

The Art of Erasure & A Conversation with Monty Little

Larry Abbott

Monty Little was born in Tuba City, Arizona, in 1983. He is Salt clan, born for Manygoats clan. After high school he attended Arizona State University but in 2004 joined the Marine Corps. He writes that he “was stationed with 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines where he deployed with the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit to various countries in Southeast Asia in 2006, and to Ar Ramadi, Iraq in 2007. . . [he] served as a fireteam leader, overseeing three Marines in a squad, while deployed in Iraq for a little over seven months.” In Iraq he led a unit to set up FOBs and rooftop surveillance. Little was Honorably Discharged from the Marine Corps in 2008.

His work is not a literal depiction of his military experience but is more evocative of the personal impact of the war as he processes his experiences. His work reveals his Navajo sensibility, his war experiences, and his personal vision as an artist, and is a continual process of discovery and invention; each new series revealing fresh visions and self-discovery. Little notes that he “began to paint and print what he wrote, using each medium as erasure, where unsettling truths reveal personal components and texture is integral, yet disruptive to find his past chaotic.”

He also writes that he finds “clarity to be marginal. Series of instinctual impressions are blanketed upon themselves to hide or unfold emotion and frailness. I use multiple mediums to intertwine shifts in dialects, but try to capture an openness that reflects past and current landscape.”

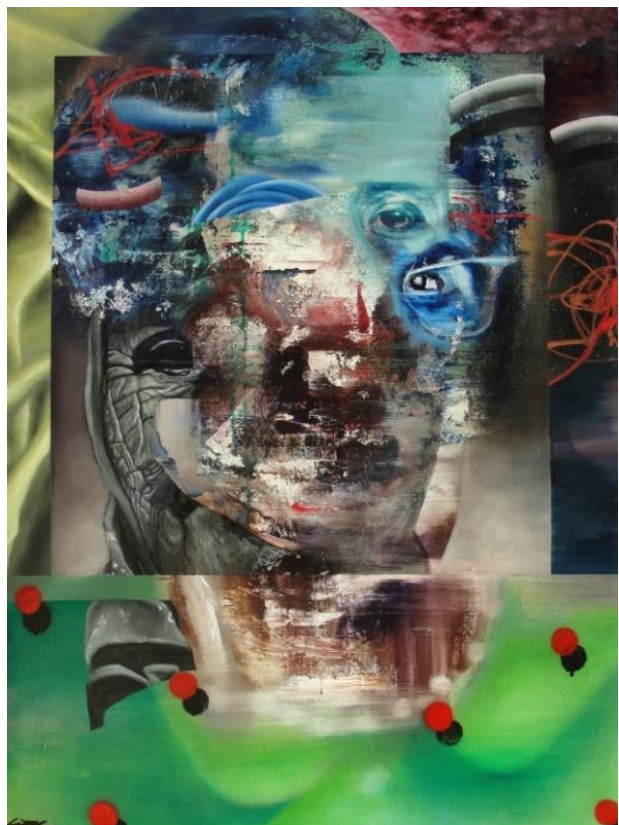


Precursor IV

Followed up more radically in the *Precursor* series (2016), the surrealistic portraits of blurred and rearranged faces connote the split self, alienated and disoriented.

Gunfire Muted Light 01 (2017), part of a series, again offers us a portrait, but diagonal strips across the face remove any sense of a literal, identifiable image. Each work

One theme expressed in his work is that of displacement and alienation, felt as both a Native American and a veteran. In *Figures Disfigure Into a Calm Memory* (2015) two partial faces blend into one (or is it one face twisted horizontally a few degrees?), with a pair of eyes and one mouth. The two oblique noses make the face appear to look in different directions at the same time.



Precursor V

in these series forces the viewer to reconcile (if possible) apparently discordant, even competing, elements in order to see the coherent whole.



