

Forever Crossing Over: At the Intersection of John T. Williams's Life and Memorial [Abstract]

Thomas Michael Swensen

In 2010, Seattle police officer Ian Birk shot master carver John T. Williams, a hearing-impaired Nuu-chah-nulth artist, four times as he walked down a city sidewalk. Birk initially claimed that Williams had aggressively run towards him with a knife drawn, but official research contradicted this justification, showing that the artist was fatally wounded on his side and back by the officer's shots. This article analyzes Native artistic responses to the killing, archival sources, and the author's visit to the John T. Williams Memorial Totem Pole, an artwork located in Seattle Center, to show how the artist's tragic death reveals the disjuncture between the nation's criminalization of Native individuals, and its formalist appreciation for Native art.

To purchase the full article:

<http://uclajournals.org/doi/abs/10.17953/aicrj.39.4.swensen>