

49 Minutes of Fame will open on November 5th and run until December 14th, 2021 at the Red Cloud Opera House in Red Cloud, Nebraska.

Wolf and Ruleaux spoke about his work with Unceded Artist Collective and 49 Minutes of Fame, as well as his disciplined working process he shared on social media during the early days of the pandemic.

MW: I read in your [KIOS interview](#) you said, "I wanted to kind of tie that idea of unceded territory, unceded land, land that does not belong to the ideas of settler colonialism, land that does not belong to white supremacy; but a people who belong to that land are the folks who make up this collective. "My understanding is that your name (Unceded Artist Collective) also opens the collective up to more Indigenous people even if their tribes are not federally recognized. Could you tell me more about this?"

NR: The US government wanted fewer Indians so they could have more land to steal, so they created this idea of blood quantum that takes away the numbers and percentage of like what you are basically, and you have to reach a certain number to be federally recognized. It kind of varies by tribal Nation. There are many tribes that faced settler colonialism earlier on who are not federally recognized anymore, or you know, the Ponca tribe of Nebraska was not recognized for a long time and they had to really fight for it with Sen. Ernie chambers. There is this big history, this really messed up history, of white supremacy erasing Native people bit by bit by bit, fraction by fraction.

But it also keeps Indigenous people who are just as Native as me from being able to connect their identity with what they do, and that is pretty rough. We wanted to open up, it is important that Indigenous people come together, but it's also important that our differences and what makes each of us unique, how our stories are different, depending on where you are and when and where you began your interaction with settler colonialism. Making us not just a Native group but an Indigenous group opens up the door for Indigenous people not just from America but first nations people in Canada, all across Turtle Island is really what we wanted to open up to, so the door is not closed to people with indigenous roots from Mexico, or Canada, or South America or anywhere here. That's how the idea grew.

Right at our formation the **Arts Omaha S***** went down ([Arts Omaha + The White Supremacy Culture of Omaha's Cultural Sector | by Brigitte McQueen | Medium](#)). This big brother org of some of the biggest hitters in our city, were actively working to have an art club that excluded people, that excluded people of color- specifically The Union (for Contemporary Art) and specifically a black-owned business.

While that was going down I kept thinking about how this area especially needs more Native representation, needs more Native space, needs to value Native lives more. The only way we do that is by taking up space, and having a support system for ourselves and where others can find us, and learn from us and work with us and pay us. At the same time, it was clear from what happened with Arts Omaha that any sort of barriers to this group from folks who should belong to it or folks with a common cause, common heritage, common struggle, shouldn't be excluded. So that's why we really wanted to be sure that it wasn't just federally recognized Natives and it wasn't just Native Americans but Indigenous people from all across Turtle Island. That being said, we want all those folks who are here too. For now I want to take all the glorious, Indigenous talent that is in the Metro and team us up. Be friendly and create a community, and start to take up space together.

MW: For the future of the collective you said public and outdoor art is something you are looking forward to doing more of. In one of the interviews I read you mentioned that having a collaborative space is a goal.

NR: Yeah, that is definitely what I want for the future. The honest truth is that we haven't come up with funding. We were supplied by a grant by Amplify Arts to put up a show and we did it, and I used the money from the grant to create a website for us for a year (uncededartist.com) and right now that website is kind of the biggest thing, along with our social media which I am running too. The website has a directory where folks can find us, find our individual websites, find out our individual skill sets and reach out if they want to hire us, or collaborate. Right now we're kind of like an information source and resources for artists and for people in the city, and also for Native people. That's the big thing that I need folks to know, this collective was made because Native people in Omaha kept running into other Natives in Omaha who were so excited to see another Native doing something in the arts and wanted to see more of each other and of our work and share and collaborate. You know, taking up space isn't just the big idea to make people understand that we are still here, but it is to have support, to see other Native people and go 'oh man I am not alone here.'

Education is really important to us, and the next generation of Indigenous artists is really important to us. That is why we made sure to have two young artists in our show. If we grew and grew and grew, I know as someone who likes teaching, who comes from a family of teachers, I'd like that to be something we pick up, something we grow with.

John Trudell is from Omaha, and was one of the leaders of AIM (American Indian Movement) for years, an actor, a musician, a poet, occupied Alcatraz with his wife and his baby and a really influential positive person for many members of the Unceded Artist Collective. I've had discussions with folks about trying to do a public piece here somewhere of Trudell or his words. I've reached out to his estate about source image, and permission and their blessing to do it. So that's the next thing I want to do. And hopefully the idea of Unceded Artist Collective is that anytime a member has something like that they want to do, they can reach out to me or to each other through the collective and team up on it. It's something I don't have much public art experience but I know there are collective members that do, it's about drawing on those

resources and supporting each other. Outside of that it's kind of about finding out what the next opportunity is, and still actively recruiting is something that is really important to me. I know that there are several folks from Lincoln who caught the show and really loved what Unceded is doing and are interested in being a part of it, so expanding our reach possibly to Lincoln but staying supportive of the folks in this area is another possible future. It's also tough, there's no money for this. We are all working people with very busy lives, complex lives, in a very uncertain time, still in a global pandemic. It's all free time and fun. It takes the community that we build with it for anything to succeed, and if that support group isn't really there then it is a pretty uphill battle to get next steps going.

MW: You made a cool poster that you said is for a Native Pop-Art show (49 Minutes of Fame)?

NR: A lot of Native pop artists, and Native artists in general who I really look up to who do amazing work are in the show. 49 Minutes of Fame is a Native Pop Art Show in Red Cloud Nebraska. It is part of the Willa Cather Foundation. It's going to be in their Red Cloud opera house, and it's going to be really cool. I was really honored to be asked to make the poster.