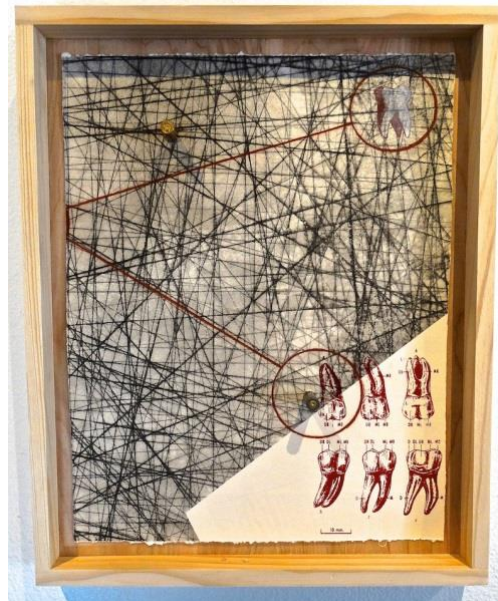
Gunfire Muted Light 01

depict on one side a section of a target with shell casings. Others in the series have embedded casings.



Alpha

A number of Little's collages use abstract elements but more clearly suggest his military experience, with titles like "Alpha," "Bravo," "Charlie," "Delta," "Sierra," and "Tango." The latter two, collages on board,



Charlie

Little's work has been nationally and internationally recognized. He was a three-year Tulsa Art Fellow sponsored by the George Kaiser Family Foundation. He has been showing his work since 2010, primarily in New Mexico, but also in Native art exhibitions in Russia and Italy. He was recognized as a SITE

scholar in Santa Fe, and has held an artist residency at the Venice Biennale through Marist College. Most recently, some of his monotypes were part of the *Original Warrior* exhibit at the National Veterans Art Museum in Chicago.

In addition to his artwork in various media, Little is also a writer (in fact, he began in the Creative Writing program at the Institute of American Indian Arts). His chapbook of a long poem, *Overhang of Cumulus*, in progress, reveals hidden similarities between apparent disparate images through juxtaposition, thus creating unexpected connections:

Bullet shells drop on splintered
floors to mother's
cadence in her jingle dress.

The sections of the poem are interspersed with occasional notebook entries from Ramadi and New Mexico which reflect on his experience in-country and also how his time in Iraq affects his return home:

Route Michigan, littered with trash and IEDs, catches me off guard when I drive today. Loose dirt on highways reminds me of buried artillery rounds. Each morning I expect prayers from the minaret over gunfire.

—Santa Fe, New Mexico. 09.01.15

Further, some of the images and descriptions in the poem and notebook entries become translated into artwork. The painting *Unaccompanied Voices* (2015) refers to an incident in Iraq:

8 casualties in the battalion this week. Whiskey company took the extent of damage. We responded to the firefight. Mortars landed around us. Fire by small arms. A suicide bomber almost took a friend's life. The insurgent's body everywhere. Where does the blood go when that happens?

—Ar Ramadi, Iraq. 07.11.07

In her essay "Indigenous OEF/OIF Veterans Express War Experience Through Art," about veteran Native artists Dante-Biss Grayson, Miridith Campbell, and Little, Stacy Pratt notes that "All three artists agree that stereotypes of veteran art can be insidious and limiting, just like stereotypes of Native art, with which they must also contend" (*First American Art Magazine*, November 12, 2018, online <http://firstamericanartmagazine.com/veterans-art/>). As the art of veterans evolves, it will take on new forms of expression and present new images, some less explicitly "veteran" than others. Meaning may be more deeply embedded in the image, and on the surface not appear to reference a military or combat experience. But as Emily Dickinson stated in poem 1263 "Tell all the truth but tell it slant—/Success in Circuit lies . . . /The Truth must dazzle gradually/Or every man be blind—"

A Conversation with Monty Little

Larry Abbott (LA): You studied architecture at Arizona State University, but left for the Marines.

What led to your decision?

