

FROM THE HEART OF A CALIFORNIA NATIVE EXISTENCE

The photographs in this section represent the heart of a Native Son, Dugan Aguilar, who possess the talent and skill to document what he loves and what moves him. People, land, and animals are related to him through experience and cultural traditions. Dugan's photograph of an elk in the morning mist is a memory trigger for hunting trips with his dad and can be traced even further back to his ancestors who hunted in the eastern Sierra for food and clothing. The interdependence of people and animals is an age-old relationship of a natural world family.

Dugan photographs the "indigenous face" of California with the respectful warm heartedness of a father, brother, or son. He will tell you of his love for Native faces, faces distinctly California Indian. A whole generation of California Indian people have grown accustomed to seeing themselves, family, and friends in his photographs and Heyday's magazine, News from Native California. For those of us over fifty, this was not a childhood experience.

Dugan's memories of contentment, of family and cultural pride, are the root of his documentary style of photography. There is no pretense in the way he approaches and photographs people. Instead there is an emphasis on what their lives represent and their contributions. The reflective pose of an elder, whose lifetime spanned incredible change and who can call back to a time when English was not spoken. Dugan's portraits of veterans reflect his own experience of serving in the military during the Vietnam War and the wartime experiences of cousins, uncles, and his dad. Veterans are a self-identified extended family of men and women whose past military experiences and the memories of those who died shaped the people they became once home. The photographs in this collection are visual testimonies of a people who are born from the land and descended from a people who had to establish firm ground in a dramatically changing world.