

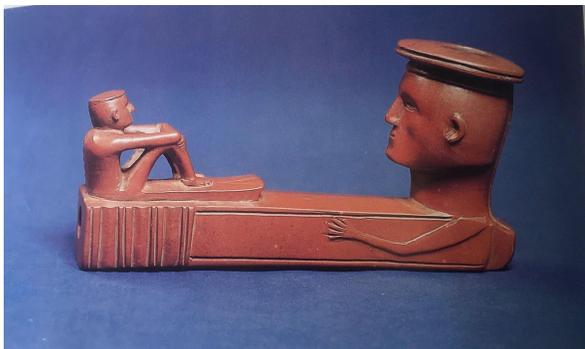


*Not Afraid to Look* faces the launch pad of the Dakota Access Pipeline project that is in front of the Missouri River. The piece sits on a hill at the Sacred Stone Camp, Cannon Ball, ND. Photo by Scott O'Brien Begay.

## How Not Afraid To Look Got To Standing Rock

by Charles Rencountre and Alicia Rencountre-Da Silva

I'm a traditional pipe carver. I have been since I was a young man growing up in Rapid City, South Dakota. This is something that was handed down to me in a strange and cherished way. My grandfather was a known carver by our Lakota community. When he died, my Aunt Ethel Lovelace handed me some of his carving tools and a started piece of pipestone that had been drawn on. I took my grandfather's piece of stone and studied it. I began to work with one of his files bringing out the eagle that he had drawn. In my early twenties, I 'd carved many pipes as well as many other small figures. This became the most satisfying part of my life—the making and studying of carved figures, plus the making of traditional pipes byway of my ancestors. Today, pipes and effigy figures are referenced in books and many are displayed in Great Plains collections.



*Not Afraid To Look The White Man In The Face* is a pipe that fascinated me at first glance. On the prow of the pipe sits a small Indian man in a seated position. He looks to the bowl of the pipe, where a much larger head of a white man faces him. The Indian sits naked and resolute.

Many unknown Plains artists have carved *Not Afraid To Look The White Man In The Face*. During those times, known as the Indian War Period, also known as the Manifest Destiny period of the U.S., its government moved west, encountering my ancestors with their army, their munitions, and an expansionist determination. After those wars, several Plains Indian warriors would become tribal delegates in Washington DC.

I believe several pipes still exist today within collections. It's likely that one Indian delegate carried *Not Afraid To Look The White Man In The Face* to Washington, DC. President Andrew Jackson's archived collection includes a rendering of the *Not Afraid To Look The White Man In The Face* pipe. It's likely it was gifted to him.

I asked myself:

*How much courage does it take to sit on the earth with no weapons looking straight ahead into the eye of the storm with no fear? It is much like counting coup on an enemy in the sense that one only needs to touch the enemy, not take his life. Touching the enemy with your eyes, with your gaze, is the highest capacity of honor, courage and compassion.*

In 2008, I met a woman who would become my beloved. Her name is Alicia Rencountre-Da Silva. She too, is an artist. Since the beginning, we spoke about how art has intersected with life in critical ways as a reflection of our environments, our communities, and our moments of shared history. Together, we decided to design and create something in unity.

I told her the original story of *Not Afraid To Look The White Man In The Face*. She thought about it and said, "Well, it isn't simply the white man anymore." We talked about changes within the generations, of intermarriages, how these groups have both been affected by the different experiences involved in the battlefields and by the invasion here. The question changed: *How does this piece speak to those within our time? Who is this piece for?* We began developing ideas for the piece together.

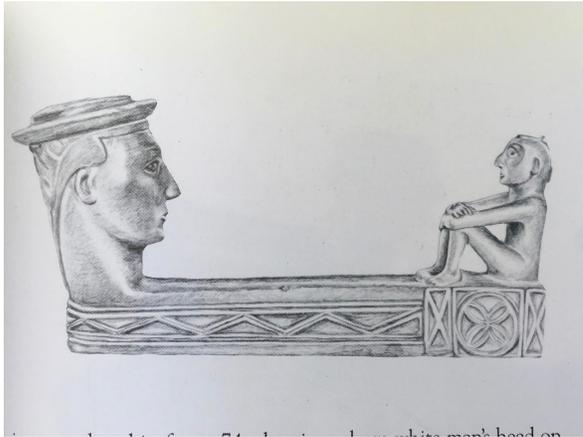
*Not Afraid To Look The White Man In The Face* became *Not Afraid To Look*.

*Not Afraid To Look* begins as a symbol from my Plains ancestors, who remind me that although we have faced genocide—we continue to thrive in many good and surprising ways. We are here. And we are here despite outsiders who tried to kill or erase us all. We are also changing.

