

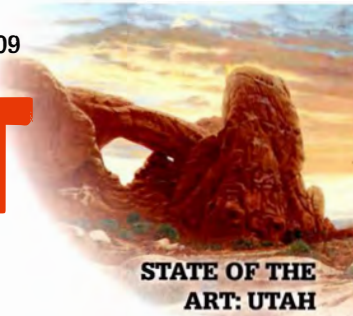
OCTOBER 2009

Previews of Works For Sale at Upcoming Shows

WESTERN ART

COLLECTOR

26



STATE OF THE ART: UTAH



\$6.95

10



© 2009

Legacy in Stone

Navajo/Ute sculptor Orland C. Joe continually aspires to express the commonalities of all peoples and the universality of our human experience.

By Christy A. Vezolles, AM

Some things a man just knows. No research required. While some artists are rightfully proud of their meticulous research to guarantee accuracy in their portrayals of Native American subjects, for Orland C. Joe Sr., much of his subject matter comes naturally. It is an autobiographical amalgam of familial, social and ceremonial rituals, childhood stories and ancient genetic memories that course through his veins. These experiences and the traditional lifeways of his people inform the artistry of Navajo/Ute sculptor Orland Joe.

In selecting his subjects, Joe stays close to home, choosing to depict primarily his own Diné (Navajo) and Ute people, as well as other tribal peoples of whom he has firsthand knowledge.

While some of Joe's portrayals are utterly timeless, others clearly exist in a bygone era. The artist's favorite time period to depict in his imagery extends from the early 1800s to the beginning of the 20th century. Seeking guidance from tribal elders, as well as referring to historical documentation, he ultimately is guided by an inner voice. Born in 1958, to a Southern Ute father and a Diné

mother, Orland C. Joe grew up in Shiprock, New Mexico, on the Navajo Nation. His artistic nature was nurtured by his parents and encouraged by his teachers.

After high school graduation, Joe was employed by the Shiprock School District print shop, where he was able to make use of his talents as an illustrator. In 1978 he traveled to Paris with a local American Indian dance troupe. Each evening he performed Navajo Hoop Dances. By day he roamed the art museums for hours, captivated by the marble statues of ancient Greece and Rome, the sculpture of Rodin



Berry Picker, alabaster, 28 x 27 x 14½"



Calling Upon the Thunder, Italian Marble, 27½ x 20 x 12"
2009 Prix de West

COURTESY NATIONAL COWBOY AND WESTERN HERITAGE MUSEUM, OKLAHOMA CITY, OK



First Mesa Hopi Maidens, Tennessee marble, 32 x 12”
COURTESY MEDICINE MAN GALLERY, SANTA FE, NM, AND TUCSON, AZ

and Degas, along with paintings by Old Masters, Impressionists and more.

Thinking back to the winter prior, where he nearly froze working as a gas station attendant in the Four Corners area, he made up his mind. He was determined to be and to do much more. That was the turning point in his young life and the beginning of an artistic career. Especially impressed by the sculpture and statuary, he set out to teach himself the basics of stone carving. His former high school art teacher gave him some small chunks of alabaster, which he carved with a kitchen knife and a screwdriver. That was 1979. Thirty years later this talented artist of humble beginnings has achieved national prominence.

Largely self-taught, Joe began devoting himself full time as an artist in 1980 and was successful in selling enough artwork to meet the needs of his growing young family.

During a trip to Italy in 1986 he was enthralled by the works of Michelangelo, Canova and Bernini. He notes that the most influential piece was one by Canova, rendered exquisitely in white Italian marble, including the intricate detail of a laced leather sandal, the memory of which is still vivid in his mind's eye even today.

Inspired by Canova's virtuosity, along with that of the Japanese masters he witnessed on his 1988 trip to Japan, Joe set about to perfect his technique. While mindful of the need to support his family of six children, he nonetheless stayed true to his vision and never sacrificed quality in favor of producing a larger quantity of lesser works to turn a quick buck. His eloquence of design concept, quality of material, sophistication of execution and consistent quest for excellence propelled him far beyond the sometimes kitschy alabaster carvings often found at tourist destinations throughout the Southwest.

Ever-seeking inspiration, fresh ideas and innovative techniques, Joe constantly guards against being unduly influenced by other artists, even while studying their work. Allan Houser, the Chiricahua Apache sculptor often referred to as "the patriarch of Native American sculpture," established the sculpture department in 1962 at the fledgling Institute of American Indian Arts



The Code Talker, 9'
PHOTO CREDIT LISA M. RODRIGUEZ



Joe created *The Code Talker* (detail) in 2004 for the Navajo Code Talkers Memorial Foundation in Phoenix and the Navajo Code Talker Monument in Window Rock on the Navajo Nation.

in Santa Fe. Joe acknowledged the influence Houser has had on generations of Native American artists.

“When the Allan Houser book first came out in the ‘80s, it was very difficult for me to buy the book because I was concerned that it would influence me too much. Finally, after six years, I bought the book. There is only one Houser—there will never be another,” says Joe.

