

*Traditional Themes  
in Contemporary Cherokee Art*

*by Astrud Reed*



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*Cover: Ganiyegi Equoni-Ehi (Danger in the River), America Meredith.*

*Pages iv-v: Silent Screaming, Roy Boney, Jr.*

*Page vi: Top to bottom, Whirlwind; Clafin Sun-Circle; Thunder, America Meredith.*

*Page viii: Ayvdaqualosgv Adasegogisdi (Thunder's Victory), America Meredith.*







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# Traditional Themes in Contemporary Cherokee Art

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# Foreword

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"What About Indian Art?" An Interview with Dr. Mary Jo Watson  
Director, School of Art and Art History / Regents Professor of Art History

KGOU Radio Interview by Brant Morrell • April 17, 2013

Twenty years ago, a degree in Native American Art and Art History was non-existent. Even today, only a few universities offer Native Art programs, but at the University of Oklahoma Mary Jo Watson is responsible for launching a groundbreaking art program with an emphasis on the indigenous perspective.

You expect a director of an art program at a major university to have pieces in their office, but entering Watson's workspace feels like stepping into a Native art museum. From traditional ledger art sketches to beautiful hand coiled baskets from a West coast tribe, her walls tell a story about an art form and its fight for recognition.

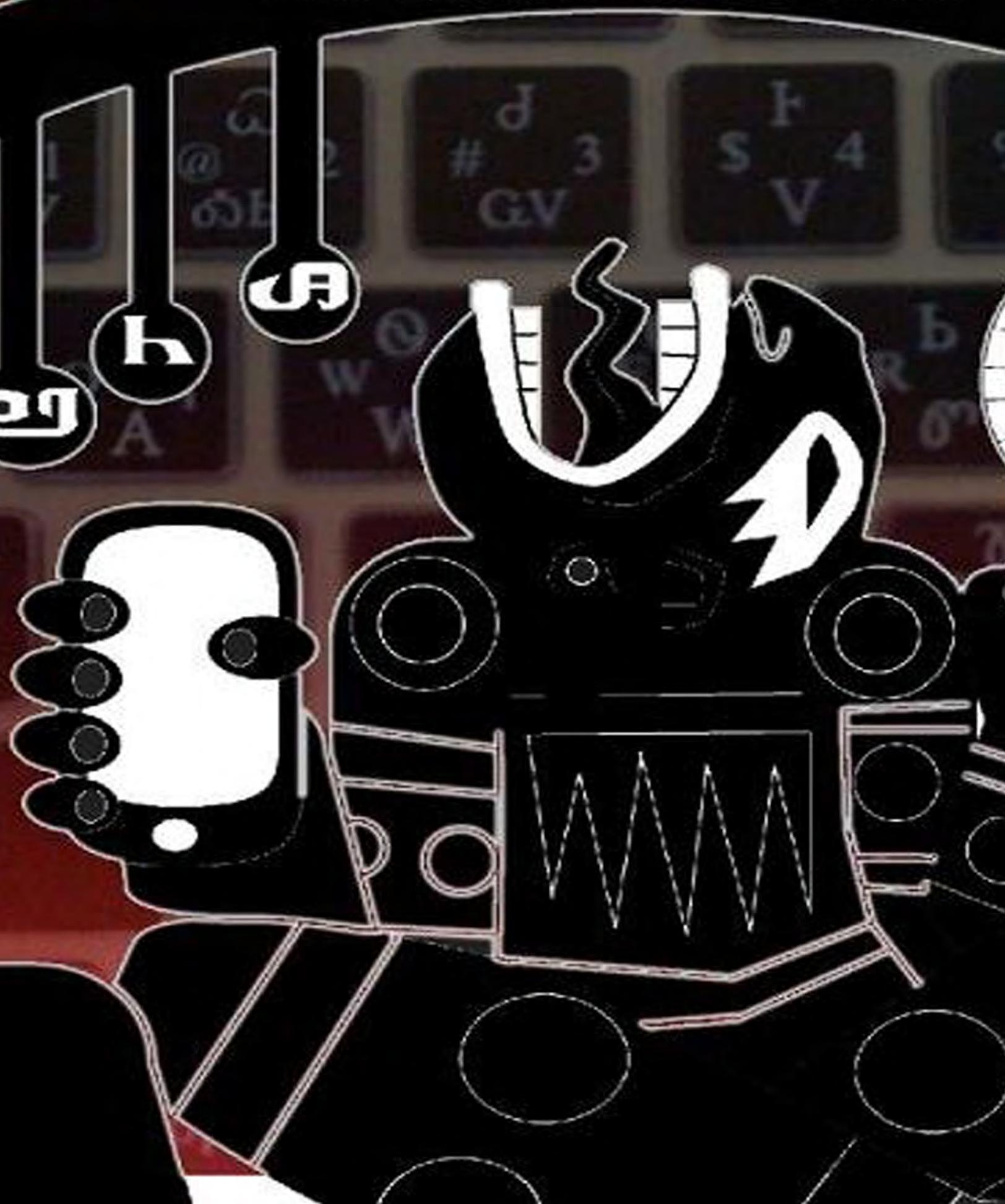
WATSON: If you can imagine, for almost a century people have looked on this art as primitive and not "good" art. It's totally different. The standards are different for Native Art than European art. We're working on a way to teach Native American art by using Native American terminology and the ideas of what it is about.

Between 1980 and 1993, Mary Jo Watson traveled across the state to raise the profile of Native American Art and the University of Oklahoma's new program. On campus, recent acquisitions like the James T. Bialac Collection give students and visitors from all over the world first-hand exposure to indigenous art and culture. Watson says she's seen a change in public perception as more and more people accept the work as fine art, rather than historical or anthropological material pieces.

*Untitled*, Joan Hill.



Learn Cherokee before it is too late.



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# Introduction

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*A Century of Indigenous Printmaking in North America*

Hyperallergic Article by Allison Meier • June 17, 2015

OKLAHOMA CITY — With nearly 100 prints from artists around North America, *Enter the Matrix: Indigenous Printmakers* at the University of Oklahoma’s Fred Jones, Jr. Museum of Art (FJMA) celebrates the medium’s rise in the 20th century. The exhibition opened last month, structured around several communities and institutions that elevated printmaking from a complicated reminder of paper’s role in controlling and relocating indigenous tribes, to a dynamic surface of cultural exchange.

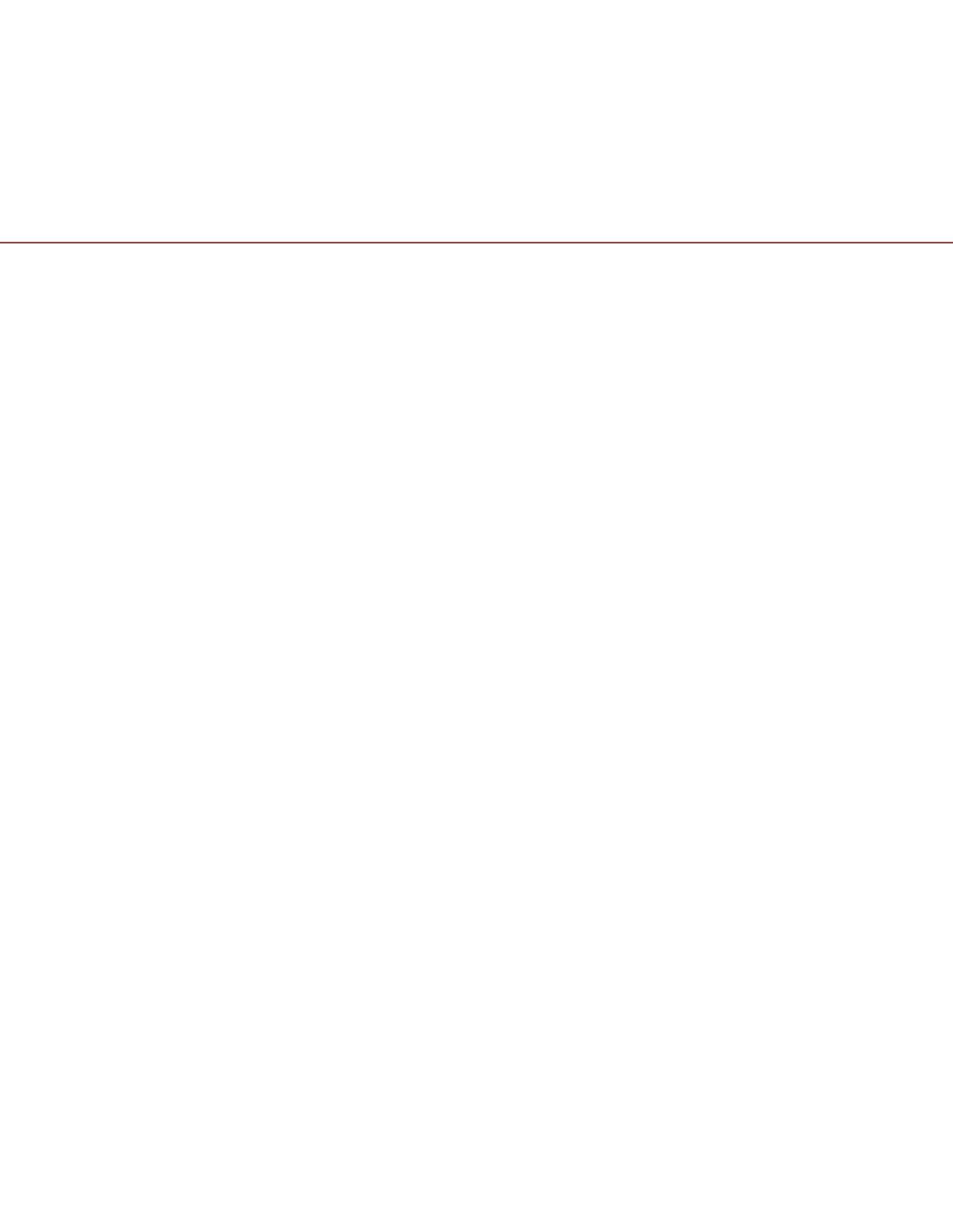
*Enter the Matrix*, organized by Heather Ahtone, FJMA’s assistant curator of Native American and non-Western art, starts roughly with the Kiowa Five, who joined as a collective in a University of Oklahoma studio space set up by the art department’s director Oscar Jacobson in the 1920s. While printmaking wasn’t central at first, the group’s Kiowa artists, like Stephen Mopope and Jack Hokeah, found the medium amenable to their flat-style painting that was inspired by traditions of 19th-century ledger art. The Kiowa Five weren’t the only indigenous artists getting attention in the early 20th century art world, but their participation in the 1932 Venice Biennale and perhaps more significantly the creation of a 24-print portfolio of their work brought it far beyond the state lines of Oklahoma. Contemporary artists included in the exhibition, such as Dennis Belindo with his “Kiowa Blackleggings” (1990) serigraph, show the enduring influence of Mopope and the rest of the Kiowa Five with the two-dimensional perspective and vivid colors compacting energy on the paper.

