



Buffalo Bill's Wild West Warriors

Michelle Delaney

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A visual pleasure and a unique insight into American history

For the first time ever, here is renowned photographer Gertrude Käsebier's haunting collection of photographs of Native American performers from Buffalo Bill's Wild West show at the turn of the century. One hundred years later, Käsebier's portraits remain significant visual records into the lives of these Sioux performers and their nation. Her striking photographs capture the strength and character of each individual, documenting the complexity of true warriors playing a staged version of themselves.

In 1898, Käsebier wrote to William F. Cody requesting to photograph Indians performing in his Wild West show at Madison Square Garden. Her photographs proved poignant. Her studio had no elaborate backdrops, and she removed Indian regalia to depict her subjects as "raw" individuals, with strong personalities and experiences that blurred the distinction between traditional life and contemporary times. Käsebier developed long relationships with several of the Indians, corresponding with a few for many years. Examples of these letters appear in the volume, as well as drawings done by Indians waiting in her studio, photographs of Dakota Sioux on their reservation, little-known historical background, and Wild West show memorabilia, including rare pages from Buffalo Bill's original route book.

Käsebier's photographs are preserved at the National Museum of American History's Photographic History Collection at the Smithsonian Institution.

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