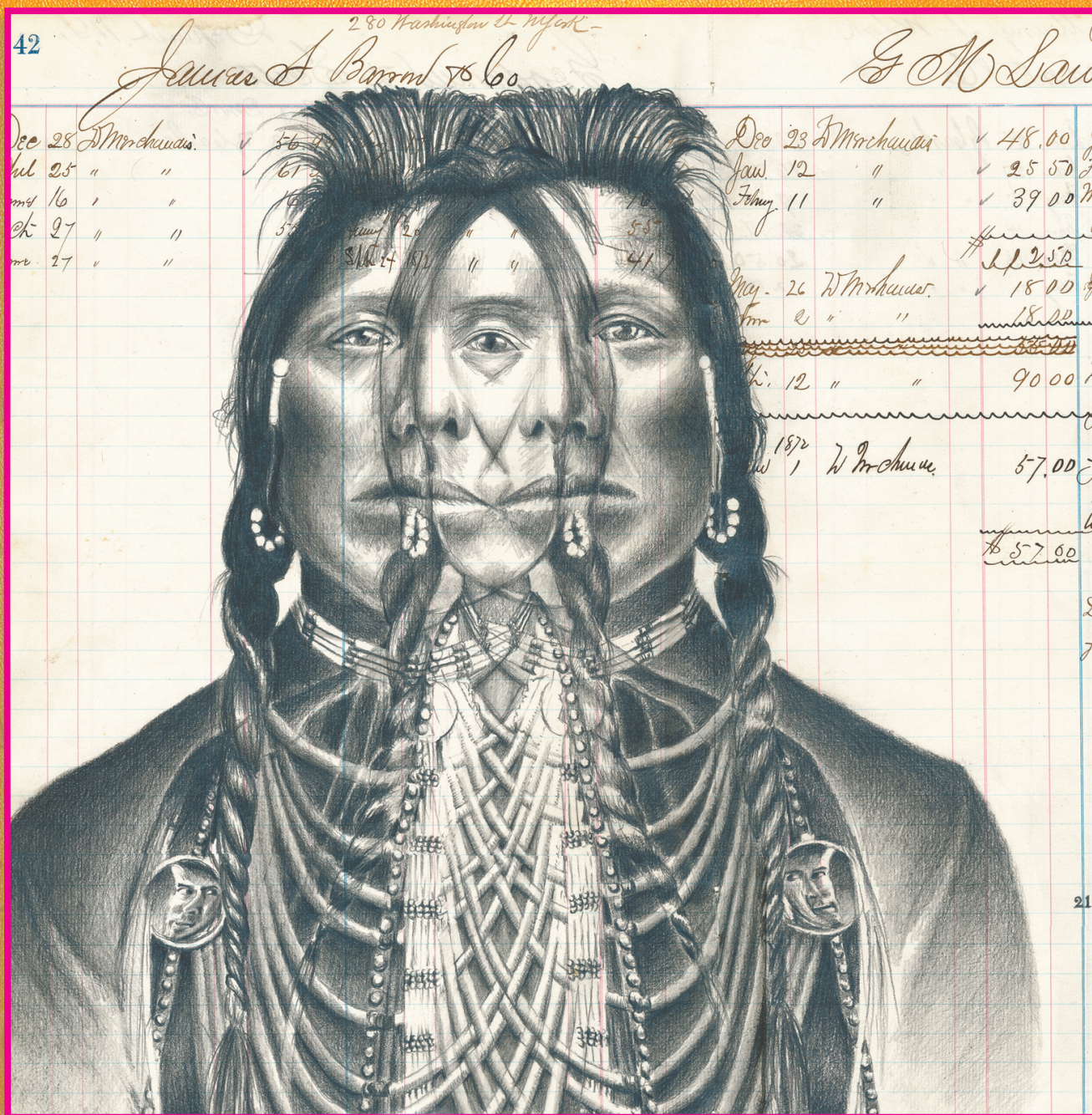


CONTEMPORARY NATIVE AMERICAN ART



NEWSPAPERS IN EDUCATION
THE OKLAHOMAN



FRED JONES JR.
Museum of Art
The University of Oklahoma

Newspapers for this educational program provided by:

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The American Indian Cultural Center and Museum (AICCM) is honored to present, in partnership in with Newspapers in Education at *The Oklahoman*, the Native American Heritage educational workbook. The Native American Heritage educational programs focus on the cultures, histories and governments of the American Indian tribes of Oklahoma. The programs are published twice a year, in the Fall and Spring semesters. Each workbook is organized into four core thematic areas: Origins, Native Knowledge, Community and Governance. Because it is impossible to cover every aspect of the topics featured in each edition, the workbooks will comprehensively introduce students to a variety of new subjects and ideas. We hope you will be inspired to research and find out more information with the help of teachers and parents, as well as through your own independent research.

Special thanks goes to the following program partners for contributing to the content of this publication:

- Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art
- Gilcrease Museum
- Denver Art Museum
- Mabree-Gerrer Museum of Art
- Five Civilized Tribes Museum
- Oklahoma Arts Council
- Bacone College, Ataola Lodge

Director's Message

Halito! The American Indian Cultural Center and Museum continues to serve as a living center for cultural expression promoting awareness and understanding for all people regarding Oklahoma's American Indian cultures and heritage. Native cultures have contributed to the very fabric of America today, especially in traditional arts. American Indians have always woven beauty into everything from elaborately decorated headdresses to everyday objects like shoes. From the past to the present, Native artists and craftsmen have played a vital role in tribal cultures, keeping alive important artistic traditions such as pottery, beading, ceramics, weaving and painting. In this edition, we celebrate the amazing meanings, histories and the superb quality of contemporary Native art. We hope you enjoy learning



Warriors Addressing Modern Technology,
Joseph Erb (Cherokee)
Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art,
The University of Oklahoma, Norman;
Gift of Rennard Strickland, 2009

about these ancient traditions that are based on the identity, talent and creativity that continues to astound and inspire us today.