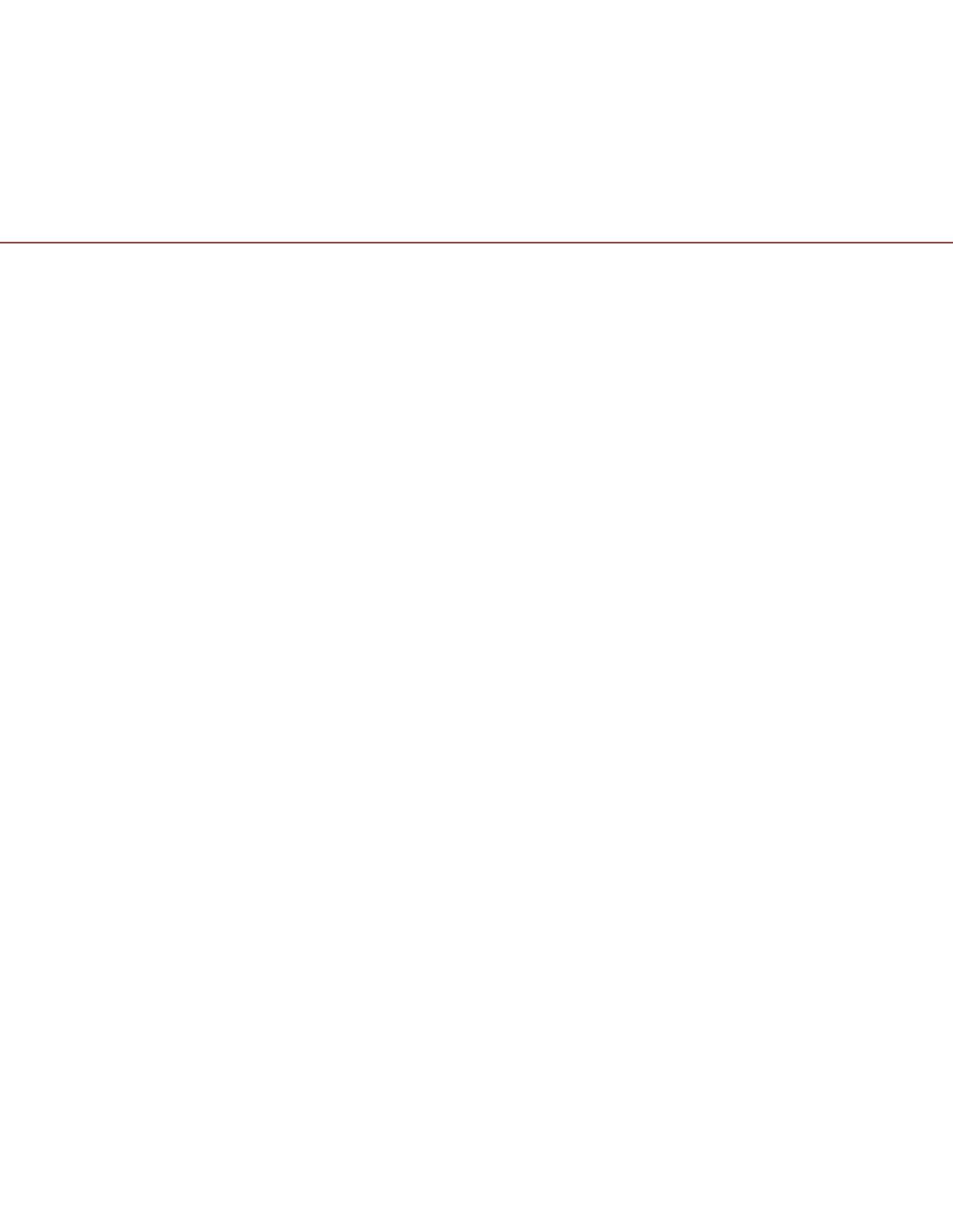
“When you think about the impact that paper has had and that indigenous artists have transformed this material into a conduit for expressing culture on terms set by the Native community — the medium becomes an important tool for ‘survance,’ Gerald Vizenor’s term to express both survival and resistance/continuance,” Ahtone explained to Hyperallergic. “Working on this project over the last two years has shown me how little has been done to consider printmaking by indigenous artists within scholarship.”

heather ahtone

Senior Curator, American Indian Cultural Center Foundation

Detail of *Learn Cherokee Before Its Too Late*, Joseph Erb.







# 1

## Cherokee Cosmology, History, and Culture

*She was the myth slipped down through dreamtime. The promise of feast we all knew was coming. The deer who crossed through knots of a curse to find us. She was no slouch, and neither were we, watching. — from “Deer Dancer” by Joy Harjo*

Anna Sixkiller Mitchell was credited with reviving traditional Cherokee pottery methods and designs in Oklahoma. Cecil Dick, often referred to as “the Father of Traditional Cherokee Art”, documented Cherokee life and its people. What are 21st century Cherokee artists giving back? Does their work keep the old ways alive, or is it taking a people into a new century far removed from the one of their ancestors, where culture and identity were tied to a place? In this paper I intend to show in an art history and ethnological manner, a resurgence of traditional themes and symbols used by contemporary Cherokee artists and how they are redefining present Cherokee identity.

*Spearfinger and the Chickadee,*  
Roy Boney, Jr.







*Unahnu Ukt'ena (Terrible Uktena) II*, America Meredith, gouache on paper.

To understand where a group is going and the momentum propelling them forward, it is important to know where they have been and the paths that were traveled. The Cherokee belief system was passed down for generations through stories and ceremonies. As with most indigenous groups, the Cherokee myths “contain a treasure of generally valid wisdom that extend far beyond the limited context of a people and a culture. They touch upon universal human experiences that people everywhere have always been exposed to, as well as existential, fundamental questions for

which they have always sought answers.”

The myths that are the basis of Cherokee thought are the creation story uniting the people to their ancestral homelands in the southern Appalachian Mountains and explaining their strong ties to nature, the first fire story which explains Cherokee beliefs on the different levels of human existence, and the first parents story with all of its Adam and Eve similarities is an exile from paradise showing why farming and hunting are difficult and sometimes do not yield enough sustenance to keep the people full. Other myths were cre-



*The Lost Hunter and the Little People*, Cecil Dick, oil on canvas, c. 1960, from the collection of Deborah and Alan Kynes.

ated to prepare the people for situations and problems that they might encounter. These stories include learning how to recognize deception and betrayal through the teachings of the trickster, Deer Woman, Spear-finger, and Stone Man; while personal development and realization are dealt with in the myths about Tsuwe'nahi and Tsul'Kalu. Some stories were used to bring relief to confusion about life's mysteries like Tlanu-wa's, great mythic hawks of the spirit world, defeat of Uktena, a monstrous winged serpent of the Below World, tales of the mischievous, yet helpful at

times, Little People, as well as the disappearance of the villagers of Kana'sta who were in search of a peaceful life with less suffering. Many other stories detail how various animals got their traits, the uses for different plants and gave examples for how the people could best handle all of the situations that arose in their lives.

In the late 1800s, James Mooney, a Bureau of American Ethnology researcher, lived with the Cherokee in eastern Tennessee. He learned their language and cosmology while also documenting all social, political, and economic aspects of the tribe. There is



Wosu, America Meredith.



