

Born of the Bear Dance

DUGAN AGUILAR'S PHOTOGRAPHS
OF NATIVE CALIFORNIA



TEACHER GUIDE

The Oakland Museum of California welcomes you and your students to experience *Born of the Bear Dance: Dugan Aguilar's Photographs of Native California*. This teacher guide will help you prepare for your students' visit. Teachers are also welcome to visit OMCA for a free planning visit.

The Oakland Museum of California occupies the unceded, ancestral land of the Confederated Villages of Lisjan Nation who, for hundreds of generations, have belonged to the land that is now known as the East Bay. These peoples continue to inhabit their ancestral homeland and work to preserve its cultural and natural history and fight for its sacred sites and cultural resources. OMCA's full Native Accountability Statement and Land Acknowledgement can be found on the [OMCA website](#).

Exhibition Content

From 1982 until his death in 2018, Dugan Aguilar (Mountain Maidu/Pit River/Walker River Paiute) photographed a wide spectrum of Indigenous California life, creating images of traditional lifeways in a contemporary California context. This exhibition aims to center his work as a link to a broader conversation around contemporary Native life, particularly the story of continuity and renewal.

The exhibition is a first look at an exciting OMCA collection, whose breadth and significance is being revealed by an ongoing collaboration between museum professionals and community partners.

Exhibition sections include:

- **THE ARTIST AND HIS WORLD:** More than just a photographer, Dugan Aguilar was a participant and important member of the Indigenous community he was photographing. Upon entering the gallery, visitors will see a sampling of images that showcase a vibrant Native California community that has always been here and continues to live traditional lifeways.
- **CELEBRATING TRADITION:** Basketweavers, singers, dancers, storytellers—including Dugan—are part of a recent period of revitalization and renewal. Whether ceremonial (sacred roundhouse events, Bear Dance) or social (basket weavers, war veterans), gatherings of Indigenous communities constitute a form of resistance, a joyful assertion of presence and survival.

- **CELEBRATING TRADITION: BASKET WEAVERS:** Aguilar was present at the founding of the California Indian Basketweavers' Association and became their official photographer. He created portraits of generations of basket weavers and their baskets for several decades.
- **VIDEO:** In this OMCA video, Native collaborators who developed the exhibition with museum staff share insights about Dugan Aguilar. The collaborators interviewed include Dugan Aguilar's family and friends.
- **DEEP TIME:** The phrase "Deep Time" evokes a sense of ancestral connection to ancient lands, traditions, and spiritual qualities, which are found in many of Dugan Aguilar's photographs. Two stories are highlighted in this section for visitors to listen to with headphones. As our collaborators have said, "Dugan's landscapes are more than just landscapes."

Key Exhibit Messages

- California's Indigenous population is large, vital, and committed to maintaining Indigenous cultural identity.
- Dugan Aguilar's photographs highlight a recent period of vibrant activity among Native communities, a "deliberate and defiant persistence of an Indigenous people who never lost faith." (Quote from exhibit collaborator Theresa Harlan).
- Dugan Aguilar's photographs were crafted and shared in a spirit of mutual generosity and respect.
- Aguilar's vision gently but unmistakably refutes anthropological tropes and broad cultural stereotypes that historical photography has promoted.
- Indigenous people have lived in California for millennia, are still here, and live environmental, ethical, and spiritual lifeways.

Understanding the Student Conversation Guide

This guide:

- Helps teachers, chaperones, and students better manage their self-guided visit to *Born of the Bear Dance: Dugan Aguilar's Photographs of Native California*.
- Promotes student-driven inquiry. Students are prompted to consider particular topics/themes, but are given the opportunity to choose what to focus on within the exhibition.
- Encourages student conversation and reflection about these topics to help students consider and extend their experience in the exhibition.

Facilitation Suggestions

- Bring enough printed copies of the student guide, writing surfaces and pencils for each student. The student guide is designed for 8.5x11 paper. A limited number of printed student guides will be available at OMCA's School Group Entrance. No pens are allowed in the galleries.
- Allow students to work in pairs or small groups. If any student(s) seems to be struggling with the prompts, check in with them and encourage them to work with a peer to solve any challenges.
- Try to create a safe space for dialogue. We encourage students to work with a partner, however, participation in dialogue should be voluntary. Encourage students to participate however they're comfortable.

Additional Resources

The following resources may help you better prepare to facilitate your students' experience, or provide student learning opportunities before or after your visit:

- Whose land are you on? Find out on the [Native Land website](#).
- **Sogorea Te' Land Trust:** A Native-owned land trust focused on returning Indigenous land back to Indigenous people, restoring sacred relationship to ancestral land, and cultural revitalization.
- **Sacred Land Film Project video** about Corrina Gould's work to preserve and protect Ohlone culture and sacred sites (13 minutes).
- **Born of the Bear Dance video:** Visitors get to know Dugan Aguilar through interviews with his family and colleagues featuring locations like Susanville, Tuolumne Roundhouse, and Chaw'se, also seen in the exhibition's photographs.
- **7 Essential Understandings of California Native History and Culture:** Resource from Redbud Resource Group and California Indian Museum and Cultural Center.
- **California Indian Basketweavers' Association:** A group that preserves and promotes basketweaving while providing a healthy physical, social, spiritual, and economic environment for basketweavers.
- **Calflora:** Database of over 8,000 wild plants. Learn about the native and non-native plants, and where they're found across California.

Vocabulary

Ancestral and traditional lands
Ceremony
Colonization
Indigenous or Native lifeways

Land reclamation
Regalia
Rematriation
Representation

Ritual
Sovereignty
Stereotype