– **Gena Timberman, Esq.,**
Director of The Native American
Cultural Center and Museum

Border Art (above)

Southern Plains

–by Yatika Starr Fields,
Osage/Muscogee Creek/Cherokee



Bunky Echo-Hawk “Napoleon Dynamite”
(Pawnee/Yakama)

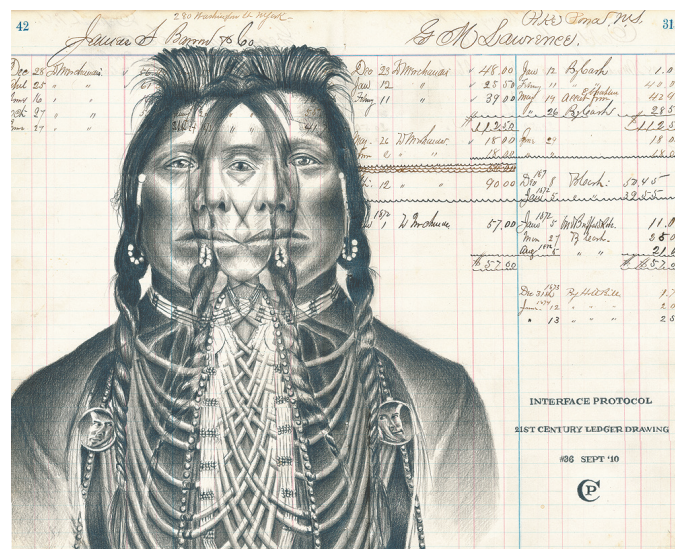
About the Cover

*Interface Protocol (21st Century
Ledger Drawing #36), pencil on
antique ledger paper*

Chris Pappan, Kaw/Osage/
Cheyenne River Sioux

The two figures or “mirrored” images

represent two people or two ideas coming together to create something new. I wanted this piece to have a connection to the digital age, so his necklaces become intertwined, creating a web, to symbolize the worldwide connection we can all share. The definition of the title, Interface Protocol, is “a common means for unrelated objects to communicate with each other” which ties in perfectly with my previous point of the two images coming together. I also think the piece really captures the feeling of the past and the future coming together harmoniously.



Introduction: Contemporary Native American Art

Yegóji is the Kaw word for contemporary, which means “right now, at this time or place.” *Yegóji* is the perfect word to describe this edition of Newspapers in Education, which is about contemporary Native American art. Contemporary Native American art is a reflection of the contemporary



Ben Harjo, Jr. “Live in Balance” (Seminole/Shawnee)

ideas, values and interests of modern Native peoples and the culture, right now, at this time and place. This edition will highlight some of Oklahoma’s most celebrated Native American artists as well as share a wide range of amazing contemporary art. Native American art is an exciting way to learn about what is important and what is happening in Native culture and life today. To pick up where we left off in the fall (2011) edition, Traditional Native American Art, we begin this edition at the turn of the twentieth century to learn about the exciting and dramatic developments that sparked the beginning of the contemporary Native American art movement, then continue forward to the present.

Contemporary Native American art is described as creative, innovative, and modern – while maintaining elements of tribal traditions and cultures. Drawing upon many of the techniques, methods, designs, and symbols of traditional Native American art, contemporary Native American art is relevant to the issues and inspirations of today’s Native artists that are communicated in a variety of traditional media such as painting, pottery, and weaving, as well as newer media like photography and graphic design. Native artists use these techniques and mediums to express their personal and cultural inspirations through the lens of today’s world.

In the previous edition, traditional Native American art was defined as art that was created by Native Americans from the earliest beginnings of Native culture to the year 1900. The same as in the Traditional Native

ideas, values and interests of modern Native peoples and the culture, right now, at this time and place. This edition will highlight some of Oklahoma’s most celebrated Native American artists as well as share a wide range of amazing contemporary art. Native American art is

Every piece of real art made for the sake of making real art is a declaration of love and guts.

—T.C. Cannon (Kiowa/Caddo)

American Art edition, this issue will focus on the visual arts. Traditional art forms such as weaving and pottery were often a shared practice among tribal communities and were handed down from one generation to the next. Contemporary art, although often inspired by these long-standing traditions, is also inspired by an artist’s personal inspirations and interests. Today, many of the traditional art forms such as finger weaving, pottery and appliqué remain the same. Native American art has grown to include pen and pencil drawings, easel painting, photography, graphic design, mixed-media, and even animation and film. Not only has the media expanded, but often the content has grown as well. Contemporary art is provocative and brings voice and insight that ranges from creativity to issues affecting Native Americans today. Contemporary Native American artists are constantly pushing the boundaries of the materials they use and the traditional artistic process to create meaningful and thought-provoking art. These contemporary influences range from pop culture, to social issues to Native identity and cultural preservation. In this edition you will learn about what contemporary Native art means to some of Oklahoma’s most

influential Native artists, and you will learn why Native American art is important.

What you will begin to understand is that contemporary Native American art is instrumental in the evolution of cultural identity and expression. Because this edition starts with the year 1900, you will learn how art, even “contemporary art,” is also a reflection of historical experiences



Joseph Erb “Making a Mix” (Cherokee)

and current events all rolled into one concept. Since its inception, Native Oklahoma artists have played a central role in developing and evolving contemporary Native American art. From ledger art to graffiti art, you will learn about some of the significant artists and art forms that have helped lead the movement of contemporary Native American art. Let’s get started, *Yegóji*!

Origins of Contemporary Native American Art

"I paint for my people. Art is a way for our culture to survive ... perhaps the only way. More than anything, I want to become an orator, to share with others the oldest of Indian traditions. I want people to look back at my work just like today we're looking back at the ledger drawings and seeing how it was then. I'm working one hundred years in front of those people and saying 'this is how we still do it ... we still have our traditions.'"

Virginia Stroud, United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians/Muscogee Creek



At the turn of the twentieth century Native people in Oklahoma were still faced with the challenges of adapting to new land, new ways of life,

and new social and political issues. These challenging times would prove to be the catalyst that would spark the beginning of the contemporary Native American art era. Through these tumultuous situations, Native people use art as a vehicle to share the importance and significance of their cultures. This new form of art provided awareness to both Native and non-



Apache Family, Allan Houser (Ft. Sill Apache)
Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, The University of Oklahoma,
Norman; Museum Purchase, c. 1948

Native people about what was happening within their communities and cultures. The practice of traditional art forms such as weaving, pottery, and beadwork continued to maintain cultural traditions, but mainstream art forms such as easel painting attracted a new generation of artists. The popularity of easel painting, later credited as the breakthrough genre for contemporary Native art, launched the contemporary Native American art era, with Oklahoma artists leading the charge during this exciting time in Native American art.

By refining traditional painting techniques used on rock and hide paintings (see Traditional NIE to learn more about hide and tipi paintings), learning traditional western painting techniques, and utilizing modern tools such as canvas and commercial brushes, twentieth century Native

artists created their own unique style of pictorial two-dimensional art.

An early influence on Native American easel painting was ledger art. Ledger art is pictorial drawing using pencil or pen (and sometimes water color paint) that is created on ledger paper. Ledger paper is a special type of paper normally used in accounting and other business fields. It has lines and columns for recording financial transactions, and traditionally comes bound in a book. Ledger art began primarily as a result of Native communities coming

into contact with the U.S. military. Often tumultuous, these encounters stemmed from disputes between the U.S. Government and tribes over land and other issues that threatened Native people's way of life. For Oklahoma tribes, some of the earliest ledger art was created by imprisoned Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Kiowa men at Fort Marion in St. Augustine, Florida and by Cheyenne and Arapaho Indian scouts at Fort Reno in El Reno, Oklahoma. The United States government supplied soldiers with ledger paper to record

transactions at the forts. The soldiers would give the ledger paper (that had sometimes been written on), along with pens, pencils, and sometimes paint, usually water colors, to the Indian prisoners. The prisoners would use these supplies to document what was going on around



Ledger drawing by Zotom, (Cheyenne) Autry National Center

them and would often depict cultural images from home. These drawings included battle scenes from homelands, interactions with the military and cultural scenes. Like the Plains culture's traditional hide and rock paintings, most of the imagery was in the foreground with little to no detail given to the background. These drawings became known as ledger art and are often credited as the start of contemporary Native American painting.