Uha, America Meredith.

some speculation on the validity of his work, but the overwhelming consensus of tribal members and historians is that a great deal of Cherokee culture might have been lost had he not recorded all he did. Many of the beliefs, ceremonies and customs that are still honored today may be contributed to Mooney's efforts. *Swimmer Manuscript: Cherokee Sacred Formulas and Medicinal Prescriptions* was a collection of songs, prayers, and stories collected by James Mooney from a man called Swimmer, and later compiled and edited by Frans M. Olbrechts. This sacred knowledge was used by Cherokee people and their medicine men to cure physical, mental, and spiritual ailments; to be successful in the hunt, raising crops, politics, and ball play; to honor their gods and ancestors; and to explain all of the elements of Cherokee society. Detailed instructions were given in the *Swimmer Manuscript* on the ceremonies, rituals, and dances used to carry out the formulas. Historically, the Green Corn dance and ceremony is one of the most important for the Cherokee. It took place in the fall as the first corn began to ripen and was about expressing gratitude for healthy crops. Many other Cherokee ceremonies are also seasonal, and incorporated the sacred fire element. Dances were held throughout the year for special purposes and to provide greater contact with nature, the ancestors, and fellow tribes people. The Legend of Stone Coat was one such dance that remembered the origin of the Cherokee songs and medicine. The Booger Dance began as a way to ward off sickness and death,

but after contact with the white man it morphed into a social function used to quell anxieties that came from interactions with these invaders as well as to curb inappropriate behavior of tribal members. The Booger Dance is recognized now for the gourd masks with phallic noses worn by the participants. Other dances were held for success in war, to commune with nature and cure sickness, and for building social relationships that include: the Eagle Dance, The Bear Dance, Formal Rites Dance, War Rites and Victory or Scalp Dance, the Corn Dance, the Friendship Dance, the Buffalo Dance, the Horse Dance, and the Beaver Dance.

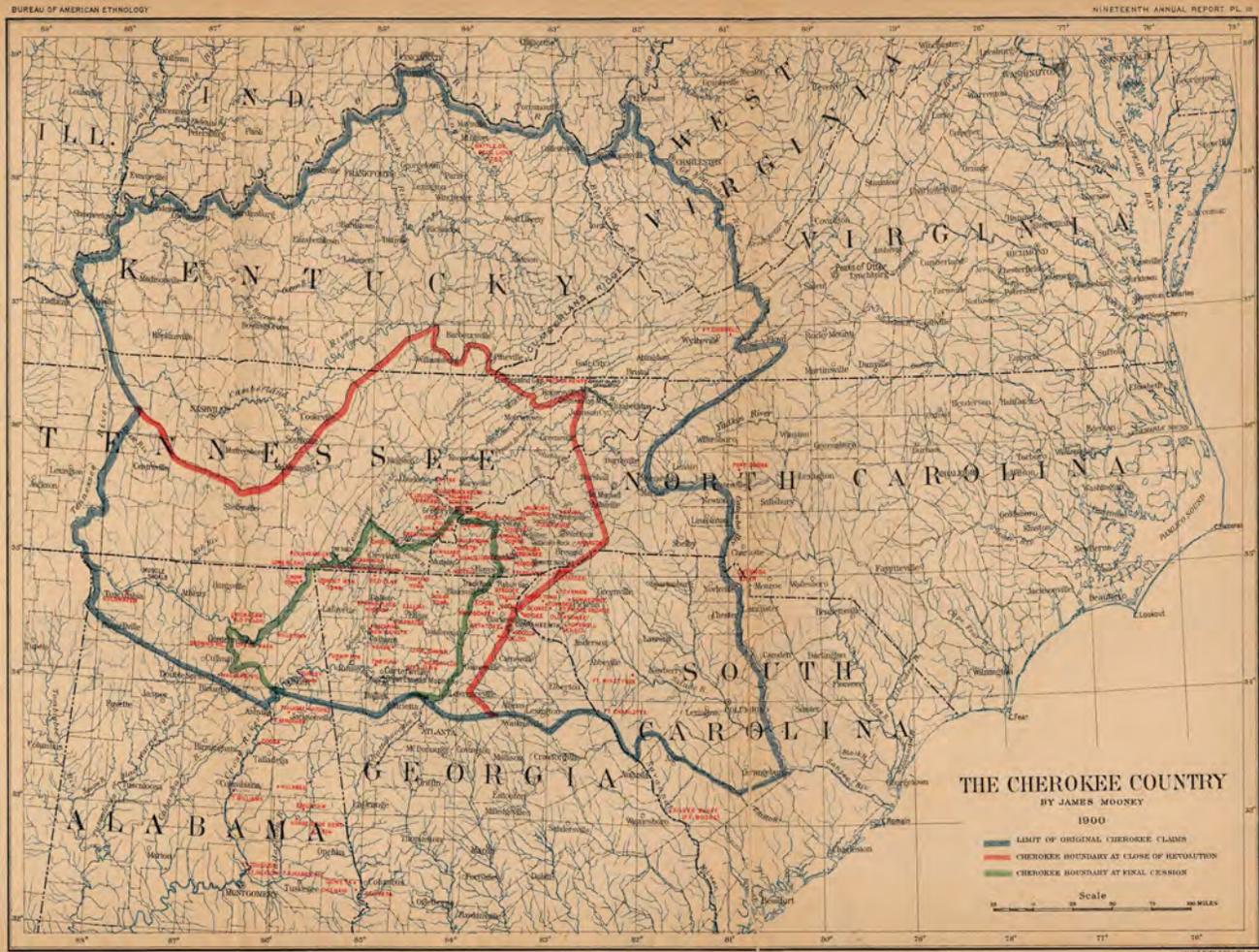
The Cherokees performed the dances using three main pieces of equipment. The water drum was made from a hollowed out tree trunk for the body with an animal skin resoaked at every use and then stretched over it tightly for the head. Turtle shell leg rattles are used by women dancers following the leader and having the skill necessary to create noise only during particular parts of the song. Gourd hand rattles were originally created made from hollowed out gourds and used as rhythm instruments. A “driver” controls most dances. This individual is also referred to as the starter since he encourages participation and maintains order. The continuation of these dances and ceremonies tied together ancient and modern Cherokees as they traveled from ancestral grounds to their current homelands.



*Mississippi Float Trip, America Meredith.*



*Guardians, America Meredith.*



*Southeastern United States Cherokee Land Shrinkage Map from original European contact to final cession. Created by James Mooney, 1900. Housed in the Perry-Casteneda Map Collection at the University of Texas.*

Most experts now believe that the Cherokee split off from the Iroquois, located in the Great Lakes Region, and moved to the southern Appalachian Mountains over 3500 years ago. The Cherokee refer to themselves as Yun wiya, or the principal people, but they are commonly known as Tsa lagi, a name apparently given to them by another group since it has no meaning in the Cherokee language. At the time of white contact, the extremely large Cherokee tribe numbered between 16,000 – 20,000 individuals living in over 60 villages that occupied an area of 40,000 square miles in what are now the states of Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

Their chiefdom-styled political organization was built on a “kin-based, segmented, non-egalitarian, small-scale society.” The Cherokee lived in permanent structures made of logs and clay with personal gardens for each home and communal fields for planting on the edge of each village. Each town was self-governed with business conducted in large, often mound elevated, town houses made with seven sides to represent the seven Cherokee clans. All citizens could participate in village affairs. Socially, the Cherokees were matrilineal with family association going through the mother’s bloodline. Women oversaw agricultural practices and child rearing, while the men hunted and kept the village safe from neighboring tribes. There was no gender dominance, which was shocking to the Europeans, and divorce was not only accepted, but happened regularly. Cherokees identified themselves socially and politically by their clan affiliation, which were named the Bird Clan, the Blue Paint Clan, the Deer Clan, the Long Hair or Twister Clan, the Red Paint Clan, the Wild Potato Clan, and the Wolf Clan. Most villages



*I Rise in Opposition*, Virginia Stroud.

had between 300 – 600 inhabitants, with each clan represented, and two chiefs. “The ‘white chief’ regulated domestic affairs, which were especially important from spring planting until the fall harvest, while the ‘red chief’, or warrior chief, was more important during the winter season, which was the time for war.” The villages only pulled together and made decisions as an entire tribe in extreme circumstances. In some of these instances a council was created from the chiefs of the various towns, at other times, one chief was appointed but would step down as soon as the issue was resolved.