Monty Little (ML): I graduated from Tuba City High School, in Arizona, and I wanted to go to an art school after graduation, but my parents didn't want me to go that route because they didn't think that would lead to a job worthy enough to spend all this money to get a quote unquote, "worthless degree." So, I wanted to find a major which was similar to art, so I focused on architecture. I was really fascinated with the theory of architecture, all of the concepts and ways of constructing a building. I was interested in the creative side. So while I was doing all of these projects, the models, for my studio classes, I would turn on the television and see the war in Iraq just unfolding in front of my eyes. There were troops, both Marines and the Army, going down the streets in Iraq and reporters were reporting first hand. Many of the journalists were becoming war correspondents. They were basically in a war zone too. I was intrigued by that. At the time I was a student, I was looking at my bank account; it was going down, and I thought of doing something a little bit more with my life. I was, you might say, naïve, and really curious about what it would be like to patrol the streets of Iraq. So, I went into the recruiting station and I signed up for the Marines, and I requested infantry right away.

LA: How old were you then?

ML: I was 20 at the time when I enlisted.

LA: And how long were you in the service?

ML: I went in in 2004 and I was honorably discharged in 2008. About four years.

LA: How do you think your military experience in Iraq influenced or had an impact on your writing or your art?

ML: In architecture school I always carried around a small sketch book and I would doodle or sketch little things, so I always had that mentality. When I was in the Marine Corps I would carry around a little black book, and I started to really miss school. When I was in Iraq, I would sit alone at night, think about school and visualize being in the classroom, so I would start writing in the black book. I was always interested in words. I would pair words together in a sentence, which would make no sense at all if you would read them in a normal way. For instance, I would choose random words, like "sun," "pillow," "rifle," something in that order, and would try to make sense of that. I would make a diagram and try to figure out the meaning of those words. What do these words mean to me? How do they relate to what I'm going through right now? I was intrigued by how as random a word could be, it would somehow make sense to your life at that time. When I was in Iraq I would write down really weird sentences, and I was starting to like poetry just because it felt natural to me. I began reading a lot of poetry. When I got out of the Marine Corps I realized that there actually were Native poets out there already, so I started reading Sherwin Bitsui, Orlando White, N. Scott Momaday, Luci Tapahonso. The way Navajo is spoken, the wording is poetic to me. It's very hard to describe something, for instance, like a basketball. You wouldn't just call it a basketball. In Navajo there would be a whole bunch of adjectives you would use to describe what that ball is. So that's kind of like how you would have

to describe poetry. You would have to describe an image in order for the reader to understand what that image looks like or feels like or smells like.

LA: Do you know the painting of Emmi Whitehorse?

ML: I first saw her work when I studied at the Institute of American Indian Arts. I remember a monotype and a mixed media with a lot of pastels. I really like what she does.

LA: Momaday also does art.

ML: I saw a lot of the horses that he used to do, the pen and ink ones, and also the oils.

LA: After discharge, you went to IAIA. You had a dual major in creative writing and visual arts, graduating in 2015. How do these modes interact? Does the poetry affect the artwork? Or the artwork the poetry?

ML: When I was at IAIA my major was actually creative writing and I didn't dual major until maybe two or three years after I started my creative writing journey, and so all the work at the time, my really early work, was actually derived from my poetry. I would see all of the images that I would write and meditate on them and try to represent them in much of the 2D work that I was doing. But now, I think what I do is, I don't try to pinpoint the whole poem like I used to. I'll write for maybe 30 minutes, but I'm not really serious about writing at the moment, but I do get up and write. I'll try these terms that I like and I'll stick with it and try to build on that. It's always been about the poetry first.

LA: You're working on a chapbook of poems, *The Overhang of Cumulus*.

ML: It's a small chapbook. It starts out from childhood and then jumps to war and then to my post-war experiences. I'm reflecting back on how childhood and war and post-war interact with each other, just because I felt all these crazy memories of myself being a little kid and having these odd memories of growing up, almost relatable to post-war and how I'm remembering being in Iraq. So I'm trying to work those out right now. I hope I'll have original art work in the chapbook.