One of the most well known and prolific ledger artists was Silver Horn (Kiowa), whose brother, Ohettoit was imprisoned in Ft. Marion. Silver Horn's art depicted Kiowa culture and history. He was an inspiration to Stephen Mopope (his nephew) and James Auchiah who later became part of the renowned group, the Kiowa Five.

The Kiowa Five



Steven Mopope
Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, The University of Oklahoma, Norman; James T. Bialac Native American Art Collection 2010



Monroe Tsatoke,
Mabee Gerrer Museum



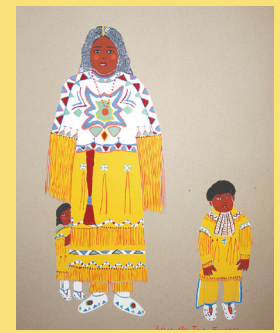
Jack Hokeah,
Mabee Gerrer Museum



James Auchiah,
Mabee Gerrer Museum



Spencer Asah,
Mabee Gerrer Museum



Lois Smoky,
Mabee Gerrer Museum

At Ft. Reno, the art was created by Cheyenne and Arapaho scouts who spent some of their free time creating images of everyday Plains Indian life. In the drawings, they paid special attention to detail, accurately depicting horses and the traditional adornment they wore.

This ledger art was then traded by the artist and soldiers who acquired either entire ledger books or just single images from the artists. In later years, these works became popular with art collectors and were highly prized in both museums and private collections. Today, ledger art continues as an art form and Native artists often seek antique ledger paper to create new works. An example of contemporary ledger art is the cover of this workbook created by Kaw/Osage/Cheyenne River Sioux artist, Chris Pappan. The cover art titled *Interface Protocol*, is drawn on ledger paper from a New York City general store.

As ledger art opened the door for Native American painting at the turn of the twentieth century, during the 1920s and '30s, three art movements had a monumental, lasting impact on the contemporary Native American art movement: the formation of the art group the Kiowa Five, the art program at Bacone College, and the Studio School at the Santa Fe Indian School.

In 1927 & 1928 at the University of Oklahoma, a professor named Oscar Jacobson brought together six Kiowa art students: Stephen Mopope, Jack Hokeah, Monroe Tsatoke, Spencer Asah, James Auchiah and Lois Smokey. Although six in number, they later became known as the Kiowa Five. Jacobson taught the students European painting techniques which allowed them to advance their art from the simple, stylized ledger drawings to show more realism. With the exception of Lois Smokey, the men in the group were all competitive powwow dancers. Their passion for dancing became a main theme in their paintings, most of which featured a male figure, colorfully adorned in dance regalia and painted in a dance pose.

The Kiowa Five used their own historical and traditional artistic influences and combined them with a distinctive modern, flat, and decorative manner to create a style all their own. Under the leadership of

Professor Jacobson, the Kiowa Five received monumental acclaim as they exhibited their work during an art show in Prague in 1929. This art show provided them international exposure and recognition. For the first time, Native American art had broken the western barrier into the world of fine art, which until then had been almost exclusively European. The legacy of the Kiowa Five continues to inspire Native American artists today and the importance of their work is showcased at the Jacobson House in Norman, Oklahoma.

In Muskogee, Oklahoma, Bacone College was also making a major impact on Native American art starting in the mid-1930s. Founded as an Indian college in 1880 and later converted to an Indian boarding school, Bacone College as it is known today, created an important art program for Native American students. Under the direction of three famous Native artists in their own right—Acee Blue Eagle (Creek/Pawnee), Woody Crumbo (Potawatomi), and Richard West (Cheyenne)—these early art teachers inspired and instructed countless students about the fine art of painting. Acee Blue Eagle was the original founder of the art department in 1935. Mentored by Oscar Jacobson, Blue Eagle helped to create what is known as the Bacone Style of painting. This style of painting is in the flat-style, similar to the Kiowa Five and reminiscent of ledger art drawings from tribal traditions. However, Blue Eagle incorporated modernist and art deco influences that were popular at the time. This blended style of art proved to be a good fit for art students at Bacone because many of the students who attended the school belonged to tribes who had experienced Indian removal and great cultural loss. This pan-Indian style of painting allowed students the freedom to paint Indian subject matter that was important to them, but not be restricted by the need to know traditional style or technique. Acee Blue Eagle was known for his charismatic personality and is an art legend for his personal artworks.

Woody Crumbo, another acclaimed artist, replaced Blue Eagle in 1938 as the Art Director at Bacone. Crumbo saw the cultural value in paintings and was often quoted as saying to his students, “a painting is a graphic record

Origins of Contemporary Native American art – continued

that a million words could not begin to tell.” Following Crumbo was Dick West, who in 1947 headed up the program. He was a renowned painter and the father to Richard (Rick) West, founding director of the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. During his 23-year tenure at Bacone, West encouraged students to be accurate in the cultural depictions in their works. At the same time, he encouraged them to freely create their own style of art and to share their culture in paintings. He always encouraged students to be creative and imaginative in their art.

Many students who studied art at Bacone went on to be very accomplished artists. These students include Ruthe Blalock Jones (Delaware/Shawnee/Peoria), Cherokee sculptor Willard Stone, Virginia Stroud (United Keetowah Band of Cherokees Indians/Muscogee Creek), and former Senator and Seminole Tribal Chief Kelly Haney, who created the Guardian that sits atop the State Capitol. Not only did students benefit from the innovation and inspirational teachings of these early art directors, the campus itself also benefited. Campus buildings and the school’s museum, the Ataola Lodge, are full of artworks by instructors and students.

Only three years after the founding of the Bacone Art Department, another art program was receiving notoriety for the innovative and original art that was being produced by students. The Santa Fe Indian School in New Mexico was a boarding school for Native American children mainly from the Southwest region of the United States, which included students from Oklahoma. The art department, later dubbed the ‘Studio School’, was led by Dorothy Dunn, a non-Native teacher from Kansas. The art program was

designed for high school-aged students and encouraged them to paint from their artistic

traditions. These traditions included geometric beadwork designs, pottery designs, and figurative rock art. Unlike the art directors at the University of Oklahoma and Bacone, Dunn did not teach important aspects and techniques of painting like color theory or perspective drawings. Dunn thought that students could use their natural ability and cultural memory of artistic traditions to create their work. What students produced were paintings that were two-dimensional, flat-style images that became known as genre paintings of traditional life which often included blue deer. For the most part, these paintings only showed the subject in the foreground with little to no attention given to the middle or background of the composition. For students like the celebrated painter and sculptor Allan Houser (Ft. Sill Apache), Dunn’s refusal to teach more painting techniques was frustrating for students who wanted to grow and develop their talent.

