

Tanya Leighton

Sky Hopinka
'SUNFLOWER SIEGE ENGINE'
28 January – 25 February 2023
Tanya Leighton, Berlin
Kurfürstentraße 24/25

Sky Hopinka
'SUNFLOWER SIEGE ENGINE'
Tanya Leighton, Berlin. Kurfürstenstraße 24/25
28 January – 25 February 2023
Preview: Friday 27 January, 6–8pm

Poetic knowledge is born in the great silence of scientific knowledge
– Aimé Césaire, 'Poetry and Knowledge' (1946)¹

Commissioned by the San José Museum of Art and University of California Santa Cruz's 'Visualizing Abolition' multi-year project connecting arts, prisons and justice, Ho-Chunk artist Sky Hopinka's latest film *Sunflower Siege Engine* (2022) delicately turns nonlinear personal narrative practice towards the carceral borders kept between his ancestors and communities. Since the mid- 19th century, an inheritance ideology has conscripted millions of Native ancestors in projects of necropolitical research. Science was called in to justify museum captivity, supporting the lie that tribal nations' families were settler pre-histories of modernity. Only after many Native peoples fought, and died, in World War I for the state that had colonized them was its citizenship bestowed. American captivity for white supremacy created Native prisoners of war, both dead and alive.²

*"There's no right way to be indian, /
just a whole lot of wrong ways"*

Mohawk activist Richard Oakes proclaims, "[t]he population has always been held as prisoners and kept dependent upon others," in archival footage of his speech addressed to "the Great White Father and All His People". We see Oakes in 1969, windswept on the island of Alcatraz, before he led a 19-month-long occupation of the famous uninhabited prison in the San Francisco Bay with over twenty other students. We see him in 2022, on a laptop screen in Hopinka's studio, a symbol, like all those years ago, of the conditions on reservations that enclose many Native nations in the United States. We see him speak to a situation that remains both the artist's concern and anguish. Hopinka's inclusion of a figure that the 20th century's American Indian Movement largely forgot embodies a question of solidarity; what if a politics of abolition was as important to histories of Native resistance as struggles for repatriation?

"It's time to go home, and float breathlessly on currents of willow and pine"

In the cameras he holds, Hopinka chooses to swim in the lacunas of displacement and surrender to spiritual warfare. The dead and the living commune outside the scope of the law—the Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act (1990)—that brings Hopinka in anticipation of their return to nationhood. They commune at the intersections of his movements between Cahokia in Illinois, the coast of San Francisco and Seaside in Oregon. They commune in the analogue 16mm film and multiple exposures of digital video; of obsolete and contemporary. They commune in the equality of land and sky that accumulates in his medium-format photography. They commune in the presences, seen and unseen, of friends and collaborators, like Abby Lord and Adam and Zack Khalil, with whom he has worked to bring back some of the hundreds of thousands of ancestors still kept in state institutions and museums. They commune outside the conscripts of government policy that beleaguer intimacy and forestall closure.

*"There's a failure in our walk, /
I think to myself as I think about body and face and form and place"*

Hopinka told me that the excerpts of his poem—*Believe you me* (2022)—feel language in the film, unlike in older works like *wawa* (2014) where he utilizes it as a subject. To what end? Anishinaabe and Chemehuevi poet-ancestor Diane Burns' nonchalance offers a clue. Through her, the somatic grammar of vulnerable comfort overrides the accusations leveled by others. He enters his own body, "*thinking about how easy it is to be stoic and to be called Nothing.*" With his camera, he reflects on how his own aging reflects his sensitivity to the past, tracing how, "*your distant voice eases the tension in my back.*" A critical intimacy with the weight of history turns his voice inward to the people who make parts of it possible.

"I told you to wait for me"

As Room Thirteen's song "Tidal Wave" washes us into the film's coda, Hopinka directs us with an imperfectly animated Disney-esque karaoke pointer: singalong to the surrender. Touch and play my wandering with your voice, asking us to consider the perspectives from which we may or may not join a ceremony stretching thousands of miles. Errantry is often spoken of as a passage between islands that requires neither to be central, yet in this body of work, we see how redrawing one's history away from those who have stolen them requires the refusal of a singular root and the maintenance of many.

– Che Applewhaite

¹ Aimé Césaire, 'Poetry and Knowledge', in *Lyric and Dramatic Poetry*, 1946-82', trans. A. James Arnold, CARAF Books (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990), xlii–lvi.

² In 1868, William Alexander Hammond, the then United States Army Surgeon General, made a federal order to obtain Indian skulls for the Army Medical Museum and in 1924, the US government only passed the Indian Citizenship Act after many Native peoples enlisted in World War I.

