The Re-Riding History project expands our frame of memory. The 72 exhibiting artists ask us to imagine anew our shared histories across generations. Their visions demonstrate a plurality of ideas about memory, history and time.

Re-Riding History proposes there is not one version of history; history is subjective. What we may think of as the “official” chronicle of a city is but one telling among many. Taken further, this idea of histories (in the plural) also suggests something very important about how we think of time.

Hours, days, months, years, decades, and centuries may be considered as linear, with one day following cumulatively upon the other. The artists and curators of Re-Riding History suggest something different. This Native reading of time is cyclical, forever turning on itself, like a spiral continuously circling to the same moments, re-inscribing these events with new insights.

Working closely with a selected group of artists, many of whom have relatives that were imprisoned at Fort Marion, the Re-Riding History curators ask us to circle back in time, suggesting in the words of artist and project director Emily Arthur that, “It’s not history.” Memory and alternative temporalities have conspired to make history present and alive. Scholars today describe this continuance as a form of “visual sovereignty.”

The story of St. Augustine, Florida is a story of Native peoples. Caddos, Apaches, Comanches, Kiowas, Cheyennes and Seminoles imprisoned at Fort Marion in the 1800s were subject to military control, but they were not simply prisoners. These hundreds of men, women and children were husbands, fathers, mothers and daughters. Their humanity exceeds the designation of “prisoner.” As my uncle Harry Mithlo states in his artist statement, “Our history continued despite captivity at St. Augustine.”

In this cyclical version of time, Re-Riding History artists, curators and educators create a new visual history of St. Augustine and in doing so; they claim the personhood of our ancestors.

-- Nancy Marie Mithlo, PhD, Associate Professor of Art History and Visual Arts, Occidental College and Chair of American Indian Studies, Autry National Center Institute

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