The inspiration for it, it all kind of happened at the same time, 49 minutes of fame comes from code for the after party of a pow wow. That was kind of in my mind.

I was thinking of what image I wanted to make, and I ended up with the dancer stepping out of this painting. I got to go to the Atka Lakota museum in Chamberlain South Dakota recently. They have 12 paintings of my Grandfather's, and they let me go into the collections to see them. He recently passed, and I was in the area and it was really powerful to be able to see a lot of these pieces. Some of them I had never seen before, I had only seen prints of, and the actual physical things were in my hands. It meant a lot.

He did a lot of traditional images of bison, that really inspired most of my bison stuff. He did a lot of pow wow dancers and traditional imagery. He has this one, at this museum they have a very large watercolor of this dancer and this elder, who I have seen in different paintings Grandpa had done, but I had never seen this one, which was a very large version of this man.

I was kind of thinking about the Joslyn's Western wing. There is [this painting](#) (N. C. Wyeth (American, 1882–1945), *Illustration for Fisk Cord Tires*, 1919.) a very famous painting- it was an ad for something way back in the day. I think it's a tire commercial.

MW: and the mud's coming up?

NR: It's smoke from the back of the Studebaker or something. There are some native people on a horse. And if you read the description that the Joslyn has about the painting, it talks about like ...'this humorous depiction is about Western society leaving Natives in the dust' and even the description I think could use an update.

That entire wing in general is this kind of experience of watching people fetishize and experience this stereotyping of Native people that has led to a lot of our modern day problems and it's in these beautiful pieces of art, you know.

Part of genocide, part of the cultural genocide that happened is a an umbrellaing of all Native nations into the concepts of Indians. Even our Unceded show is called, " The People, The Human Beings." There is a quote from John Trudell, an AIM activist saying we are older than the concept of Indigenous or Native, we're just human beings. And that is taken away by making, painting us like savages, and the Washington football team's old name, and that happens through Hollywood, and through poor and wrong and incorrect and stereotypical representation of native people for years and years and years, to where people who support Native mascots will lie to themselves and somehow convince themselves that they are somehow honoring Native people with it.

I was thinking a lot about how modern Native pop art kind of turns a lot of those stereotypes on their heads or reclaims them. And I wanted this Banksy-esque, street art/ pop art-y , able to make many copies of stencil, of this dancer stepping out of one of those classical paintings, and that was kind of the idea of this image.

MW: Having both artists and teachers in your family, does it feel like something really deep in you that you'll continue to share?

NR: When my child was born, when we were family planning, we talked about how I wanted to be a dad and I wanted to take care of him. I have worked with kids from pre- k through college age. My partner was doing well enough to kind of support us and I could be child support and be a stay at home dad. While that was going on, I quickly found out that whatever goes on inside of me here (points to head) or here (points to heart) needs to be let out in some way. I started doing more visual art, I have always done visual art for me. It was around that time that I started taking it more seriously and just like drawings turned into complex drawings, turned into paintings turned into more complex paintings, turned into switching mediums, turned into printmaking and it just kind of grew and grew and grew as i just kept trying to find more outlets with which to express myself.

At the same time I was spending a lot of time I was at home, and my grandfather who was retired and dealing with different health issues and stuff was also at home and so we started talking on the phone a lot and it was through that that I started to take reconnecting with my identity more seriously and incorporating my Native identity into my work more seriously. It was through his encouragement and support that I ended up submitting work to the Red Cloud Indian Art Show back on Pine Ridge, and I've done that for two years. He was like one of the first artists to ever show there, and showed there for years. He was a big staple in that community, back on the reservation of my people, and it meant a lot to me. That was the springboard back into myself and that journey started before Covid.

It's clear that everyone has experienced this thing (the pandemic) in different ways. It has been something that has completely shifted my reality and outlook on life. It changed what I believe matters to me. It made me reevaluate things that concerned me or took up space in my brain and my life that can now be filled with forms of peace, time spent with family, time spent with the land, time spent with art, time spent with my community, time spent helping others and trying to do what i can in a smaller, local controlled way. It is after what feels like a lifetime of misplaced values and misaligned goals, also tied with what seems like a lifetime of beating my head against the wall furious about large national or global problems that frankly I can work hard to influence but without fixing things locally...I now realize it takes fixing what you can fix within arm's reach before you can get the world to get fixed.

Leading into Unceded Artist Collective I was working with Art Stock here to kind of grow the arts and culture for the better. I wanted to make sure that we were hearing as many Native voices as possible so I started interviewing Native folks in the community, artists and art lovers about their experience in the art and culture sector in Omaha. Some folks say, 'ask me whatever.' I was talking to someone who said, ' we Natives love to talk, ask me I'll tell ya but you better listen to what I say and then do something with it, otherwise, why are we talking?'

And then I've talked to other people who are like 'no, I'm tired. I'm tired and I do not want to educate you. It is your responsibility to go find books, to learn what wrongs have been done, and it is not my job to educate anybody.' and as an educator it is a very tricky ground. That influence definitely comes from my father who is a retired teacher, my brother is currently a teacher, and I have uncles who teach. My Grandfather was an award winning teacher, he won an award from the state for his years as an art educator. And it is something that I will definitely keep doing, and it is something I do everyday. Whether it be trying to teach my son to say I'm sorry, or teaching my son the difference between a duck and a goose, or trying to teach someone why 700+ missing indigenous women should be given as much attention as one missing white woman.