer Theresa Harlan about Aguilar in the introduction to the book, *She Sang Me a Good Luck Song*. "Dugan's portraits are visual testimonies from the descendants of a people who withstood waves of pernicious Spanish, Mexican and American assaults on mind, body, and spirit."

OMCA's Curator of Photography and Visual Culture, Drew Johnson states that, "Indigenous people have lived in California for millennia, are still here, and continue to practice environmental, ethical, and spiritual lifeways. We are lucky to have had Dugan Aguilar document these traditions and lifeways for generations to come, and it's a privilege to present *Born of the Bear Dance*...to the public to celebrate, honor, and learn from." MMA holds this work in high esteem and endeavors to share its vision with respect and thoughtfulness.

Many of the themes explored in this exhibition through Aguilar's powerful and emotional photographs include ceremonies, conferences, and gatherings; California basket weavers; Native

American war veterans; portraits of well-known Native artists, as well as important elders and the children who receive their wisdom; and California landscapes from an Indigenous perspective, such as Yosemite and Sutter Buttes.

In undertaking its stewardship of Aguilar's extensive archive, OMCA acknowledged that the photographer held extraordinary trust and access to Native peoples through long-standing relationships, his art, and his work. OMCA upholds the integrity of his intentions to respectfully and accurately reflect the stories told in his images and the people and cultural practices they capture.

"*Born of the Bear Dance* is an important exhibition for Monterey Museum of Art. Its rich cultural significance, along with Dugan Aguilar's photographic skill and personal insight, combine to truly celebrate stories of California Indigenous peoples. MMA is honored to partner with OMCA to showcase this work." --Corey Madden, MMA Executive Director

Born of the Bear Dance: Dugan Aguilar's Photographs of Native California is organized by the Oakland Museum of California, and curated by Drew Heath Johnson. Major support is provided by the Henry Luce Foundation. Special thanks to sponsors Chris and Craig Johnson, and Louise O'Connor who helped make this exhibition possible at MMA.

Dates and Original Location:

The exhibition originally ran at the Oakland Museum of California from November 8, 2024, to July 13, 2025.

Story Highlights/Angles:

- **Personal Story:** Dugan Aguilar was born in 1947 in Susanville, California and was a photographer of contemporary Native life. He learned photography as a young person and furthered his photographic exploration at the University of Nevada, University of California Santa Cruz, and University of California Davis. He also studied with Ansel Adams. His work has been celebrated and exhibited at Oakland Museum of California Art, the Ansel Adams Center for Photography, the Crocker Art Museum, Santa Clara University's De Saisset Museum, and others.
- **Connecting communities:** Portraits of Indigenous peoples, ceremony participants, veterans, and basket weavers
- **Historical significance:** Celebrating Native life; History of Photography; California artist/photographer, Vietnam Veteran; Indigenous documentarian with respected insight

- **Educational value:** History; Contemporary Native life and Indigenous endurance; photographic skill

Also On View at MMA

Rex Ray: We Are All Made of Light

August 27, 2026, until January 17, 2026

Rex Ray: We Are All Made of Light features multimedia American artist Rex Ray (1956–2015), best known for his innovative and subversive pop aesthetic. Drawing inspiration from mid-century modernism, Dada, the decorative arts, Fluxus, Pop Art, low-fi zines, and mail-art culture, Ray became a leading figure in both graphic design and fine art. He is especially known for his large-scale mixed-media collage and tour posters for artists including the Rolling Stones, R.E.M., Radiohead, and David Bowie. MMA presents this exhibition as the first museum retrospective of Ray's work.

Land and People Acknowledgement

Monterey Museum of Art (MMA) extends its respect to the Esselen and Rumsen/Rumsien Ohlone Tribes, on whose ancestral homeland the Museum stands. MMA also recognizes the Chalon, Mutsun, and Salinan Tribes, whose unceded lands encompass much of what is now Monterey County. In alignment with our mission to celebrate the diversity of California art—past, present, and future, MMA acknowledges and honors these communities, who have cared for and cultivated the Monterey Peninsula for millennia.

The Museum recognizes that our collection and exhibitions are inherently tied to the Indigenous land on which they were created, as California's landscape has long served as inspiration for generations of artists and creatives. MMA honors the Chalon, Esselen, Mutsun, Rumsen/Rumsien Ohlone, and Salinan Tribes—alongside all California tribes, past, present, and future—for their enduring connection and lasting impact on our shared lands and waters.

To learn more about the Indigenous lands we inhabit, visit <https://native-land.ca/>.

ABOUT MONTEREY MUSEUM OF ART

Monterey Museum of Art (MMA) inspires creativity, connects communities, and celebrates the stories of California art.

MMA is grounded in the art of place—the dynamic relationship between creative vision and the landscapes, communities, and ideals that shape it. From our extraordinary vantage point on the Monterey Peninsula, we present California art that inspires our community and attracts visitors from around the world. As the only museum devoted to collecting the art of our region, we steward iconic works that reflect and shape California's evolving cultural identity. Beyond our region, we champion artists across the state, situating Monterey County within the broader story of California art—past, present, and future.



FINAL FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE JULY 7, 2026

Connect with MMA on Facebook and Instagram
@montereyart

Monterey Museum of Art

559 Pacific Street

Monterey, CA 93940

Open Thursday – Sunday 11:00 am – 5:00 pm

www.montereyart.org

VISITOR INFORMATION

MMA Pacific Street hours

Open Thursday - Sunday

11:00 am - 5:00 pm

Located across from historic Colton Hall in Old Monterey, the Museum features galleries devoted to exhibitions of American and California painting, photography and contemporary art. Wheelchair access is available at the sculpture park entrance located between Pacific and Calle Principal Streets.

Adults: \$15

Free Admission:

Students w/ID

Active Military w/ID*

18 years and under

MMA Members

Museums for All SNAP Participants w/EBT**

NARM, ROAM, and AAM Members

*Active members of the military and their families receive free admission.

**Museums for All – Individuals and families presenting a CalFresh/Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card, and a valid form of photo ID receive free admission for up to a group of four.

Bicyclists: Receive 50% off Museum admission on Thursday when you show us your helmet. Excludes special programs and events.

Media Contact

Alana Puryear



Director, Marketing and Communications

pr@montereyart.org

apuryear@montereyart.org

FINAL FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE JULY 7, 2026

###