Nonetheless, the correlations between Joe’s work and that of master sculptor Allan Houser are inescapable. Both artists, due to intense interest in and study of the human anatomy, exhibit an understanding and mastery of the figure that establishes a solid foundation on which they build, regardless of the realistic or abstracted nature of a particular sculpture. Joe says, “It is so

important to understand correct proportion of the figure. Some younger artists haven’t learned that, but it is what is expected and necessary,” if one is going to succeed in a sophisticated market.

Both Houser and Joe are proficient in representing the figure in a very realistic manner, rendering a high degree of detail as it suits their intention. Conversely, each has the uncanny ability to distill the essence of the figure to a stylized form that transcends the physical being and elevates the subject to an almost supernatural status.

Joe’s distinctive work caught the attention of the members of the Cowboy Artists of America, including co-founder Joe Beeler (himself of Oklahoma Cherokee heritage). He was voted into membership by the group

and began exhibiting in its annual show and sale at the Phoenix Art Museum in 1994. In the 15 years that have ensued, Joe has won top honors, not only at the CAA Show, but also repeatedly at the Autry Museum, the Heard Museum Indian Market, the Prix de West and the Santa Fe Indian Market.

Continuing to create some pieces in alabaster, a soft stone that is carved more readily, has allowed Joe to offer quality works at an affordable price. However, the artist notes, that marble, particularly Portuguese marble, a dense stone with a luscious golden yellow hue he began using five years ago, is his favorite stone to carve. He has also recently begun carving Chinese Imperial black marble.

“It is a challenge mentally and physically to cut into stone. Your tools are



Hershey Miyamura Monument
PHOTO CREDIT LISA M. RODRIGUEZ



Sunrise Song, Italian marble, 26 x 9 x 6"
2009 Prix de West
COURTESY NATIONAL COWBOY AND WESTERN HERITAGE MUSEUM, OKLAHOMA CITY, OK

always changing because the hardness of different stones varies," says Joe.

Typically beginning his workday at 8 a.m., the artist finds six hours of steady carving optimizes his creativity. He has an apprentice rough out the form to his precise specifications, reserving his time and energy to do the finish work to his exacting standards. If a stone is not responding the way he would like it to, Joe notes that he will simply walk away from a piece. He says, "I generally have four pieces going at one time. If one piece of stone doesn't want to cooperate, I move on to another," only to return to it later, sometimes much later, noting that he walked away from one stone six years ago only to complete the piece this summer.

Joe with his latest Chinese Imperial black marble piece from this year's SWAIA Indian Market.





Mountain Dreams, Italian marble, 24 x 24 x 7½”
COURTESY MEDICINE MAN GALLERY, SANTA FE, NM, AND TUCSON, AZ

Although he excels at stone carving, Joe also creates limited-edition cast bronze sculpture, which allows him to experiment in another aspect of 3-D work as well as providing excellent opportunities to collect appreciable works at a more affordable price point than a one-off carved stone sculpture. Jewelry-making, painting and music (singing, playing guitar and songwriting) are a further extension of his creative drive.

Joe's largest monumental sculpture to date is a 22-foot bronze of Ponca chief Standing Bear, commissioned by the Native American Foundation in 1996. The New Mexico Governor's Award for "Excellence in the Arts" was bestowed upon Joe in 2000. Two years later the Lewis & Clark Bicentennial Committee commissioned him to create a sculpture including five life-size figures and a dog titled *The First Council*. He created a 9-foot bronze of a code talker in

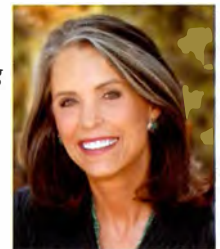
2004 for the Navajo Code Talkers Memorial Foundation in Phoenix and the Navajo Code Talker Monument in Window Rock on the Navajo Nation.

In the past year, Joe has completed three monumental sculptures commissioned by the Sky Ute Casino to accompany an 8½-foot carved limestone representation of a traditionally dressed Ute matriarch, which he created in the mid-1990s at the behest of the tribe.

A native of New Mexico, Joe's roots run broad and deep in the homeland of his ancestors. While his heritage informs his artistry, he constantly aspires to express the commonalities of all peoples and the universality of our human experience. The multitude of awards garnered by this talented sculptor attest to his success, and subjects of his endeavor stand as silent witness to the achievement of his aspiration. 🍷

About Christy A. Vezolles

Christy A. Vezolles is an accredited art appraiser specializing in American Indian Art. Principal of Art Value LLC, she also has expertise in American and European Fine Art.



Focusing on printmaking, ceramics and art history in college, Vezolles taught at Sinclair Community College and the University of Dayton. During that time, she exhibited her intaglios, drawings and ceramics, including at the Eiteljorg Museum, the Heard Museum, the Kennedy Center and the Philbrook Museum of Art. She managed a law office on the Navajo Nation for 10 years. Vezolles is a member of the American Society of Appraisers and of the prestigious ArtTable, based in New York.