After European contact, life for the Cherokees began to change. Like most other eastern seaboard tribes, almost half of the tribe (approximately 8,500 individuals) died from smallpox and other diseases of European origins. As settlers began to encroach their lands, most Cherokees deemed it advantageous to assimilate much of their culture. James Mooney described the Cherokee response to colonization in the following manner, “unlike most other Indians, Cherokees are not conservative.’ In this, he means that the Cherokee, more easily than other tribes, made the transition from ancient tradition to methods, tools, and ways that they recognized as superior and useful.” This may have been a more natural change than with other tribes due to the pre-existing Cherokee social and



*Anthropologist James Mooney (1861-1921) of the Bureau of American Ethnology. Undated.*



*Swimmer: Photo courtesy Smithsonian Bureau of American Ethnology.*

political structure. It also fostered a more favorable environment for civil affairs, trade, and intermarriage with other groups. Interested colonists were welcomed into tribal society and politics, many garnering recognition as tribal members up until the inception of the Dawes Rolls even though they did not possess any blood quantum. Many of the great Cherokee leaders were far from being full blooded. Chief John Ross (1790 – 1866) was the original principal chief of the Cherokee Nation from its inception in 1828 to his death. He was only one-eighth Cherokee and did not like to use Cherokee during tribal business because he believed that his own Cherokee was poor. Sequoyah, or George Gist, (1770 – 1843) was half Cherokee and half German. General Samuel Houston was adopted by Western Cherokee Chief Ahluidegi, or John Jolly, and later married a Cherokee woman. Some members of the Cherokee tribe did not favor assimilation. The Keetoowah Band, later known as Western Cherokees, fought to retain the traditional Cherokee way of life. Increased skirmishes between settlers and Cherokees, mostly based on land and resource title, and 200 years of native and colonial wars created the need for John Ross, Charles Hicks, and Major Ridge to attempt diplomatic and political solutions with the American government to protect the tribe and avoid forced removal. The Cherokee Constitution, based on the United States' version, was enacted in 1827 with Ross' appointment as principal chief finalized in 1828. After many treaties and court rulings were unenforced, the Cherokee Treaty Party, led by John Ridge, Major Ridge, Stand Watie, and Elias Boudinot, felt that removal was eminent and signed away the

Cherokee lands in the Treaty of New Echota, which supposedly guaranteed lands west of the Mississippi River in Indian Territory for the tribe. Principal Chief Ross and the National Party collected and presented over 16,000 signatures against the action and even though he did not sign it, the United States Senate ratified the treaty in 1836. A massive cultural loss occurred upon the split of the Cherokee tribe as a result of the Treaty of New Echota. Most of the over 18,000 members were either forcibly removed or fled from their ancestral homelands. Andrew Jackson, president of the United States at that time, gave the Cherokee very little for their land and would not negotiate on allowing the Cherokee to stay. Nu na da ul tsun yi (the place where they cried), known by all of the Five Civilized Tribes (Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole) as the Trail of Tears, occurred for the Cherokees between 1836-1839. Over 4,000 Cherokees died between the inhumane internment camps where the people were held prior to the trip, and the long journey to Indian Territory. There are now three federally recognized Cherokee bands: the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians of North Carolina, and the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indian of Oklahoma. It has taken over 150 years for the tribe to heal, but through this reunification of a people a great resurgence of cultural pride and tradition has begun through various local and technology-based distance programs resulting in increased Cherokee speakers, syllabic readers, and members versed in the tribe's oral history.



*Sequoyah, Charles Bird King, 1828*



*John Ross, Bureau of American Ethnology, 1858.*



## 2 Transformation of Traditional Crafts and Utilitarian Items Into Art

*The introduction of a tourist demand created the need for unusual as well as traditional pieces. Resulting economic changes for Cherokee women also occurred through this market, which drove these artists to hone their skills for an increased supplemental income, and ultimately revitalize an aspect of Cherokee culture.—from “Selling the Indian” by Carter Jones Meyer*

Pre-contact Cherokees were highly skilled in using the resources provided by their natural environment to create many utilitarian items that supported all of the needs that a stable, agricultural village required: clothing, tools, domestic utensils and vessels, weapons, as well as religious and ceremonial pieces. Formal art experts have historically dismissed these indigenous works as only craft but it is this highly developed craftsmanship, passed down for generations in apprentice-type educational systems, that elevated Cherokee basketry, beadwork, pottery, weaving, carving, and painting to articles of art. Contemporary thinking has changed as it pertains to tribal art as expressed by Roy Boney, Jr., in the initial issue of the *First American Art Magazine*,

*The Fourth Estate bandolier bag,*  
Martha Berry. (2009.)







*Cherokee Burial*, Cecil Dick.

“they mistook the abstraction and simplification of shapes and figures of masks and other ceremonial objects as being primitive --- a return to the image of the stereotypical noble savage. This belied the artists’ lack of understanding of the cultural aspects of the Indigenous objects they saw.” As descendants of Mississippian culture, 800 CE to 1500 CE found in the East, Southeast, and Midwestern United States, and the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex, 1200 CE to 1650 CE found in the East and Southeast parts of the country, Cherokee arts and crafts from the pre-contact period used iconography similar to other groups from this area due to extensive trade. This often made it difficult to determine the origin of particular pieces or symbols since a Bird-man, Great Serpent, or warrior likeness from ancestral Cherokee lands might appear exactly the same as one from Oklahoma’s Spiro Mounds. Often the defining factor was the type of material a piece was made from since each group

generally used local resources like copper from the Appalachian Mountains and the Great Lakes region, conch shells from Florida, and lead from the upper Midwest. Cherokee arts and crafts were no different with period pottery made using a coil method from local clay and burned with area wood that determined the final color (along with the amount of time a piece spent in the fire), and basketry traditionally woven from native river cane, oak, and maple.

European assimilation was forced on the Cherokees and other tribal nations in their social, cultural and religious practices. From 1880 – 1930, native children were sent to Indian boarding schools to formally educate and “Europeanize” them. The experience was very traumatic, creating a loss of identity for many. Army Captain Richard Henry Pratt, Carlisle School founder, coined the phrase, “Kill the Indian, save the man,” in reference to this attempt at cultural genocide. This break in oral tradition and cultural ap-



*Lottie Stamper teaching a basketry class at the Cherokee Boarding School.*

prenticeships caused a decline of many Native craft customs. 20th and 21st century Indian schools have attempted to counteract these travesties by reintroducing tribal art and culture, bringing Cherokee National Treasures into schools and community settings to share their knowledge and gifts.

The 17th to 19th centuries brought new associations, technologies, designs and locations to the Cherokee people, all of which influenced their art. “The colonial-frontier fur and slave trades had a significant impact on the nature of Cherokee social, political, and economic institutions, as well as on the creation and use of sacred and secular objects. The acquisition of art materials, the manner of producing various objects, and even the gender of those responsible for creating some types of art were all affected by these foreign influences. The outcome was a mixture of extreme challenge and unprecedented opportunity that ultimately resulted in the decline or disappearance of some

forms of art and in the transformation of others.” Cherokee pottery was almost lost with the introduction of trade goods, causing many previously handmade objects to no longer be needed, and lack of traditional materials due to forced relocation. Basketry, on the other hand, blossomed with the introduction of honeysuckle and innovations in basket shapes and sizes driven by a new Native art market. Until this time, baskets were only created for specific utilitarian or ceremonial uses. A basket was identified by its purpose, the technique, material, and form. The introduction of a tourist demand created the need for unusual as well as traditional pieces. Resulting economic changes for Cherokee women also occurred through this market, which drove these artists to hone their skills for an increased supplemental income, and ultimately revitalize an aspect of Cherokee culture.

A resurgence of traditional Cherokee art occurred in the mid to late 20th century. Beginning with a desire to



*Naturally dyed buckbrush basket, Mavis Doering.*



*Lottie Stamper, Eastern Band Cherokee weaver.*

make her husband a Sequoyah-style elbow pipe, Anna Belle Sixkiller Mitchell (1926 – 2012) unknowingly started down a path to revitalize the making of Cherokee pottery. Using eastern Oklahoma clay found close to her home, she started teaching herself how to procure, mix, and work the clay, but finding skilled elders or examples to copy proved very difficult. Her interest grew and she began traveling the Midwest looking for any information that might aid her in her quest. A chance meeting gave her access to Smithsonian archives, followed by various informative trips to the Southeastern United States. As do most Cherokee artists and historians, she discovered that it is often challenging to differentiate ancient Cherokee designs and motifs with that of other tribes of the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex so her research focus changed to learn about the entire process of traditional Southeastern pottery. Her archival studies were greatly complimented by the ethnographic methods used in interviewing elders for even the smallest memories about where their mothers, grandmothers, or aunts gathered clay, how they built their fires, and what methods they used to create the coiled shapes and decorate the finished vessels. She initially believed that pottery making stopped during removal, but she later found that it actually began much earlier due to assimilation and access to European goods. Even though she possessed a fierce adherence to traditional methods that honored the ancestors, there was still room for innovation and creativity. Mitchell experimented with clays from multiple

locations, as well as combining clays and infusing other materials for a variance in weight, color, thickness, and texture. She created her own paddles for stamping designs, used varying relief patterns, and has finished her pieces with a plethora of natural materials and ornamentation. The forms she created were both utilitarian and ceremonial in appearance. “ Her aesthetics are bound up in the heritage of Southeastern and Cherokee culture. She produces pottery that is elegant, superbly constructed, and which manifests her strongly held bond with the early Cherokees and Southern Indians. Anna has come to be nationally recognized as one of the master ceramic artists of the Southeastern pottery styles.” Her greatest gift to Cherokee and Southeastern pottery though, was her dedication to teaching those who have come after her about the culture and history of their tribe and the beautiful art they created that honored those traditions.

