

University of Missouri

The Magazine of the Mizzou Alumni Association

# MIZZOU

## Filling the Bookshelf

Film studies professor published two books in December 2012.

Story by Kelsey Allen

Published Dec. 19, 2012

**A**lthough Joanna Hearne isn't in the classroom during the 2012–13 academic year, she's not on vacation, either. Hearne, an associate professor of film studies in MU's English department and winner of a 2012 Kemper Fellowship for Teaching Excellence, published two books in December 2012 and is working on a third.

“It was insane,” Hearne says. “You know, you’re supposed to write your first book and *then* write your second book.”



Professor Joanna Hearne in Columbia's Missouri Theatre. Photo by Nicholas Benner.

Hearne studies cinematic representations of indigenous people, often focusing on Native Americans. She was drafting *Native Recognition: Indigenous Cinema and the Western* (SUNY, 2012) when the editors of the new book series *Indigenous Films* at the University of Nebraska Press invited her to write *Smoke Signals: Native Cinema Rising*. (University of Nebraska Press, 2012).

And when the 1998 film *Smoke Signals* is involved, Hearne has a hard time saying no. *Smoke Signals* — the first film to be directed, acted, written and produced by Native Americans to have national theatrical distribution — was released when she was a doctoral student at the University of Arizona, working as a research and teaching assistant for a film professor and teaching high school students on the Tohono O’odham reservation in south central Arizona.

“Seeing how this film impacted [my students’] lives and then studying film in this very formal way, it clicked for me,” Hearne says. “I got involved in thinking about representation on the screen and thinking about film as a way that we tell stories to each other.”

It was the perfect storm.

“I’ve seen the study of Indigenous media go from *Smoke Signals* being embraced by my students to this incredible global phenomenon that is about communications justice for indigenous peoples,” Hearne says. “I’ve been working hard to keep up with my field as it surges ahead.”

In the book, Hearne discusses the innovative characters in the film such as Thomas Builds-the-Fire (played by actor Evan Adams). “He has all this esoteric knowledge about Charles Bronson movies and Superman, and he also knows how to cook fry bread for his grandma,” Hearne says. “The director and writer took back popular culture as indigenous culture. Rather than saying indigenous people are separate from pop culture, they say not only do we know about popular culture, but it is also ours.”

Her second book, *Native Recognition*, focuses on lesser-known films about native people, films from the archives spanning from the silent era to today, from the U.S. to the Czech Republic. She uncovers Native American director James Young Deer and his wife, actress Princess Red Wing, who were making Westerns in the early 1900s. She digs up the 1928 silent film *Ramon* by Chickasaw director Edwin Carewe that features Latina actress Dolores del Rio. And she highlights contemporary documentaries, such as *Imagining Indians* by Hopi artist Victor Masayesva, that feature interviews with Native

American extras in 1950s Westerns. Her book becomes an exercise in hide-and-peek, a search for lost films to make them found, an effort to recognize the often-uncredited Native extras.

“The anonymous Indian warriors in the background of the Western become real to us,” Hearne says. “Instead of a representation of native death — just getting shot by John Wayne — we recognize that the Native actor is in fact an emblem of survival. We can see that as an important retrieval of what otherwise might have been lost.”

Listen to Joanna Hearne discuss “Who Will Tell Native Stories, and Who Will Hear Them,” in an interview with SyndicateMizzou.

**Topics:** Arts and Humanities, News, Research, Web Exclusives

**Tags:** Faculty

---

Published by MIZZOU magazine, 109 Reynolds Alumni Center, Columbia, MO 65211 | Phone: 573-882-5916 | Email: [mizzou@missouri.edu](mailto:mizzou@missouri.edu)

*Opinions expressed in this site do not necessarily reflect the official position of MU or the Mizzou Alumni Association.*

© 2019 — Curators of the University of Missouri. All rights reserved. DMCA and other copyright information.

An equal opportunity/access/affirmative action/pro-disabled and veteran employer.