Collectively, this history of ledger art and easel painting became known as the traditional form of American Indian painting. These paintings inspired future generations of painters who pushed the ‘new traditional’ boundaries of American Indian painting. One of the first to do this was T.C. Cannon (Caddo/Kiowa). T.C. Cannon is known as one of the most influential and important artists of the 20th century, and is widely referred to as the Van Gogh of Native American art. Born in Lawton, Oklahoma, and raised in Gracemont, Oklahoma, T.C. was an intelligent student who later reflected his academic talent in his art. Cannon pursued his art studies at the Institute of the American Indian Arts (IAIA) in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 1964. IAIA had taken over the former ‘Studio School’ at Santa Fe Indian School, and new instructors were encouraging students to explore new themes and techniques in their work. It was here that Cannon began to incorporate pop themes along with cultural elements to pioneer a new genre of Native American contemporary painting. His work was a blending of social issues that faced his generation and traditional culture and virtues. He painted with bold lines and color and his intellectual compositions were often filled with unexpected subjects: for example, the painting “Tosca”, featured an Indian couple listening to the classic musical composition on a phonograph. This was not a scene that non-Native art patrons were used to seeing back in the 1970s.

Tragically, at 31 years old in 1978, Cannon died in a car accident in Santa Fe, New Mexico. His influence still lives today and most contemporary artists



Indian Maiden, Acee Blue Eagle (Muscogee Creek/Pawnee/Wichita)

Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, The University of Oklahoma, Norman; James T. Bialac native American Art Collection, 2010



Acee Blue Eagle & Echogee, America Meredith (Cherokee)—Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, The University of Oklahoma, Norman; James T. Bialac Native American Art Collection, 2010

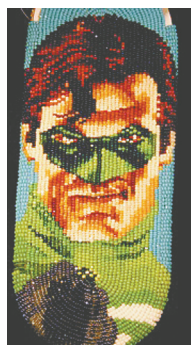
Powerful Bird, Willard Stone (Cherokee) Ataola Lodge, Bacone College



Waiting for the Bus, T.C. Cannon (Caddo/Kiowa)

Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, The University of Oklahoma, Norman; James T. Bialac Native American Art Collection, 2010

pop icons in his work like Wonder Woman, The Green Lantern and Janet Jackson, as well as historical figures like Sitting Bull and Geronimo. Another well-known beadwork artist is Teri Greeves



(Kiowa), who uses tiny glass beads to create pictorial, narrative scenes of both traditional and contemporary life.

These images include people at dances and young girls at sporting events. Terri's art is beaded on a range of materials such as sneakers, and even umbrellas!

Green Lantern, Marcus Amerman (Choctaw)

Another important genre of contemporary Native American art is sculpture. One of the most famous contemporary Native American artists to hail from Oklahoma is sculptor Allan Houser (Haozous) (Ft.

Sill Apache). Also known as one of the most important artists of the 20th century, Houser was a student of Dorothy Dunn at the 'Studio School' and later an instructor at the Institute of American Indian Arts. Houser was both a painter and sculptor whose work featured Apache culture. Inspired

credit him with empowering Native art by defining the creative freedoms that have contributed to the many styles and genres of contemporary Native American art today.

In addition to painting, other genres of art have defined what qualifies as contemporary Native American art. One of these is beadwork. Drawn from its ancient traditions, modern beadwork artists have incorporated pop culture icons and social scenes into their artwork. Marcus Amerman (Choctaw), a highly acclaimed beadwork artist, has mastered pictorial beadwork. Pictorial beadwork is an art form where the artist uses beads to create an image. Amerman often includes



Fancy Dancin' 'B' Ballers Teri Greeves (Kiowa)

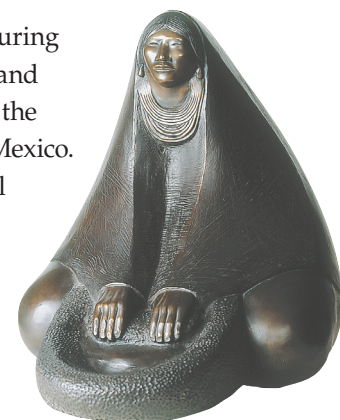
by his parents' experience of being prisoners of war during their early life at Ft. Marion in St. Augustine, Florida, and at Mount Vernon Barracks in Alabama, he drew from the traditional Apache culture of his homelands in New Mexico. Houser received widespread recognition for his mural paintings as part of the Works Administration Project during the Great Depression, but it was his sculpture that brought him international acclaim. A genius at bronze sculpture and stone carvings, Houser mastered large scale sculpture that captured the play between abstract lines and organic curves. His understanding of materials and how to sculpt and shape them created motion, softness, and emotion of the subject. He was a prolific sculptor and his works, as well as his foundry in Santa Fe, continue to inspire contemporary Native artists of all genres today. His enduring legacy can be seen on Oklahoma car tags which feature his sculpture *Sacred Rain Arrow*.

There are countless other talented artists who influence and continue to develop and change the genre of contemporary Native American art.

Visit the teachers guide online at <http://nie.newsok.com> to learn about other Oklahoma contemporary Native American Artists.

To hear a radio program about ledger art, visit <http://nativeamericacalling.com/ram/2012/feb/022212.m3u>

Use ledger paper to create your own ledger art. Draw a scene from your everyday life or you can draw a scene of an important event in your life. Share with the class. (See Teachers' Guide for full ledger sheet.)



Corn Grinder, Allan Houser (Ft. Sill Apache)

Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, The University of Oklahoma, Norman; Purchase, Richard H. and Adeline J. Fleischaker Collection, 1996

Month of September 1915

25	26	27	28	29	30	31	Total No. of Days	Wages per Day	Amount Paid	Amount Due	Total Amount	RECEIVED PAYMENT
							20	2.75	55	55	00	Lottie Vandervort.
							"	3.25	65	65	00	Belle Dumbree
							"	2.75	55	55	00	Solly Upen
							"	3.25	65	65	00	Rosie Partridge
							"	3.00	60	60	00	Marthana DuMont
							"	4.00	80	80	00	Theresa O'Marshel
							"	4.00	80	80	00	Harry Phelan
							"	3.25	65	65	00	Katherine Kang
							"	3.75	75	75	00	Ethel B. Wolcott
							"	5.56	111.11	111	11	D. J. Vandermiller
							"	7.22	144.44	144	44	P. G. M. City
							"	5.00	100	100	00	Helen Moseley
							"	5.00	100	100	00	W. J. Donaldson
							"	11.11	222.22	222	22	J. R. Clements
							30	2.00	60	60	00	Chas. Wagner
							"	1.83	55	55	00	Mustan Smith

Community: The American Indian Cultural Center and Museum asked Oklahoma Native artists why contemporary Native art is important. This is what they had to say:



I am a Miami bead work artist who works in both traditional and contemporary styles.

