

Wolf Nation, 2018

Video, color, sound; 9:59 min.

Soundtrack by Laura Ortman

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase with funds from the Director's Discretionary Fund 2019.327

In *Wolf Nation*, Alan Michelson transforms webcam footage of red wolves, a critically endangered indigenous species, into a meditation on displacement, the environment, and survival. The video links the eradication of the wolves from their extensive historic range with the colonial dispossession and removal of the Munsees, the Wolf Clan of the Lenape people, from their homelands, which included large portions of present-day New York and New Jersey. The video's color and wide format refer to the Native tradition of wampum belts—woven sashes of purple and white beads carrying solemn messages used in diplomacy. Michelson's projection assumes the form of a wampum belt for the digital age, with moving pixels standing in for beads. As a Turtle Clan member of the Mohawk Nation, Michelson affirms Indigenous environmental practice and its philosophy of kinship with the natural world.

The soundtrack is composed by White Mountain Apache composer and musician Laura Ortman.



550 Access

Shattemuc, 2009

Video, color, sound; 31 min.

Soundtrack by Laura Ortman

Collection of the artist

Shattemuc is titled after one of the Indigenous names of the Hudson River. Sailing at night, Alan Michelson shines a marine searchlight onto the land, echoing the nineteenth-century Hudson River Night Line tour boats, which pointed spotlights on passing local monuments such as Grant's Tomb.

Appropriating and reversing the colonial gaze, Michelson uses a spectral beam to trace part of Henry Hudson's 1609 exploration of the river from Hook Mountain to Haverstraw, where Hudson's crew engaged in a bloody clash with the local Rumanchenancks. The wooded shoreline gives way to an industrial quarry, luxury housing, a village, and a power plant, tracing the river's trajectory from Indigenous land to contemporary landscape.

The soundtrack is composed and performed by White Mountain Apache composer and musician Laura Ortman.



551 Access

Alan Michelson with Steven Fragale

Town Destroyer, 2019

Wallpaper and augmented reality, with video, color, sound; 5:57 min.

Collection of the artist

Town Destroyer is an augmented reality installation addressing the Sullivan Expedition, George Washington's scorched-earth campaign against the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois Confederacy of Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and Tuscarora Nations). When activated through the downloadable app, a bust of Washington—represented on a frieze of scenic wallpaper in his Virginia estate, Mount Vernon—becomes a screen onto which a challenging history unfolds.

Pressured to choose sides in the Revolutionary War, the Haudenosaunee fought alongside both British and American forces. Washington, known as Hanödaga:yas or Town Destroyer to them, dispatched armies who burned and plundered sixty of their villages, including hundreds of houses, farms, and orchards, forcing thousands to flee as refugees. In the aftermath of the war, the Haudenosaunee were dispossessed of millions of acres of their homelands, which were seized and incorporated into the bulk of what is now New York State.

To download the app, go to whitney.org/AR or scan the QR code. To access the video, open the app and hold your device in front of the bust of George Washington. Turn on your ringer for spatial audio, which will begin after one minute. Closed captioning (CC) is available.



Alan Michelson with Steven Fragale

Sapponckanikan (Tobacco Field), 2019
Augmented reality



Collection of the artist

Four hundred years ago, when the Dutch arrived in what is now Manhattan, there was a Lenape fishing and planting site called Sapponckanikan (tobacco field), near what is currently the foot of Gansevoort Street close to the Museum. The tobacco the Lenape grew here was not the commercial strain cultivated for the European, and later the American market, and it was not casually smoked. It was, and remains, a sacred herb used ceremonially by Native people across Turtle Island, the Indigenous name for North America.

Sapponckanikan (Tobacco Field), an interactive, site-specific augmented-reality installation in the lobby, recalls and honors the Lenape and their tobacco field. To download the app, go to whitney.org/AR or scan the QR code. To access the work, open the app and a circle of tobacco plants cycling through the seasons will appear in the lobby.

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ALAN MICHELSON