

Runners Continuum: A thought-provoking journey **with artist Greg Staats at the Art Gallery of** **Hamilton**



Credit: Greg Staats (Mohawk b. 1963), *Runners Continuum* (3), 2024, archival digital pigment print. Courtesy of the artist.

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The Art Gallery of Hamilton announces the opening of *Greg Staats: Runners Continuum*, a new exhibition of work by the Toronto-based artist, which will run from February 22 to May 18, 2025.

The exhibition, which spreads over three gallery spaces covering more than 3,000 square feet, includes more than 25 works – some in photographic series and others in mixed media. The central new work created for this exhibition is *Runners Continuum* (2024), which comprises 14 large-format photographs, spanning 70 running feet. Most images are colour landscapes, recently photographed on Six Nations and in Gravenhurst, where Staats regularly visits. They form a long and poetic line of mnemonics—a term Staats favours in describing how an image can be a stand-in, or clue, to an idea, place, or memory.

For this exhibition, which required more than five years of planning, Staats imagines himself in the place of the Hodinöhsö:ni' runner—a person whose role was to run over large distances to deliver important messages between communities and nations. He

imagines the roles, responsibilities, and the visual absorption of the runner in a time after the five Founding Nations were brought together in a Confederacy by the Peacemaker while carrying the knowledge of the Great Law of Peace, and the period before colonial contact.

"What I've seen and felt along the pathway back to the Great Law of Peace I've recorded as reminders that strengthen me to move forward," says Staats. "And as I come through the thorny bushes towards the light of the clearing, I hesitate until the knowledge gathered between footsteps becomes visible and my breath repeats the phrase *in constant return*."

For more than three decades, Greg Staats has been making photographic images from a very personal, complex, and liminal space. He intends, through visual expression, to model the embodiment of a non-verbal Hodinöhsö:ni' way of being and knowing. To do so, he photographs elements of the land on and around Six Nations of the Grand River Territory, where he grew up and where his family has lived since its inception.

Focusing on simple recognizable elements, such as the branches and needles of a white pine tree, Staats shares cultural knowledge with the goal of reciprocity and renewal. He points out that the desire to understand symbols within images is dualistic and Western in nature, in contrast to a Hodinöhsö:ni' way of knowing. Staats's images are the direct expression of his long line of thinking around renewal, as he advocates for care and reciprocity between Indigenous and settler cultures.

Staats has developed his own visual and philosophical methodology, which he has titled a "restorative aesthetic." This positioning is anchored in his Hodinöhsö:ni' roots, where he brings forward original ways and concepts as he continues to learn them from language teachers and Elders on reserve. His desire to regain cultural knowledge, through symbols often greater than words, stems from his experience of having witnessed much loss through Canada's forceful colonial systems, many of which were at an extremely aggressive and sometimes irrevocably harmful height during the years of his upbringing. Staats shares cultural knowledge with viewers with the goal of reciprocity and renewal.

"We are extremely privileged to feature the work of Greg Staats at the AGH," says Shelley Falconer, President and CEO at the Art Gallery of Hamilton. "We invite you to visit the Gallery and experience *Greg Staats: Runners Continuum*, which will engage your mind, heart, and spirit by challenging perceptions and broadening horizons."

To coincide with the opening of *Greg Staats: Runners Continuum*, the AGH Shop will be selling a fully illustrated hardcover exhibition catalogue with new essays by Melissa Bennett, Richard Hill Senior, and Philip Monk. The 92-page catalogue was beautifully designed by OTAMI, an independently owned Cree/Nêhiyaw graphic design studio based in Tiohtià:ke/Montréal.

We invite the public to attend the [Winter Exhibitions Opening Celebration](#) on Sunday, February 23, 2025 from 2:00 to 4:00 pm, where we will be celebrating *Greg Staats: Runners Continuum*. The artist will be in attendance. Remarks begin at 3:00 pm.

Media Preview

By appointment, the AGH will hold media previews of the exhibition on Friday, February 21, 2025. Please contact Aaron Lam, Coordinator of Communications, at alam@artgalleryofhamilton.com to book your preview.

Media Kit

[Greg Staats: Runners Continuum](#)

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About Greg Staats

Staats was born in 1963 in Oshweken, Six Nations of the Grand River Territory, and he now lives and works in Toronto. He has been working since the early 1980s in all formats of film and digital photography (and moving image, and additionally some object-based works and installation). He is primarily a photographer, who first learned film and darkroom skills as a teenager in the 1970s, at the Woodland Cultural Centre on Six Nations, with teachers Larry A. Hill, Richard Hill, Senior, and Hubert Buck Junior. While at the Centre, Staats was encouraged by language teachers and linguists Reg Henry and Jacob Thomas. Staats is a survivor of the Indian day school system, a part of the residential school system, and he brings his on-reserve lived experience to every aspect of his practice.

Staats is a 2024 recipient of the Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts, with works currently on view at the National Gallery of Canada. Highlights of his career include being an inaugural artist in residence at Longhouse Labs at University of Waterloo (2024-25), Toronto Arts Foundation Inaugural Indigenous Artist Award, and the Duke and Duchess of York Prize in Photography.

About the Art Gallery of Hamilton

Founded in 1914, the Art Gallery of Hamilton is the oldest and largest public art gallery in southwestern Ontario. Its permanent collection, which is focused on historical Canadian, International, and Contemporary art, numbers more than 11,000 works and is recognized as one of Canada's finest. The AGH is a vital creative hub and centre of lifelong learning that enables people of all ages to enrich their lives by gaining a deeper understanding of art. The Gallery is supported by the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, and the City of Hamilton.



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