When I was twelve, I wanted to learn an art that was traditional to my people. I chose bead-work, as the beads seemed to call to me. While there were no living bead-workers in my family or in the surrounding area for me to learn from, I set out to teach myself. Through looking at pieces in the family and in museums I have come to this point in my career almost forty years later. I often say

that my teachers were the bead-workers of the past.

When I am working on a contemporary piece I draw from my traditions. I want the viewer to know that it is a Native piece while also showing that it is art of today, not of the past. We are people of today who are in constant motion, moving forward while not forgetting our ancestors' way of life. We continue our traditions while creating new ones as our lives change as does everyone's on this planet.

My inspirations come from everything around me. The birth of my first grandchild, items of my childhood and memories of family. From the ever changing environment that we live in, to items left behind by our ancestors. Oral stories, to the pictographs and petroglyphs.

Our world is full of inspiration, grab a piece of it and express yourself!

—Katrina Mitten
Miami Tribe Of Oklahoma



Contemporary Native art is important to me because it's the living, evolving of our people. With art, the ideas and visions don't get filtered or mediated. Visual art is a way to convey ideas that might not be possible to put into words, and art overcomes language barriers. Maybe we can't always speak our native languages, but we can paint and sculpt in our native tongues. Contemporary Native art connects the artist to their times, as well as drawing from ancestral art, and sharing these connections with the audience.

—America Meredith, Cherokee



The creation of contemporary Native art is important because it shows the continuum and evolution of our native cultures. It is important because it dispels the many ongoing myths, misconceptions and stereotypes surrounding our existence as modern tribal entities. One of the responsibilities of being an artist is to document the here and now, and to make an expression of how we view the world around us.

—Anita Fields, Osage



For Native Americans, our visual identity is perhaps our largest asset. When anybody thinks of Native people, our art comes to mind. As Native people, our art and creative process are simply a way of life for us, a way to be. At one point, the symbology in our beadwork and clothing design was contemporary. It reflected our relation to the world, to one another, to the universe. Today, it is imperative that artists working in traditional arts create work that does the same. It is time for our beadwork to tell the story of now. .it is not enough to simply replicate art that was once contemporary. Future generations need to be able to look at our work that will be handed down to them, and to be able to read it, so they can know the kind of life we live today.

Contemporary artists are some of our most important tribal members. Contemporary Native art has the opportunity to address misconceptions about our cultures, and change those negative beliefs held by not only the mainstream society, but ours as well. I am a huge fan of contemporary Native art that has substance and that makes a statement.

—Bunky Echo-Hawk, Pawnee/Yakama



Imagine for a moment, that Indian boarding school students would have been allowed to incorporate their culture, spirituality and arts into their educational curriculum, instead of being shamed and forced into abandoning them. Their knowledge base would have expanded exponentially to a broader world view, with much more to offer the world, as well as to the advancement of their own culture. But that didn't happen and instead, it rendered many tribal members disconnected from much (if not all) of their traditional ways of knowing and being. Today, as we all merge into a mainstream global society, we risk even more cultural erosion and disconnect, which is rapidly happening to Indigenous cultures worldwide. This could mean our descendants will have even less to draw from, as generations of knowledge and wisdom become forever lost, creating an even more homogenized and myopic world view. At this rate, we'll all have far bigger problems to worry about by allowing this erosion to continue. Like never before, Native artists now stand at a threshold of opportunity to impart a broader perspective of the not-so-insignificant contributions that Indigenous peoples bring to the human family table, while at the same time, continuing to enrich their tribal culture for future generations.

—Sharon Irla, Cherokee



Historians write that a people's culture is defined by their language and by their arts. Native Arts are an integral part of Native culture — art has the power to express an entire civilization. Without our arts, our cultures cannot survive.

But I feel it is terribly important that we express both traditional and contemporary art forms. The ancient ways link us to our past, but innovative interpretations have the ability to persuade and inspire. It can focus our attention to our present condition and direct our vision to the future.

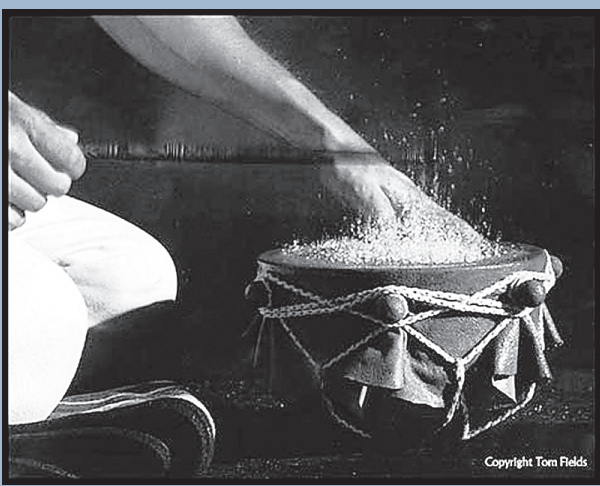
—Shan Goshorn, Eastern Band Cherokee



My artistic sensibilities are shaped by being born a Yuchi person, and continue to be informed through the cultural process, popular culture, as well as my own world view.

I believe an "evolving" distinctive Indian culture will live into the future through the arts (in the broadest sense): visuals, symbols, dance, music, cinema, oral literature, theater, the new technologies, etc. Art presents an opportunity for reflection, experimentation and discovery ... life is creativity.

—Richard Ray Whitman, Yuchi



"The art I make relates to my daily experiences and knowledge of my own history and cultural heritage. Drawing inspiration from this, then creating new works using modern materials and techniques, transforms my past to the present. Redefining art through this lens is the role each generation plays in reconstructing their future."

—Tom Fields, Muscogee Creek/Cherokee



Is beadwork traditional Indian art? Are beaded moccasins traditional? Are my beaded, high-heeled shoes traditional? The techniques and the raw materials I use on them are the same techniques and raw materials that are used on any pair of beaded moccasins you can see at a pow-wow or ceremonial dance today. These are materials and techniques that have been used for at least the last 200+ years by many Native peoples all over North America.

So what makes Indian art "traditional" or "contemporary"? I know plenty of Traditional and Fancy Dancers that use neon tape, nylon fabric, rhinestones, plastic beads, Velcro, chemically tanned hides, etc. to create their dance outfits. Does that make them traditional or contemporary dancers? How about the drum groups that record (new) War Dance songs on computers and then burn them on CD's or download them on MySpace? Does using the computer make their music more or less traditional?

