

Press release

Film & Video

Sky Hopinka: Fainting Spells



September 18, 2025 – January 18, 2026

Sky Hopinka: Fainting Spells

- Dates: September 18, 2025 – January 18, 2026
- Curator: Geaninne Gutiérrez-Guimarães
- Film & Video gallery (103)

From September 18, 2025, to January 18, 2026, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao will present *Sky Hopinka: Fainting Spells*, the last exhibition in this year's Film & Video program.

Fainting Spells (2018), a film by the artist Sky Hopinka (Ferndale, Washington, 1984), explores the creation mythology of *Xqwj̓ska*, or Indian Pipe Plant, also known as “ghost flower” or “corpse plant.” This medicinal plant is traditionally used by the Ho-Chunk people of Wisconsin to revive those who have fainted. It is also emblematic of Indigenous identity, knowledge, and culture and can be linked to the cycles of life and death and the spiritual world. Despite his extensive research, Hopinka could not unearth an origin myth for the plant and instead created one to engage with and reclaim the practice of mythkeepers and mythmaking in his own Indigenous culture.

This three-channel video begins with a handwritten poem that moves across scenes showing expansive colorful landscapes accompanied by lyrical music. The poem, a printed version of which is also showcased at the exhibition, speaks directly to *Xqwj̓ska*, who later appears personified as a cloaked figure and leads viewers on a walk through the spirit world in different states of consciousness. Filmed in Washington, Colorado, Wisconsin, Oregon, and New Mexico, the film creates a dreamlike visual narrative by collaging together music, poetry, image, sound, and color, inviting viewers into a unique immersive experience created specifically for the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao's Film & Video gallery.

Sky Hopinka explores Indigenous culture, history, and traditional beliefs through themes like identity, memory, language, and myth. A member of the Ho-Chunk Nation of Wisconsin and a descendent of the Pechanga Band of Luiseño people (California), the Pacific Northwest holds a special place in his artwork, especially as he delves into investigating notions of homeland, personhood, and landscape. His films reflect on the complexities of contemporary Indigenous life by blending non-narrative filmmaking and abstract imagery with an ethnopoetic approach—a response against the ethnographic gaze that has long objectified Indigenous cultures in moving image.

Ethnopoetic cinema examines themes of cultural identity, displacement, and the everyday experience through a combination of documentary and experimental filmmaking techniques, thereby emphasizing the artistic and performative aspects of cultural expression. At the core of Hopinka's work is a profound commitment to storytelling through his Indigenous perspective, a narrative that has long been marginalized within the Western canon. As the artist explains, “Part of the desire I had to make films was to tell Indigenous stories that were unique to my own community and my own identity.”



Sky Hopinka. Biography

Sky Hopinka was born and raised in Ferndale, Washington, and spent a number of years in Palm Springs and Riverside, California; Portland, Oregon; and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In Portland, he studied and taught chinuk wawa, a language indigenous to the Pacific Northwest, and began to take an interest in documentary filmmaking. In Milwaukee, he enrolled in a graduate degree in experimental filmmaking and discovered unconventional ways of documentary filmmaking that enabled him to uniquely express his interest in Indigenous languages and Native American life today. He currently lives in Brooklyn, New York, and is an assistant professor in the Department of Art, Film, and Visual Studies at Harvard University, Cambridge.

Hopinka's work has played at prestigious festivals including Sundance Film Festival, Utah; Toronto International Film Festival, Ontario; Courtisane Festival, Ghent; Festival Punto de Vista, Pamplona; and the New York Film Festival, New York. His work has also been recognized internationally in numerous solo exhibitions at institutions like the Center for Curatorial Studies–Bard College, Annandale-On-Hudson, New York (2020); Saint Louis Art Museum, St. Louis (2020); The Museum of Modern Art, New York (2021); LUMA, Arles, France (2022); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2023); Frye Art Museum, Seattle (2024); and Kunsthalle Friart, Switzerland (2024). Moreover, his work was included in the Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2017); the Gwangju Biennial, South Korea (2023); and the Göteborg International Biennial, Sweden (2023).

Sky Hopinka's films, videos, and photographs are in the collections of some of the most important museums in the world. Additionally, Hopinka was a fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University, Cambridge (2018–19); Sundance Art of Nonfiction Fellow, Sundance Institute, Los Angeles (2019); Guggenheim Fellow for Creative Arts (2020); Forge Project Fellow (2021); and a MacArthur Fellow (2022). His multiple awards include the Herb Alpert Award in the Arts, Film, & Video (2020); the Infinity Award in Art from the International Center of Photography (2022); and the Persistence of Vision Award from the San Francisco International Film Festival (2025).

Educational activities:

Opening lecture (September 18)

Sky Hopinka will share central themes of his artwork and his approach to filmmaking by screening and discussing three videos in context with *Fainting Spells* (2018) with a Q&A to follow the artist's presentation.

Film & Video (gallery 103)

The Film & Video gallery is dedicated to video art, video installations, and the moving image as key media in understanding the art of our time. Since its opening in 2014, the Film & Video gallery has displayed works by unique artists such as Christian Marclay, Ragnar Kjartansson, Fiona Tan, Ken Jacobs, Amie Siegel, Pierre Huyghe, Michael Snow, Javier Téllez, Diana Thater, Allora & Calzadilla, William Kentridge, Alex Reynolds, Sharon Lockhart, Monira Al Qadiri, The Otolith Group, Marine Hugonnier, Metahaven, Anthony McCall, Vito Acconci, and Sergio Prego, among others.

Cover image



Sky Hopinka: Fainting Spells

Fainting Spells, 2018

Three-channel color video, with sound, 9 min. 45 sec.

A.P. 1/2, edition of 3

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Purchased with funds contributed by the Photography Council, 2021

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Press Images for
Sky Hopinka: Fainting Spells
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Sky Hopinka: Fainting Spells

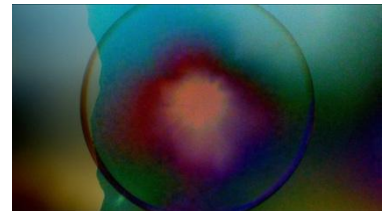
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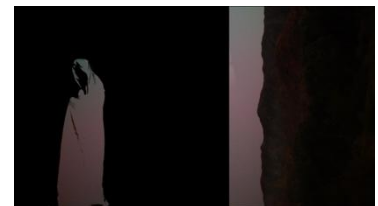
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Sky Hopinka (b. 1984, Ferndale, Washington)
Courtesy the artist
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