For more information, please contact:
Melanie García, melanie@tanyaleighton.com

For high resolution images, please contact:
Zheng Zhang, zheng@tanyaleighton.com

The gallery is open Tuesday to Saturday,
11–6pm, and by appointment.

SKY HOPINKA

Sky Hopinka (born in 1984 in Ferndale, Washington) lives and works in New York. He is a member of the Ho-Chunk Nation/Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians. He 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 Lower Columbia River Basin. He received his BA from Portland State University in Liberal Arts and his MFA in Film, Video, Animation, and New Genres from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. He currently teaches at Bard College.

His video, photo, and text work centers around personal positions of Indigenous homeland and landscape, designs of language as containers of culture expressed through personal, documentary, and non-fiction forms of media. Recent solo exhibitions include LUMA, Arles, Broadway Gallery, New York, and Memorial Art Gallery, Rochester in 2022; Museum of Modern Art, New York, The Block Museum of Art, Chicago, Vorspiel/ transmediale, Berlin, and VOX Centre de l'image contemporaine, Montréal in 2021; and Saint Louis Art Museum, Missouri, Tate Modern, London, The Green Gallery, Milwaukee, and CCS Bard (curated by Lauren Cornell), Hessel Museum of Art, Annandale-on-Hudson in 2020, just to name a few. Current solo exhibitions include the 'Current Speed' exhibition series (curated by Tyler Blackwell) at Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky; 'Behind the evening tide' at LUMA Westbau, Zürich, and 'Seeing and Seen' at the San José Museum of Art, California.

Hopinka's work is included in the permanent collections of SFMOMA, San Francisco; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; The Whitney Museum, New York; Kadist, San Francisco; Milwaukee Art Museum; Minneapolis Institute of Art; Northwestern Mutual, Milwaukee; Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton; and Princeton University Art Museum, amongst others.

He was a fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University in 2018-2019, a Sundance Art of Non-fiction Fellow for 2019, an Art Matters Fellow in 2019, a recipient of a 2020 Alpert Award for Film/Video, a 2020 Guggenheim Fellow, and a 2021 Forge Project Fellow. In 2022, he received a MacArthur Fellowship for his work in films and videos that offer new strategies of representation for the expression of Indigenous worldviews.

Sky Hopinka
Sunflower Siege Engine, 2022
Film still





Sky Hopinka
Protected, 2022
 Inkjet with hand-scratched text
 and UV laminate, framed
 101.6×101.6 cm
 40×40 in
 Unique
 (HOPINKA-2022-0025)

*adopted by Blue Sky
and she changed her name and her voice
and gave birth to my dad
and said farewell for far too long.
I only knew them in their distance,
a mutual hate and a mutual love,
brought about by a great violence.
I feel sorry for fatherchild,*

Sky Hopinka
Protected, 2022
Detail



and she changed her name and her voice

and gave birth to my
jagji and said farewell
for the day. I only
saw her in this distance
a muted note and a muted love
brings about by a great silence.

I feel sorry for
fatherhood.



Sky Hopinka
Illinois 1, 2022
Inkjet with hand-scratched text
and UV laminate, framed
101.6×101.6 cm
40×40 in
Unique
(HOPINKA-2022-0027)

*There's no time for death songs,
we don't remember them anymore, anyhow.*

Sky Hopinka
Illinois 1, 2022
Detail





There's no time for death songs, we don't remember them anymore, anywhere.



Sky Hopinka
Road to Meskwaki, 2022
Inkjet with hand-scratched text
and UV laminate, framed
99.1x99.1 cm
39x39 in
Unique
(HOPINKA-2022-0028)

*I think to myself as I think about body and face
and form and place,
and,
the way my hands look when they type these words,
when they clap real loud,
when they squeeze yours real tight,
when they hold these books,
when they clutch that beer,
when they shake late at night after tossin and turnin
for hours on end
tryin to dream those dreams I had when I was small
when you were old and
and I saw them in your words
and heard your voice.*

Wendy





Sky Hopinka
Dickson Mounds, 2022
Inkjet with hand-scratched
text and UV laminate, framed
101.6×101.6 cm
40×40 in
Unique
(HOPINKA-2022-0031)

*another skin in the city.
hanging loosely off arms and legs
There's no right way to be indian,
just a whole lot of wrong ways.*

Sky Hopinka
Dickson Mounds, 2022
Detail



Another skin in the city, hanging loosely off seams and legs
there's no right way to be in it, just a whole lot of wrong ways.





