

AN EXPLORATION  
OF RESILIENCE  
AND RESISTANCE



Kali Spitzer

An Exploration of Resilience and Resistance  
By Kali Spitzer

grunt gallery  
116 – 350 East 2nd Avenue  
Vancouver BC  
V5T 4R8  
March 15 – April 27, 2019

Curator: Glenn Alteen  
Writer: Ginger Dunnill  
Design: Sébastien Aubin  
Copy Editor: Hillary Wood  
Photography: Dennis Ha, Kali Spitzer

Printed in Canada by East Side Graphics  
Edition of 300

ISBN# 978-1-988708-13-3  
All Rights Reserved  
Publication 2019 grunt gallery  
Artwork 2019 the artist  
Text 2019 the author  
All images courtesy of the artist

© Copyright grunt gallery, the writer and the  
artist.

This exhibition is part of the 2019 Capture  
Photography Festival Featured Exhibition  
Program.

In conjunction with this exhibition the event  
Together Apart, Queer Indigeneities will take  
place on April 19, 20 and 21, 2019 in various  
locations around Vancouver. Organized by  
Whess Harman with Kali Spritzer, the string of  
events aims at making and holding space for  
2SQ/Indigiqueer folks to come together and to  
be in dialogue with one another.

grunt gallery gratefully acknowledges support  
from The Canada Council for the Arts, The  
British Columbia Arts Council, The City of  
Vancouver, The Province of British Columbia,  
the Audain Foundation for the Visual Arts and  
the Vancouver Foundation.

TO BREATHE IN OUR BRILLIANCE  
AND SHINE OUT RESILIENCE

There is an extreme vulnerability that must be attended to when a photographer invites a member from an Indigenous, Black, Brown, Queer, Trans, Non-Binary, Womens and/or Femme community to sit for an image to be created, quite plainly, from their flesh. This vulnerability may be marked by the sitter's trauma of abuse or continued erasure and systematized invisibility or it may stem from a deep mistrust of the camera which, for many Indigenous people, relates directly to settler colonialism. Its vulgar curiosity has made images, which -- throughout history -- have exoticized and even aided in the destruction of entire communities through the toxic practice of settler-colonial 'othering'.

Portrait photographers of settler descent have historically stolen and misrepresented the essence of Indigenous peoples, not only in North America, but throughout the world. In support of their own expansion agendas, they perpetuate exotic fantasies about the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples and particularly have had harmful impacts on Women. Although this horrific trend has subsided over the past 200 years, it is still apparent in the world of contemporary photography. Today however, we are witnessing Indigenous, Black, Brown, Queer, Trans, Non-Binary, Women and/or Femme photographers making their communities more visible than ever before. They actively reclaim the art of portrait photography on their own terms. These artists are finding ways to frame their actions, imagery and language with explicit accountability to the communities they are documenting. When Indigenous, Black, Brown, Queer, Trans, Non-Binary, Women and/or Femme artists get behind the camera to document their peers, they are authentically representing their subjects, because in a real sense, their subjects' lived experience is also their own. The photograph can then share a perspective from the community itself, through their own authorship and authority. This is a tender and evolved learning experience for any artist crossing into this photographic territory who must be accountable to their communities by properly interpreting and respecting the stories being shared. This process reclaims identity presentation of Indigenous, Black, Brown, Queer, Trans, Non-Binary, Women and/or Femme people and is a critical action in dismantling colonialism, patriarchy and white supremacy. Creating work for, by, and within these communities on their own terms is a critical practice of Decolonization.