Other Cherokee women artists from this period were very influential in maintaining a high level of adherence toward traditional themes, symbology, and methods. Two of these were basket maker Mavis Doering and painter Joan Hill. Cherokee basketry has always been a high cultural priority. Although materials and styles may have varied some after removal, with Eastern Cherokee women using traditional white oak and rivercane, and Western Cherokee weavers utilizing native Indian Territory flora like buckbrush, the double-weave technique remained promi-



*Duck Bowl, Anna Mitchell.*



*Anna Mitchell teaches traditional Cherokee pottery.*

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ment. The increased market demand beginning in the mid 1800s did create an avenue that allowed for more individualized style as function became less important for these non-utilitarian pieces. The double-weave, lidded basket is one example of vessels created almost solely for sell and trade outside the tribe. Otis T. Mason was quoted in George Wharton James' *Indian Basketry* as saying the following about native basket makers, "Long before the fire-maker, the potter, or even the cook, came the mothers of the Fates, spinning threads, drawing them out and cutting them off. Course basketry or matting is found charred in very ancient sepulchers. With few exceptions women, the world over, are the basket-makers, netters and weavers." The weaving skills of Mavis Doering (1929 – 2007) brought her great attention and honors. While adhering to traditional construction methods, Doering was able to still create very unique and beautiful artistic works. As a third generation basket maker, she had the opportunity to apprentice with family in a prehistoric manner that garnered insider knowledge into the collection and processing of the eastern Oklahoma materials, traditional designs, and functions. Her pieces can be recognized by their use of "well-known Cherokee patterns, such as Mountain Peaks, Double Chief's Daughter, and Lightning." Celebrated Muscogee Creek / Cherokee painter Joan Hill (1930 - ) is known for her "stylized" acrylic and watercolor paintings depicting ceremonial, cultural and historical views of Cherokee and Creek women that often incorporate the landscapes and flora of

these tribes portrayed in unconventional methods. Hill expressed her artistic views in 1991 stating the following, "Art widens the scope of the inner and outer senses and enriches life by giving us a greater awareness of the world." Hill's art is inexplicably tied to her heritage with an often dreamlike quality infused into the scenes that are at times depicted without foundation or a full range of colors. The viewer can feel these paintings and understand the unsaid words. Her work is highly intellectual and sophisticated in its simplicity.

Often regarded as the father of Cherokee traditional art, Cecil Dick (1915 – 1992) spent over fifty years recording Cherokee culture and history. His work is easily identifiable with its Eastern Oklahoma flat-style painting techniques, highlighted by beautiful, almost hauntingly ethereal shades of blue that are found in so many of his works. Extensive historical knowledge made it possible for Dick to create pieces on Cherokee ceremonies, dances, ball games, mythology, death, medicine men, hunting, war, agriculture, and other scenes of daily life. His work evolved over time with later pieces exhibiting greater technical detail, layered with numerous aspects of Cherokee cosmology and experiences. Dick considered every article of clothing, as well as every detail in the landscape and action of the subjects. Through art, Cecil Dick, Joan Hill, Mavis Doering, and Anna Mitchell, shared what it means to be Cherokee to younger generations. Their cultural pride and historical dedication laid the groundwork for the next generation of Cherokee artists.



*Cherokee Man*, Cecil Dick.



# 3

## Contemporary Cherokee Art Themes, Methods, and Artists

*Cherokee sculptor Bill Glass Jr. had wanted to create monumental Cherokee art in Oklahoma. Ironically, that desire found initial realization in Chattanooga, Tennessee, a major departure point of the Trail of Tears. — from “Cherokee Monumental Art Returns to Origins”*

Inspired by the previous generation, Cherokee artists from the late 20th and early 21st centuries are weaving new connections between traditional themes and contemporary concepts and materials. Some have revived or even saved original Southeastern methods like Anna Mitchell, while others, in the Cecil Dick tradition, document Cherokee culture and history. An emerging group of 21st century Cherokee artists are revitalizing Cherokee language, culture, and cosmology. Using new styles in their art while maintaining a dedication to tradition these individuals are helping to create a Cherokee identity for a new century that encompasses historical pride, social activism, and hope for a unified future. The Cherokee Nation has also played a substantial role in the process by recognizing artists who preserve and promote Cherokee culture, as well as providing events and support for Cherokee artists to show and sell their work.

*The Passage*, Team Gaduci. Ross’  
Landing, Tennessee.





# M artha Berry • Beader



Martha Berry began researching Cherokee history in the 1980s in the hopes of finding out more about her female Cherokee ancestors who were all deceased prior to her birth. She began beading as a way to connect with them while continuing her search for information on her people. After discovering various photos and drawings of traditional Southeastern bead designs or Cherokee chiefs wearing beadwork from this period, she found that she had been creating Plains Indian patterns. Her research then moved specifically to the post-contact / pre-removal period of the Cherokees, as well as Southeastern mound builder art and artifacts. When asked where she learned the skills necessary to revive this lost art form, Berry replied, “I am self-taught, but not by choice. When I became interested in this work, there were no teachers, no classes, no how-to books, and no Internet yet. So I started collecting photographs of historic artifacts and finally applied for a grant to examine the SE beaded artifacts at the Smithsonian. From there, I began making things that looked like the photos and the artifacts. Gradually, I learned more and more about authentic materials and where to obtain them. And I learned about the symbolism used in the old work. Finally, I just kept beading until I could create relatively neat and tidy work. Then I began entering shows, and was usually the only period authentic Southeastern beader entered.” Berry bases her designs on actual artifacts but as an artist who finds it very important to teach through her art, each piece tells its own story while highlighting the symbols that are historically Cherokee or Southeastern. The Fourth Estate bandolier bag, commissioned in 2009 by Cherokee Phoenix editor Bryan Pollard, is a perfect example of this merging between historical and current Cherokee life. Honoring the Cherokee’s strong commitment to inner-tribal communication, the bag features seven Cherokee sun and fire symbols on the right strap. The equilateral cross inside of a circle was widely used on mound pottery throughout the Southeastern tribes prior to contact. In Cherokee syllabary, the left strap says “Cherokee Phoenix” showing the important creation by Sequoyah that made it possible for Cherokee people to quickly learn and use a written language, as well as the longevity of the tribal newspaper. “Across the shoulder of the strap is a symbol created





by Martha Berry to represent DNA. In this instance the symbol denotes the time in Cherokee history when we first encountered Europeans and their culture. It was a time of merging and blending every aspect of our culture, from housing construction and governmental organization to family structure and even our blood. The symbol on this bandolier bag starts with a drop of blood, then travels through five generations of DNA and ends in another drop of blood.” The bottom right and left corners possess modern technological symbols for “play” and an internet connection signifying an aspect of the Phoenix and tribe’s 21st century mode of communication. The focal point is the flap that shows a phoenix emerging out of the fire with blue, green, and brown wings as a remembrance of Cherokee’s ancestral mountain home and the strength of the paper having survived the removal and two fires. The entire bag is read counter-clockwise in the same direction that Cherokee ceremonial dances are performed.



*Above: Hidden in Plain Sight, Martha Berry*

*Header left: Bandolier Bags, Martha Berry*

*Header right: Sun Circle Moccasins 2, Martha Berry*

*Left: Chief Chad Smith being sworn in wearing a Martha Berry bandolier bag.*

# B ill Glass, Jr. • Sculptor



After studying with well known Apache artist Allan Houser at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico, Bill Glass, Jr., started art programs in communities in Northeast Oklahoma as the Cherokee Nation's Arts and Crafts Director. He was also instrumental in the creation of the Cherokee Artist Association as he became more involved with his tribe's history and culture. Glass has received numerous awards, as well as the admiration of the Native art community over the past three decades. His greatest honors include the 2012 Red Earth Festival Honored One, 2009 Cherokee National Treasure, 1999 Cherokee Medal of Honor, and 1986 Master Artist of the Five Civilized Tribes Museum. Inspired by the efforts of Anna Mitchell and Cecil Dick, he began researching Southeastern Mound Builder themes and symbols. While adhering to this focus, Glass became very experimental with his processes and the materials that he uses. His sculpting style is contemporary, allowing the piece to arrive at a shape instead of forming the clay into a preconceived form. Award winning Absentee Shawnee-Seminole printmaker and painter Benjamin Harjo, Jr. said the following about Glass in his nomination for the 2012 Red Earth award, "Bill is by far one of the most original and innovative Native artists living today. He has a deep connection with his Southeastern Cherokee Heritage, but his creative designs are all on his own." Glass' art has progressed from pottery and small clay sculptures to bronze, metal, and large installation pieces. In 2010, Bill Glass, Jr., was awarded the Cherokee Art Market Best of Show for the Healer. This 3-1/2 foot diameter work was created from metal and clay, weighing over 100 pounds. The mosaic-type clay work in the center of the piece features a traditional Cherokee medicine man performing a



shamanistic ceremony. Southeastern equilateral crosses are prominently displayed on each side of the figure with rolling green hills and a rising sun behind him. The medicine man's head is surrounded by what appears to be a highly decorated headdress. The pendant he wears, possibly a shell gorget, also is inscribed with an equilateral cross found on Southeastern mound builder pots and funerary objects. His body is painted half white to show duality between the natural and the spiritual worlds. This sculpture is encircled with a thick metal frame in the shape of a shell gorget. The size, shape, materials, and some of the artistic elements exhibit very contemporary styles, while adhering to the Southeastern historical aspects continuing this movement of Cherokee art into the 21st century.