What the human people face today is similar to what my ancestors faced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. *Not Afraid To Look* comes out of a living cosmology and worldview. It may remind human people to use the power instilled within us to endure and face what seems insurmountable. The piece symbolizes our relationship when we human people connect with the earth, because that is the lineage it comes from. Though the earth has faced many forces evoked by fear, anger, delusion, and denial by the human people, the

earth endures and will endure. Human people can do this too. There is truth that when we listen we can face things that look like hell realms and still find ways that are meaningful and valuable to us though it may be difficult.

Images of *Not Afraid To Look The White Man In The Face* are from *Plains Indian Sculpture: A Traditional Art from America's Heartland*. By John C. Ewers



In the summer of 2016, the Standing Rock Sioux Nation called out for water protectors to come. At that point we realized *Not Afraid To Look* needed to appear. This call became important to us for many reasons. As a Lakota, I am part of the Oceti Sakowin and Seven Council Fire, I am from the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe—the people of Standing Rock are my relatives. Together, Alicia and I have nine grandchildren in South Dakota who depend on the Missouri River for many purposes. Water is sacred as Lakota; water is life for *all beings upon this earth*.

Alicia and I contacted LaDonna Brave Bull Allard before arriving in Cannonball, ND. She granted us the permission to build the monument. It was quite a push to make things happen within a short window of time. With limited resources and hardships, Alicia was in a major car accident prior to leaving for North Dakota, we began the work ahead. That week I went alone and Alicia remained home to help and heal.



*Not Afraid to Look* on the hill above the Sacred Stone Camp, Standing Rock Sioux Nation, ND. October 2016.  
Photographer unknown.

In Cannonball, ND I worked 12-14 hours every day for a month. I listened to the songs and the prayers of many Nations. Many amazing encounters and friendships came to me; I was in a wakan(holy) place. When I asked for help, people showed up. To make a monument, it takes a village and I felt the aliveness of a beehive down below at the camps. I asked for help with the foundation and a water supply for the concrete work and this happened through the community. Johnny Kessenich in particular showed up many days through lots of cold and wet weather. I gave my time and artistry to making the piece because I felt this was something I had to do—*Not Afraid To Look* needed to look directly at what was transpiring, towards the eyes of those creating destruction in my ancestral lands that range across a far greater territory than the US government acknowledges today.

The beauty of the land and the incidents of violence and threats of violence to come, reminded me that I as was looking at the 21st century I was also experiencing a repeat of the history that my ancestors experienced. I witnessed the exertions by those in power to ignore and destroy my people again— Both corporate and governmental authorities disrespected and worked actively to harm the integrity of those who work to protect the land, which sustains all of us.

The story of *Not Afraid To Look* at Standing Rock continues. He sits upon a hill; he oversees the bigness and circle of life along the Cannonball and Missouri Rivers. He also observes the destruction by the Dakota Access Pipeline Project, the Energy Transfer

Partnership, and the United States and North Dakotan governments that continue to disregard laws of the US constitution and common sense.

With all of this I recognize that we, as human beings, have the capacity to overcome historical differences, wounds and antipathies, to work together for what is sacred and what is our right to respect, to protect, and to live, as part of its life. As artists, my wife and I have visions to place *Not Afraid To Look* in places that are in need. *Not Afraid To Look* will symbolize a stance needed: to squarely face what is and at the same time recognize something much greater than what divides us. Art creates a response that builds community; that reflects and gives voice to those in need of its truths— And it is our way to move forward. We see art as a relationship and a gesture within and from a community that begins a process for healing of that which has been unheard and denied. We feel now is the time to show up as artists and as human beings with cante (heart), however people will respond to the complex predicaments in our world.

### **The future of *Not Afraid To Look***

*Not Afraid To Look* is a piece that is timeless in its relevance. Historically and today there are many things that need to be addressed for our communities to live in just and inclusive ways. *Not Afraid To Look* can and will be used in an array of global concerns and places.

When we began the first *Not Afraid To Look* in 2009, we knew then that individualized renderings of this piece belonged in places where humanity is avoiding responsibility to look at what is happening— at the actions and issues that cause harm and endangers or communities and our home the earth.

In relation to the oil and government/corporate agendas we are considering the next four locations to have *Not Afraid To Look* appear. This is in flux and we're keeping the door open. In partnership with Honor the Earth, we are working to have *Not Afraid To Look* stare into the eyes of those at the Enbridge Corporation. We hope *Not Afraid To Look* will gaze upon those in downtown New York City and/or those within Washington DC. We hope *Not Afraid To Look* will partner with the National Museum of the American Indian and, quite possibly, the indigenous peoples and the disenfranchised communities of color and poorer communities of Louisiana.

We are thinking about Louisiana because what we have learned since Hurricane Katrina is the disproportionate distress communities of Louisiana have suffered. Louisiana is, and has been, on the frontline between the impacts of climate change, poisoned waters, and poisoned environments. It is also the other end of the Dakota Access Pipeline project as well as many other oil pipelines. Our work continues and our prayers as artists and relatives are for all water protectors and beings doing their best to help in this time of great need.

Mi taku ye oyasin.