Ginger Dunnill

When Indigenous, Queer, Femme photographer Kali Spitzer documents her peers and community members -- in an exchange of trust and the energy of a moment shared between brown

bodies and for brown bodies -- it is a lived artistic experience of resilience and resistance. In a subversive act of decolonizing the practice of portrait photography, she is standing up with her peers across the world who are actively reclaiming their communities' stories throughout all artistic mediums. This way of working as an artist within community is a rewiring of trust -- who we trust and how we ask to be trusted, how we are seen and how we let ourselves be seen. As a person who has worked with Kali Spitzer in the past and who has trauma around being seen, it was not easy for me to be photographed. To share my flesh in the timelessness inherent in portrait photography can feel unsafe, especially for many of us who have been manipulated and exotified by settler colonialism. Spitzer recognized this moment of vulnerability with me and with other folks she has documented and has demonstrated what it means to make a thoughtful energetic exchange with those being photographed. Though her artwork takes the final form of a photographic image, Spitzer's mastery is in the creation of relationship; her practice depends on dialogue and learning about the diverse ways in which her communities interpret and build trust. Each of her portraits therefore evolve through a specific protocol, so that each documented community member may be seen on their terms. They are allowed -- even empowered -- to become embedded into the historical record in ways that no longer deny or exotify their existence, but rather exposes their fierce importance as an Indigenous, Black, Brown, Queer, Trans, Non-Binary, Woman and/or Femme body thriving in our world today. Recognizing the kaleidoscopic variance in human vulnerability, Spitzer's work acknowledges the long-term relationship created in the momentary photographic exchange, and assumes accountability for the artwork in its multiple and evolving forms beyond that intimate point of collaboration.

The photographs and accompanying audio recordings in Spitzer's exhibition, *An Exploration of Resilience and Resistance*, ask us as Indigenous, Black, Brown, Queer, Trans, Non-Binary, Women and/or Femme people to see and hear each other in a tender way that, due to forced assimilation from settler colonization, we have otherwise been made to deny. Spitzer is reminding us of our Resilience. The work wakes us up to our beauty, strength and vulnerability. It questions how we define these terms, apart from the lens of white supremacy and settler colonialism. This process does not come with ease but through

acknowledging the resilience and resistance within the communities represented through this work. Spaces like the one created by this exhibition are currently being carved out across the world, through the labor and care of Indigenous, Black, Brown, Queer, Trans, Non-Binary, Women and/or Femme artists who work tirelessly to be seen on their terms while making sure all participants are safe during this radical act of visibility. At this point in history, it is critical that we author and shape the representation of ourselves. Kali Spitzer's *An Exploration of Resilience and Resistance* tells the stories of our relatives doing this work, it is a source of focused solidarity and empowering vulnerability. In a world that feels very unsafe for so many of us, this exhibition is a moment to breathe in our brilliance and shine out resilience.

## BIO

### ARTIST

Kali Spitzer is Kaska Dena from Daylu (Lower Post, British Columbia) on her father's side and Jewish from Transylvania, Romania on her mother's side. She is from the Yukon and grew up on the West Coast of British Columbia in Canada on unceded Coast Salish Territory. She is a transdisciplinary artist who mainly works with film – 35mm, 120 and wet plate collodion process using an 8x10 camera. Her work includes portraits, figure studies, and photographs of her people, ceremonies, and culture. Her work has been exhibited and recognized internationally. Spitzer recently received a Reveal Indigenous Art Award from the Hnatyshyn Foundation and was featured in the National Geographic and Photo Life in 2018.

### WRITER

Ginger Dunnill is the founder and producer of Broken Boxes Podcast. Dunnill works in audio composition, sound installation and performance-based art. She collaborates with artists globally, creating, acknowledging and performing work that inspires human connection, stands for intersectionality and advocates social and land justice.

*Together Apart, Queer Indigeneities: 2SQ/Indigiqueer Symposium Event*  
April 19, 20 and 21, 2019  
Full schedule online at [grunt.ca](http://grunt.ca)

*Together Apart* has been envisioned as a way of making and holding space for 2SQ/Indigiqueer folks to come together and to be in dialogue with one another so that we might centre the conversations we'd like to hear or that we feel have been absent in our communities. However, our intentions are also simple: to celebrate and enjoy one another's creativity and dedication to our practices, and to recognize one another in such a way that speaks across the distances we experience in our living and movement through our worlds.

*Together Apart* is supported by the First Peoples' Cultural Council and the City of Vancouver Creative City Strategies Grant Program.