LA: Have you been influenced by Navajo culture, or native art generally? You've mentioned the geometric patterns of Navajo rugs and the imagery of the sand paintings.

ML: I am interested in the rug patterns, especially the colors that are actually coming from the earth, the plants that are around us. You use the dye from the plants so the colors all come from nature. I've been trying to utilize those colors, but now I'm becoming more and more interested in radical colors, like hot pink and lime green, and seeing how that can reflect or represent Navajo culture nowadays. For instance, if you look at Melissa Cody's textiles, she includes that exact same color palette where her rugs have hot pink in them and anything from ultramarine to a really nice light blue in the patterns. It's amazing how she gets those colors integrated into her rugs. I'm trying to understand what it means to modernize these colors and ask, how does hot pink relate to myself as a Native American, as a Navajo, trying to practice in that culture. I guess there's a transition from looking at the past and then finding where that transition actually takes place and where that leads to.

LA: Do you think you're telling stories in your paintings?

ML: I don't know if it's telling a story because I think stories are fictional. What I'm trying to do is tell truth rather than stories.

LA: You've mentioned that your art finds and expresses turmoil. Can you expand on that idea?

ML: Turmoil is synonymous with uncertainty. We don't know what's going to happen in the next five minutes within our lives, and I like to represent that in all the paintings. There could be uncertainty with exactly how a viewer responds to my paintings. There can be uncertainty and a disconnection between the viewer and the painting, and also between the painting and the artist. Or even the viewer and the artist. I look at it as the possibility of uncertainty between any of those connections. For instance, one of my first shows was accepted to the Santa Fe Indian Market in 2015. When I first showed, there was definitely turmoil within me being there because I was doing something completely different from what was being displayed. A lot of people were walking by commenting, "How did he get into the Market? This doesn't represent what Native work should be or what it should look like." I felt like I was attacked in a way. I think I sold only like two paintings there. But what was great was that Indian Market accepted me again and they've continually accepted me, because I feel like they trust me to keep contributing to the Native art scene.

LA: Any other artistic influences? I saw an echo of Francis Bacon. You've noted punk rock.

ML: I like obscurity, so obviously punk rock has had a strong influence on my work, not really embedded in my paintings as such, but just the lifestyle that punk rock is about. The expression of a rebellious state, and my work kind of resembles that. I try to not follow the norms of what

indigenous painters should be painting. And yes, definitely Francis Bacon, whom I really adore. And Rick Bartow. I like obscurity and finding myself outside of the margins so I've always been inspired by the Mannerism movement before High Renaissance paintings. Although on my printmaking side, I'm interested in collage, so I've been researching Robert Rauschenberg and Antoni Tàpies. And Abstract Expressionists like Willem de Kooning. I like his abstract work, but more when he was doing his figurative stuff, such as *Pink Angels* and *Seated Figure*. You could tell what he was trying to paint. Also Gerhard Richter when he started painting portraits. He would paint the portrait and blur the subjects' faces with his brush. Recently I've been studying a lot of paintings by Kei Imazu, Andy Denzler, Alex Kiessling, and Jenny Saville. I could name more, but those come to mind.

LA: How does the theme of displacement or alienation emerge in your work? "Displacement" is the first chapter of your career in your chapbook.

ML: *Displacement* was the title of my first solo show in 2017 at Living Arts in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Included were large and medium paintings and full sheet monotypes. It was here I decided that this show was going to be my first step into becoming a professional artist. So I titled all my paintings *Precursor* to notify viewers these paintings were a step to finding a theme, style, and to attain meaning through color, abstraction, and portraiture. Displacement is a theme that I kind of live by and am living with, because going through war, and then coming out of war and trying to live a normal life, there's a certain line where you cross between war and the present. There's a timeline where you re-wind mentally and go back to Iraq and look at your experiences. I was amazed by how frequently I look back on the war where it was hard and scary. You look back at all of your friends that you served with and who were there during wartime with you.