Native people, the people you come from, have always used new technologies when they have been given the chance. Beads and thus beadwork is not "traditional" if you go back far enough. We didn't have glass-blowing factories to make seed beads and cut beads but as soon as we got them, we made them our own. We revisited beadwork through Native eyes: where once our sacred colors, our tribal patterns, our family emblems, our personal medicine was rendered in earth paints and porcupine quills, today it is rendered in shiny glass beads sewn with nylon thread sometimes on hide but more often on man-made material. It is our very handling of this new medium that has made beadwork Indian.

And this is the beauty of Indian art. It is part of our proud legacy of survival from the old ones. While there are strict guidelines for ceremonial objects, we, like all the peoples of the world, use the objects that we make to interpret the world around us. And today, softball, basketball, iPads, cell phones, computers, video games, satellites and all the rest are a part of the world we live in.

Contemporary Indian art: It's not what it's made of, it's what it says that makes it Indian.

—Teri Greeves, Kiowa



Continued on pg.14

Native Knowledge

Cultural teachings, histories, spiritual beliefs and other parts of Native American culture have long been encoded within objects through unique designs and motifs. These designs hold special meaning and are often referred to as *mnemonic devices*. A mnemonic device is something that assists with memory. Native people encoded their art as a visual language with these mnemonic devices to pass down stories, histories, and other information from one generation to the next. Sometimes the designs are clear depictions of things like the fire, people or animals. Other designs can be abstract representations of things like the four cardinal directions, depicted in two lines crossed in the center, or the Thunderbird, represented in a linear diamond motif. Organized together in a composition, they collectively tell a story or communicate an idea. Not only do the designs communicate information, but the construction and the materials an object is made of can share knowledge as well. It is important for Native people to continue to know about the materials and techniques used to create cultural objects as a way of keeping traditions alive within the community. Below are three examples of contemporary Native art which are directly inspired by traditional tribal art forms. These three works honor their cultural traditions. By studying these examples, you will learn how these artists are incorporating contemporary ideas and materials into traditional art forms.

Cherokee Baskets

Historic

Basketry is one of the original art forms created by Cherokee people. These baskets are made from a range of materials like river cane, honeysuckle vines, and white oak. One of the most common materials for Cherokee baskets is river cane, which is found abundantly in the southeast along river banks. River cane is the cousin of bamboo - it is a strong, fibrous, hollow, wood material which is well suited to create baskets. Once the river cane is harvested it is cut into strips for weaving. Sometimes the strips are dyed different colors with plants like walnut, bloodroot, and pokeberry. Weaving different colored strips into the basket design creates specific patterns that hold special meaning. The historic basket is woven in the complex double-weave technique which features diagonal construction. The diagonal weave design is one of the most historic designs distinct to tribes from the southeast. Most commonly, these baskets were used for utilitarian purposes such as storage, transporting and cooking.



Cherokee Basket, Ross Family, c. early 1800s, Five Civilized Tribes Museum

Contemporary

Inspired by the importance, function and purpose of traditional basket weavings of her tribe, Cherokee basket maker Shan Goshorn decided in 2011 to create a double-weave constructed, coffin-shaped basket to share the important story of the Carlisle Indian Boarding School experience. She named the basket *Educational Genocide: The Legacy of the Carlisle Indian Boarding School*. Shan used the traditional double-weave technique to weave together historical documents and photographs from Carlisle Indian School that she cut into splints. One of the documents was a speech from Captain Richard H. Pratt, founder of the school, and a Carlisle Indian Boarding school class photo from 1912. She created the basket as a metaphorical storage container to help promote healing and understanding about the harrowing experiences so many Native American children endured in boarding schools during the late 1800s and early 1900s.



- Study the construction of the historic basket and the contemporary basket. Notice the way the artists of both baskets wove together the materials to create the designs.
- What are some similarities in how the baskets are woven?
- What are the differences in how the baskets are woven?

Underwater Panther and Thunderbird

Historic

For over a thousand years, many tribes have shared a belief that powerful beings played roles in maintaining balance in the world and universe. One view was that the universe was divided into three parts: the upper world (sky), the middle world (on the earth – this world), and the underworld (below ground or water). Two of these powerful beings are the Thunderbird and the Underwater Panther. Both hold special powers and are regarded as protectors. The Underwater Panther has the ability to cause storms with its huge tail and is able to travel on land and swim in water. The Underwater Panther motif has been documented on centuries-old rock art, shell art, and textiles. Depicted on this Potawatomi bag from 1840, this powerful being is shown with zigzag lines on its tail that represent the different levels of the universe. The scales on the back of the panther are believed to possess healing powers, and the line above the





head represents the water where it lives. The rib-cage pattern on the center of the panther represents birch-bark dishes that hold offerings. Native people would include the offerings in the designs of the panther in order to keep it happy and to maintain balance in the underworld.

On the opposite side of the bag is the Thunderbird. The Thunderbird holds opposing power to the Underwater Panther, and the Underwater Panther and Thunderbird are in competition with each other. The Thunderbird is regarded as a warrior and has the ability to cause rain, thunder and lightning. Sometimes Thunderbird is depicted in bird form, and sometimes thunderbird is depicted in geometric diamond patterns.

Native people carried bags like this one to represent balance between the upper and the underworlds. Medicinal plants like tobacco were placed inside the bag to maintain balance in the middle world, the place here on earth.

Contemporary

Miami artist Katrina Mitten grew up hearing the stories about Thunderbird and Underwater Panther. These stories taught her about how these beings watched over her people and provided protection for them. When Katrina's granddaughter was born she decided to make a cradleboard for her with the images of Underwater Panther and Thunderbird on it as protection for her grandchild. She used the bag pictured as inspiration and decided that the cradleboard would be a metaphor for the traditional bags. As with the bag, both beings are represented in order to create balance. However, what sets this piece apart is that instead of medicinal plants being placed inside the cradleboard, the baby fits snugly inside and is the human representation of an offering for the balance in this world. The baby inside the cradleboard also makes the statement that Miami people are alive and well today. Katrina is an acclaimed beadworker and used beadwork to create the designs on the bag. She titled the cradleboard, *Powerful Protectors*.



- Study the images on the historic bag and the images on the cradleboard.
- Based on the descriptions of both pieces, can you find similar meanings in each piece?
- Because the Underwater Panther lives in the water, what do you think the scrolling design means?
- Because the thunderbird flies, what do you think the diamond pattern represents running beneath the image?

