

SHE SANG ME A GOOD LUCK SONG

The California Indian Photographs of Dugan Aguilar

Photographer Dugan Aguilar comes from the Mountain Maidu, Washoe, Pit River, and Walker River Paiute people of California and Nevada. This one-man exhibition of selected photographs from the book of the same name, *She Sang Me a Good Luck Song: The California Indian Photographs of Dugan Aguilar* (Heyday Books), presents us with an authentic view of California Indian people, communities, and land with origins predating the arrival of British, Russian, Spanish, Mexican, and American colonizers. Aguilar makes visible the ties between that age-old origin and the contemporary existence of a “Native” California to those who choose to look through his lens.

The photographs in this exhibition and companion book are one Native man’s celebration of his extended California Indian family and community. The exhibition is divided into three fluid sections which offer space and time to reflect on the stories held in each image. From the Heart of a California Native World Existence speaks to the integration of ancestral ways and beliefs in the contemporary lives of California Indian people. Ancestral Design with Nature as the Medium calls attention to the dedication of California Indian people and communities to continue to practice the art and technology of basket weaving and architecture unique to Native California. In Song and Dance, We Embody the Dreams of our Ancestors honors individuals who continue the life ways their ancestors were born from.

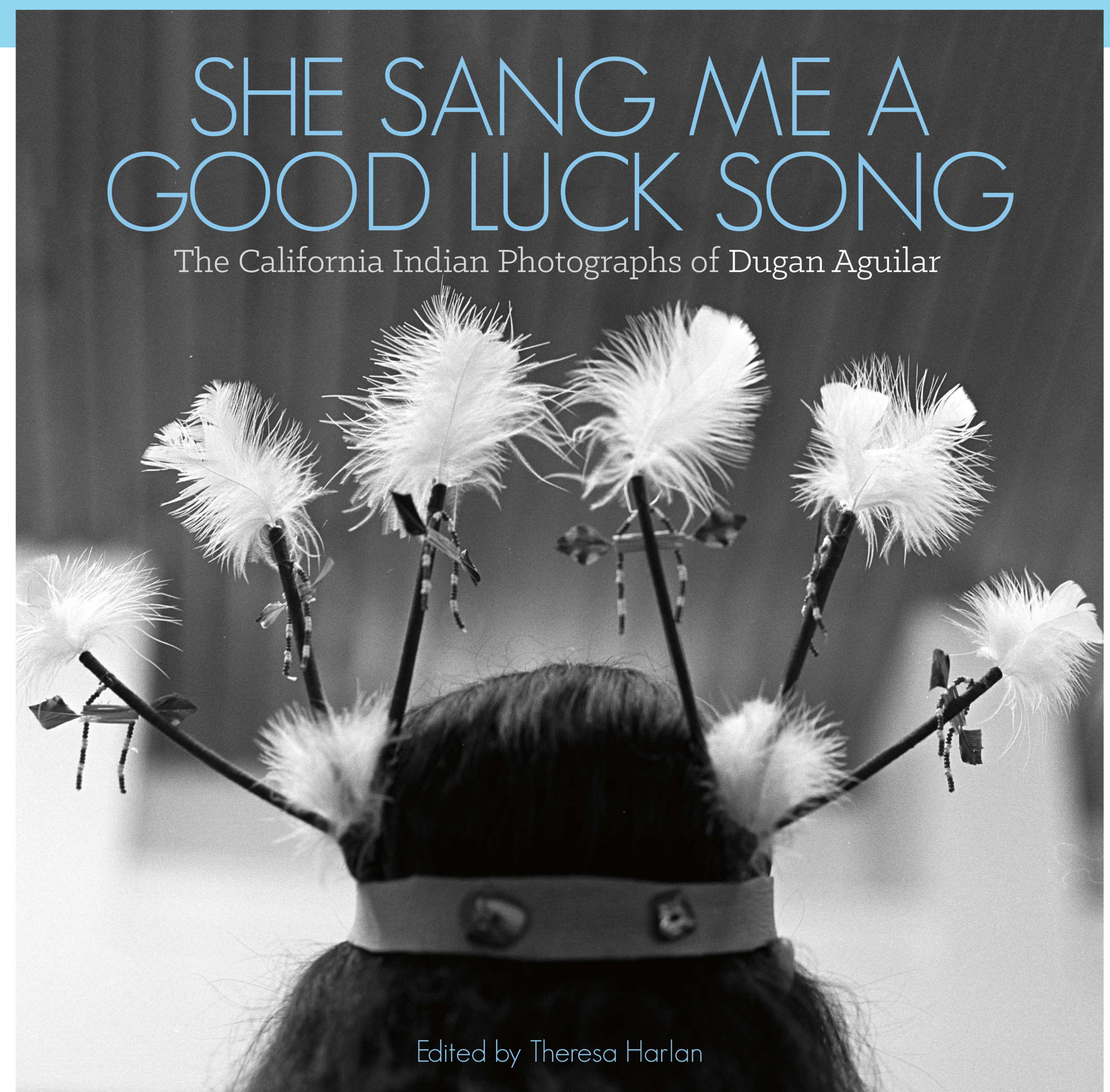
For almost forty years, Dugan picked up his camera and, with a gentle manner, traveled across California to photograph gatherings where California Indian people meet. His self-described purpose is to “show Natives alive and well”—a people who, it was predicted, would succumb to mission building, military campaigns, the infamous gold rush, and land speculator schemes. This mythical Native “demise” often portrayed in museum exhibitions, books, TV/film, and social media shows Native people in the past tense and/or doomed to perish because of their inability to comprehend and adapt to a Western industrial and technological world. Clearly Dugan’s photographs stand contrary to these backward notions.

The title of this exhibition and book, *She Sang Me a Good Luck Song*, is borrowed from the time when Dugan and family friend Lena Servilican (see Dugan’s photograph of her in this exhibition) met up with each other at a Stewart Indian School reunion in Nevada. He asked Lena if he could take her picture. She agreed. After the picture taking was done, Lena sang a Paiute good luck song for Dugan—a song which has followed him on his California Indian photo-journey. You are invited to enjoy the imagery and stories held in each photograph as this exhibition allows you to stand in Native California. Don’t miss all of the News From Native California issues in which Dugan’s images are cover images.

► Theresa Harlan, [curator](#)

Harlan is an independent curator and writer of contemporary Native American art and photography.

She curated the traveling exhibition (2007–2011) *Sing Me Your Story, Dance Me Home: Art and Poetry from Native California* for Heyday. Published essays include “A View of Our Home, Tomales Bay, Calif.: Portrait of a Coast Miwok Family, 1930–1945” in *Our People, Our Land, Our Images: Indigenous Photographers* (Heyday, 2006), and “Indigenous Photographies: A Space for Indigenous Realities” in *Native Nations: Journeys in American Photography* (Barbican Art Gallery, London: Corporation of London, 1998). Born in San Francisco, she is the adopted daughter of Elizabeth Campigli Harlan (Coast Miwok) and John Harlan. By birth she is Jemez Pueblo and Kewa Pueblo of New Mexico.



This exhibition is based on the book *She Sang Me a Good Luck Song* published by Heyday (Berkeley, CA). We are grateful for the support and participation of the following people and organizations:

Maidu Museum (Roseville, CA) for agreeing to be the first host site, and the Friends of the Roseville Public Library for providing support for the printing of the book.

Heyday staff Lindsie Bear and Ashley Ingram (design) for their consultation and work on the planning of the exhibition.

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- Dugan Aguilar and Theresa Harlan

