

# IN SONG AND DANCE, WE EMBODY THE DREAMS OF OUR ANCESTORS

California Indian ceremony, ceremonial regalia (never to be considered costume), song, and dance represent a tenacious survival of indigenous California people and languages. Ceremony renews the connection of people to ancestral beliefs and cultural practice. Dugan Aguilar says that dancers and singers provide him with a connection to the earth, and through his photography he shares these connections. He respects those who go into the round-house to pray for the world we all inhabit. Writer and friend Darryl Babe Wilson gave him a Pit River phrase for a series of portraits of dancers and singers, “Wa’tu Ah’lo,” which means a connection of a person by the umbilical cord to the earth.

Dugan’s photographs demonstrate a living presence of spirit held by this spiritual umbilical cord fed by beliefs, culture, language, and ceremony by California Indian people. California Indian people embrace their family and traditions with a heart of love and defiance: it took defiance to hold onto what white dominant society belittled and ridiculed, but which California Indian families treasured. The generation of indigenous people who left this earth during the height of Western colonial expansion and military campaigns which cut a path of murder, rape, and disease had to wonder what would become of their world and would their descendants experience anything of what had once been.

When looking at the photographs in this section, one cannot help but be moved by the choices and actions of their descendants, who did not forget them and who refused to turn away from the old ways, the old knowledge. Instead, descendants gave new life to the world of their ancestors by learning to speak Native languages and practice traditions. Some could only work from wax cylinders or anthropological notes to restore what had been considered lost. Others, with the help of neighboring tribal traditional practitioners, brought back ceremonial traditions and regalia to their communities. These photographs represent the love from one generation to another and the persistence of California Indian people to continue to know the world as their ancestors did.