

2006/2007 Worldstudio AIGA Scholarships Coyne Family Foundation Award



NIZHONI ELLENWOOD

Photography

Sophomore

San Francisco Art Institute

My name is “Nizhoni,” which means ‘beauty’ in Dine (Navajo). I am of the Ni Mi’i Puu (Nez Perce) and Apache Tribes, which are closely related to the Dine. My parents were artistic, beautiful and strong, yet the world has a way of weighing on people and they eventually could no longer care for me. When I was nine years old I became a ward of the court and my godparents became my foster parents, which to this day I am very thankful for. As a child, creating art was one way of coping with emotional crisis. My godparents, both practicing artists and political/environmental activists, helped me see how creativity can move mountains. They were constantly using their art and music to better our community, and this helped to shape my world. They enrolled me at the School of the Arts High School in San Francisco where I found my own creative voice, discovering a love for the photographic image and a desire to experiment with new multi-media genres. Out of high school I’ve needed employment, so while going to school I have worked as a para-educator with autistic teens and adults in a special education classroom. I love my job and I especially love the students I get to work with. I have found a strong love for my students and want to use my arts education to help them explore their own artistic abilities in a fun and therapeutic way. As a young indigenous woman, my personal artistic vision is to combine my current interest in photographic/multi-media work with older tribal traditions to create a new form of modern indigenous art. By doing this, I hope to help younger generations find a connection to their heritage through contemporary artwork, maybe seeing a pathway for themselves to reclaiming and rediscovering heritage and family.