*Above: Bottle, Bill Glass, Jr.*

*Header left: Demos and Bill Glass Jr.*

*Below: Cherokee Woman, Bill Glass, Jr.*

*Left: The Healer, Bill Glass, Jr.*



# Jane Osti • Potter



2005 Cherokee National Treasure Jane Osti began her training with Anna Mitchell in the late 1980s. They are the only two potters that have been garnered with this title. Like Mitchell, Osti is fiercely involved with constantly garnering information on the traditional Southeastern pottery methods and designs, and sharing this sacred knowledge with others. Many of her pieces incorporate standard forms, but she is also known for creating very large works with unusual elements. Osti shared her inspiration with the Tahlequah Daily Press in April of 2011, “My passion and connection to clay is from the heart. I believe it is passed on to me through ancestral memory. I’m grateful to wake up every day and touch a part of this beautiful earth that allows me to re0create forms from the past, as well as create them in new ways.” Her 2004, Medicine Wheel Vessel, incorporates a partially cutout sun shield with an equilateral cross in the center that is merged into Cherokee design sun rays and repeated four times around the middle of the vessel to signify the four directions and elements (fire, water, earth, and air.)



# Knokovtee Scott • Carver



Knokovtee Scott was acknowledged as a Cherokee Living Treasure for his work carving shell gorgets from purple mussel shells (renamed Mankiller pearl shells to honor former Chief Wilma Mankiller) found around fort Sill, Oklahoma. His endeavors to revive this pre-removal art form that has given the Cherokee tribe so much of its iconographic history include teaching classes with all levels of students on Southeastern jewelry making and history, as well as sharing with others how to find and process the raw materials. Scott's focus is not on simply replicating past art but to create a contemporary twist on ancestral images. In a Tahlequah Daily Press story announcing one of his classes, "Scott said students create their own designs, using traditional symbols to illustrate varied themes. 'I try to teach a theme variation approach so we learn the basic motif, like the cross and the circle, and from there we do our own variation of that.'" In his *Incised Gorget with Beads* piece (1999), Scott uses a shallow relief technique to highlight his contemporary interpretation of a fylfot or swastika symbol, often used as a sun reference. The gorget is set in the midst of dainty shell beads in various sizes, colors, and forms.



*Left Header: Shield, Jane Osti*

*Left: Cherokee Turtle Design pottery jar, Jane Osti*

*Above Header: Shell carvings, Knokovtee Scott*

*Above: Shell gorget, Knokovtee Scott*

# S hell Gorgets



Renewed interest in Southeastern Ceremonial Complex shell gorgets has attributed a great deal to contemporary Cherokee art. These pieces were commonly made by Southeastern tribes during the Mississippian period, AD 1000 – 6000. A great deal of debate has ensued over which symbols and figures were native to certain tribes since these were highly traded items during this period. The latest consensus is that the native peoples in this region were common ancestors to many current tribes, making this an important shared history.





*Above: Cox style shell gorget.*

*Header left: Rattlesnake gorget.*

*Lght:Mississippian Warrior gorget.*

# America Meredith • Painter



America Meredith blends her Cherokee-Swedish ancestry in her art to produce pieces with traditional native and European styles, often highlighted with a pop culture twist. Her paintings are done in various mediums. They highlight current Native American people and issues, as well as focusing on traditional designs and themes. Often these blend together in a single work. In *Think Pink*, acrylic on Masonite, 36" x 24", Meredith critiques American society's need to put people in categories even though the majority of the population is of multiethnic backgrounds. She has worked tirelessly to understand and share the Cherokee language as shown in her "Spokespeople" project, to show native flora and the Cherokee stories associated with them in "The Plants Are Our Allies", she honors both current and deceased Native persons, as well as Cherokee and Southeastern cosmology like in her painting *Unahnu Uk'tena (Terrible Uktena) II*, gouache on paper, and *Ganiyegi Equoni-Ehi (Danger in the River)*, bottle caps, poplar wood, aerosol paint, and resin on plywood panel.



*Above: Benediction, America Meredith*

*Above Header: Fumage rattlesnake gorget, America Meredith*

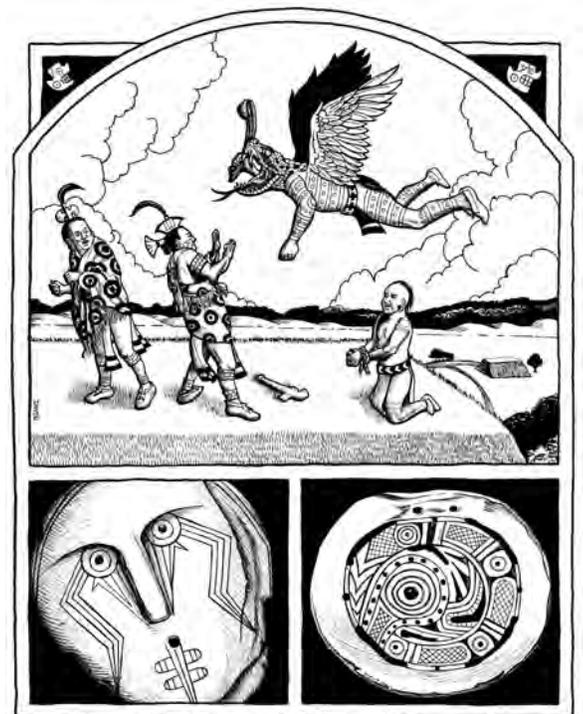
One of Meredith's latest passions are the images and designs found in Southeastern carved shell gorgets. In the 2012 Cherokee Stories of the Turtle Island Liars' Club written by Christopher B. Teuton, Meredith illustrated the stories told by Cherokee elders. "The Journey of the Four Directions" story includes the Cherokee myth of Solegeh, also known as the winged one. Meredith bases part of her illustration for this story on a rare Southeastern mask gorget with drilled mouth and eyeholes, and a bas-relief nose. Decorative face paint is also used. A serpent shell gorget is displayed beside the mask. The great serpent held important significance to the Mississippian people who resided at Spiro Mounds in Oklahoma. Many items found here were closely related to ones found in the ancestral homeland of the Cherokee due to the vast Southeastern trade network that existed during this period.

America Meredith's Rattlesnake Gorget, fumage on mulberry bark paper, uses a technique that became popular during the classic Surrealism period. It is based on one of the few shell gorget designs that has been confirmed as having Cherokee ancestry since the design continued to be popular after contact. This image was also used in a large installation piece at Ross' Landing, Tennessee, created to honor the Cherokee people on their Trail of Tears journey.