Sky Hopinka
Cahokia, 2022
Inkjet with hand-scratched
text and UV laminate, framed
101.6x101.6 cm
40x40 in
Unique
(HOPINKA-2022-0033)

*who calls me by name as I'm sitting on the grass
squinting hard under a harder sun
thinking about how easy it is to be stoic
and to be called Nothing.
Nothing out of fear and nothing out of resentment.*

Sky Hopinka
Cahokia, 2022
Detail

Am sitting on grass?

stoic

and of resentment

Who calls me by name as I'm sitting on grass?
sweeping hand under a brook's sun
thinking how easy it is to be still
and to be called nothing
nothing out of fear and nothing out of resentment



Sky Hopinka
Sunflower Siege Engine, 2022
 16 mm to HD Video, video, stereo, colour
 12 minutes 22 seconds
 Edition of 3 + 2 AP
 (HOPINKA-2022-0029)

[Viewing link](#)
 Password: Kurfursten






I held an ancestor in my arms, and we spoke of dust.


Sky Hopinka
Sunflower Siege Engine, 2022
Film still

Sky Hopinka
Sunflower Siege Engine, 2022
Film still

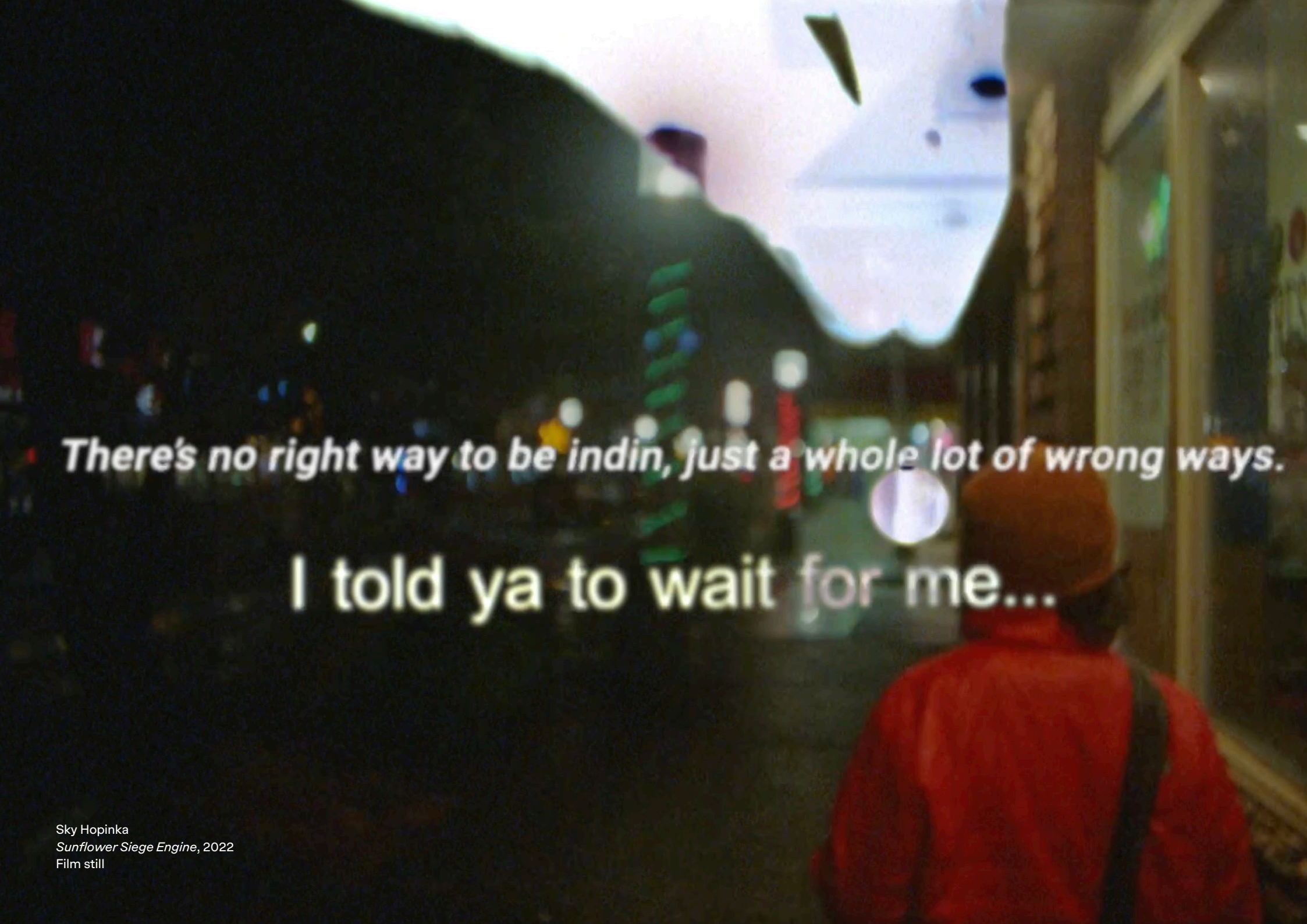
A film still from 'Sunflower Siege Engine' showing a hand reaching up towards a bright light against a dark, colorful background. The hand is in the foreground, with fingers spread, reaching towards a small, bright white light source. The background is dark with vibrant, out-of-focus colors of blue, red, and green, suggesting a night scene with city lights or a stylized environment. The overall mood is contemplative and artistic.

