

IMMA Collection: Elaine Reichek

American artist Elaine Reichek is concerned with issues of national and cultural identity, which she investigates from a position informed by feminist theory and practice.

Reichek says of her interest in found images that 'pictures white Americans and Europeans have made about Native American cultures – ethnographic photographs, nineteenth-century paintings, museum dioramas, and backyard snapshots – reveal far more about the culture that produced them, than the one they purport to show.'

Using a monochrome palette suggested by the black and white photograph, the figures represented in the images are recreated by Reichek in wool by hand-knitting. As artist and writer Jimmie Durham describes Reichek believes the image; she believes the crosses in the headdress are wooden, so creates a wooden cross on her knitted figure. Proving the impossibility of documentary truth which is the lie of the photographic and filmic image.

Reichek found the images while researching in The Museum of Natural History in New York. The photographs were made by Edward Curtis (1868–1952), probably around 1906 as part of his grand study 'The North American Indian'. All the volumes have now been digitized and can be found online. Curtis staged his images, sometimes adding 'accessories', but they are still considered a truly valuable resource for the study of Native Americans.

This work was acquired for the IMMA Collection on the occasion of the group exhibition *From Beyond the Pale*. It toured as part of Reichek's solo exhibition *Home Rule*, at IMMA, and the Orchard Gallery, Derry in 1993.