

Margaretta K. Mitchell, *Iconographies*, 20x24 Polaroid Camera Images, PHOTO, Oakland, Oct. 2, 2015, all framed. The images often have the messy edges we associate with Polaroid pictures; smears of development chemical and inky black edges. Others have been trimmed clean. The whitest whites in these images retain softness, the colors have an infinite gradation, and the color gamma seems designed for human skin.

Mitchell's catalog references her love of the Italian Renaissance and her use of the iconic Renaissance images as sources, along with re-interpretations of Isadora Duncan's dances. Yet I find the New World (diptych) particularly evocative. It is clearly a modern model wearing a floral print dress yet her stance, the lighting, and background harken to an earlier age of more subtle colors without the blown-out high lights and the hyper-colors of digital photography. The model is in profile wearing a head dress looking affair. In her right hand she holds out something that is reminiscent of an iconic American Indian holding Tobacco. A snake winds around her ankle. While our western culture is engrained with Renaissance Icons, the power and conflicts of our own national historic icons are reflected in Mitchell's "New World."

The American natives used tobacco but it was the European immigrates that turned it into a wealth generating machine that enslaves and kills millions. These Europeans presented it to their buyers as a gift from the Indians. Through the magic of Mitchell's image we are challenged to reexamine the myth: Was it truly a gift? Both the Indians and Tobacco have not fared well. The former were decimated and the latter has become a modern health crisis.

Western classical education is not taught much these days, not at all in high school. College seems more orientated to careers and building wealth than cultural education. Greek and Roman icons are losing their power. The Renaissance is fading. Our own icons still retain much of their power along with the conflicts of their mixed messages.



"New World"



*These images were not part of the exhibit – just for comparison*