There's a kind of reciprocity where you start to miss your friends and the war, and that's where it becomes kind of scary. You start to look back at the experience and you say to yourself, I should go back and be nostalgic about it. That's another theme that I'm working with right now: nostalgia.

LA: One of the other themes in your work is that of erasure. In many of your portraits, the faces are blurred or manipulated, making them distorted and unrecognizable.

ML: Those are all about trying to erase the truths of war. I am projecting my truths about war onto the canvas. You're projecting all the fear that you have. All the scary thoughts you've had are projected on the canvas and you want to erase them. I'll blur the image and try to hide those truths inside those paintings.

LA: Maybe we could now turn to some of your specific works, going back to 2015. One that struck me was *Laying It to Rest*. It's certainly your largest work at 8 x 11 feet.

ML: It's pretty epic. I was completing that for my BFA at IAIA. I wanted to title my show *Laying It to Rest*. When I first started I wanted to include this huge painting. I wanted to put this installation in where I was collecting empty bullet shells, bullet casings, as many as possible. My goal was to fill this room, one of the gallery spaces, just fill it with casings. But I never met my goal, and after several critiques, I was starting to become less attached to that idea. So I stuck with paintings and printmaking. *Laying It to Rest* came about by stating, now that I'm graduating from IAIA, having different emotions, starting from when I went to school at IAIA and now that I'm graduating, this is enough. I am not looking back at Iraq in that way. I'm not going to be so emotional about Iraq any more. I'm hoping PTSD will end here. When I think about this

giant mural, I'm going to engorge myself into it. That was the painting where I said, I'm laying everything to rest now. This is where I start my journey and it's going to lead to a better me.



Laying It to Rest

LA: There was a lot happening in that painting. There are two seated figures with the disembodied heads floating above the figures. There are also some figures toward the bottom left side canvas.

ML: When I started I didn't want the heads in there at all. Some of the critiques asked why I was becoming more and more cryptic in the paintings. So instead of placing the heads where they should be, I put them way off and so I was like, well there, you can see who they are now. It's a man and a woman. I don't know who they are but maybe that's a different way you could look at someone. I don't really see them as being decapitated. I just see them as they should be. I'm

trying to force your brain to make the connection of where the heads should be. A lot of the black and white images actually represent the memories that I have. There's an empty bed. There's a hat with no face, no head, and there's an empty chair. All that correlates into someone missing or someone passing. There's nobody there to fill those little voids or to fill those little images. And then the lady who's in the middle of the canvas. She looks like she's been begging. I would see Gypsy's in Venice, every day they were out there, constantly begging for money. I just thought it was really ironic to see people begging for money in a really prestigious place like Venice. It was just a new experience and I kept it with me.

LA: *Unaccompanied Voices*, also from 2015, is smaller, about 3 feet by 2.5 feet, where the figure seems to be wrapped in a blue shroud, or a blue cloth. The face is in red and only one eye and an ear are visible.



Unaccompanied Voices

ML: It actually represents a guy that blew himself up. He was an Iraqi terrorist, I believe, and we were out and got in a firefight with a group and sure enough he was trying to kill us by blowing himself up. And there is a little area where his head is that I left blank. There's still some blue; the background is all tan colored. I wanted to add this—thumb up—like a hand, that had a thumb up. After he detonated himself, no one got really injured, some people got some shrapnel and what not, but what was so odd about this was that we were trying to look through all of his bodily pieces and I remember

walking around and seeing that his hand was severed and bits and pieces were laying all over the place, but his hand had his thumb up, like he was happy to go or happy to detonate himself. And I just thought it was really strange, you know, those little strange things that you remember.

LA: In two pieces, *The Overhang of Cumulus* and *The Idea Lingers*, you have a word in the painting, "useless."

