

viewpoints

In the Flow

Seine of Journeys reveals delicate beauty of nature



Truman Lowe

Canoeing is Truman Lowe's religion. His life—and his art—are firmly rooted in water and wood. "Truman's work reflects his profound reverence for and emotional relationship with nature," says Karen Kramer, PEM's assistant curator of Native American Art. "By evoking the rhythms of nature and the experiences of being outside, he's asking us through his art to interact with nature in a very gentle but very real way."

PEM commissioned a work of art from Lowe for the museum's reopening in 2003. That sculpture, *The Seine of Journeys*, is the centerpiece of the exhibition *All of My Life: Contemporary Works by Native American Artists*. It hangs from the ceiling in a delicate arc. Willow branches joined by fishing wire create a textile pattern in wood that resembles the movement of water along a riverbank. Shadows on the floor evoke a walk through sun-dappled forest.

Lowe wanted to create a sculpture that would reference patterns in other artwork in the museum's Native American collections. Equally important, Lowe felt, was that his installation reflect natural components from the eastern woodlands. He wanted the sculpture to be a fluid, blanketlike piece that would be porous and therefore able to reveal and interact with the artwork in the gallery. Lowe says that while he was assembling willow saplings at PEM for *The Seine of Journeys*, Lowe says the sculpture took on characteristics of a net or weir for trapping fish in the flow of water. One of his earlier works, *Feather Fence*, conveys a similar theme, with a fence collecting feathers from wind.

His overriding concern, he says, is to assemble the various elements in his artwork "to say what I really want to say."

The Seine of Journeys says as much about Lowe's cultural and familial ties as it does about his views on the transcendent qualities of water. Because he grew up along Wisconsin's Black River, Lowe's frame of reference is, simply, nature. When he takes his canoe on the river, his gaze is drawn to the shorelines, in search of patterns created by the intersection of water, land, and woods.

"Water is a major influence on my life," he says. "I think that you have an understanding of that here in Salem. When you wake up, you can look east and see this great body of water. There's something reassuring about that."

The Seine includes references to centuries-old woodworking and weaving techniques still used by Lowe's Ho-Chunk (formerly Winnebago) community. But it incorporates a modern message. "Water," Lowe says, "allows you to travel physically, but also intellectually and emotionally, to wherever you want to be."

A new exhibition of Native American art opens in June. Organized and interpreted with the help of guest curator Laurie Beth Kalb, the exhibition features artwork and objects that convey the depth and variety of PEM's collection, among the oldest Native American art collections in the western hemisphere.



ABOVE: *In and Around These Mountains*, 1999, Mateo Romero

ABOVE LEFT: *The Seine of Journeys*, 2003, Truman Lowe



Ishi: *The Last Wild Indian* (detail), 2001, David P. Bradley

Collectors and donors enhance Native American collections

All of My Life: Contemporary Works by Native American Artists is dedicated to the memory of Margie "Mitch" Krebs, a longtime friend of PEM and who was a devoted and enthusiastic volunteer. Along with her husband, Jim, Mrs. Krebs became an important collector and, beginning in the 1990s, helped the museum acquire contemporary works for its collection of Native American art.

"Mitch and I found it very stimulating to discover, learn about, collect, and live with art and design—sources of visual and intellectual delight and satisfaction every day, never ending," says Jim Krebs. "As our collecting habit continued, our spaces filled and our ages advanced. We began thinking about other homes for our art. We were especially pleased to find common interest with PEM in adding some of our contemporary Native American art to its wonderful collection of older objects and in working with PEM curators to help build a deeper museum collection through purchase funds that we established."

Many of the Krebses' works of art are now on view in the Contemporary Native American Art Gallery. Husband-and-wife team Barbara and Joseph Cerno's *Storage Jar* was made in the traditional Acoma ceramic style of simple geometric patterns on a white-slip background. In the artists' contemporary interpretation, the design is complex, almost dizzying in its intensity.

Also courtesy of the Krebses are the paintings *Shopping*, 1996, Judith Lowry; *Indian Country Today*, 1996–97, David P. Bradley; *In and Around These Mountains*, 1999, Mateo Romero; and *Ishi: The Last Wild Indian*, 2001, David P. Bradley.

Support for *All of My Life* also comes from the 2003 PEM Docent Council, which raised funds to help purchase Truman Lowe's *Seine of Journeys*. "The docents saw this as a very important piece," says Karen Kramer, assistant curator of Native American Art. "They wanted to ensure that it had a permanent place in the collection."