

# A NIGHT WITH THE SHADOW CATCHER

By Julie Leidel

There are some moments in life where time stops moving forward and something starts to stir from a place of connection deep inside. Objects can take you back in time, and transport you into the past. I've felt this connection with the Arts & Crafts Movement many times as I touched my first Van Briggles Lorelei, sat under the light of a Dirk Van Erp lamp, and turned the pages of *The Motto Book* by Elbert Hubbard and the Roycrofters.

Tonight, at the Winter Symposium, I was a time traveler once again to see the past come to life through the photos of Edward Curtis (1886-1952). The timing of the Arts & Crafts Movement was synchronous with the rise of photographic techniques in America. I was in awe, however, at how Paul Unks became a human conduit into the very heart of the late 19th and early 20th century American West. Through both his photogravure tutorial, and keynote presentation *The Life and Times of the Shadow Catcher*, Paul was able to take me back in time and make the unfamiliar, familiar: make the past the present, and make the strangers in the photos become like ancestral family.



Photogravure  
Technique  
Tutorial with  
Paul Unks



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I brought some easels and an art wall to help set up for the evening, and at the beginning of the night, as I helped hang the many framed gold tones and photogravure prints, I was struck by the physical beauty of them. The way the light would hit the gold tones glistened back at me with the precious metals that were used in the printing process. The soft and muted sepia tones brought warmth, and the light feels to be emanating from the artwork itself. The photogravures were rich with texture and the indentation of the plate on each paper was a lovely detail to enjoy. Each frame was so elegantly chosen to fit the subject matter. Quartersawn oak frames made by Tim Holton, Dard Hunter and Warren Hile Studio, brought about a perfect balance to each piece. I suspect because I'm an artist, I had purely an artistic eye at the beginning of the night, looking at the line qualities, the composition, the depth of field, and the light that Curtis had captured. My perspective was widened over the next few hours to be sure.

As Paul taught us the photogravure techniques, I became more and more amazed at the entire process. The hours of detailed work that goes into the creation of each print is astounding. The multitude of steps there are to create the film, the copper plate, the oil mixtures of three tones



Paul Unks next to a photo of Edward Curtis

As Paul began speaking of the setting and times in which a young Curtis set out to record and capture a vanishing nation, the air in the room changed. I was no longer thinking of details and process of printing, I was captivated by the amazing storyteller in front of me. Paul shared with us the multifaceted life that Curtis had as a historian, anthropologist, ethnologist, author, and photographer. Much deeper than that however, was the passion Curtis had for telling the story of the tribal nations that he saw slipping away before his very eyes. The passion to connect and recognize this universal connection--Mitakuye Oyasin (pronounced Mee-tah-koo-yay O-yah-seen)--which means "We Are All Related" in Lakota embodies the spirit of both the work of Edward Curtis and Paul Unks. As we saw the photos of the raw and real Native Americans, we heard in great detail, the names and stories of the people in the photos. We learned of the research Paul has done to connect with the living ancestors of the people in these photos and how he has gained many new insights and stories to add to what Curtis had brought together over a century ago.

We learned how a granddaughter could be brought to tears when presented with a photo of her grandmother, "The Blanket Weaver". Paul discovered the name of a Hopi man photographed that would have been lost to history without his efforts to connect with descendants. Wari's photo

was particularly impactful for me because I learned that his soft, pained portrait reflected the agony of just having his daughters forcefully taken away to a white school 30 miles away just hours before it was taken.

"The Storm" - Apache shows four on horseback leaving their home forever, with a woman looking back over her shoulder one last time, the soft details of her face full of emotion. The photo where a young girl stood outside of her "play house" teepee, and the photo of Whistle Smoke, her loving father that made her a toy home to remind them both that fun, play, and love must still exist even as The Indian Removal Act of President Andrew Jackson was upon them.

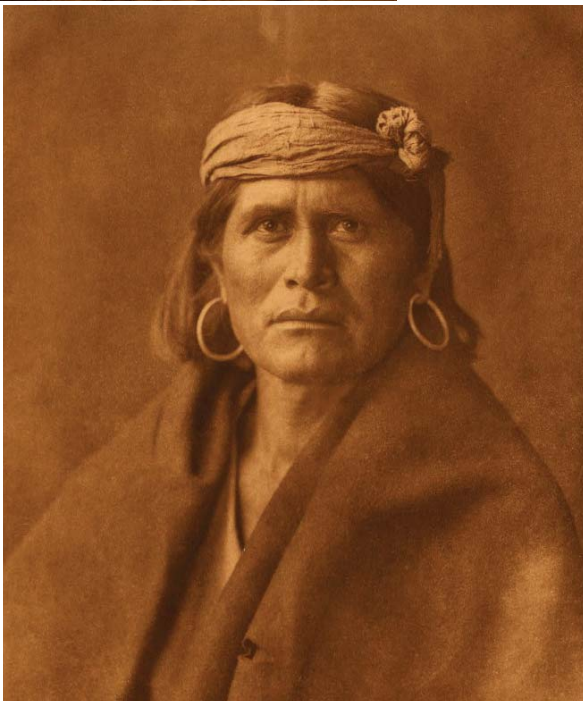
The room was alive with the past. The voices were vivid and humble. The stories were poignant and brought tears to my eyes more than once. As we ended the night and I helped pack up Paul's prints and gold tones, I now was familiar with the faces in these photos. I knew their song and story. I looked at them now as if they stood before me in the room. I felt a personal and universal connection to them. I find much gratitude in the fact that these tribal people can live on forever because of Edward Curtis *The Shadow Catcher*, and the passionate work continued by Paul Unks, *The Brother of The Shadows*. 🌟



"The Blanket Weaver"  
Najavo



"The Storm" Apache



"A Walpi Man" Hopi:  
Recently identified by descendants as "Wari" (pronounced Wah -Jee)



"A Piegan Play Tipi"



Father "Whistle Smoke"