ML: The *Overhang of Cumulus* was supposed to be the painting of one of my friends whose last name is Orr. He committed suicide in Alaska. You see on the right panel, or the right canvas, it's



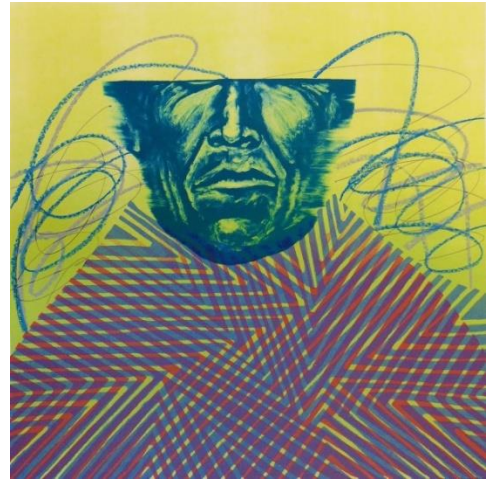
The Overhang of Cumulus

all white and that represents snow. And that little pool is blood. They weren't sure exactly if he committed suicide or if it was an accident but he ended up shooting himself and lost a lot of blood and he passed away. I'm not sure exactly if he knew what

he was doing. But the term "useless" represents the United States government, that it's useless now. The government is not really helping us veterans in any way. I feel like the VA, the Veterans Administration, is not doing enough to stop this epidemic of suicide and that word "useless" also goes another way. One way is that the government is useless to us now, but another way is that we've become useless. We've gotten to the point where we're so sick that we're becoming useless to society now. Too many veterans are committing suicide.

LA: You also do monotypes, like the *Notos* series.

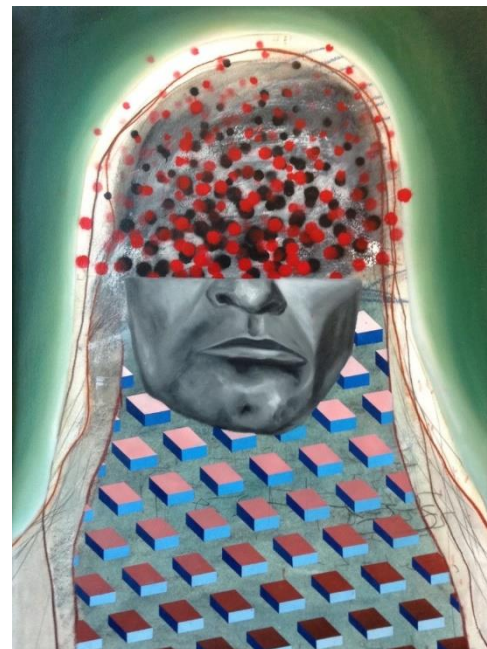
ML: I'm really interested in words, so I was trying to find the Greek word for spring. So *Notos* represents spring, and the monotypes in that series were actually supposed to be representations of spring. The cursive or the scribbles represent wind. Back in Tuba City spring becomes extremely windy and it kicks around a lot of dirt and sand that reflects Iraq. Those dust storms would come and they remind me of being in Iraq. Tuba City reminds me of being in Iraq.



Notos XXX

LA: Your two series from 2016, *Precursor* and *Gravitas*, have surrealistic portraits. Are you trying to redefine the portrait?

ML: I feel like there's a common understanding of what a portrait is. People will ask, "can you paint my portrait?" I think people want their portrait to be realistic, to make themselves look very honorable, or they want to have characteristics where they seem very honest with themselves, or they want the artist to capture the beauty inside them. But it's strange that people themselves, if they do self-portraits, they can never draw themselves as perfectly as possible, exactly what they look like. They project what they think they look like. And usually it's always something way, way different. So whenever I get



Gravitas 005

asked that question, "Do you do portraits?" my reply is, I don't do portraits where I will represent you as an exact likeness. If you have me do a portrait, it's going to look completely different. I'm going to put all sorts of colors on your face. I guess you could say re-invent but also I'm trying to re-configure the portrait and make it look differently. If you mix things up and twist things around and put an eye somewhere else, just like Picasso did, it looks more interesting. There's something to talk about with those portraits. People are a lot more interested in that. If you disfigure a face, there's a lot more to talk about. And I think that's more important, to sit around and talk about what this portrait looks like rather than, oh well, you captured his or her eyes, the color of her hair. That's the only thing you can talk about, just the surface characteristics of it. If you disfigure it and totally rearrange the face or the mouth or whatever, there's a lot to talk about. There are a lot of things that can come out in discussion.