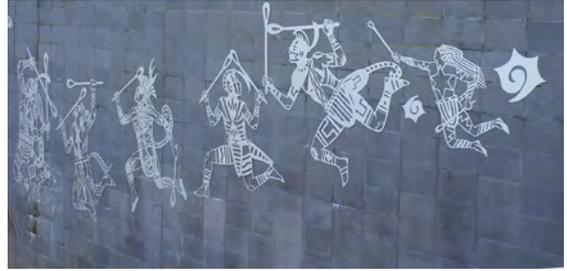


*Above: Think Pink!, America Meredith*

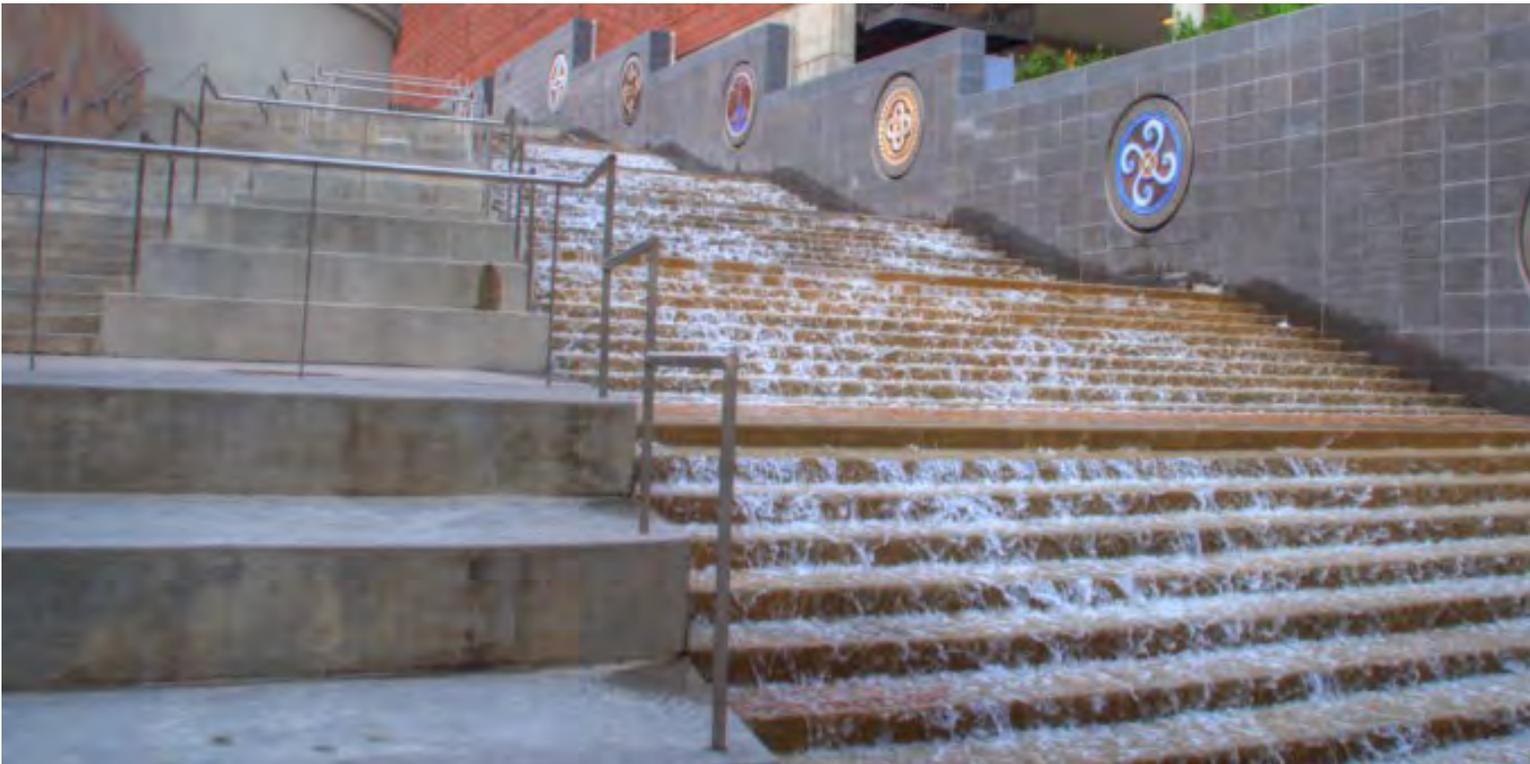
*Below: Solegeh, America Meredith*



# T eam Gadugi • The Passage



The Passage was a collaborative project with two generations of Cherokee artists working under the name Team Gadugi. Founded upon a dream of Bill Glass, Jr., to create monumental art for the Cherokee people, this Chattanooga, Tennessee, waterfront installation melds tribal history and symbology with contemporary techniques and materials. Glass described the project in the Cherokee Phoenix article “Cherokee Monumental Art Returns to Origins” by Dan Agent, “ ‘It’s a celebration of our culture. It memorializes the past but celebrates the history, the present and the future.’ In addition to celebrating culture, traditional ancient Southeastern American Indian designs and motifs, the foundation of much of Cherokee art, are presented. ‘It shows Southeast design in a monumental way; it puts it out there for the public at a monumental site so its good to open people’s eyes up to Southeast art.’ ” The steps descending to the river are lined with ceramic disks that weigh 400 – 600 pounds and are six-feet high. One of the disks designed by Bill Glass, Jr., Coiled Serpent, represents the winged serpent found in late Mississippian shell gorget and pottery artifacts. Team Gadugi’s statement regarding The Passage was read at the opening ceremony, “To truly honor the memory of our ancestors, past and present, we felt it necessary to create contemporary public art that expresses true cultural relevance and establishes an aesthetic that inspires appreciation of Chattanooga’s artistic past, with narrative





*Above: Coiled Serpant, Team Gadugi*

*Below: Sun Circle, Team Gadugi*



*Header left: Ball players, Team Gadugi.*

*Right: The Passage, Team Gadugi.*



insight from an indigenous perspective. It is our team's honor and privilege to complete this circle begun by our ancestors so many years ago by bringing back to this area the vitality and visual strengths of our Cherokee forefathers' artwork. Through this art installation, we feel as though we are symbolically returning to our ancestral homeland."

# Demos Glass • Sculptor



Demos Glass, son of Bill Glass, Jr., created a stainless steel structure measuring twelve feet in length that is located in the reflecting pool of The Passage entitled "Little Water Spider." It is a symbol from Cherokee cosmology on the origin of fire. He primarily works in metal and wood, taking great interest in the effects produced by the combining of materials. As seen in Fish Dreams, Glass also blends periods and styles in his

Demos Glass, son of Bill Glass, Jr., created a stainless steel structure measuring twelve feet in length that is located in the reflecting pool of The Passage entitled "Little Water Spider." It is a symbol from Cherokee cosmology on the origin of fire. He primarily works in metal and wood, taking great interest in the effects produced by the combining of materials. As seen in Fish Dreams, Glass also blends periods and styles in his work. This sculpture takes on a post Depression era look. Various forms of wood make up the body. Gilded silver is then applied on top of the piece highlighting facial features and traditional Native designs like the sun circle.

Working out of their Locust Grove, Oklahoma, shared studio, Bill and Demos Glass continue to create contemporary pieces based on traditional Native themes. The Glass's 2008 public art installation work in Tulsa's BOK Center shares Cherokee and Southeastern art with hundreds of thousands a year. Four large floor mosaics found in the lobby show guests an ornamental cross design, the mirrored face of a Southeastern warrior, a sun circle pattern, and a bird. "The four installations are thematically intertwined, stylistically rendering the three worlds of Cherokee existence: Upper, Lower, and This World. One installation encompasses all three worlds and is the first installation visible when entering the BOK Center."

In 2010, the pair were commissioned to make a piece for the American Indian Cultural Center and Museum in Oklahoma City. Touched to Above, constructed entirely of stainless steel and measuring over fourteen feet high, was inspired by a rainbow but also honors the "Creator". Demos Glass described the four-foot hand that dangles from the zenith, "(it) represents fire, and the four-log or cross is a symbol used by different Indian cultures."



*Left: Fish Dreams, Demos Berry.*

*Header left: Little Water Spider, Demos Berry.*

# S han Goshorn • Weaver



Melding old and new in innovative ways comes to the forefront in the artwork of Shan Goshorn, Joseph Erb, and Roy Boney, Jr. Shan Goshorn, Eastern Band Cherokee, is a multimedia artist and political activist. The pieces that have garnered her the most attention are baskets woven “out of watercolor paper on which she has printed the texts of treaties between the Cherokee people and the U.S. government, maps that delineate what were once Cherokee lands, lists of sports teams and products that use Indian names, even contemporary photographs.” Her technique is often highly unusual as well. Most of Goshorn’s baskets are made employing a difficult double-weave technique creating beautiful results. Her baskets are housed in the Smithsonian permanent collection and she has received a 2013 Contemporary Art Fellowship honoring emerging artists from the Eiteljorg Museum in Indianapolis. *Educational Genocide: The Legacy of the Carlisle Indian Boarding School*, 2011, a lidded, Cherokee style double-weave basket won the 2011 Red Earth Grand Prize. Student’s names and historical documents can be viewed throughout the splits. A photograph of the 1912 Carlisle Student Body encircles the lid. This addition makes it her most moving piece to date, showing the children affected by this attempted cultural genocide.



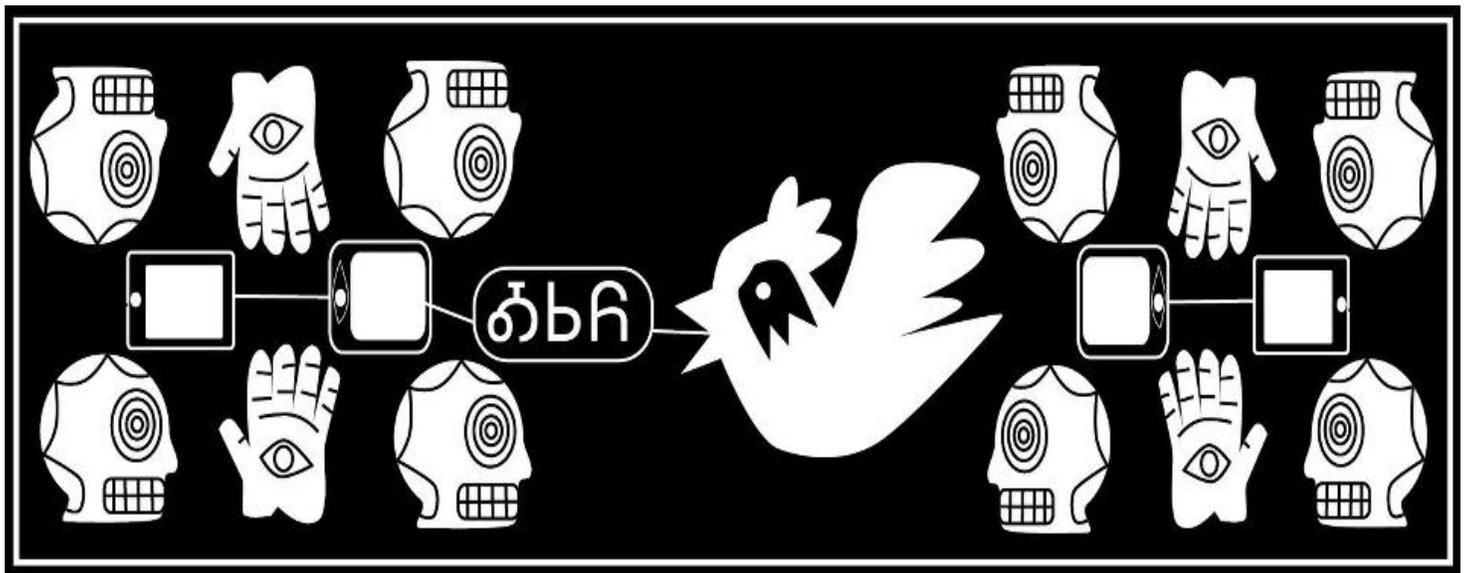
*Above Header: Basket weaving detail, Shan Gos-*