Southeastern S-Curve Historic

Prior to European contact, Native American people of the southeast encoded

their pottery with symbols that held sacred and important meaning. At the time of European contact, conflicting beliefs brought circumstances that caused tribes to fall out of practice with encoding pottery. This motivated tribes to begin incorporating these same symbols into beaded sashes typically worn during ceremonies. These sashes were usually created with dark trade cloth and white beads featuring scrolling or S-curve designs. The S-curve design represented the movement of the ceremonial stomp dance. During the 1800s, Native men began carrying bandolier bags, which some say were inspired by military ammunition bags. Bandolier bags became as popular and important as sashes. The designs on the bags became more elaborate and included more colors and important symbols. One of these symbols was the equilateral cross that represents sun and fire.



Caddo Pot, Late Mississippian Period c. 1400s, Denver Museum of Art

Contemporary

Martha Berry wanted to learn more about her Cherokee heritage so she began studying traditional Cherokee beadwork. Finding great examples of the traditional beadwork on bandolier bags, she began to learn about the symbols and designs covering the bags. After learning about the traditional techniques used to bead the bags as well as the ancient motifs worked into the bags, she was inspired to revitalize the tradition of making bandolier bags, which at the time was virtually lost to Cherokee people. Martha painstakingly creates bandolier bags with great attention to historic detail, infusing contemporary themes and materials. Examples of these themes are found in her bandolier bag, *Honoring the Warriors*, which features motifs from pre-European-contact pottery. On the center flap of the pouch are woodpeckers, which are an ancient symbol for soldiers. She chose the color red because in Cherokee culture red represents war.

The blue looped square is the ancient pottery symbol for wind, and the white arms reaching out represent the sun and fire. The scrolling design climbing the right side of the shoulder strap is her interpretation of the S-curve similar to the design on the pot. Martha has embedded this bag with special symbols and meaning to honor her family members who have served in the military.



- What makes Martha's bag contemporary? What makes the pot historical?
- In addition to the S-curve, what other designs do you see on the bag?
- Why do you think that it's important for traditional culture to continue to future generations?

Governance

One State – Many Nations

Before tribes were moved to Oklahoma, they existed in their homelands as independent, self-ruling, sovereign nations. During Indian Removal, however, these exclusive rights were stripped and over 67 tribes from all reaches of the United States and Canada were removed to Oklahoma. After the tumultuous years of Indian Removal, tribes reorganized again and reassumed their status as sovereign nations. Each tribe in Oklahoma has a different experience to share about how they came to the state.

To honor tribal histories and cultures, Oklahoma has dedicated art in public places across the state for the public to learn about Native people and their harrowing experiences of removal, recovery and sovereignty.

Two powerful examples of public art include: the poetic sculpture by Allan Houser (Haozous) (Ft. Sill Apache) titled *As Long As The Waters Flow*, located in front of the State Capitol; and the painting *Make Them Dance* by Brent Greenwood (Ponca/Chickasaw), which hangs stately in the new Oklahoma Judicial Center building.

Allan Houser was commissioned by the State Capitol in 1988 to produce a sculpture that spoke to the sad history of removal as well as the inspiring, resilient spirit of Native people in Oklahoma. The title, *As Long as the Waters Flow*, refers to President Andrew Jackson's broken vow to Native Americans that they shall possess their land "as long as the grass grows and the rivers



As Long as the Waters Flow, Allan Houser (Ft. Sill, Apache) From the Oklahoma State Capitol Art Collection, (c) Oklahoma Arts Council and the artist. Photo by Kimberly Rodriguez

run." The fifteen-foot bronze statue of an Apache woman exudes Houser's artistic style. The large solid planes on the surface denote strength within an everlasting presence of Native people in Oklahoma. Her traditional attire is complete with an eagle feather fan, which is considered a sacred symbol among Native American cultures. This sculpture is placed prominently in front of the State Capitol to remind all visitors about the momentous experience Native American people endured on their journey to Oklahoma.

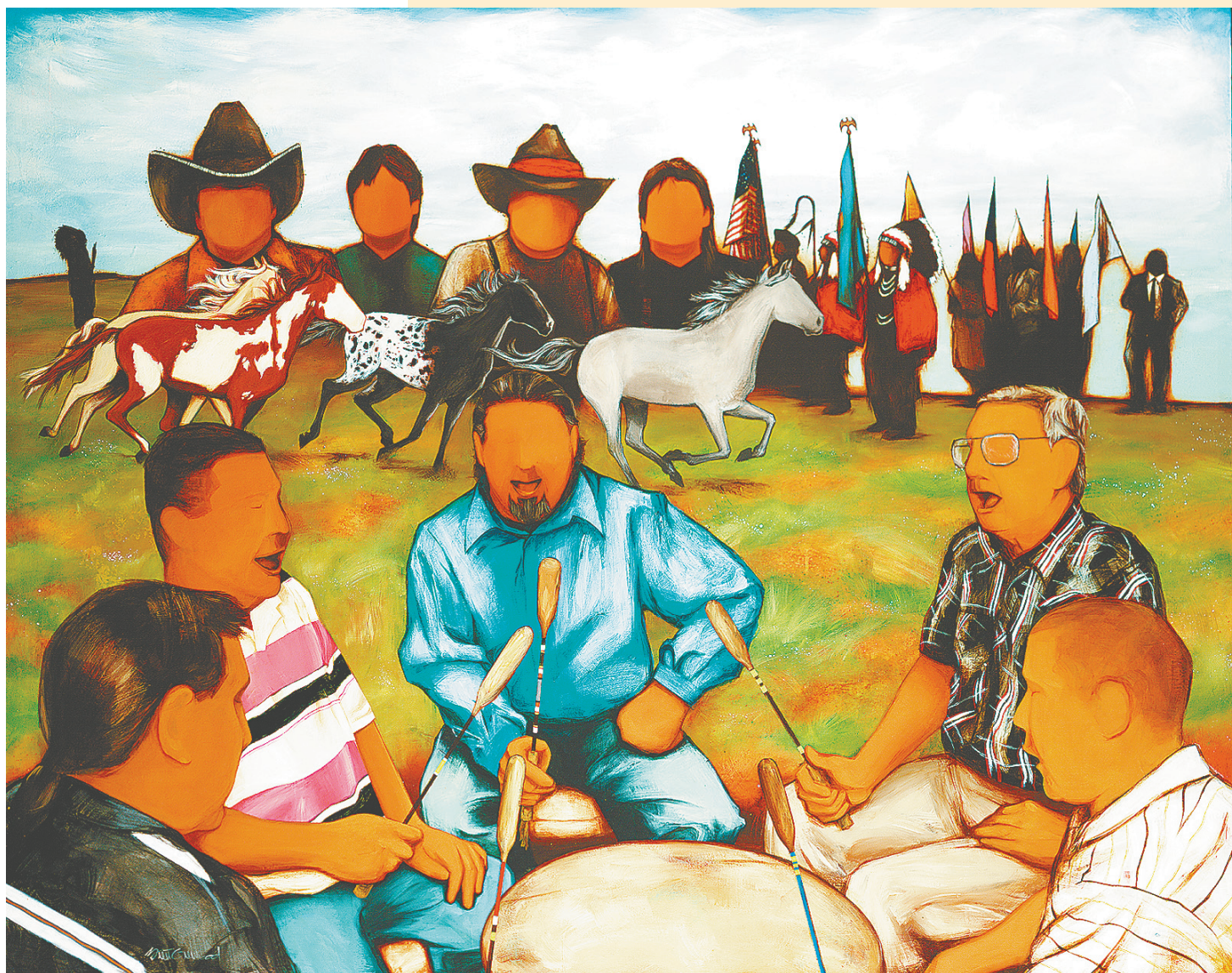
The Oklahoma Arts in Public Places program collaborated with the planners of the new Oklahoma Judicial Center building to create an exhibit of commissioned artworks that focus on the diversity of tribes in the state. One of the artists who was asked to create a piece was Brent Greenwood. Brent decided to create a painting that highlights the important opening ceremony at the annual Sovereignty Symposium (opposite page). The Sovereignty Symposium brings together tribal leaders and state public officials to discuss state and tribal governmental affairs and concerns such as tribal rights and legal issues.