LA: Do you follow up that idea in the 2017 *Contingency Combs Memory* works? They look to be in black and white, where the faces are distorted by spirals, I don't know how to exactly describe it, or where the faces are distorted by strips.

ML: To me, Edward Curtis' photographs don't tell the whole truth about Native peoples in the early twentieth century. I felt that he had this romanticized way at looking at Native Americans. For instance, if you search for "Navajo Man" you either get mug shots or a Curtis photograph, and that's not very a good representation of us whatsoever. You rarely see what a contemporary Native American looks like. There's hardly any news coverage of Native Americans doing well in this country. For instance, there's a Navajo man who is part of the NASA program who helped

design and build the robot that went to Mars, the second one that went to Mars. You don't ever hear coverage of that. So with the spirals, I looked at Curtis' photographs and put a spiral on them, saying these don't represent who we are now. If you look at yourself in a puddle and toss a pebble in it creates a ripple effect that dilutes your image. I'm trying to dilute his photographs, I'm trying to say these aren't us anymore. We're more contemporary than this.



Contingency Combs Memory VI

We're people of color. We are more than a one-hundred year old photograph.



These Days Settling

LA: The *Elder Man* series seems different from some of your other work.

ML: I started that in 2017 and I started to bring it back in 2018 when I painted Tom Tso and Orlando White and then a painting called *These Days Settling*. I want to say these works are not really trying to dismember or disfigure anybody. I believe there's a multitude of ways to paint a figure. Doing these strips across the image is

easier to do, but they also represent glitches. For instance, like the VCRs in the 90s, when you pressed the "pause" button the images had a glitch, images were blurred in some areas or the heads were kind of swirly. You never had a really perfect "pause image." Growing up I didn't have cable or anything like that. I watched old, old VHS videos, like *Dances with Wolves*. I

replayed that like fifty times in the day time just to keep myself occupied. I've always been aware of the idea of the glitch which was apparent to me growing up and being a contemporary Native. You know we walk these two lifestyles, where on one side we're trying to be as traditional as possible, but also we're trying to be contemporary. We're trying to live in white society. And it's very hard to live those two life styles simultaneously.

LA: Floyd Solomon, from Laguna Pueblo, unfortunately he passed away a few years ago, once told me he felt pressure that he had to be one hundred percent white in white society and one hundred percent Laguna in Laguna society. It was a tough road to be one hundred percent in both worlds at virtually the same time.

ML: Definitely. When I come back to the reservation and I hear people speaking Navajo, I can only understand about forty percent. I can't speak it. I only know about five percent of Navajo, so already there's that disconnect within my culture. But I'm Navajo, and non-Native people think that I know my culture completely. And then while I'm walking around and someone talks Navajo to me they think that I know the language. And so you know, even though I'm Navajo, they still criticize me because I don't know my culture one hundred percent.

LA: Which is probably impossible for anyone anyway. In the ongoing *Usurped* series of monotypes, you depict certain historical figures, I guess some would say heroic figures, or infamous figures, like Lincoln, Kit Carson, Teddy Roosevelt, and Custer, among others. Some of the portraits are more or less literal. But some strange things start to happen with the eyes and faces. The images of the same person become more grotesque and, I guess you would say, more gruesome. What were you trying to do in this series?

