

WORDS OF PRAISE FOR DUGAN AGUILAR

There's a photo near the entrance to my office that I'm especially fond of, a portrait of my friend David Smith, a Pomo singer, flanked by five Pomo dancers rigged out in full regalia. They are posed at the entrance to the Chaw'se roundhouse in the Sierra foothills. The year is 1996. I was there with my daughter, Sadie, who was then interested in photography, and I had sent her off with Dugan Aguilar to see what she could learn from the master. Dugan posed the men, set everything up, and asked Sadie to click the camera. He later developed the film, enlarged it, and had it framed, and he presented it to me as a gift. The caption reads, "Photo by Sadie Cash Margolin." As far as I know, all she did was click the camera.

This anecdote sums up for me a quality that makes Dugan such a remarkable photographer and so well loved in the California Indian world: his generosity. He's not only generous with prints and credits, he generous in his judgement of people. He approaches his subject not as a conqueror, not as a hunter out to capture an image, but as a shy, diffident admirer. He treats everyone and everything with a deep and genuine respect. He seems more than willing to step out of the way. Watching him work, one has the feeling that he is not "taking" pictures—"taking" is such an aggressive word. He seems to set things up in such a way as to allow a picture to happen.

Yet make no mistake. In his quiet and persistent way, Dugan is a fighter, for some forty years now battling an enemy that has done everything it can do to destroy Indian people: silence. Silence has erased Indian names from the landscape, has all but written Indians out of the history of California, has expunged Indian presence from our daily consciousness. In the face of this pervasive silence, the tendency is to turn the dial up and make loud noises—photos that scream at you, overloaded with drama and intensity. Dugan has chosen another way. Rather than overdramatize, his photos whisper. They whisper to us with a quiet intimacy, revealing not only people's physical presence but hinting at their daydreams, suggesting something of the richness of their inner lives.

Such splendid photos! If you are unacquainted with the California Indian world, shed all of your preconceived notions and give yourself over to a new experience. For those immersed in this world, however, Dugan's photos are perhaps even more revelatory. These are portraits of our friends and neighbors, of people we know, or think we know, people glowing with the fullness of their being, people whose survival in this world is nothing short of amazing.

Look closely at the people here. Think about who they might be, about what their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents experienced. Imagine who their children and grandchildren might be. Look with your eyes and with your heart. She Sang Me a Good Luck Song is a record of a people who, against all odds, have survived.

— Malcolm Margolin, Heyday publisher

"To be a Native American artist is to know the traditional view of the world celebrated in ceremony and song. The myths, legends, and designs and symbols—plants, trees, animals, fish, and fowl—help establish a spiritual relationship to the Earth. Dugan Aguilar's family and the communal elders have helped him understand that difficulties and hardships can be overcome by love and patience. The images made by Dugan remind us that there are things that never change, and are worth remembering and believing."

—Frank LaPena, Nomtipom Wintu artist, professor emeritus,
California State University, Sacramento

"Dugan's photography embodies the ancient spirits of giving and sharing; it's visual poetry that resonates through time with the land and the people gently, yet assertively....Beautiful and insightful photographic storytelling for all people of the world."

—Larry McNeil, Tlingit photographer and scholar, professor
of photography, Boise State University