

Artist Statement

My art actively seeks to engage people in examining important issues. I address the topics of personal and cultural loss. Instead of speaking out words, I pursue a visual dialog. Through color, line, and visual form, I express deeply felt concerns regarding removal, disturbance, and the struggle to reclaim cultural context.

As a Native American artist, I explore issues of identity, culture, including Osage mythos, place, and the dynamics of personal and cultural transformation. Over the years I have used a visual vocabulary consisting of images and symbols drawn from my cultural heritage, personal life experiences, and contemporary culture. The underlying principles that inform my art include tribal oral histories, maps, art historical references, and nature. Through visual narrative, I explore how my point of view relates to a historical, political and cultural sense of place in contemporary society. The use of narrative in my work acts as a continuation of the Native American storytelling tradition. Ancestral tribal stories and sayings have served to explain the world in which we lived. New and emerging stories serve as allegories of transformation in an ever-changing world.

Sense of place, which is a primary concept explored in my work, can be interpreted in many ways. Place of origin describes the physical landscape where one lives or originates. Mythological place transcends physical place and describes the timeless spiritual or mythic origin where stories begin and civilizations emerge. History has left its mark on the land, creating a place where political and cultural boundaries define our identities. As a child, maps fascinated me because they were complex symbols for places I had yet to know. Maps, through symbolic representation, define boundaries and landmarks of the place we identify as home. Maps instantly broaden my point of view, from a strictly personal recognition of place to embrace cultural context and history. Maps also have been used deceptively to create false borders and they work to re-write history.

Through layering of visual images that seem to coexist without any clear hierarchical order, I begin to convey a non-linear sense of time. As these images freely mingle between the past and present, they become a metaphor for the experiences I encounter when I am at home in Oklahoma, traveling across ancestral lands in Kansas, participating in the E-lon-schka ceremonies, and just simply living. For example, in my earlier paintings a mythic landscape was the setting where Osage stories, interwoven with hybrid symbols, formed from an awareness of past and present history.

A few years ago, I began to explore other approaches to image making. The computer became a sketchbook where I developed digital images and collages. I began to use a variety of printing techniques including paper lithography and reduction printing. The use of gum arabic transfers from digital sketches and

hand cut stencils allowed me to advance the layering process to achieve a new spatial and conceptual depth to the prints. The act of placing images on the printing paper echoes my desire to orient myself in the physical world. While painting allows images into my vocabulary at a contemplative pace, printmaking allows me to develop ideas quickly and to explore variations on new ideas. These explorations in printmaking will be used to inform a new series of large-scale paintings.

Recently, the concepts of borders, boundaries, and the migration of peoples have been in my thoughts. Current issues in the news about immigration laws and talk in public media about strengthening national borders is leading my work into a new direction. Questions about who is the 'other' and terms such as indigenous, immigrant, and illegal alien have entered my vocabulary. The latest series of prints includes imagery of historical figures from US currency, flying saucers, and maps of the Americas. While researching early prints of native peoples made by 'new world artists', I was provoked by conventional mainstream ideas of history and how we might question the relationships that exist between fact and fiction. For example, images from the 16th century Theodor De Bry's engravings, and an unknown German artist's woodcut titled, "People and Island from a Land Discovered", became the catalyst for a new narrative in my art. I see the content of my art expanding from an interest in personal expression to a higher awareness of social issues.