A quiet love is a lazy love in Mexico City

Sky Hopinka
Sunflower Siege Engine, 2022
Film still



Go on keep calling all night
Go on keep calling all night long



There's no right way to be indin, just a whole lot of wrong ways.
I told ya to wait for me...

'Believe you me'
Sky Hopinka

*Booze n' loozin blues follow me and follow you.
Diane, I first heard your name after reading a book of poems
that were not your own
and was told there was a line in there that was yours.
"This ain't no stoic look this is my face"
I've said to myself quietly for years now.
Looking like me never worked out so well in a lot of my life
but that never stopped me from apologizing or agonizing
or gazing away and glancing down
about being a skin in a town
in a city in places near and non that I live in or pass through
or visit or am guested.
Lac Court Oreille is not far away from my home
where my grandmother was born
and adopted by Blue Sky and she changed her name and her voice
and gave birth to my dad and said farewell for far too long.
I only knew them in their distance, a mutual hate and a mutual love,
brought about by a great violence.
I feel sorry for fatherchild,
especially when I see my face in his at the right time of night
and I see it in hers, too.
Or I used to.
I still wonder about when it'll be time to say it's okay
and not think about how I look
or who I look at
or who sees me
and who calls me by name as I'm sitting on the grass
squinting hard under a harder sun
thinking about how easy it is to be stoic and to be called Nothing.
Nothing out of fear and nothing out of resentment.*

*I don't know, Diane,
I once saw a kindness in the heart of palm
and it was ragged and tired like me on Saturday afternoons,
before everyone comes back and after everyone's long left.
My face and my body
and my shame and my humiliation
are all tied together
all tangled together in the eyes of the movers
and the in voices of the locators all lined up saying
where I should go where we should go.
We're not trash and we're not nothin but indins
trying to have a nice time.
No eye contact no quick movements
you've got to be ashamed and you've got to watch out,
it's time for another one on the avenue
on the stage where I heard you sing.
Not to me not to them not to anyone else
other than a memory of lights lit nicely
and courage and fear all rolled into one
all rolled into a cigarette burning lopsided under each drag*

*still puffing the wrong way.
I cough when I smoke these days,
I don't remember when I stopped being young but the pain in my body
and weariness in my hands make it clear it was
a long time ago last night when I was loosing voice at the lamps
following me down the street.
Saying,
don't look at me anymore
don't let them see me I'm tired of my face and my voice and my hands.
There's a failure in in our walk,
I think to myself as I think about body and face and form and place,
and,
the way my hands look when they type these words,
when they clap real loud,
when they squeeze yours real tight,
when they hold these books,
when they clutch that beer,
when they shake late at night after tossin and turnin for hours on end
tryin to dream those dreams I had when I was small
when you were old and
and I saw them in your words
and heard your voice.
Modene was the roller derby queen²,
and I never liked 49's the way that I should.
There's no right way to be indin,
just a whole lot of wrong ways.*

*It's a quiet stage where you stand now,
still dark and still quiet and still
still.
Still, your distant voice eases the tension in my back
and my slouch
and my jaw
and my teeth
from the sides of my cheeks that I bite when I'm afraid I'm alone
another skin in the city.
That tension it goes and it flows and it rolls
through the holes in the pockets of my clothes³
hanging loosely off arms and legs
as I'm thinking about you and a walk on a Saturday afternoon
with a big smiling face and a slow and easy step.
There's no time for death songs, we don't remember them anymore, anyhow.*

¹ From Diane Burns' poem

² From Diane Burns' poem *Big Fun*

³ From Bob Dylan's song *Walkin' Down the Line*

Tanya Leighton

Sky Hopinka
'SUNFLOWER SIEGE ENGINE'
28 January – 25 February 2023
Tanya Leighton, Berlin
Kurfürstentraße 24/25

For further information, please contact:
Melanie García, melanie@tanyaleighton.com

Tanya Leighton
Kurfürstenstraße 156
10785 Berlin
+49(0)30 21972220

www.tanyaleighton.com