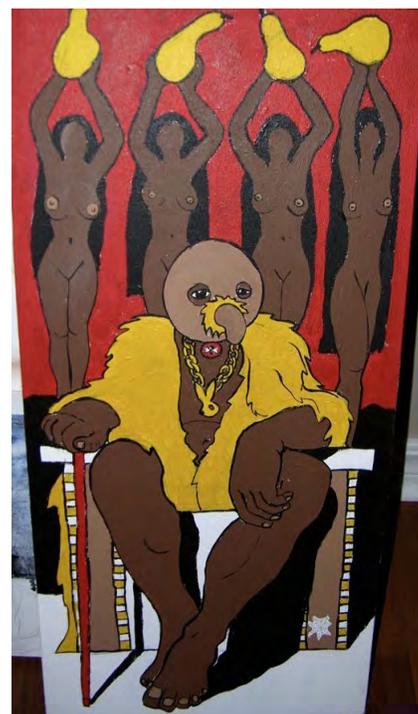
*Above: Educational Genocide: The Legacy of the Carlisle Indian Boarding School, Shan Goshorn.*

# Joseph Erb • Multimedia



Joseph Erb, Cherokee painter, sculptor, animator, and language revivalist, is helping to advance the Cherokee tribe's historical and contemporary connection through language and technology. He is part of the team that brought the Cherokee syllabary to apple computers and iPhones, and continues to advocate tribal use of technology for members to stay in touch with each other. His 2006 *Gourd with Warriors* depicts a Southeastern-styled warrior listening to an iPod and typing on a laptop while encircled with traditional symbols and syllabary writing. In the June 5, 2012, *Tahlequah Daily Press*, Erb expressed his frustration with native cultural stereotypes, "Every culture uses technology. You don't think of Italians not being Italian if they have technology, or Brazilians to be less Brazilian if they have a radio, but people think of Indians being less Indian with technology. I saw a white couple shooting pics of an Indian in powwow regalia, talking on his cell phone like they'd seen a three-headed goat." A great deal of his newer work is produced digitally but it continues to focus on language and technology while incorporating traditional symbols and themes. Most of his pieces only use red, black, and white emphasizing their highly symbolic nature. This can be seen in *Untitled*, January 2013, and *Learn Cherokee Before It Is Too Late*, October 2012. When asked how he arrived at this place in his work, Erb replied, "My work deals a lot with tying the past to the future using technology. I use technology as medium for cultural expression. As for the images or iconography from the past, I re-contextualize it with modern iconography of technology symbols. The people before us use those images for many reasons but it dealt with who they were in a time and place and I feel my work must do the same. The work I do in the world of language and art is all the same."





Header left: *Stamping*, Joseph Erb.

Left: *Untitled*, Joseph Erb.

Header right: *Gourd*, Joseph Erb.

Above: *First Telephone Line in Oklahoma Territory*, Joseph Erb.

Bottom: *Booger Pimp*, Joseph Erb.

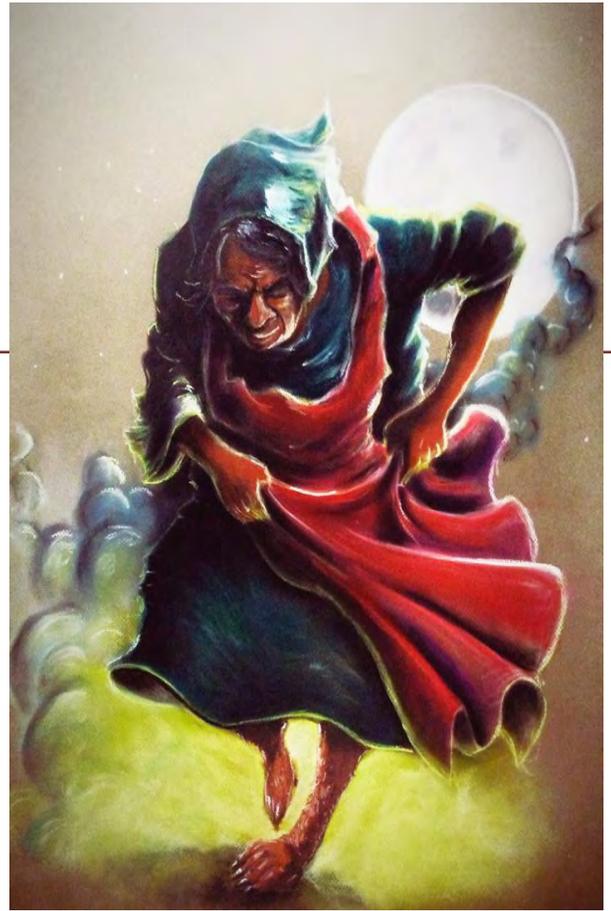
# Roy Boney, Jr. • Painter



Roy Boney, Jr., painter, animator, author, language revivalist, graphic designer, and graphic novelist, focuses his art on telling Cherokee stories. He uses ancient iconography, as he interprets them, and Syllabary characters to achieve a tribal connection. His art is always linked to his personal experience so the fact that it varies so greatly from the symbolic “Indian art” of the late 19th and early 20th centuries is completely logical. His early years were spent creating zombie and dark sci-fi comics with his first entry as an adult in a Native American art show in 2006, *Our Father*, winning Best of Show. This satirical, “zombified” Andrew Jackson piece was a shocking Trail of Tears Art Show winner at the time. Seven years later, it seems perfectly understandable. Boney’s, and other 21st century artist’s, work is redefining contemporary Cherokee identity. No longer do native people have to fit into a stereotypical mold that dictates what they should wear, how they should act, where they should live, or they type of art that they should be making. Thanks to the efforts of great 20th century tribal historians like Anna Mitchell, Cecil Dick, Lottie Stamper, Martha Berry, Jane Osti, Knokovtee Scott, and Bill Glass, Jr., just to name a few, 21st century Cherokee artists know their past and understand their culture better, making it possible to take their art to the next level. On this level, art can not only continue to teach but can bring a people closer together through language, technology, shared history, and blood, creating a bond that future trials will not break. When asked if there has been a recent increase in the use of traditional symbols and themes in contemporary Cherokee (and all native) art, Roy Boney, Jr. responded, saying “I believe there has been a resurgence of southeastern imagery, particularly starting with the work of Cherokee artist Anna Mitchell. It’s her re-



search and work that first helped bring the southeastern graphic language back to the forefront. As I learn more about the history of contemporary Cherokee art, there have been many artists, like Mrs. Mitchell and Bill Glass, Jr., in the last few decades working hard to make our imagery the forefront as opposed to southwestern & plains styles and, of course, the stereotypical touristy art. Far too long people associated native art with those aforementioned styles. I think every working Cherokee artist now has made it his or her duty to carry that mission forward. With that mindset, it has brought everyone up to a higher standard. I think because of that, right now in the 21st century is one of the best times to be fortunate to work as a Cherokee artist.”



*Header left: Self-portrait, Roy Boney, Jr.*

*Left: Unknown, Roy Boney, Jr.*

*Left: Our Father, Roy Boney, Jr.*

*Above: Things Happen When She Twirls Her Skirt., Roy Boney, Jr.*

*Bottom: Booger, Roy Boney, Jr.*

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\* Note: In my research on Martha Doering, I discovered a mutual ancestor. I obviously will look into this connection further!

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## Acknowledgements

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I have always taken issue with the idea that the word “myth” has come to signify falsehood. I don’t want to get into a discussion here on the nuances and subtleties of language, but the idea that a culture can be judged simplistic and primitive based upon its myths has always concerned me. After all, what is myth? Creation stories, talk stories, foundations of culture, foundations of language, the basis from which all social and cultural definitions come forth and define a people, a language, a system of belief, a way of knowing, a way of being.

Therefore, creation stories that are not literal creation stories are the idea that a culture can be judged simplistic and primitive based upon its myths has always concerned me. After all, what is myth? Creation stories, talk stories, foundations of culture, foundations of language, the basis from which all social and cultural definitions come forth and define a people, a language, a system of belief, a way of knowing, a way of being. To define a culture by its mythmaking, primitivizing its creation stories by calling these stories “myths” automatically, in some circles, connotes falsehood. Therefore, creation stories that are not literal creation stories.

I don’t want to get into a discussion here on the nuances and subtleties of language, but the idea that a culture can be judged simplistic and primitive based upon its myths has always concerned me. After all, what is myth? Creation stories, talk stories, foundations of culture, foundations of language, the basis from which all social and cultural definitions come forth and define a people, a language, a system of belief, a way of knowing, a way of being.

*Deer Woman*, Artist unknown.

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