Brent illustrated the opening ceremony of the Symposium in a colorful composition that includes key figures who participate in the event. Brent wanted to honor these people and their important ceremonial roles by featuring them within the painting.

In the foreground of the composition are drummers who sing traditional southern songs at the opening of the symposium. The four horses in the

middle of the composition represent Gray Horse, the original drum group who had a long tradition of singing at the opening ceremony. The male figures behind the horses represent the members of the Gray Horse Drum group, and pays homage to their legacy of blessing the ceremony with their singing and drumming. The silhouetted figure in the left corner is Gordon Yellowman, a Cheyenne Peace Chief who offers a prayer at each meeting for the leadership who attend, and prays for a productive meeting. The figures to the right of the drummers are the Kiowa Black Leggings Society who ceremonially carry in the United States and the Oklahoma State flags. Just behind the Kiowa Black Leggings Society is a group of tribal leaders from across the state who are each carrying in their individual tribal flags. This is a strong symbolic representation of the concept of sovereignty. A distinct feature of Brent's work is that he leaves the faces of the people blank.

He does this so that the viewer can imagine who the people are and become actively engaged in the piece. Brent adds that, "These people represent all the Native people in Oklahoma who strive to honor and protect tribal sovereignty."



*Make Them Dance, Brent Greenwood
(Chickasaw/Ponca)*

Activity:

Visit the following link for activity.

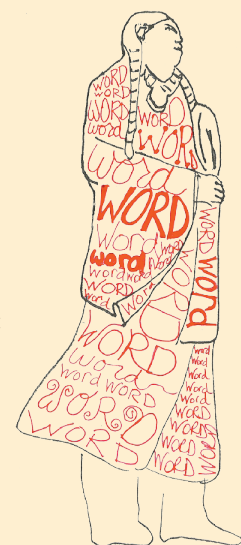
http://arts.ok.gov/pdf/Teaching_with_Capitol_Art/ReflectontheMeaning.pdf

To learn more about Allan Houser's life and work, visit:

<http://ndepth.newsok.com/spirit>

To learn more about Brent Greenwood's artwork visit:

<http://www.brentgreenwood.com/index.html>



Community Continued from page 9



Through Native art, I feel I am able to be a carrier of my valuable culture. When weaving, I feel a connection with my ancestors by studying and trying to learn their weaving techniques and patterns. I often wonder what their eyes were seeing and what they were feeling and thinking about as they were forming their baskets of necessity. When I teach and share basket weaving with others, I am passing this knowledge on to the next generation and keeping our tradition alive, and am hoping most of all that my ancestors are proud of our work.

—Sue Fish, Chickasaw/Choctaw



Native Art is the remainder of an equation. It is incumbent upon myself and other Native artists to occupy space, bandwidth, and airwaves and claim those territories on behalf of Native voices, ideas, laughter, songs, and expressions. This is the fundamental role of our mediums. Our work fortifies the existence that we

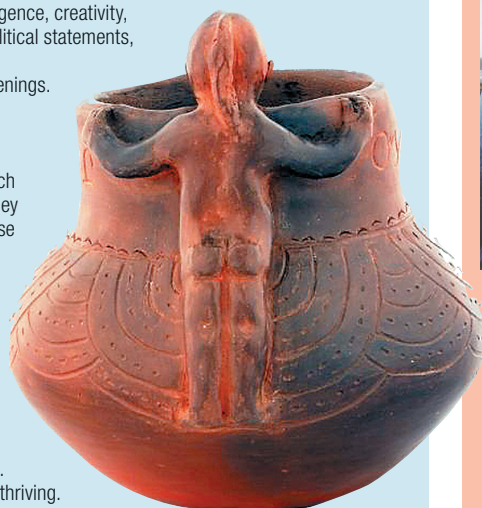
carve out for ourselves and our communities. The best way to understand its importance is to imagine its absence. How would the inside of your house change? How would the way you speak change? How would your weekends change? How would your clothes change? How would your behavior change? These things were given to us and we are meant to give them to those that come after us. Native art holds only allegiance to the process by which it's transferred and its relevance to those that receive it.

—Ryan Red Corn, Osage



I love the new directions cultural art is going. A new generation of contemporary artists are creating art that conveys humor, intelligence, creativity, outrageousness, rebellion, political statements, and daring. They make fun of themselves and current happenings. This isn't new; look at booger masks from the past, certain IAIA students from the 1970s (whom I won't name), and each generation of artists since. They have fun with their art, they use new technology and tools to create new art forms. We have access to more information and resources than ever before. Social media makes it easier than ever to share with other artists. But there is still a lot of cultural influence, a lot of historic reference in the art. Cultural art is vital, alive, and thriving.

—Lisa Rutherford, Cherokee



Art is important to me as a healing process for myself and it has the power to inform or destroy. Art must be handled with great care from Native artists because it is a direct extension of themselves, community, culture, and image. The life of the artist and art must be equal, positive or negative, or it is not, in my regards, worth anyone experiencing. I have met Native artists that create truths they do not believe. I have seen Native exhibitions of work I loved... until I read the artist statement or met the artist. I would like to see more Native artists create about forgiveness. Forgiving themselves, their families, their tribes, their religious leaders, their governments, their neighbors, and their enemies...this is why Native art is so important to us.

—Micah Wesley, Kiowa/Muscogee Creek





Fusion, Matt Bearden, Citizen Potawatomi

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Allan C. Houser
(U.S., Chiricahua Apache, 1914-1994)
Apache Mask, 1976, Bronze, 14.5 x 5.5 in.
The Eugene B. Adkins Collection at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, the University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma and the Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

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