ML: *Usurped* started around 2014 with "Usurped Custer 01" and then it evolved to "Usurped Jackson," "Usurped Carson 01", and "Usurped Lincoln." What happened was, John Boehner was



Usurp Custer 01

on TV a lot during that time, complaining about a lot of things that were happening in Congress and what not and he would cry all the time. And it just really bugged me. So when I started the series, I was going to do a monotype of John Boehner crying but it didn't come out that great.

However, I figured out that I could portray these other historical figures, and



Usurp Kit Carson 01

I was like "wow!" I'll do more public figures. So I started off with someone everyone has heard of, Custer. The series evolved to different leaders, different people, and I looked at all the United States Presidents, starting with George Washington all the way up to number 45. And each one of them has, in some way, done wrong things, has committed serious crimes or has done something to actually dismantle and cause havoc for Native Americans. Now that I have completed all these, I'm actually creating a whole new set again, from George Washington and now I'm somewhere around the 22nd president. I put the word "useless" on them because to me, I say they're useless to me. All the scratches you see inside these monotypes are my attempt to erase them from history. I paint them and try to make them not literally representative and then I erase them, try to erase them. And those little dots that go around or near their mouth,

those are actually teeth. That's my way of saying, my way of working in identity, all that work has to do with identity. The teeth represent when someone is so mangled, they can't identify who the body is, they usually look at dental records to find out who it is.



Usurp Lincoln 01

LA: "Lincoln 01" and "Lincoln 03" are really grisly, and definitely don't portray him in his usual heroic light. In "Lincoln 01" it's virtually impossible to recognize him.

ML: The images just evolved over time. When I first started the series I wasn't exactly sure what I was going to do or what direction I wanted to go in. I wanted to get a reaction to



Usurp Lincoln 03

how they should come out. I got a really good response, but a lot of people were saying, maybe you should make them a little bit

more representational and so I started to do them over time. After doing them for three plus years, they're becoming more and more representational.

LA: Well, let's wrap up. You moved back to Tuba City, which is your hometown.

ML: Yeah, I was born in Tuba City, graduated from high school there.

LA: And you were most recently in Tulsa on a fellowship?

ML: Three years. I was accepted and started the program in 2015 and then ended in 2018, December 2018.

LA: So now you're back to your starting place, so to speak. What direction is your current work taking?

ML: I'm definitely going to be doing more of the monotypes like the *Notos* series. A lot of people who are interested in them like the color. With the paintings I'm going to be doing things a little bit differently. I still need to go and compile and actually finish a series called *Fever*



Fever Dreams Amy Poehler

Dreams. I have four paintings lined up. The *Fever Dreams* will be about five paintings all together. For the *Usurped* series, my project is to finish all 45 of them and then write an exhibition proposal and start sending it out to the galleries and see if someone will pick it up and hopefully have a show. I'll also continue the striped ones like with Orlando White and Tom Tso; those are actually a little bit more on the brighter side where I'm trying to highlight individual Navajos who are doing good for the community. Orlando is a Navajo poet who teaches at Diné College, and Tom was a notable medicine man who passed back in 2009, so a lot of those will come out too. I'm travelling throughout the Reservation and taking pictures of

certain notable people, like poet Luci Tapahonso, and some of the teachers around Tuba City who are teaching and helping us as a community. So I have all these different projects I'm working on right now. I have one side that's very bright and looks very promising and more positive and actually doing something good for the community, and another side where I'll continue with the disfiguring portraits. That's what I'll be dealing with for probably another two years or so and then I'll definitely be going in a different direction. I usually try to go about two years and then I'll change.

Art and digital images by Monty Little

Monty Little's work can be viewed at: <https://www.montylittle.com/>

Larry Abbott is a retired college and high-school English/American Studies teacher. He is the editor of two books of interviews with Native American artists: *I Stand in the Center of the Good* (University of Nebraska Press) and *A Time of Visions* (<http://dev.cushing.org/abbott/>), as well as numerous articles in *Indian Artist* magazine and *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*. Abbott holds degrees from NYU, Columbia, and Middlebury College.